

# Adventure to Kita-Karuizawa



Route from Niigata to Kita-Karuizawa

**July 17:** The purpose of this trip is to visit new friends, Brian from the UK and his Japanese wife Mieko. They spend their summers in Kita-Karuizawa near Mt. Asama in Gunma Prefecture, which is about 370 kilometers or 230 miles from my home. They first contacted me because of their interest in this blog. I had never met them face to face before. Though Kita-Karuizawa is in Gunma, I saw from the map that the surest way to get to it is to take a round about way through Nagano. I had never been to that area before. This trip took me over the 80,000 kilometer mark since keeping [records from August of 2003](#).



Mt. Asama

Hitchhiking 370 kilometers to Kita-Karuizawa in only 4 rides with very little waiting time was as good as it gets! I left home at 10:30AM and arrived at the very door of my destination a few minutes after 4PM.

The first driver was a Yamazaki Bread man. He went out of his way to take me to the expressway entrance at Sanjo.

The second driver, Mr. Tsukioka, took me to Echigo Kawaguchi which was the epicenter of the Niigata Chuetsu earthquake of October 23, 2004. This was the second time to meet Mr. Tsukioka when hitchhiking! He remembered picking me up last year at Tokamachi City.



Tokyo man who took

me to Kamisato  
from Echigo  
Kawaguchi



Brian and Mieko

Because Brian gave me the exact latitude and longitude to his house, I felt that Mr. Kubo may have turned down the wrong road and gone past it. He turned around and went back to the last intersection. I saw a man who appeared to be a foreigner walking in front of the house at the corner of the intersection and called out, "Brian!" He turned and said, "James, you made it!"

**July 18:** The next day at noon, Brian and Mieko took me to the Saku interchange of the Joushin'estu expressway. I called Mr. Kobayashi who lives in Nagano city and has a company in Chikuma city which is 54 kilometers from Saku. Mr. Kobayashi has been a good friend whom I met many times since we first met back in 2001. I was hitchhiking in Nagano and he picked me up. Mr. Kobayashi invited me to lunch and encouraged me to come as quickly as possible to Chikuma. At first he offered to pay for a train, but then realized I could arrive even quicker if I hitchhiked. I told him I would call again after getting picked up.



Young man who took me to Shiojiri  
City from Midoriko

After a 10 minutes wait at the interchange, a lady who appeared to be in her 30s, Sachie, offered me a ride as far as the Yunomaru Service area about 14 kilometers toward my destination. Sachie carries blood samples from doctor clinics to hospitals. She says she washes her hands frequently to avoid getting infected. It's possible some of the samples may even contain HIV!

A few minutes into our journey, Sachie offered to take me all the way to Chikuma after a brief stop at a hospital in Yunomaru to drop off her blood samples. Chikuma was still 39 kilometers away and it cost her another 950 yen and 40 minutes of her time to take me there! Mr. Kobayashi waited for us at the Koshoku interchange exit. He was delighted that a lady picked me up and offered to take her out to lunch with me. However Sachie declined the offer saying that she still had more work that day.

Mr. Kobayashi took me back to his office where we met an associate of his, Mr. Sano. Mr. Sano was wearing a fine gold ring. When I inquired about it, he said it is a special ring that helps blood circulation and improves health. One ring costs 1,800,000 yen or about \$19,000 US. I asked Mr. Kobayashi if he bought one and he said no.

Mr. Kobayashi knew that Mr. Sano was heading in the same direction I wanted to go, and he asked him if he would take me. Mr. Sano was glad to and said that he would take me to Akashina train station, about 80% of the way to my destination. Mr. Kobayashi then said I would not want to take the train but rather hitchhike the rest of the way. I expected that he would tell Mr. Sano how much I love to hitchhike and meet people, but instead he said I hitchhike because I have no money! I told them that's not entirely true! I had plenty of cash with me, a little over 4000 yen or about 10 times what that train fare would be. Of course I do love to save money as well as meet people.

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## Hitchhiking to town



Kazuko

**June, 21, 2009:** Today is my 59th birthday. I went to one of my favorite traffic lights to hitchhike to downtown Niigata City to meet a friend to do some street evangelism. The first day of summer was a hot one, about 31 C. Though there was a lot of traffic waiting at the red light, everybody was ignoring me.

After about 10 minutes I heard a voice calling from a distance behind me. A lady turned the corner and drove to an adjacent road about 10 meters parallel to the road I was on. She was offering me a ride!

The lady's name is Kazuko, 31 years old. We established an immediate rapport when she told me she went to a Christian high school in the area, Keiwa Gakuin, the same school that one of my friends sent his children. We talked about the deep things of life, love, unselfishness, giving, sharing, the [paradox of hedonism](#) etc.

Kazuko's hobby is photography. She took my photo with an old Nikon F1 35 mm film camera.

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## Adventure from Niigata to Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka



The red line running from the north to the southeast shows my proposed journey. Click the image to see an enlargement.

I hitchhiked to Hamamatsu city in Shizuoka Prefecture to bring a laptop PC to my friend Maria and teach her how to use it. It's a Windows Vista PC which she is unfamiliar with. To hitchhike such a long distance (about 560 kilometers) passing through Tokyo is a real challenge for me. I calculate what time I should be at certain points to see if I can realistically reach my destination the same day. The hardest part of this trip is figuring out how to get on the Tomei Expressway which runs from Tokyo to Nagoya and passes by Hamamatsu.

At 9:00AM I got off to a bad start. The first driver took me only a few kilometers and to an area off the main highway. Lesson learned: Make sure of the drivers destination before boarding!

To get back toward the main highway I had to walk a couple kilometers. A kind man from [Gosen city](#) stopped and took me to route 8, a major road that passes close to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. I now had a much better chance to get a good ride out. The driver told me that Gosen city has some of the best natural water in Japan. "Gosen" literally means "five springs."

The third driver was going to Sanjo city and went out of his way for me to take me to Sakae Parking Area. This helped gain some of the time I lost with the first ride.

The fourth driver was going all the way to Narita Airport to meet his Thai wife returning from her home country. He took me as far as Takasaka Service

area in Saitama area just before Tokyo. From there two men going to Yokohama took me to the entrance of the Tomei expressway at Yoga Interchange.

I thought there was a parking area at Yoga and walked in vain 30 minutes to find it. I remembered that I hitchhiked from Yoga a few years ago standing close to the entrance ramp, and I hoped I wouldn't have to do it again. At Yoga I have to stand on the narrow divider area between two lanes in the middle of the road to make my intention known to the drivers. I knew the police would scold me and kick me out if they saw me standing there. So I prayed desperately for a ride. I knew it would have to be a car without any traffic in back of it in order for the driver to stop safely.



Yuko and Thomas

After about 15 minutes a lady stopped for me, a real miracle! Her name is Yuko and she delivers curry dishes with her American husband. I asked Yuko if her husband wouldn't be angry for her to pick up a strange man hitchhiking, and she said, "No problem, he already knows!" Thomas was following from behind in another vehicle.

Yuko took me to the Kohoku Parking area and there I met her husband, Thomas. I was surprised to learn Thomas is ethnic Vietnamese. I told them about a website I made that has Vietnamese literature, [starsandpearls.com](http://starsandpearls.com). Thomas said that he can't read Vietnamese but will read the English that is next to it. Both Yuko and Thomas seemed impressed with how I live and travel. I told them that it's only because of God's care that I can live in such a way. Thomas was raised a Roman Catholic. He said that it was amazing to meet me at this time because that very day at a coffee shop he had got into a deep discussion with a friend about the [meaning of life](#). Yuko speaks good English but said she usually speaks in Japanese with Thomas at home.



Young man who works with  
an insurance company who  
took me from Kohoku to  
Ebina Service area on the  
Tomei Expressway.



Ashigara Service area at sunset  
with Mt Fuji in the background.

From Ebina a 31 year old man on the way to Numazu City took me to Ashigara Service area in Shizuoka Prefecture. I had a good view of Mt. Fuji which kept

me inspired while waiting a relatively long time of about an hour to catch the next ride. An older couple returning home to Tsuruga in Fukui took me the rest of the way to Hamamatsu. Tsuruga is relatively close to Obama, the town made famous due to Barack Obama's election to U.S. President. In all it took 9 cars and 11 hours to travel 560 kilometers from my home to Hamamatsu City.

## The return home

**May 28:** It's extremely windy at 10:00 AM when I set out. After only a short wait, Mr. Matsui, a veterinarian, took me to the Nihonzaka Parking area on the Tomei expressway. I've been picked up by doctors before, but this is the first time to meet a veterinarian when hitchhiking. I told him that in 1981 when living in Noda city in Chiba prefecture, a veterinarian gave my cat a free operation to sew up his torn abdomen. It was caused by fighting with the local tom cats!



Mt. Fuji taken in Feb. 2004 from a highway as I travelled. The clearest views of the volcano are in the winter.

At Nihonzaka, I had to wait an hour for the next ride. The wind was so strong it nearly knocked me off balance once and blew my hat off twice! Policemen entered the parking area a few times in their squad cars, but they didn't seem interested in me. Mr. Someya came and rescued me taking me to a larger service area, Fujikawa which is not far from Mt. Fuji, where I had a better chance of getting a longer ride. It wasn't nearly as windy at Fujikawa, but it started to rain a bit.

After only a few minutes, a middle aged man took me all the way to Shinkiba station in Tokyo. From there I took a train to Fujino station in Saitama which is close to the Miyoshi Service area. I knew there is a bus I could catch but rather than wait for it, I started to walk in what I thought was the right direction. After a few minutes, I realized I was lost and walked up to a car waiting at a traffic light to ask for directions. Two ladies were sitting in the car, and older lady named Michie and the younger one who is Michie's daughter, Akiko, the driver. Akiko told me I was walking the opposite direction from Miyoshi offered me a ride! It's not very common to be offered a ride in this manner. Akiko and Michie were glad to go out of their way for me.

From Miyoshi Service area of the Kan'etsu expressway, another lady took me to Takakaka Service area, and from there two men took me to the border of Gunma to Kamisato Service area. It's now already dark a little after 7PM.

Once a few years ago after dark I waited three long hours for a ride at Kamisato! I certainly hoped not to repeat that experience. It was getting colder and I was dressed in a short sleeve shirt with only a thin wind breaker jacket over it. After only 15 minutes a man stopped and offered me a



ride to Echigo Yuzawa in Niigata! From there I could catch a train the rest of the way back home, but I was short a few hundred yen for the fare for that distance of about 100 kilometers. I told the man, Akio, that rather than take me all the way to Echigo Yuzawa, he could drop me off at the Akagi Kogen service area in Gunma from where I could catch a ride going further. But Akio was insistent that he take me to Echigo Yuzawa! From my cell phone I looked up the next train leaving to be 8:30 PM, and we knew we would arrive in plenty of time for me to catch that train. But because I didn't have enough money for the fare, I kept trying to convince Akio to drop me off at the parking area in Gunma. Akio then said he would give me 1000 yen and asked me if that would be enough. "Quite enough!" I replied. Aren't the Japanese kind to strangers? This isn't the first time I've received gifts of money when hitchhiking. I never ever ask them for money, they offer.

Perhaps Akio was kind to me because I really tried to help and encourage him. Akio said that he has been afflicted with depression from two years ago and was just returning home after seeing a doctor. The doctor told him that drugs will not cure him, only relieve the symptoms. He then said that he went to a woman mystic who told him that he is afflicted with the spirit of a departed person who committed suicide at his workplace! She said that two other people committed suicide at the same workplace. Akio immediately remembered that there were two people who took their lives where he works, and learned later that there was indeed a third person. When I heard that, I immediately started to pray out loud in the Name of Jesus and I told the spirit to leave Akio and go elsewhere! Depression and mental problems are often caused by [spiritual forces](#). I was very glad that Akio knows that too. Half of the way toward victory is identifying true cause of the problem.

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## [Adventure from Saitama to Niigata](#)



Businessmen who took me to Miyoshi  
Service Area from Kawagoe

## Interchange

The third driver who picked me up today is one of the few Japanese believe that at least part of Japanese ancestry is from Israel. He told me that some of the people of Aomori in the Tsugaru area have blue eyes and that there are Hebrew words in their folk songs.

The 5th driver, Mr. Nakabayashi is an electrical engineer who owns a small company. He referred to himself as a "double poor company president. " Mr. Nakabayashi offered to take me to a parking area where he would ask other drivers to take me the rest of the way. I consented to that with reluctance. I know from experience that when I approach a driver asking for a ride, they may give me one but not very happily. This was true in this case as well. The man who obliged Mr. Nakabayashi wasn't very friendly or talkative. Next time I will try to be firmer in rejecting such offers of help.

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## Hitchhiking during Golden Week, 2009



Hirosaki Castle the beginning of  
May

I had a fantastic 10 day trip traveling 1460 kilometers in 28 vehicles during the Japanese holiday season from April 29 to May 5th known as "[Golden Week](#)".

**April 30th:** It took me over two hours and 6 vehicles just to get out of Niigata City! A lady took me as far as Toyosaka on the edge of Niigata City. She said her 29 year old daughter lived one year in Montana. After that a Russian man took me as far as East Port in Niigata and after that a lady with her mother took a me a few kilometers further up route 113 to the middle of nowhere somewhere between Niigata city and Murakami city. It was a less than desirable spot to catch a ride with few cars passing through a forested area,



but I had a scenic view of the Sea of Japan on my left that kept me inspired. After a long wait a young man who works in a travel agency who says he is a Christian and whose father is from Nagasaki took me to route 7 in Murakami. In all it took 16 cars in all to get to Akita City 270 kilometers down route 7 arriving at 7:30PM, but the last driver took me to the very area where I spent the night with friends.



Chieharu and Jun

**May 1st:** It took two hours just to get out of Akita city. After waiting at least 30 minutes on route 13, a lady who works in a kindergarten took me about 10 kilometers to a point close to route 7. From there an elderly man took me a short ways to a gasoline station on route 7 but from there I had to walk a long distance of nearly an hour to get to a good traffic light. The third person was a truck driver who took me all the way to Odate in Akita Prefecture. The 4th car was a young couple, Jun and Chieharu who took me all the way to the very door of my destination in Aomori City! They actually went a hundred kilometers out of their way to take me because their destination was Hirosaki city, about 50 kilometers before Aomori City. They were on their way to Hirosaki Castle Park to see the cherry blossoms. I had a lot of time to share my faith in Jesus with Jun and Chieharu. They happily prayed with me to [receive Christ as their Savior](#).



Koinobori

**May 5th:** This is the last day of the Golden Week holiday which is called "*Kodomo no hi*" which means "Children's Day". Everywhere there are waving flags in the shape of Carp that are called "[Koinobori](#)" meaning "Carp banner". I left Aomori to go to Chiba in the Tokyo area, nearly 700 kilometers due south. Previous experiences in trying to catch a ride from a driver entering the Tohoku the expressway from Aomori have been difficult with long waits of over an hour, but today I caught the first ride within a minute! The driver was a policeman who flashed his badge at me after riding with him for a few minutes. I was glad to meet a friendly officer of the law, for I told him on April 15 I had been [stopped by two policemen for hitchhiking](#) and was detained for 10 minutes in their patrol car. He smiled sympathetically. I asked him if hitchhiking is illegal in Japan or not, and he replied that it is not. The officer took me up to Hanawa Service Area in Akita Prefecture. The area was crowded with parked cars and people.

After waiting only a few minutes at Hanawa, a couple, Mr. and Mrs Nagata with Kawasaki license plates stopped to pick me up. I rejoiced because I knew they would take me over 95% of the rest of the way to my destination of Noda City in Chiba! This must be the longest I've ever went in a single vehicle for it was at least 600 kilometers.



Takaaki, Atsumi, Minori  
and Ryota

Mr. and Mrs. Nagata have been married for 16 years but have no children. Mrs. Nagata told me that they would like to adopt a child, but Japanese law makes it difficult to adopt unless you already have at least one child! She would need to be a registered kindergarten teacher to qualify.

The travel time from Niigata City to Aomori city of 480 kilometers was 17 hours averaging 29 kilometers per hour in 20 vehicles. By comparison, the trip from Aomori to the Tokyo area only took 3 cars and 8 hours to go 670 some kilometers, and this was in spite of traffic pileups on the expressway during the last day of Golden Week. It was 3 times faster to travel on the expressway than the regular road.

**May 9th:** The sweetest people who picked me up on the way back home were four young people on the way to Numazu in Gunma Prefecture, Ryota, Minori, Takaaki and Atsumi. Their average age was 25 years old. One of the girls, Minori, often touched my arm showing affection. They all visited the USA for a month a few years ago and spoke some English. One of the young men, Ryota, gave me his pen that he said he used in his university.

From Akagi Kougen Service area, Mr. Katou took me as far as Koide, a small town between Kawaguchi and Muika Machi. He travelled all the way from Shizuoka to visit his mother for mother's day which was the next day.



Truck driver who took me to Koide  
in Niigata.

From Koide I opted to take the low road to Ojiya knowing that few cars would be entering the expressway from that point. A Suntory Juice truck picked me up. The driver said that he had never picked up a hitchhiker before. I told him, "congratulations!"

A sweet middle aged couple took me the rest of the way back to Niigata. They were on their way to Nakajo to see their son.

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## [Hitchhike Adventure to Osaka](#)



I always consider it a miracle to hitchhike from Niigata to Osaka in a single day. The distance is over 600 kilometers or about twice what I usually travel. This time it only took 5 cars to get to my destination, and the last driver went out of his way to take me to the very residence I needed to go! I left home just after 9AM and arrived at my friends house in Osaka about 7:30PM after dark. It could have been a bit quicker if there had not been a traffic jam between Kyoto and Osaka. The cause of the jam was a traffic accident.



Route to Osaka from Niigata. Click on map to see an enlargement

The final driver was Mr. Inoue, a company owner. He was driving a brand new Mercedes costing 15 million yen or about \$150,000 US. He pulled up to a parking spot near me at the Shizugatake Service area on the Hokuriku Expressway. Just before he got out of the car, he looked at me and smiled. Usually when I make eye contact with a driver, it's almost certain that they will offer me a ride. I looked away and continued to hitchhike. When I looked back at the car, the man was gone, but a few minutes later as he walked back to his car he approached me asking my destination. I saw from his licence plate that he too would going to Osaka. Mr. Inoue was glad to take me and even went out of his way to drive me right up to my friend's apartment building.

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## [Detained by the police for hitchhiking!](#)



Sunday, April 5, 2009: A lady picked me up and told me at first she would take me to the center of Niigata City which was my destination. However, when I learned that she was on her way home, at about 2/3rds of that distance, I offered to disembark at an intersection that I thought would be convenient for me to continue to hitchhike from so that she wouldn't have to go out of her way.

However, the timing and place where I got off her car were not ideal. Just a few minutes earlier at that very intersection, there was a traffic accident. Two officers of the law were present collecting information. During the past 11 years in Japan, I have never ever been told by the police that I could not hitchhike on a normal road. It's supposed to be legal to hitchhike in Japan. I had nowhere else to hitchhike without walking a long distance of a couple kilometers, so I pulled out my sign to show the drivers and proceeded to hitchhike right in front of the faces of the two officers. They immediately stopped me. According to those two police persons (one was a woman), it is illegal to hitchhike. Jesus said to "agree with your adversary quickly" and so I didn't argue with them. I learned a long time ago that it doesn't pay to get mad at the police and so I smiled a lot, especially in the beginning. They [invited me into their patrol car](#) where they proceeded the usual routine of collecting all the information of my identity. It's a good thing I had my Alien Registration card with me or I would have been arrested. There is no [writ of habeas corpus](#) in Japan. A person may stay in jail for a few weeks for questioning even though not formally charged. [You are considered guilty of a crime until proven innocent](#) and may be badgered to sign a confession of something you did not even do! If you sign a confession of a crime of which you are innocent, it will not be overturned in a Japanese court of law and you will be convicted. (A big thank you to [Arudou Debito](#) for sharing this information!)

After the police got what they wanted (including my cell phone number!), they let me go. I promised I would look for a bus. I ended up walking about 30 minutes to get to a street from where I caught a bus the rest of the way to town. I met and talked to a young man from New Zealand on the bus, so maybe it was worth it all. I wouldn't have met him otherwise.

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# Hitchhike adventure to Chiba prefecture



Nobuo and Miwako

**March 27, 2009** The main purpose of this trip was to bring a desktop PC to a friend in Noda city, Chiba. I took it in a carrying case with wheels so it wasn't so hard to carry. The destination today was the city of Kashiwazaki, [home of the largest nuclear power plant in the world](#), to see my friends Nobuo and Miwako and their friends. An elderly couple with their one year old granddaughter sleeping in a child seat in the back took me out of their way to the city of Sanjo from where I caught a highway bus to go to the Sakae parking area just 5 kilometers down the road.

This was the first day of a special offer from the Japan Highway company. Any car equipped with an "ETC" device can drive as far as they like on the expressway the last two weekdays of every month for only 1000 yen! This means that it's possible to drive from Hokkaido to Kyushu for a 1000 yen when it would normally cost 30,000 yen or more. I expected the expressway to be crowded with traffic, but it wasn't. Only people who frequently use the expressway for business have ETC devices equipped to their vehicle.



Miyuki Saisu

It was for this reason that when I told the the driver of the next car my destination of Kashiwazaki, he didn't hesitate to say he would take me there. The driver and his wife were just taking advantage of the cheap highway toll to take a drive to places they normally would not go. They didn't even have a particular destination that day.

The last driver was Miyuki Saisu, a young mother who took me the last 7 or 8

kilometers from the expressway exit to an area near Kashiwazaki station. She says she has a 2 year old daughter. About 15% of the drivers are women, both married and single. It used to be as high as 19% five years ago but it's slowly going down. Could it be because of my age? ☐

**March 29th, 8:00 AM** It was snowing and the temperature was just at freezing in Kashiwazaki. Nobuo asked me where he should take me, to the train station, or back to the expressway. It's uncommon for it to snow in this part of Japan so late in the year! At first I said the train station, but that would mean I would be aborting my trip to Chiba and going back home instead. Immediately I changed my mind and decided to go for the gold and head for the expressway. Nobuo brought me an umbrella he said I didn't have to return. I was dressed only in a light jacket and a summer cap, but I had some good warm long underwear on. I was glad that at least it wasn't windy.

Nobuo dropped me off at the Kashiwazaki expressway entrance. After 20 some minutes a couple who said they turned around to pick me up took me to a parking area on the expressway just before the Nagaoka junction. It started to snow harder and I took refuge in the parking area restaurant facility and waited 15 minutes for the snow to subside. I wasn't in a hurry and had already an early start.



Parking area of Echigo Kawaguchi on the Kan'etsu expressway. The background shows a mountain of piled up snow.

The next driver was Mr. Kaneko who was on the way to Koide between Echigo Kawaguchi and Muika Machi. He is a good English speaker, but I switched to Japanese when he asked me about what I thought about the U.S President Obama. I told him that the [U.S. government has been in the hands of the International Bankers from 1913](#). It's [Wall Street and the Bankers](#) who are the *real* rulers of America. The President is only their representative who does what he's told to do! Mr. Kaneko was fascinated.

Echigo Kawaguchi was the epicenter of a [major earthquake in October of 2004](#)

The next driver was Mr. Maezawa, a grammar school teacher who took me the furthest, all the way to the Miyoshi parking area near Tokyo. Mr. Maezawa is Sokka Gakkai, a sect of Buddhism that many Japanese consider to be very narrow minded and cultish. In a previous post, I wrote about [talking to a Sokka Gakkai truck driver](#). The problem with Sokka Gakkai and the Nichiren sect of Buddhism it is based on is that the adherents do not acknowledge other faiths as possibly valid. This is very much unlike the average Buddhist who is tolerant of other religions. I shared some things with Mr. Maezawa from the Bible before I knew he was Sokka Gakkai, and true to form, he interrupted me when he didn't want to hear any more and started to share his beliefs. I try to find points of agreement as much as possible with such people and just agree to disagree with the points I don't accept.



I did learn some interesting things from Mr. Maezawa. He told me that his political party, [New Komeito](#), was the party that caught and prosecuted the various companies that polluted Japanese waters with poisons such as [mercury that causes Minamata disease](#). He also told me that the reason Gunma prefecture is so windy is because the clouds from the Sea of Japan on the west dumps its snow on the mountains dividing Japan down the middle of Honshu. It then becomes a dry wind over the Kanto plain.



Nori and Naomi

At the Miyoshi Service area a young man named Nori who was driving a fine car spoke to me in such perfect English I didn't think at first that he is Japanese! It turned out that Nori lived in New York City for a short period when he was 12 years old. He says he's been learning English from 3. Nori offered to take me to Omiya Station. That would have been perfect for me because from Omiya I could pick up a train on the Tobu Noda line and get to my destination for only 400 yen.

Nori took me to a convenience store where he bought me a cup of coffee. After that we picked up his girlfriend Naomi who he said he has met only for the third time. Naomi was impressed at Nori's English. I think impressing his girlfriend was the real reason why Nori picked me up, because instead of taking me to Omiya as I had hoped, he drove me a mere 5 kilometers to the Fujimino station on the Tobu Tojo line saying that Omiya was too far! From there I had to take two more trains to get to Omiya which cost me double than what I had originally thought I would pay for transportation that day. Such is the life of a professional hitchhiker. □

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## [Hitchhike adventure to Ikebukero](#)



Ikebukero is one of the large commercial centers in Tokyo with one of the busiest train stations. I intended to spend the night with a friend in

Ikebukero so that I could easily go from there the next day to the American Embassy to renew my passport. It's been ten years since I got the passport in Hawaii.



Typical night scene in Ikebukero, Tokyo

The first driver was a off duty policeman who specializes in the Japanese mafia known as the “Yakuza”. I hear these days the Yakuza are not very powerful. I hardly see them anymore. The Chinese and Russian mafia have taken over.

I talked to the policeman about my experiences with the Yakuza – usually OK. They normally don't bother the common people. I've been treated to lunch by at least two of them. One thing that strikes me about mafia type of people is that they usually think they are pretty righteous and that society is wrong, not them. The policeman agreed with that point. I then brought out that man in general has this same attitude toward God. It's called “self-righteousness”. We often think we know better than God. Many people even think they are “gooder” than God! But in reality, we are all sinners and criminals in God's sight. Only Jesus did no sin and therefore paid the price for our crimes of ungratefulness toward God and unloving actions toward our fellow man. He paid the price with His own death!

The concept of “sin” is pretty clear in Western cultures, but very vague in the Japanese mind. Even Japanese who have come to know Jesus Christ and are still young in faith don't understand very clearly what sin means. The policeman identified with what I had to say about the average criminal, but did not include himself as a “sinner” in his relationship with his Creator.

Unfortunately many church people in America seem to equate sin mainly with sexual pleasures, or even any type of pleasure while at the same time justifying truly horrible crimes in the eyes of God such as the occupation of Iraq! But Jesus didn't condemn the drunks and harlots. In His eyes, the self-righteous **religious leaders** of His time were the real sinners!

I forgot my hat in the policeman's car without giving him any way to contact me. I don't think he even knew my last name. Somehow he figured out where I live and brought the hat back!

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## [Making new friends on the way to](#)

# Isezaki



A scene from Akagi Kogen Service Area

Isezaki City is in Gunma Prefecture and only about 2/3 of the way to Tokyo from my home. I wasn't in an especial hurry to get there because all that awaited me was to check into a hotel for the night. I had to be in Isezaki in the morning of the next day, February 28, for certain important business. I dislike staying at hotels and rather would stay with friends, but I have no close acquaintances living in that city.

There was relatively little waiting for the first two cars which took me to Sakae Parking on the expressway, but I had to wait nearly two hours for the third driver. In every case, though tiring and taxing on my patience, I find it is worth the wait because God usually sends somebody special. This time it was a kind foreigner, a Russian man by the name of Sasha.

At first I didn't recognize Sasha as a foreigner and spoke Japanese to him, but he told me in English that he doesn't speak Japanese and is from Russia. I then greeted him in Russian and he was so happy! I was happy too because I realized he didn't speak much English, and therefore it gave me a chance to practice speaking again the Russian language that has lain dormant in my mind the past 12 years since living in Russia. I could understand nearly everything he said.

I asked Sasha if he believed in God and he said he is an atheist having been born in Soviet times and was taught atheism. He said he believes the world happened without God. I asked him if he thought his car happened without man, or if he thought the road we were riding on happened without man. I hope I gave him food for thought. Sasha is a very friendly man like most Russians, and our conversation was pleasant the two hours I was with him.

Sasha dropped me off at Komayose Parking area just before Maebashi. Isezaki is about 15 kilometers east of Maebashi. I thought that probably the next car would take me to either Maebashi or Takasaki a bit past Maebashi, and from

there I would take a train the rest of the way. But wonder of wonders, 3 young men heading directly to Isezaki picked me up and took me directly to the hotel! Two of them are 24 years old, and one only 22. They really seemed to like me and one of them, Shinpei, invited me over to his house for supper after checking in at the hotel. I accepted and he took me to his apartment. There I met his wife, Tamami. They are still newlyweds being married only 3 months. I had a great time and shared my faith with them and the two other boys, Yuki and Hidenori. Shinpei wants me to visit again someday. I hope I have further business in Isezaki and meet up with them again in the near future.

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## [Hitch-hike back to Niigata from Saitama](#)



After waiting only a minute at the entrance of the Kan'etsu Expressway in Kawagoe, Mr. Aikawa picked me up and took me to the Takasaka Service area. This was excellent because it is in the direction toward home in Niigata. Often I get picked up by drivers going in the opposite direction, southbound toward Tokyo. I'll go with them as far as Miyoshi Service Area and then walk 20 minutes to get to the northbound area. I was making good time and knew I might be able to even stop for an hour in Tokamachi to see more friends on the way back.



Nobu



Nobu's camping car

From Takasaka, a retired man named Nobu driving a camping car took me as far as Akagi Kogen in Gunma. This was excellent because it is past Takasaki and Maebashi. Often I have to get off at Kamisato, a service area just before these two cities. Many of the drivers will go only as far as Takasaki or Maebashi. I normally reject offers from them to go only that far because I learned from experience it is difficult from those points to get back on the expressway.

Nobu lived 8 years in the USA and spoke good English. His hobby is snowboarding. He said he would travel all the way to Hokkaido in that camping car to go snowboarding. He knew of my friend in Aomori, Simon Bernard ([www.hakkodapowder.com](http://www.hakkodapowder.com)), who helped save the lives of skiers caught in an avalanche on Mt. Hakoda in 2008.



Young people heading toward a ski resort

After waiting around 30 minutes at scenic Akagi Kogen, two cars of young people passed me by but then stopped a few feet away. The driver of the second car drove back toward me in reverse and asked my destination. They were going snowboarding to a mountain resort in Shiozawa just past Yuzawa. Both cars were full of both people and luggage. The driver of the second car had to persuade the driver of the first car to take me and part of my luggage which was two cases. After a bit of negotiation he agreed.

I was glad to get to Shiozawa, but it wasn't exactly an ideal location to hitchhike from. There was too few cars in the parking area. I decided to leave the expressway parking area and walk to the regular highway, route 17. From there I knew it would be fairly easy to hitchhike further. But though route 17 was fairly close within eye shot only about half a kilometer away, I didn't see a road leading to it. I was separated by a snow covered rice field. In the summer it may be possible to walk across the banks of the rice field, but not when it is covered with a meter of snow! I had to walk a long circuitous path just to leave the expressway and then walk along a road that went somewhat parallel to route 17 hoping to get to an intersection. But there was none in sight! There was hardly any traffic along that road and the drivers of handful of cars that passed by ignored me. But God sent another angel to rescue me, a lady who at first said she wasn't going exactly the way I wanted to go but decided to take me to the highway later. I probably would have been walking close to an hour in all if she hadn't come.



People in front of a castle from  
from snow!

From Shiozawa man heading to Nagaoka took me as far as Muika Machi. From

there a family took me to Tokamachi. This city is famous for its deep snowfalls in the winter and it's snow festivals. I saw many well crafted snow sculptures throughout the city. The only other city in Japan where I have seen such snow sculptures is Sapporo in Hokkaido.



Mr. Saito

In Tokamachi I spent an hour with my friends Keiji and Miyoko, and then hitchhiked the remaining 100 kilometers back home – in a single car! The driver, Mr. Saito, was heading to a town right next to mine and dropped me off at a point only a few minutes walk to my house! This is nothing short of miraculous considering the distance involved and the numerous other places a person may be heading to from that point. I walked in the door at 5:15PM, in plenty time for our Sunday evening weekly Christian fellowship meeting.

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## Talking to a Soka Gakkai truck driver



Miniature Schnauzer

It was good weather and still early enough at 4PM to hitchhike the 48 kilometers down route 16 from Noda to Chiba city. Noda is famous for its production of Soy Sauce, and Chiba is the Prefecture capital. I was on my way to see friends before they leave Japan, perhaps this time for good.

Though the distance involved was not so far, because it is the regular highway, I knew I was taking a risk in my race with the sun. I could wind up standing at some traffic light after dark if I had to wait too long, or if it took too many cars. The likelihood of going to Chiba in a single vehicle was



slim – unless it happened to be truck. That's exactly what God provided for me, a kind truck driver. And he had two little dogs, both Miniature Schnauzers for me to pet along the way! I love dogs. I'm also fond of cats and all animals as well.

The driver turned out to be a member of SGI – Soka Gakkai International – radical sect of Buddhism. It is related to two other sects of Buddhism, Nichirenshu and Nichirenshoshu. All three sects are considered by most other Buddhists to be heretical to the basic teachings of Buddha because the founder, Nichiren, was a man of war, not peace and tolerance as almost all Buddhist sects teach.

You may now be able to visualize my reaction when the driver told me he is a member of SGI. But he said it with a smile. □ I always try to open the door to witness to people like these by asking them questions about their faith. In this case, he seemed to be more interested in hearing about my faith in God and Jesus Christ, and of course this made it even easier for him to talk to him. He told me that Buddhism doesn't teach the concept of God as the Creator. I asked him if this fact didn't make Buddhism more of a philosophy rather than a religion? This seemed to be food for thought for him.

I told him my God is Love and love is the main positive power of the universe. God the Father showed His love to us by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us and pay the penalty of our crimes of not acknowledging or thanking Him for all He does for us. The driver remarked that he could see how quickly his dogs took to me. The female Miniature Schnauzer went to sleep on my lap.

The timing was perfect when I arrived in Chiba because my friend and his wife just happened to be in a gas station only a couple hundred meters from where the truck driver dropped me off!

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## [Adventure hitch-hiking to Saitama](#)



Mr. Watanabe

I had to return to Sayama City in Saitama Prefecture to help my friend Jonas clean his PC from a Trojan. Sayama is just a few kilometers NW of Tokyo. This time it took me 10 rides because it took 5 just to get to the expressway interchange in Sanjo.

One lady who picked me up wanted to take me to a train station in Kamo city, but I insisted I would rather be dropped off on the highway. Sometimes the drivers think they know better than me and want to take me to places I know from experience would not be good for me. I try to reason with them, but when that doesn't work, I usually yield to their wishes. But not if they want to take me to a train station when I don't want to take a train!

Mr. Watanabe, a man who works in an employment agency, took me to Sanjo City from where I could get on the Kan'etsu Expressway heading toward Tokyo. As you might notice from the photo, Mr. Watanabe is a very cheerful fellow! He seemed impressed to hear all the things God has given me the skills to do. Perhaps Mr. Watanabe will continue to be a friend when I return home.

A young man who says he designs tests for junior high school children took me a considerable distance close to Yuzawa, a famous ski resort in Niigata Prefecture. I made the mistake of getting off at a rest stop just a few kilometers before Yuzawa. Normally parking areas are better than expressway entrances to hitch-hike at, but not when there are less than 10 vehicles present! I realized it would have been better to get off at Yuzawa and looked for a exit from the Parking area. It was surrounded by snow too deep to walk through and so I had to find the road that I knew the Service Area workers had to use to get to work every day. My first attempt took me down a road that went nowhere. The low road that runs parallel with the expressway was only 30 meters away but to get to it from where I stood I would have to walk through snow over my kneecaps! I knew there had to be a better way. After backtracking my steps I found it.

But though I was able to leave the expressway Service Area, I realized it was just too far to walk to Yuzawa. It would have taken me over an hour and I was at a race with the sun. Unless I catch the last ride before sunset, it gets progressively more difficult to make progress. After walking 15 minutes or so, a 21 year old lady by the name of Yuka rescued me and took me all the way to Yuzawa!

After only a few minutes wait at Yuzawa, a 38 year old truck driver picked me up and took me all the way to Akagi Kogen in Gunma! He said that I am as old as his father and he was one year old when I first came to Japan.

Now I was making progress and knew for sure I would make my destination by evening. It is quite rare for a truck driver going on the expressway to pick me up, perhaps only as much as once a year.

After that a 24 year old man from Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture took me as far as Takasaka Service Area in Saitama! It just started to get dark when I

arrived.

A few minutes later a grammar school principal Higashi Matsuyama took me as far as Tokorozawa! From there it was only a 200 yen train ride to get to Sayama.

**February 20, 2009:** Today was cold and raining with even snow on the ground! This is quite rare for southern Saitama just north of Tokyo. I took a train to Noda City in Chiba Prefecture just Northeast of Tokyo. My friend's PC needed repair.

I hitch-hiked from Noda city to Chiba city in a single vehicle, a truck with two small dogs. The driver is of the Sokagakkai sect. He asked me many questions about Jesus and was impressed that his dog's took to me so quickly. I told him that the God of Creation is a God of Love. All of His creation can understand love, not only people and animals, but even plants. It could be that even non-living materials can react to love or its absence as well.

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## Adventure from Kobe to Kanto



Mr. Notsu from  
Matsui

**February 7, 2009:** I needed to be in Tokyo the very next day and so I hitch-hiked to Noda City in Chiba and stayed with friends. It's a long trip of over 600 kilometers but it only took me 3 cars. The longest ride was from Mr. Notsu who teaches mentally handicapped children. He's from Matsui in Shimane Prefecture but lives in Hiratsuka in Kanagawa Prefecture, over 1000 kilometers from where he was raised.



Mr. Fuji from Ashigara Service Area  
on the Tomei Expressway

Just a few minutes after they left, a good English speaker, Carl, picked me up took me as far as the Kamisato expressway near Gunma. Carl works as general manager of automotive lighting sales for General Electric.

From Kamisato I got a ride to Shibukawa Parking area which is just past Maebashi city. An older couple, Mr and Mrs. Tomaru, took me. The Mrs. Tomaru was looking at me constantly and always smiling as we talked.

After waiting a relatively short time in Shibukawa Parking area, a man driving a fine car took me as far as Akagi Kogen. He is a owner of a golf club. I asked him how much he pays in taxes every year. He replied their are three separate taxes of 20 million yen each from an average yearly income of 200 million yen.



Mr. and Mrs.  
Tomaru

From Akagi Kogen a man took me as far as Echigo Yuzawa. I knew from experience most of the cars from that point would be going back toward Tokyo, and so I decided to hitch-hike on the low road to Muika Machi, about an hour further, and get back on the expressway from there. From before I wanted to visit Muika Machi to check out a job offer. A young man who said he is a road building took me to the company where I left my contact information. After that I walked the rest of the way to the Muika Machi Interchange, a good half hour hike!

From the Muika Machi Interchange a 29 year old man who works in a tool company took me as far as Sanjo. From there it was only a short train ride back home.

The total approximate distance hitch-hiked in this trip was 1917 kilometers or about 1200 miles. The total cost for the short bus and train rides was \$65, and I spent about \$40 for food during the 12 days. I brought back home \$470 made from gifts for my computer work. If didn't hitch-hike but took regular transportation, I surely would have run out of money along the way. Transportation alone would have cost an approximate \$780!

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## [Adventure to Osaka and Nagoya](#)



Nanami (9) and mother, Mrs. Kondo

**January 29, 2009** Today I went to the city of Kashiwazaki to see my friends Nobuo and Miwako. Kashiwazaki is home to the largest nuclear powerplant in the world – built right smack dab on an earthquake fault! The area was hit by a magnitude 6.8 earthquake on July 16, 2007. The nuclear reactors immediately shut down and continue to remain down at the time of this post. It may be several more months before the inspectors are sure the reactors are safe enough to turn back on.

I left home around 9:15AM and walked 20 minutes to the main highway. While waiting at the usual traffic light, a Mrs. Kondo pulled up and asked my destination. Next to her sat her 9 year old daughter Nanami. She offered to take me all the way to the expressway IC in Sanjo – about 20 kilometers out of her way – if I wouldn't mind a slight detour so she could drop her daughter off at school first. I accepted. Mrs. Kondo told me that they returned to pick me up after passing me. Nanami told her, "Mama, there's a man who seems to be in trouble, we have to help him!"

After Mrs. Kondo dropped me off at Sanjo, I took two highway buses to get to the Hokuriku Expressway because I needed to gain some time to make my 2PM appointment with Nobuo. Two drivers took me the rest of the way. One of them was a life insurance salesman. I asked him how any life insurance company can make any money at all when people die and they have to pay out such hefty sums. He replied they invest money in stocks, etc.



Mr. Ohashi, Nobuo and Yuka

In Kashiwazaki I helped Nobuo teach English to his students from 2PM to 8:30PM. It was nice to see Mr. Ohashi again who I met at least 3 times previously, and I got to meet Yuka for the first time. That evening I stayed at Nobuo's parents house.

The next morning after eating a great breakfast, Nobuo's mother took me to the Kashiwazaki expressway entrance. I still didn't know where I would wind up this evening but my general direction was south. The next day I had an appointment to visit friends in Ogaki City in Gifu Prefecture and I had 3 options where to go before that.

Only a few minutes after the first driver picked me up, Nobuo called my cell phone telling me I left my reading glasses! I just had to go back and pick them up. Nobuo's mother kindly went back to the expressway entrance and I got a quick ride back and met her.



Chieko, husband Jun and  
baby Shishi

**January 31, 2009:** Today my destination is Ogaki City in Gifu to see Philip and Maria. I took a bus to the Suita Service area on the Meishi Expressway. The first car was a young couple with a one year old boy. They took me as far as Kyoto. The second driver, a software engineer, took me all the way to Ogaki city – a good 150 kilometers from Kyoto. But he could take me only as far as the expressway bus stop exit. I still had 10 more kilometers to go, a bit too far to walk and the city is not familiar. But I learned I learned I don't really need to learn the roads because the local people know them well. After a quick lunch, I just went to the road and started hitch-hiking again. A young man picked me up and took me right to my destination. □ He says he makes good money maintaining Bullet train tracks.

**Feb. 1, 2009:** I went to Nagoya and met my good friend Silvio from Brazil and his Japanese friend Junko. We had a good chat about their projects.

**February 2-3, 2009:** I visited my Brazilian friend Paulo and his school, 'Escola Sao Paulo' in Anjo City, Aichi Prefecture. He had lots of work for me making sure all the school computers were free of web-bugs, trojans and viruses. I looked at 7 PCs in all, all Notebook computers, and installed Avast Anti-virus on most of them.

Being in the Brazilian school is almost like being in Brazil itself. I had fun picking up Portuguese words and talking to the dear Brazilian people. Most of them cannot speak English, but they all do know some Japanese. Many of them are very good Japanese speakers.



Mrs. Iida

**February 4, 2009:** Because my business in the Osaka area was not finished, I hitch-hiked from Kamigo Service area near Anjo City back to Osaka in 4 cars. The third car was Mr. and Mrs. Iida and their dog, Rimi. I love dogs and Rimi let me pet her, but she still didn't seem to trust me completely throughout



the trip. The Iida family took me as far as Yoro Service Area on the Meishin Expressway. From there a man who works as postal carrier took me the rest of the way to Osaka. He happened to be going to the very area I needed to go, and took me right to my friend's house!

**February 5, 2009:** I went to Kyoto to help my friend Joseph teach English at his school. Spent all day with him from 10AM till 8:30PM.

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## Meeting Yoko and Mariko



Yoko

January 20, 2009: **Yoko** and **Mariko**, two ladies in who appeared to be in their 20s, picked me up near downtown Niigata. Yoko lives in Toyosaka and so it was out of the way for her to take me to Akiha Ward, but she did so anyway. Yoko first took Mariko to where she parked her car, dropped her off and then took me home. They work at the Okura 5 star hotel next to Bandai Bridge in Niigata City. Business is much worse this year than it was last year they said. "But" I replied, "the year has just begun!"

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## Making new friends through hitch-hiking



Making a new friend through hitchhiking.

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## Hitchhike to Tokyo, New Years Eve 2008



Hiromi

I hitch-hiked to Tokyo in 5 cars from Niigata. The third driver was Hiromi, 24 years old from Maebashi, Gunma Prefecture. She took me from Sakae Parking area just after Sanjo in Niigata, to Akagi Kougen in Gunma, a distance of about 150 kilometres. I told Hiromi the Good News of eternal salvation in Jesus and she prayed with me to receive Christ!

The next driver was a 25 year Takayuki from Oita city who took me all the way to Tokyo. I told him about Jesus as well and he also believed! I wanted to introduce Takayuki to Hiromi because they both work in the same city, but this is contingent on whether Hiromi contacts me first. She said she would write me after seeing her photos on my web page, but if she did I may have missed it. I get a lot of spam and a new Japanese address may have been filtered to the spam box by mistake. Maybe she'll still write me later.



Valentin and Yoshiko

In Tokyo I visited my friends Russian Valentin and Japanese Yoshiko. I first met Valentin in 1994 in Khabarovsk, Russia, and a second time in Aomori Japan in 2006. Valentin and Yoshiko work in the national Japanese travel agency.