

Hitchhike Adventure From Niigata City to Nagano and Tokyo



This is an article I wrote at the end of August 2005. It was on my old website which is no longer on-line and I am therefore re-posting it. After reading it again, I found numerous typos, corrected them, and am therefore re-posting it to the home page.

I hitchhiked from Niigata City to Matsumoto City in Nagano, then to Tokyo, and then back to Niigata in 3 days, a distance of 700 kilometers (440 miles) in 16 vehicles. Among these were 3 trucks and at least one luxury car. Among the people who picked me up were one stock broker, one high school teacher, 4 foreigners, and 2 relatively wealthy men one of whom is a nationwide famous entertainer! Three of the cars had small children, two had women without a male companion, and two had large dogs, one a Labrador and the other a German Shepherd.



Jerry Fujio,
Japanese
entertainer

The highlight of this trip was being picked up by a famous entertainer: Jerry Fujio. You may not have heard of him in your country, but everybody in Japan over 35 years old seems to know him quite well! All my Japanese friends have seen him on TV or in a film. His peak of fame seems to be around the 1960s. I asked him if people hound him for his autograph. "A long time ago" was his reply. Jerry's mother is English and his father is Japanese. His age seemed to be in his early 70s.

Another highlight was a retired man in his 60s from the Meguro area of Tokyo

driving an expensive car who appeared to be of upper-class Japanese society. The reason I say this is because he looked like a company president and attended Sumo wrestling matches. Tickets to these events are very expensive! He didn't accept my business card nor even give me his name. He probably didn't want to accept my card because in doing so, he would be obliged to give me his in keeping with Japanese custom. Nevertheless, he was very friendly, talkative and laughed a lot! I asked him if he is a member of a secret society. He replied he's a member of a golf club. He didn't tell me exactly what his profession was except that it was related to education and government but that he was not a politician. I asked him if he knew that the United States is a secret dictatorship run by the [CFR](#), and he replied in the affirmative. I told him that most Americans don't know that which surprised him. Though not a Christian nor a believer in God, he does acknowledge the possibility that the world could have been created by a Great Designer. He said he doesn't believe in Darwinism and claimed that it is not taught in schools in Japan. I thought it strange he would say that because nearly everyone in Japan believes in Darwinian evolution.

A Chinese couple with a baby took me as far as Kurohime ("Black Princess"), a small mountain town in Nagano Prefecture close to the border of Niigata Prefecture. I didn't know at first that the man was Chinese because his Japanese was so good. He is from Harbin and his mother is Japanese. Harbin is part of Manchuria which the Japanese occupied till the end of WW2. He is very knowledgeable about the world and real motivations in politics. We talked about the [Tienanmen Square massacre of 1989](#). I told him I met a Chinese college student in Southern China back in 1998 who believed that nobody was killed in that tragedy. He replied that thousands of students had probably died! How quickly the world is forgetting that it ever happened. He knows that there is no real democracy or freedom in China, and especially no freedom of religion.

To learn more about China, its history, and the murder of Chinese citizens by their own government on June 4th and 5th, 1989, please see: [The Tiananmen Square Massacre](#)

I never got off the expressway at Kurohime before, and so it was an adventure pioneering how to get back on track. There were few cars so it took me a while to get back on the main road. I did so 3 cars later.



A red Ferrari, \$300,000
of eventual junk

At Kamisato Service Area on the Kan'etsu expressway, a red Ferrari sports car parked right in front of where I stood hitchhiking with my sign. The driver got out and looked at the rear of the Ferrari. His friend from another car walked up and also looked. They looked and looked for the longest time. I thought they were literally worshipping that car! They looked at it from all angles and took photographs. If I ever ended up with such a thing, I wouldn't

really own it, it would own me! I probably would be thinking about the Ferrari half of the day if I owned one. I'd get bummed out even if it got the tiniest scratch on its shiny red exterior. Thank God for deliverance from materialism!

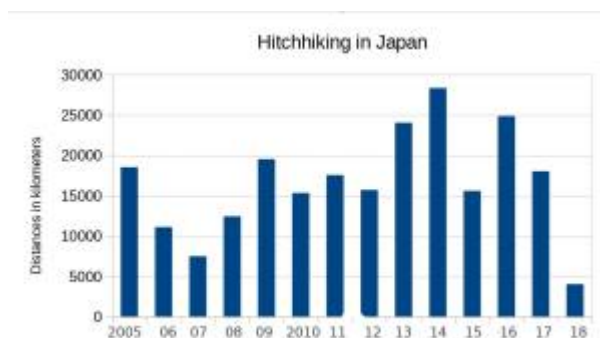
I always carry with me Gospel literature and give a copy to every driver. I try to share some seeds of the Word of God in their hearts, as much as I feel they are ready to hear and receive. Most Japanese are very respectful of Jesus Christ. From my experience, the only ones who don't often are those who belong to a radical sect of Buddhism called Sokkagakai which sprang out of Nichiren Shoshu, a sect which is also intolerant of other faiths. Most Buddhists do respect Jesus and His teachings.

Pioneered Hitchhiking in Guam!



Fun hitchhiking and meeting new people on the Pacific island of Guam.

The End of My Adventures Hitchhiking in Japan

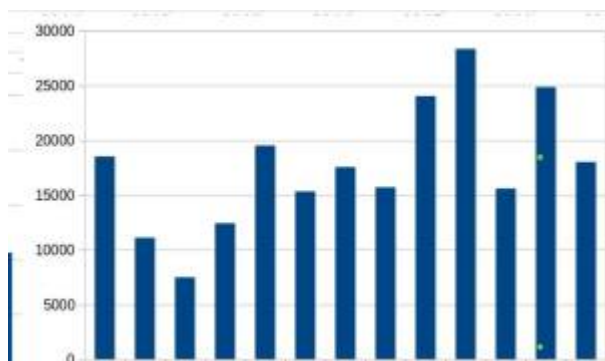


My days of hitchhiking in Japan are over. On May 5th, 2018 I will start a brand new life in Guam with my bride! The chart shows the distances I

traveled by hitchhiking since I kept records, a total of 258,500 kilometers. I estimate the total distance hitchhiked over 20 years from March 1998 to be 350,000 kilometers.

You can see a [detailed breakdown](#) of the people who picked me up.

End of Year 2017 Hitchhike Statistics



Distances I hitchhiked in Japan in 2017.

Hitchhike Adventure During Golden Week 2005



This is another adventure I had on my old kt70.com/~jamesjpn site which I am reposting. It occurred from April 27 to May 7, 2005.

I had two consecutive hitchhiking adventures, the first to Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo, and the second to Nagano. The total distance traveled in the 19 vehicles that picked me up was about 1750 kilometers or 1095 miles. This was during the period called "Golden Week" in Japan. Golden Week is a string of 4

national holidays which begin on April 29 and ends on May 5. Many people travel during this period to visit their parents and relatives. That makes it a relatively good time to hitchhike long distances.

The first day, Wednesday April 27, I hitchhiked to Osaka, a distance of 565 kilometers from my home in Niigata City to my friend's home, and in only 9 hours and 40 minutes! This is exceptionally quick considering that it was on a weekday. The 4th and last vehicle, a mini van, took me 498 kilometers of the 565 kilometers or 88% of the distance. This is the furthest traveled in a single ride since I have been keeping statistics from August 2003. The driver went a bit out of his way to take me right to my friend's house! The driver and his partner are members of the "Sokagakai" sect of Buddhism. They are not known to be friendly to other religions, and *especially* not to Christians! But they were polite. I first ask them questions about what they believe and listen to them. This obliges them to listen to me when I tell them about Jesus!



Kengo with his girlfriend.

In Osaka I saw my friend Kengo – the sponsor of my very first web site at kt70.com/~jamesjpn – and his girlfriend Aya. I first met Kengo while hitchhiking through Shizuoka in 1998. He was the person who helped me get started with web site construction back in 2001 by offering me free web hosting on his server! After sowing seeds of the Word of God in his heart over the years, I finally had the opportunity to pray the prayer of salvation with him to receive the Lord Jesus Christ into his heart!

Osaka is next to the city of Amagasaki where [a tragic train accident](#) occurred on April 25 when 107 people died when the lead car derailed and smashed into a building.

Two days later I took the train to Kyoto and visited two friend's homes. This was the most expensive part of the trip – about \$10 to travel only 1.5 hours. People often ask me if I visited the many temples in Kyoto. I do not visit temples!! I tell them if I wanted to see a Buddhist temple – which I don't – I would take a little walk down the road from my house to see one.



The Okubo family

The photo the Okubo family who took me from Kyoto to a parking area near Gifu City. A Japanese muck raking tabloid called "Friday" published an article in that week's edition about my Christian Fellowship, [The Family International](#), and had a line about yours truly in it! It says, (my translation from Japanese) "*Hitchhike evangelism – A male believer of the group who supports the [Ainokakehashi Project](#) (a web site I made for my friends in Hiroshima) is*

engaged in evangelism while hitchhiking across the country. On his web site are many photos of regular people who picked him up." Ha! While at a parking area I pointed out to Mrs. Okubo the magazine at the newsstand and told her there was a line in it about me. She said, "What?! There's something bad in it about you?" "Not at all" I replied, and I showed her the article. She understood very well that the particular magazine is a muck raking tabloid trying to make money by throwing dirt at others. The article didn't even have all the facts correct. But I felt honored that the reporters noted my web sites. The Devil may be trying to hurt my hitchhike ministry by this article, but because Friday magazine, though nationwide, is read by a relatively small percentage of the population, so far nobody who has picked me up since the article has mentioned it. None of my close Japanese friends read such a gossip rag.

After spending the night in Gifu City, I hitchhiked to Tokyo. Shigeru, an officer in the Japanese Self Defense force took me a good distance and even bought me lunch. He works as a MP. Shigeru says that unlike the US Military, there is no military court system in Japan. Serious crimes in the military are brought before civilian courts. I had a great time talking to Shigeru and shared the Gospel with him.

An Indonesian couple with two small daughters in the car took me back to Niigata from Tokyo. The husband spoke English well and was quite talkative. They are Muslims. I have no problem at all with most Muslim people I meet. Only a small percentage of Islamic people I have met have tried to argue against the Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Indonesians were very friendly. They understand very well the **real** reasons for the [war in Iraq](#). Many Japanese tell me that the war is about religion. Nothing could be further from the truth. I try to help them see how they have been conditioned by the mass media to think so.

Trip to Nagano May 6-7

I hitchhiked to Nagano on Friday. An elderly man took me most of the way and even bought me lunch. Nearly every week I go to Chino City to perform marriage ceremonies. I get a ride to the wedding chapel, but to return home, I often walk from Chino station to the Suwa interchange, a distance of about 3 kilometers or almost 2 miles carrying all my luggage with me. But I really don't mind it. It keeps me healthy. Part of hitchhiking is not only the "hitch" but the "hike" . When I get weary of walking, I think of wealthy people who spend thousands of dollars just to scale a mountain peak while enduring all sorts of discomfort but getting nowhere. I walk not *just* for exercise, but to get somewhere!



Mrs. Yamashita and
children

On the right is a photo of Mrs. Yamashita and her children who were riding in

the car that picked me up on May 7. Her husband, Masa, speaks English. He took me from Suwa IC to the Suwa parking area a few kilometers down the road. Masa has since been writing me emails asking deep questions about the reasons for war and why believing in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and personal savior is so important.



From Suwa a college student, Mr. Mochizuki, picked me up and took me as far as Matsushiro parking next to Nagano City.

There were not many cars at this parking area and so I opted to walk directly to the drivers and show them the sign I was holding an A4 paper sign with the name "Niigata" which was my destination. One lady in a S.U.V. saw the sign and waved her hand back and forth meaning "no!" I saw that the license plate of her car said "Nara", a city near Osaka which meant that they would be going at least part of the way to my destination. After about 20 minutes the lady walked up to me with a map saying that she and her husband would take me as far as Nadachitanihama, a parking area not far from the junction that goes to Niigata. They would be entering the junction going the opposite way from Niigata, but because the parking area is not far from the junction, and because this particular parking area has a bridge crossing to the other side with traffic going to Niigata, I happily accepted her proposal!



Satomi

Later well into the trip the couple decided they would do me a favor and take me toward the direction of Niigata from the junction. This unfortunately was not nearly as good for me as the original plan for they took me instead to the Joetsu IC. It's not as easy to catch a ride at an interchange as it is from a Parking Area, and besides that, it was already dark. So after waiting unsuccessfully for 20 minutes I decided to leave the interchange and make my way to the nearest train station and take a train the rest of the way home. It was \$40 just to travel 60 miles! I had to climb a low fence to get to the regular road. There was a gas station nearby where I asked directions. The attendees said it was too far to walk to the station and one of them, the sweet girl in the photo, Miss Satomi, gave me a lift!

Did you like this page? Please write and tell me about it! Or if you see any typos, misspellings or bad grammar I would appreciate hearing about it so I can correct it.

Hitchhike Adventure During Golden Week



Another oldie goldie adventure from my old website I am reposting.

On April 30, 2004, I hitchhiked 500 kilometers from Niigata city to Nagoya, the 3rd largest metropolis in Japan. It was the second day of "Golden Week." Below is a brief description of what Golden week is all about:

The Golden Week is a collection of several national holidays within seven days in the end of April and beginning of May. It consists of four national holidays: Green Day (Midori no hi) on April 29, Constitution Day (Kenpo kinenbi) on May 3, "Between Day" (Kokumin no kyuujitsu) on May 4 and the Boy's Festival (Kodomo no hi) on May 5. (Taken from <http://www.japan-guide.com/topic/0005.html>)



Tetsunori

The most interesting person who picked me up on the way was a 24 year old Buddhist monk by the name of Tetsunori. He said he sat down in mediation for two weeks straight in a cross legged position without sleeping on 3 different occasions! He was not allowed to sleep nor move during this time! I asked him how it went. "My legs hurt" he replied. I told Tetsunori all about Jesus and my life as a missionary and he told me all about his life as a monk. I was surprised to learn that he is allowed to listen to any kind of music he likes or watch any type of trashy Hollywood film. I would think they would have more separation from the world. But Japanese Buddhists have much more freedom than other Asian countries. They are allowed to marry and have children which is not allowed in Thailand or Tibet. Tetsunori says that he is the 17th generation of Buddhist monks that have been responsible for the care of a temple he lives in. I pray that the Lord used me to plant some seed of the Word of God into his heart. Buddhism is another "works religion". Only the Blood of Jesus Christ can save us! I told Tetsunori that Jesus' Message is simple enough that a young child can understand. We both agreed that if only

highly intellectual people can attain to knowledge of salvation, not many would be saved. I know I wouldn't be. I couldn't even spell the word "intellectual" correctly and had to look it up! ☐

In the Nagoya area I stayed with my Brazilian friend Paulo and his family. He took me to a typical Japanese Golden Week festival.



Paulo with his youngest son,
Enoki



Brazilian children dancing



The flags in the shape of
Japanese carp are called
Koinobori in Japanese. They are
flown every year from April till
the end of Golden Week.



Booth of the Brazilian school in
Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture.

"Koinobori. Carp streamers, called *koinobori* in Japanese, decorate the landscape from April through early May in honor of Children's Day on May 5. In Japanese culture, the carp symbolizes courage and strength because of its ability to swim up a waterfall. Since these are traits desired in boys, families traditionally flew koinobori from their homes to honor their sons. Ranging in size from about a foot to several meters in length, the koinobori resemble jewel-toned sea beasts swimming through the watery, azure skies. May, 1998." (Taken from <http://www.hardfocus.net/stevie/koinobori.htm>)

On May 3rd. I left downtown Nagoya at 1:30 PM to start back home. This is rather late to hitchhike another 500 kilometers, but I couldn't leave any earlier. It was absolutely imperative for me to be back home sometime this evening in order to perform a Christian style marriage ceremony the very next day! I opt to hitchhike at least part way to save some money.

Though I like to be cheap on myself, in order to save some time to get out of the busy city center, I took a 20 minute train ride to Tajimi, a small town that is close to the Chuo Expressway. This expressway passes through Nagano Prefecture which is on the way to Niigata. It is also a tried and proven route I have traveled many times and the same route I used to travel to Nagoya.

The entrance to the Chuo Expressway is about 3 kilometers distance from the train station, a bit too far to walk because I am pressed for time, so I caught a ride from a kind man going that way. I arrived at the expressway entrance about 2:30 PM. So far so good!

I was not surprised to find most of the traffic heading back the opposite direction to Nagoya. I know that at least SOME drivers would be headed to Nagano, but after waiting more than 30 minutes I was getting a bit discouraged. The drivers that were heading the direction I wanted to go ignored me, but others offered me a ride going back to Nagoya. I knew there is a fairly large parking area called Utsutsutoge only 5 minutes down the road toward Nagoya, so I decided to take up the next offer going that direction (the opposite way I intended to go) thinking that I could find my way on foot to the other side of the parking area which heads back in the right direction. I have done this from time to time when I thought it was necessary. To date there hasn't been a single parking area I haven't figured out how to get to the opposite side. Some have a foot bridge to cross over but most have access roads which run parallel to the expressway with a tunnel going under the expressway. But the Utsutsutoge parking area is the *very first* expressway parking area to have neither! It is situated in mountains with no access road running parallel to the expressway. There was no way I could get to the opposite side going in the right direction unless I would attempt to cross the expressway on foot – something extremely dangerous if not illegal! Cars were whizzing past as fast as 140 KM per hour. That means to give myself at least 5 seconds to cross safely both the East bound and West bound lanes, I would had to wait for both directions to clear for a distance of at least 200 meters or about the length of two football fields. That was not going to happen. It was heavy traffic during "Golden Week" which is vacation holiday time in Japan when folks travel long distances to see their relatives or go sightseeing. Back in 1998 I did the cross the same expressway in this manner, but it was in a area far from the big city with few cars passing that time of day. Happily I wasn't spotted by the police.

All was not lost, however. I knew that though I had to keep heading the opposite direction from what I originally planned, I still had a few more options. One was to travel as far as Maibara from where I could catch a ride on the Hokuriku expressway which would take me to Niigata. But this route is much longer. It would add another 150 KM to my journey. Another possibility was to try a new expressway route that I had never traveled on before. It's

called the "Tokkai-Hokuriku". This also heads toward the Hokuriku expressway which would take me to Niigata, but cuts the distance in half. The reason I never attempted to travel this route before is because the expressway is not completed in the middle (at that time). There is a stretch of 35 kilometers of normal road connecting both ends. My third option was to travel to a point I could get off the expressway I was on now and hitchhike back the opposite way.

The driver who picked me up at Utsutsutoge suggested that the Tokkai-Hokuriku route may be the best one for me. He said he traveled it only very recently toward Toyama. I knew if I could get as far as Toyama, it would be a piece of cake the rest of the way – or so I thought! More about that later.



On the map the blue line represents the route to Nagoya. The red line was my return trip. The green line was a possible alternate route which though much more out of my way, is a route I had traveled much before. The part of the red line that crosses Honshu toward the Sea of Japan and connects two points of the green line ending at Toyama (name not listed on the map) is the Tokkai-Hokuriku, a new route I had never used before.

After a 40 minute wait, a car with 2 men and a women took me half way to Toyama. Their names were Mitsuru (the driver), Yoshinori and Rie, all friends employed at the same company. We traveled though some of the most beautiful mountain areas of Japan with lots of lakes, rivers and even a waterfall.



(Left to Right) Mitsuru,
Yoshinori, Rie and me



One of the many lakes along the
way

They couldn't take me as far as I would have liked but dropped me off at a tourist area with other parked cars and a constant flow of traffic. It took me at least a half hour to get my next ride, a married couple by the names of Hiroshi and Masayo. I had something in common with them. They both spent a year living in Moscow and could speak Russian! We exchanged a few sentences

in Russian. There are not many Japanese people interested in Russia. Only a very small percentage of the population is interested in visiting, and only a very tiny percentage who learn the Russian language.




With Hiroshi and Masayo

It was 7:30 in the evening by the time we arrived in Toyama on the Hokuriku Expressway. I still have some 250 kilometers left in my journey! The winds were blowing very strong along the Hokuriku which runs close to the Sea of Japan. So strong in fact that the cars and trucks were swayed sideways by heavy gusts! So though I originally told Hiroshi and Masayo that I would get off as soon as we arrived at Toyama to hitchhike further, because of the wind and the lateness of time, I lost confidence and turned to “the arm of the flesh” and decided to take the train the rest of the way. They themselves encouraged me to do the same. We thought there would still be trains going to Niigata at 8PM. We were wrong!

As it turned out, I missed the last train by about a half hour. There was no way I could get home by train that night! So Hiroshi and Masayo offered to take me back to the expressway entrance. I lost 45 minutes of precious time because I didn't have faith to continue hitchhiking, and now I was forced to hitchhike like it or not!

I was desperate! It is now completely dark, about 8:15 PM. Hitchhiking is much more difficult at night. A few cars with Niigata license plates seemed to slow down for me. I ran up to them in excitement thinking the driver would offer me a ride. This only caused the driver to become afraid of me and he fled away! One man stopped and I asked him a pleading tone of voice to take me at least part way home. He refused. So I realized that I needed to calm down and have more faith that God would come through for me. A pleading and desperate sounding tone of voice was working against me.

After about 45 minutes a man offered to take me as far as Arisomi – a large parking area a good distance down the road. I knew from experience that it was a very good place to get my next ride.

Most of the people ignored both me and the paper sign I was holding:  – Niigata.

At the parking area I tried to talk to the few who made eye contact. One man seemed to be willing to take me but his wife was not! She had a look of apprehension in her eyes. So I politely excused myself and left.

I don't like to make the Japanese people feel they must do anything for me. I try to leave it up to them. I know that God's sheep are always around somewhere. Sometimes they seem to be only 1 in a thousand. It was now 9:30PM and the cold attitude most people had was understandable. Why was I so dumb to get myself into such a situation anyhow?

After many rejections I decided to step away from the crowd and stand near the expressway entrance. This way more drivers would see me. But as I turned to go, one couple I had asked only a few minutes before approached me. The wife began chiding me for letting myself get in such a fix! I just smiled and calmly said that I had misjudged the time and had hoped to get a train, but there were no more trains. She softened her voice and said if it was all right with me, they would take me as far as Nagaoka – about 90% of the rest of the way! Of course I was very glad to accept their offer.

Throughout the journey they were both talkative and asked me many questions about my life. The wife asked me what I teach. I told them about Jesus and why He was killed on a cross. Most Japanese don't know or realize the meaning of the cross. They don't know that crucifixion was the preferred method of executing criminals during the reign of the Roman Empire. And so I make it a good history lesson for them. Japanese people tend to be very indifferent toward religion in general, but because they like to learn history, I try to approach them from this angle.

About half way into our trip the couple conferred with each other and decided to take me the rest of the way home – an extra distance way out of their way of at least 100 kilometers! And half of that is by low road. I refused their offer at first but the husband insisted several times. So I left it at that. It was my final answer to prayer to be home that night! Though it was after midnight when I finally arrived home, there was still plenty of time to get a good night sleep in preparation for the next day. I had to be on a train at 8:02 that morning to travel a 100 kilometers back in the direction I came!

[Tips On How to Hitchhike in Japan](#)



With another man also hitchhiking! His partner with him took the photo.

Due to popular request I have compiled a list of tips and lessons I learned over the past several years hitchhiking in Japan. I think the basic tip is to use common sense and have the attitude of, "where there's a will, there's a way."

- Get to the a good intersection of the highway that has a **nice long red traffic light** which builds up a good row of vehicles in front of it when the light turns red. Sometimes I walk 3 or 4 kilometers to get to it, sometimes and sometimes I take train or a bus to get to it.
- I usually stand before the traffic light. The longer the light stays red, the better. I stand near the light when it first turns red and wait for the first car to come. When I think the driver is close enough to see the whites of my eyes, I either hold out my thumb or hold out a sign that shows my destination. If the driver either makes no eye contact with me, shows no interest, or waves his or her hand back and forth indicating "NO!", I proceed to walk up to the next car, and then the next, and then the next until either I get a positive response from the driver or the traffic light turns green and the cars begin to move again. When the light turns green, I turn around and walk back to the light and wait till it turns red again.
- Sometimes I'll continue to hold out my sign after the light turns green in spite of the fact the traffic is flowing. Sometimes an interested driver who sees my sign though he passes me by and crosses the intersection will return back for me and offer me a ride. This has happened dozens of times.
- I try to present myself well groomed and dress reasonably well in dress pants and a dress shirt, never in jeans. Sometimes I've hitchhiked wearing a suit and tie but I found it really didn't help much.
- I try to make eye contact with the driver and smile. Once he or she makes eye contact, it usually means a ride.
- I made signs showing my destination with A4 size paper and a thick pointed magic marker. I use a clear plastic holder to keep the signs together with the sign of my destination on top. The sign is written in Japanese ideographs (Kanji).



An example sign written on A4 size paper in a plastic folder with other signs below the top sign.

Usually I'll carry the marker and several blanks sheets of A4 paper in the plastic holder if I need to make a sign of a new destination. The driver is usually happy to write the Kanji down for me. I can copy Japanese characters if I look at them, but the Japanese will write them much nicer than I can. □ Since 2016 I started using larger binded sketchbooks to make signs. One advantage is the pages are bound and will not fly away in the wind as A4 pages can. I write one kanji on a page and hold the sketchbook open showing two pages. The names of most cities and prefectures in Japan consist of two kanjis. The sign is therefore larger and easier to see from a far distance.



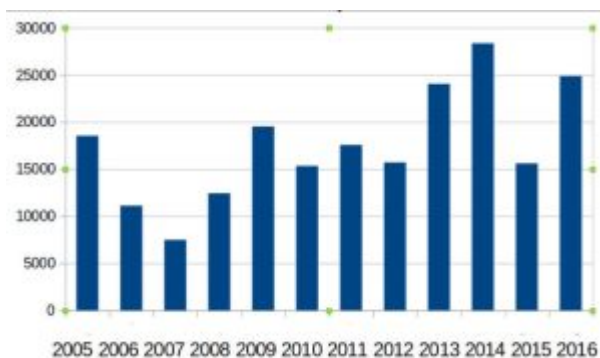
A3 page in a binder can be used for signs.

- A sign should not show a destination that is too far away. On a regular

road the destination should be not further than the next major city. The exception to this rule is if your destination is the largest city among all the cities you will be passing. Some examples: Tokyo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Niigata.

- At expressway entrances, try to stand at a safe place before the entrance where the cars can easily stop. There are good expressway entrances to hitchhike at, and poor ones. How do you know the difference? By experience!
- If after you catch a ride from a driver entering the expressway who is going toward the direction of your destination but considerably short of it, have him drop you off at the largest service area that is before his exit point. Service areas are better than expressway entrances because the flow of traffic is always in the direction you want to go. I stand near the facilities on the side of the road where cars would pass when exiting. If you are too obvious or stand too close to the exit ramp, the traffic cops might tell you to leave when they see you.

[Distances Hitchhiked Since year 2005 / Sharing Christ with the Japanese](#)



A white American hitchhiked throughout Japan consistently over a 20-year period.

[Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori City and Kanto](#)



On September 17th, 2016, I hitchhiked from the crossroads of Route 345 and Route 7 near Gatsugi Station in Murakami City in Niigata Prefecture all the way to Aomori City in a single car! This is a distance of about 400 kilometers or 250 miles. I am 66 years old at the time of this post.

The driver's name is Hiroshi who lives and works in France as a chef of French cuisine. He once was the chef of the Emperor and Empress of Japan and actually met them! He bought me lunch and went way out of his way to take me exactly where I wanted to go, a 5 hour drive from his original destination. Unfortunately Hiroshi wouldn't let me take a photo of him.

Hiroshi needed to go to Yokote City to buy some exotic Japanese cuisine. Normally I would have refused to go with him to Yokote, but he promised me he would take me the rest of the way to Aomori afterwards and I believed him. Yokote is the longer route to Aomori.

The scenes are in Akita Prefecture. The red and white striped pole is to mark the edge of the road after heavy snowfalls, a frequent winter occurrence in this part of northern Japan.



Akita Prefecture, Ani



Two days later my destination is now Sayama city in Saitama Prefecture. Saitama is one of the prefectures in the Kanto Plain area of Japan. Aomori City is the northern city of Honshu, and Saitama is just north of Tokyo which means I needed to travel 600 kilometers or 400 miles that day in order to make it. I nearly didn't!

After waiting only 30 minutes, a couple going to Furukawa City in Miyagi picked me up. This was a good distance of 200 kilometers, a 1/3 of the distance I needed to go!



The couple who took-me over 200 kilometers-from Aomori City to Miyagi Prefecture

The second driver was on his way to Nagoya and would pass through Niigata. Normally I would have gone with him to Niigata which has been my home till date. But because today I'm going to Saitama, he took me to the Adataru Service Area in Fukushima Prefecture which is just before the Banetsu junction that goes to Niigata.



Masayuki who took me to Fukushima from Miyagi



The third car of my hitchhiking adventure from Aomori City to Sayama City in Saitama was a young couple I met at Adataru service area in Fukushima. They were on their way to Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture and had also picked up a university student who was also hitchhiking from Aomori City! He was on his way to Matsumoto in Nagano which is 3 times further than my destination in Saitama. The couple offered to take us both to the Sano Service Area in Tochigi.

By the time we arrived to Sano, it was dark and raining heavily to the low atmospheric pressure influence of the typhoon in Okinawa. Because it was a holiday, "Senior Citizens Day," the service area was crowded with vehicles and thronged with people. But from experience I knew that was not necessary a good thing. Too many people means the average Japanese thinks someone else will give the poor hitchhiker a ride!

I stood in front of the restrooms out of the rain and showed the paper sign of my destination to everyone. They all knew what I was doing but nearly everyone ignored me and avoided making eye contact. Often a person who makes eye contact is willing to help.

At the service area there were 3 other hitchhikers. One was the university student who came with me from Fukushima, and the other two were highschool students on their way to Hannyu city in Saitama. We were all in the same boat. Nobody was offering them rides either.

After about 45 minutes, a man approached me and gave me a can of hot coffee and a pet bottle of green tea! He couldn't help me but wanted to encourage me.

After an hour I decided to call it quits. I consigned myself to an uncomfortable night camping out in the service area rest facility. There were only hard chairs to lay down on.

I sat down at a crowded table in the midst of other travelers. After a few minutes a young lady sitting on my right started talking to me in English. She was interested in what I was doing but I could tell her male partner

wasn't interested in helping me.

After she and her partner left a man sitting at my left started speaking to me in perfect English! He lived in Germany for 4 years and went to an international school in Frankfurt and all that time schooled in a total English environment. He was on his way with his family to an area in Saitama which is relatively close to my final destination! I told him I am facing an unpleasant night unless I can leave the service area and get to a train station and go by train where I needed to go, Sayama City. He talked to his family and they agreed to take me with them! And what a family! It was his parents, his wife and children, and his brother's and sister's spouses and children, at least 20 people in all! And because they all lived in Germany before, most of them speak English! They were traveling in the huge bus you see in the photo.



The bus that took me from Tochigi to Saitama.

In the beginning I spoke to them in English but later switched to Japanese as I shared my faith in the Creator God and true history from the Bible. They listened with interest and one of the men became my Facebook friend.

I am facing a crossroads in my life at this time. Rather than hitchhike several times a month to Aomori just to earn money, I am thinking and praying about moving there. Any financial help or encouragement you can send me is appreciated.

First Hitchhiking Adventure of 2016 from Niigata City



On March 4th, 2016 I hitchhiked 100 kilometers or about 60 miles to the city of Tokamachi. It is a city in the midst of hills. The Shinano River which is

the longest river in Japan flows through Tokamachi. It's called "Shinano" for that was the old name of Nagano Prefecture which is its source. But in Nagano Prefecture the same river is called Chikuma.



Doctor Masaya

The first driver was a medical doctor by the name of Masaya. He works in a hospital not far from my home. I asked Masaya if he believes the spirit is separate from the physical. He said most doctors do not believe the spirit affects physical health, but he does. I gave him tracts from [Dr. John Gideon Hartnett](#) that expose Evolution, Big Bang, Dark Matter and Dark Energy as pseudo-science. Masaya took me from Niigata city to Sanjo city which is on the Kanetsu / Hokuriku expressway. He could not take me exactly where I wanted to go in Sanjo because he was pressed for time. I walked the rest of the way, about 20 minutes and crossed a bridge over the Shinano River to get to the expressway interchange.



Man who took me to Echigo Kawaguchi

After hitchhiking at the expressway interchange for 15 minutes without success, I decided to take a 190 yen bus ride to get to the Sakae Parking area of the expressway. From there a man on the way to Gunma prefecture took me to Echigo Kawaguchi. "Echigo" is the old name for Niigata before the Meiji era. Kawaguchi literally means "river's mouth". It has some meaning related to the Shinano River which passes through it. The man was coming from Gosen City on his way back home in Gunma.

Because the man was not getting off the expressway, he dropped me off at a parking area from where I could walk over a bridge to get off the expressway to a regular road. Pedestrians are *not* supposed to be walking on that bridge! One of the expressway workers saw me passing by the toll booth and knew I must have walked over the bridge from the expressway parking area! By the time he saw me I was already in safe territory and there was nothing he could do to stop me from going further. He was only curious as to what I was doing. I was honest with him and told him I was hitchhiking and needed to go to Tokamachi. Because the driver didn't get off the expressway at that point, I had to walk. He told me that was a no no and not to do it again, but he wasn't upset at me at all. He said it only out of a sense of duty to the people he works for.

After that it was only a few minutes wait for the next man to stop. Tokamachi was still too far to walk to. It was a 30 minute drive from Echigo Kawaguchi. The weather was fine that day and the sunset was beautiful over scenic Tokamachi. This city is noted for its heavy snowfalls, but this year the snow wasn't as high as last year.



Tokamachi at dusk

My purpose to go to Tokamachi was to visit my good friends Keiji and Miyoko and family. The next day Keiji had business in Mitsuke city which is going back the way I came. But nevertheless because he would be passing by Ojiya City, I asked him to take me to the Ojiya Interchange. My destination was Sayama City in Saitama Prefecture. From Ojiya it is nearly twice the distance that I traveled the previous day. But I had all day to get there.

Ojiya City is close to the epicenter of a major earthquake in October 2004. About 50 people died. Had an earthquake the same strength occurred in the center of Tokyo, hundreds of thousands would have died! Roads after the earthquake were broken and cars could not pass from Niigata to Tokyo the shortest way possible.

After only a few minutes at the Ojiya Interchange, a man stopped and took me to Echigo Kawaguchi, the expressway service area I had been to the previous day. But this day I needed to go further. It was fine weather and so warm I actually took off my heavy winter coat!

It was about an hour before I finally got a good ride. Just before it a man offered to take me to Muika Machi, but it was too close and would have taken me back off the expressway had I gone with him. The driver and couple were elderly in perhaps their late 70s. They were on the way to Saitama, but would get off the expressway at a point before my destination. I asked them to take me to the Kamisato Service area which is just within the border of Saitama.



Driver and car that took me to Saitama Prefecture



The entrance of the Kanetsu tunnel, the longest car tunnel in Japan.

We passed through the Kanetsu tunnel which is the longest tunnel in Japan for vehicles. It's nearly 11 kilometers long and takes about 10 minutes to pass through at the speed limit of about 100 kilometers per hour. It would take more than 2 hours to walk through it. Gasoline trucks are not allowed through it in case of accident. The tunnel passes through the highest mountains at that point and exits in Gunma Prefecture.



Just inside the Kanetsu Tunnel

At Kamisato Service Area after a relatively short wait, a lady sitting in the passenger side of her car offered me a ride as far as Kawagoe. That was exactly the spot I hoped to get off the expressway at!

The lady was with her husband and their two elementary school children were sitting in the back. They had lived in Singapore for 3 years and could speak English! I suspected that was the reason why they picked me up recognizing me as a foreigner and probable English speaker. But though we spoke in English for a time, suddenly they both switched back to Japanese.



Couple who lived in Singapore who took me to Kawagoe.

From the Kawagoe Interchange it is only a 15 minute walk to Minami Otsuka Station, and from there only 190 yen train fare to my final destination of Sayama City. From Sayama station rather than take a 220 yen bus ride to my friend's house, I decided to hoof it and use the navigation on my Tablet PC for directions. Another 25 minutes later I was at my friend's house just before 6 p.m. the very arrival time I was shooting for.

God is good! My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ provides all my needs!

[My First Hitchhiking Adventure of 2016](#)



Father Tsukasa and son Naoto who took me to Miyagi Prefecture from Akita Prefecture.

On January 31, 2016 I hitchhiked from the Hanawa service area in Akita

Prefecture on the Tohoku Expressway back home to Niigata city. My friend Keiji who is from Akita Prefecture was amazed that I made the 505 kilometer (316 miles) trip in a single day. To be honest I myself am amazed! It's only because of the good Hand of my Creator Who provides all my needs. His Name is Jesus.

I shaved my one month growth of beard the day before the trip. I shaved it because I wasn't sure whether people would want to pick up a Westerner with a beard. Would you?

The hardest part of hitchhiking from A to B is often the very beginning. Somehow I had to make my way to the Tohoku Expressway if I wanted to return home the same day. Using Google Maps on my Android Tablet, I perceived the Hanawa Service Area is within walking distance from the Kazuno Hanawa train station. Kazuno Hanawa is only two stations away from Towada Minami from was. It was only a 210 yen (1.75 USD) fare for me to get to Kazuno Hanawa,

I have never been to this part of Japan before. But thanks to Google Maps and my Asus Tablet PC, and especially thanks to the Global Positioning System (GPS), I was able to find my way from Towada Minami to the Hanawa Service Area in spite of taking three wrong turns. I estimated the walk would take less than 30 minutes. It took me over an hour!

The weather was clear with a blue sky and the temperature was a few degrees below freezing. I walked over hard and slippery icy and hard packed snow much of the way carrying my or pulling suitcase (it has wheels) with me.

Twice I was puzzled in trying to find the expressway service area. The first time I misunderstood the navigation directions on my tablet and took a wrong turn which ended in a dead end. For those who have never been to Japan, most areas are not divided into blocks like they are in America. The "go around the block" concept is not common in Japan unless you happen to live in Kyoto or Sapporo. Arriving at a dead end of a road in Japan basically means, "go back the way you came to get back to the turn you should have taken." The other alternatives are either trespassing on private property and / or trying to find a safe way to the road you want to get to which is just below a fairly high and steep hill. I contemplated both. But because the steep hill was covered with deep snow, and because I would rather not walk on property that is obviously not public, I deemed it a no go.

After that and more more wrong turn, I finally walked to the point of visual distance of the Tohoku Expressway. Due to recent poor eyesight, I can mainly tell I'm close only when I hear the traffic of vehicles on the expressway.

The problem I faced then was the navigation led me to follow a road that was filled with snow! I needed to get to the *opposite* side of the expressway. This meant I needed to find an underpass that led under the expressway, or a bridge that led over the expressway. It was clear that no vehicles were taking the road which the navigation showed me to take. There weren't any tire tracks in the snow on the road. I walked back a hundred meters (yards) back to the well travelled road that ran parallel to the expressway and walked a couple hundred meters to the direction I perceived the expressway service

area to be. But initially I wasn't even sure I was indeed walking in the right direction! After walking 2 or 3 hundred meters (yards) further, I saw a passageway under the Tohoku Expressway which the snow covered road I previously saw led to. What to do? I turned around to get back point I was a few minutes before, back to the snow covered road. There was a mountain of snow that was created by a snow removal vehicle but I saw just around it were footprints in the snow which were going the direction I needed to go! Would those footprints take me to the underpass to get to the opposite side of the Tohoku Expressway? Can you guess? They didn't. The footprints ended a hut a hundred meters away. It was a small man-made structure of the size that probably no more than two people could be in at the same time! I walked around the hut only to find myself in knee-deep snow! There were no more tracks in the snow that headed in the direction I needed to go. I looked and saw only level (and deep) snow, and a fence that bordered the expressway, but no underpass in sight that led under the expressway to the other side.

What to do? In such a situation I learned from experience there is only one good and effective solution: Go back the way I came.

(To be continued!)

Chart of 10 years of Hitchhiking



The chart shows how many kilometers I hitchhiked every year for the last 10 years. Only the first year of 2005 doesn't show accurately how far I hitchhiked that year for I started keeping records from August 2, 2005. The total distance to date is 223,042 kilometers. over a period of exactly 925 days in 3587 vehicles. The latter two figures should be exact but the distance traveled may have a small percentage of error. I'm trying to be as accurate as possible. I used to use Google Maps to measure distances but now I use an on-line application on <http://www.mapfan.com/routemap/routeset.cgi> which should be more accurate. This is a great app if you live in Japan and can read Japanese well enough to use it.



Last year of 2015 was 12,749 kilometers (7968 miles) less than 2014 which was my record to date of 28,352 kilometers or 17,720 miles. The reason for this is I made far fewer trips to Aomori Prefecture. Will 2016 be a better year for me? I hope so. The number of trips has something to do with not only how much money I save, but how much income I can earn. You can see my income fell last year from the year before.

November 2015 Adventure Hitchhiking to Aomori Prefecture



On November 21, 2015, I hitchhiked in 9 cars from Gatsugi in Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture, to Hirosaki in Aomori, a distance of 330 kilometers of about 206 miles. This trip was so unusual that I feel compelled to document it in this post.

The first car was from Murakami city at the intersection of Route 345 and Route 7. Two ladies with two little boys 3 and 4 years old stopped for me! They were on their way to the Kamo Aquarium in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture. It was such fun talking to the boys and the ladies. They are sisters, twins but not identical, and the one sitting on the passenger side is the mother of the two boys.



The ladies dropped me off at a point still far from the center of Tsuruoka. I walked a mile or so to get to a better traffic light where I could hitchhike. On the way I met the goat you see in the photo! He was friendly and let me pet it, but then he put my arm between his horns and twisted his head in such way it hurt my arm! I immediately left. □

Car #2 was a lady who took me to an ideal point in central Tsuruoka. From there many cars would be going to the next city of Sakata.

After only a short wait a man on his way to Sakata picked me up. He plays the viola in a orchestra!

Car #4 was a mother and daughter who took me close to the border of Akita, the town of Yuza.

Car # 5 was a lady from Niigata, Kazuoka Kobayashi, who is from the same remote area of Japan as my friends, the Matsuoka family, and she of course knows them! She was on her way to her home town. I would have gone with her to see my friends but their children were sick with the flu. Even more unusual is that she heard the Gospel when she was little, loves the Words of Jesus, and realized she is a child of God! And because her and I would be returning back the same day two days later, we arranged that I meet her at the closest train station that was convenient for both of us so that we could return to Niigata together. And so we did!

Kazuko took me to an expressway parking area that had only a few cars. Normally I would not choose such a place to hitchhike, and felt a bit worried. However only a few minutes after Kazuoka left a car with a married couple entered the parking area and offered to take me to the next large city of Noshiro. This was perfect for me!

From Noshiro after only a few minutes wait a lady, car #7 pulled up and offered to take me to Futatsui. This is only a relatively short distance but on my way to the next city of Odate.

Car #8 was yet another lady, Keiko Kanako, a piano teacher! And she was playing George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue which I just heard the previous evening! I introduced her to Emily Bear, a gifted American pianist that some consider to be a child Mozart. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=To7EG40KofU>

Did you count the number of cars with only ladies? Six in one day! This is by far my record! Things like this happen only in Japan.

Keiko took me to my favorite hitchhike spot in Odate, from there many cars would be going to Aomori. It was cold and I went to the toilet of the convenience store nearby to put on warmer clothes. It's now after 4 p.m. and getting dark. After 20 or so minutes of no success and getting cold I decided to walk up the road to try to stay warm. After another 10 minutes or so a man offered to take me to Hirosaki train station. This is only 45 kilometers or 30 miles short of my final destination. I took a train the rest of the way.

God is good and answered my prayers in Jesus's Name abundantly!

James Japan on another Journey



Dear friends and followers of this website,

On April 6th I left my home in Niigata City and traveled to Noda city in Chiba prefecture which is just to the northeast of Tokyo. It was the first day of an extended trip which will last till the end of April. But only a few days later on May 2th, I'm off again on the road!

The red line starting at the top of the map and going southeast toward Tokyo was the first leg of my journey. The rest continues on to Osaka, and then back to Niigata via the expressway along the Sea of Japan. The blue arrow shows where I am at the time of this post, Shizuoka City.



Some folks have asked to have Skype sessions with me. While on the road it is difficult to arrange such direct sessions. I am not always in a quiet place with time and a good Internet connection. I need all 3 simultaneously! When at home I always have a quite place with Internet, and I can usually arrange making the time, but while on the road, it is very seldom I have all three factors at the same time. And this morning when I did, the person seeking to Skype with me was off line!

For the time being I may not be able to continue much on my project of adding more chapters to "The Two Babylons" article on this site. Maybe I will complete it next month.

The Hitchhiker's Woe: leaving Valuables in the Vehicle



My hitchhiking adventure to Aomori on March 6, 2015 was both wonderful and traumatic! Wonderful in that it was on a day of good warm weather with relatively little waiting for the next car. Traumatic in that I left my suitcase in car number 7, and my tablet PC in car number 9!



This is Miki who lives in the city of Noshiro. She was driving from Tokyo and had not slept all night. I was throughly into a deep conversation with her about the false teaching of the evolution of life. Her job is helping to bring new life into the world; She's a midwife! Miki took me to a parking lot of a convenience store at Higashi Noshiro. There I took photos of her. Here she is holding the sign I was carrying that says Noshiro, which was the next city toward my destination of Aomori. I thanked her and she drove off, but to my dismay I saw that my suitcase wasn't on the ground next to me! I left it in Miki's car!

What to do in such a situation? I had no way to contact Miki. I could only pray that Miki would return to the spot she left me as soon as she noticed the suitcase, or that she would contact me eventually via Facebook for she had my name written on a tract that I gave her. I waited and waited, and I prayed and prayed. I also called a friend in Aomori and told him of my trouble. I could not access my Facebook account from my location for I had no WIFI, so I asked my friend to access my Facebook account for me. He did but there was no friend request from Miki. At the time of this post though 4 days later, there is still no friend request from her.

After about two hours Miki returned with my suitcase! Was I overjoyed! She apologized for taking so long to notice it, and I apologized for causing her trouble to drive all the way back for me. I take the ultimate responsibility.

I had lost two hours and had only a bit more than an hour left of daylight. After only a few minutes, another lady stopped for me. She said she saw me hanging around the parking lot of the convenience store and wondered what had happened to me. The lady took me to Futatsui which is about 10 kilometers further up the road. I still had 100 kilometers left to my destination.

It was now getting dark and from experience it has been often difficult to catch a ride further past Futatsui. Rather than use a sign and wait at the traffic light, I decided to walk up the mountain road. When I'm in a lonely place often the driver will have compassion on me and stop. Sometimes they

will pass me, make a U-turn up the road, and come back for me. Such was the case today. A man who runs 3 food stores returned for me. He was going all the way to Hirosaki which was better than I hoped for! Hirosaki is in Aomori ken and only 40 kilometers short of my final destination.

The man's name is Mr. Kimura. He runs three food shops with 21 employees. I often get rides from company presidents. Mr. Kimura wanted to take me to his shop in Hirosaki and treat me to a meal of one of his food products, but because we saw I might be able to catch the 7:21 p.m. train from Hirosaki station rather than the 8:13 p.m. later train, we opted for the earlier train. In my haste to catch that train I quickly disembarked without checking if I left anything behind. I made the train with only a minute to spare, but to my dismay, my tablet PC was not with me! I realized I left it in the car or perhaps might have dropped it when running to the train station. I had no way to contact Mr. Kimura. At the time I didn't even know his name or the name of his shop! I only knew he had three food shops and the cities they are located.

The next morning after waking up a new thought occurred: I had told the driver where I work! It was a place he knew of. Hopefully, he would bring my tablet PC to the place. Sure enough, Mr. Kimura contacted my work place. He sent one of his employees to bring me the tablet. In the process, I learned his name, his phone number, and the name of his shop. The next time I come to Hirosaki I hope to visit him.

More photos



A lady who took me to Sakata from Tsuruoka. She is a former English teacher. She went out of her way to take me to Sakata, 20 kilometers away, for that was not her destination.



The lunch that driver #4 gave me.



Young man in car #6 holding a tract by John G. Hartnett that exposes evolution as a pseudo -science.



Car #6: A mother with her son and daughter who took me to Akita station.

First Hitchhike Adventure of 2015: Niigata to Osaka



The green line shows my route along the Hokuriku and Meishin expressway from Niigata in the north to Osaka in the south.

January 16, 2015: I had been intending for months to visit my good American friend from the State of Arkansas, Roger. I've especially been meaning to tell him about my new understanding of the [70th Week of Daniel](#)! He lives in the big city of Osaka, Japanese second largest city. Though Osaka is 550 kilometers (344 miles) from home which is 125 kilometers (75 miles) further than Hirosaki in Aomori (my usual destination), it is actually easier to hitchhike to Osaka than Aomori. This is because of an unbroken expressway most of the distance. When I hitchhike to Aomori, I'm mostly traveling on a regular road with stoplights.



The first driver to pick me up.

It was raining the previous evening but good weather the day of this trip. I took public transportation (680 yen or about \$6.00) to Sakai Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. Sakai is a convenient place to hitchhike because I can go from there 3 different directions, either to Tokyo, Nagano or towards Osaka which includes Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui Prefectures. But the parking area is not so big, and sometimes I've had to wait long periods to catch a ride, often an hour, sometimes two hours, and once 3 hours and 40 minutes!

I used to stand near the entrance ramp just before cars re-enter the expressway, but now I stand close to the concession stands where people walk after parking their vehicles. I learned this gives me more opportunity to catch a ride. Anybody who notices me or the A4 paper sign which shows my destination, I try to make eye contact with them and ask them if they would take me. Most say no but some stop to talk and encourage me. And doing so proves to them I can speak and understand their language. One reason why a person may not pick me up is because he or she fears the foreigner (me) cannot communicate with them in Japanese.

Though I have waited for long periods at Sakae parking area, today the very first man I met offered me a ride! He was going to Kashiwazaki, about 40 kilometers away. This was good for me because it took me to a parking area past Niigata Prefecture's second largest city of Nagaoka where most of the drivers would be exiting the expressway.

The young man took me to Ozumi parking area just past Nagaoka. This parking area is smaller than Sakae, but more than half of the traffic will be traveling past the next large city of Kashiwazaki in the direction I want to go. After a relatively short time, a printer from Niigata City took me to Yoneyama service area just past Kashiwazaki.

Yoneyama is much larger than either Ozumi or Sakae, but much of the traffic will only go as far as Joetsu City, and some of the traffic will go toward Nagano Prefecture. It's possible to go to Oaaka through Nagano, but the distance is longer. I would only accept a ride from a man going through Nagano if he were going as far as the cities near the southern edge of Nagano near Nagoya. That would definitely make it work going to Osaka via Nagano because it would be more than half the distance in a single ride. But such a scenario is rare.

After close to an hour wait at Yoneyama I caught a ride from a man going to Toyama city. He took me to Arisoumi service area, a good distance of 125 kilometers, the furthest in a single ride so far today.

After considerable wait for over an hour, a sweet couple from Ueda City in Nagano took me to Oyabegawa service area which is past Toyama city. Oyabegawa SA is large with many cars, but most of them would be going only as far as Kanazawa City in Ishikawa. I needed a ride that would take me past Kanazawa, and preferably to somewhere in Fukui Prefecture.

A gas lady gas station attendant approached me and asked my destination. She said she would tell the customers about me and maybe one of them would offer me a ride. I have been helped before by gas station attendants. A few minutes later she walked me to me with a cup of hot coffee in her hands! I'm not supposed to drink coffee because I consider [caffeine an evil addicting drug which is harmful for health](#), but I accepted her gift and drank it. I don't want to offend the Japanese who show me much kindness.

After 30 some minutes a lady going to Fukui offered me a ride. She took me to Onagatani just before Fukui city. From that point I was more than halfway to Osaka and absolutely positive I would make it that day.

A man saw my Osaka sign and told me he would be going a different direction, to Nagoya. But I realized that he could still take me further down the Hokuriku Expressway before he gets to the junction of the Meishi Expressway from where drivers can go either south to Osaka or north to Nagoya. The man then offered to take me as far as Kanda parking area just before the Maibara junction.

Kanda is a small parking area and I regretted getting off there. I could have gotten off at Shizugatake, a much larger service area though a shorter distance from where the man picked me up. But after only a few minutes, a lady saw my Osaka sign and offered to take me to Taga Service area. Though Taga is not far from Kanda, it is right on the Meishin expressway with all the traffic going my direction.

At Taga after 30 minutes or so, I approached a truck driver who offered me a ride to Suita Service area in Osaka! This was my exact destination and the end of hitchhiking that day. I arrived just a little after 5 p.m., 10 hours after I left home. From Suita it was a short walk to a bus stop from where I caught a 220 yen (\$1.75) bus ride to Minami Senri station, and from there a 15 minute walk to Roger's apartment. Total transportation that day was 900 yen or about \$7.50. The Shinkansen (Bullet train) would have cost 22,000 yen (\$175.00) and by plane 33,000 yen (\$275).

Year 2014 – A record year for hitchhiking



The graph shows distances hitchhiked from 2005 to the present.

In 2014 I hitchhiked 28,352 kilometers (17,720 miles). That's 4304 kilometers or 2690 miles more than year 2013– a record to date! The older I get, the easier it is to catch a ride! □

December 12, 2014 Adventure to Hirosaki



70 year old man who took me to Akita City. He says he has been married for 50 years.

Today for the first time instead of hitchhiking on lonely Route 345 along the Sea of Japan, I took the train 25 kilometers further to Gatsugi station so I could hitchhike on Route 7 which has more traffic. It was cold but it wasn't raining or snowing as it was the previous week.

Five drivers took me to Hachiryu which is the beginning of a free expressway. I opted to get off there even though the driver said he was going further. Hachiryu (means 8 dragons) is an ideal place to hitchhike because the preponderance of traffic is going the direction I need to go – north. They want to take advantage of the free expressway that goes north from that point. Not many cars would be going south from Hachiryu because the road is a tollroad going south. Tolls are expensive on non-free expressways. Only those people who are in a hurry or those who can easily afford it will take them.

After over 30 minutes wait for a car to stop for me, I was getting desperate. In less than two hours it would be dark. Darkness ends further hitchhiking that day. Finally a lady stopped! I immediately jumped into her car without asking her destination. What a mistake that was! I assumed she would go at least as far as Higashi Noshiro, the second exit going north and another good place to hitchhike. But I was dismayed to learn she would get off at the first exit, Minami Noshiro. I knew both from experience and logic Minami Noshiro is a bad place to hitchhike! Most of the traffic would be going the opposite direction toward where I came from, to the south and not north toward my destination. The lady knew from the sign I was holding that I was

going both north and east from that point. Why would she think she was helping me? She wasn't. She actually hindered my journey by picking me up! Nevertheless I was courteous and thanked her. She was on her way to a hospital to be treated for a cold. I gave her a few drops of my peppermint oil and told her to rub it on her nose. Since I have been using peppermint oil, I hardly get a cold anymore.

I knew God would have to do a miracle for me to get me out of my fix. And sometimes He uses my mistakes to get me to meet people I would not have met otherwise.

A man stopped for me. Sure enough, he was going south. I told him no thank you and he drove off. Later I wondered if I should have told him to take me back to Hachiryu. I decided to do so with the next driver who stopped if he or she was going that direction.

After a considerable wait, another lady stopped for me. She was also going south, but when I told her I was going north to Hirosaki and would be passing through Odate (the birthplace of the dog Hachi of the film of the same name starring Richard Gere) , she said she would take me to Odate! It is her home town and it would give her an opportunity to visit her mother. The miracle I needed! God is good!

The lady is a nurse. Nurses often stop for me. She was glad to hear the Message I shared with her from the Bible. She called me a "happiness doctor." I really wanted to take her photo but she said no. She is 40, a mother of two daughters, and her husband is 43 centimeters taller than she is! He is 190 cm tall. Not many Japanese are taller than me. I'm 183 cm.

December 5, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Truck that took me to Aomori City
from Murakami in Niigata.

I wore my warmest coat, hat and gloves for another adventure to Aomori on a cold rainy day. I stood again for more than an hour showing passing drivers my A4 paper sign that says "Tsuruoka". The place was on [Route 345](#) which runs along the now turbulent [Sea of Japan](#). For some reason there was a lot of trash on the road and sidewalk where I stood. Workers arrived to clean it up. They got closer and closer to me which caused me to walk further up the road to get out of their way.

Finally a driver stopped for me but he took me only 2 or 3 kilometers down the road. Now I was in a windy area. I used my umbrella to shield myself from the wind and intermittent rain.

About 15 minutes later I prayed, "Oh God, please send a car to take me at least to Route 7!" *Immediately* a car with a man and woman stopped for me. They were headed in the opposite direction, the direction I had just come from. "You're not going to catch a ride to Tsuruoka standing on this road!", the lady said. "Come with us and we will take you to Route 7 which has more traffic!"

I knew she was right. Route 7 runs parallel to Route 345. It connects to Route 345 about 25 kilometers from where I was standing. However the man and woman wanted to take me to a point on Route 7 which was closer, and to get there they had to go the opposite direction from my destination. There was a mountain range separating Route 7 from Route 345, and to cross it, they had to go backwards from the direction I was heading. Nevertheless, I agreed to go with them.

About 30 minutes later we arrived at a convenience store on Route 7 in the area called Asahi. I have stood there before several times. "Look, that truck has Sapporo license plates!", said the lady. "Ask the driver to take you." And so I did. Sapporo is the largest city in the northern island of Hokkaido. I knew the driver would be going to Aomori Prefecture, and maybe even to Aomori City where I could stay even cheaper than I could if I only went as far as Hirosaki. Aomori City is a port town in the northern part of the main island of Honshu, some 400 kilometers from where I was in Asahi Town, Murakami City. Ferry boats run from Aomori City to Hakodate in Hokkaido.

The truck driver seemed surprised at my request but he graciously agreed to take me.

It is not common for a truck driver to stop for me or agree to give me a ride. Most truck companies have rules that forbid taking on passengers. They don't want to be liable to a passenger in case of an accident.

The driver's name is Hideki Watanabe. Mr. Watanabe had been driving all the way from Okayama Prefecture, an area the other side of Osaka, some 800 kilometers away. He says he makes the Okayama – Sapporo trip every week! This means if the timing is right, I can meet him in a parking area in Niigata,

perhaps even as early as next week when I need to travel again.

Mr. Watanabe said there was an accident on the Expressway in Toyama which closed the road and delayed his trip. If it were not for that, I would not have met him!

Mr. Watanabe was impressed with the music I played him from my tablet PC. When I return back home to Niigata I hope to post it on this site.

I'm using the tablet now to write this post. If I don't write up an adventure as soon as it happens, I often lose interest to write it later when home. Who reads this stuff anyway? If you do, please write me some encouragement in the comments below and perhaps I'll be inspired to write more often and even the past adventures.

October 10, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Mr. and Mrs. Suehiro who took me from Niigata Murakami City to Kisagata in Yamagata, a distance of 150 some kilometers

October 13, 2014: Today is the first day of a major change in my life. I returned home from my trip to Aomori prefecture to an empty house. My beloved spouse has gone to America to help her daughter's large family of 7 children. Our dog, Lady, was also not in the house but I retrieved her from the lady who is caring for her when I am not home, Yoneko san, whose business is to care for dogs when their master is out of town.

Now that I find myself with more time on my hands, I hope to be more regular

in writing about my experiences hitchhiking in Japan. I need to travel nearly every weekend some 400 kilometers up north.

October 10, 2014: It's was a cool Autumn day with a cloudy sky when I arrived at Majima Station on the Ouetsu Line at 7:40 a.m. The station is just 100 meters from Route 345, the road that runs along the Sea of Japan in Niigata Prefecture. The traffic is sparse. The drivers see the paper A4 size sign I am holding and drive on by. The sign says, TSURUOKA, nearly 100 kilometers further up the road, the next major city in Yamagata prefecture which is the neighboring prefecture just to the north of Niigata. Fukushima prefecture happens to be Niigata prefecture's neighbor to the east! FYI most of Fukushima is NOT the nuclear wasteland some people portray it to be. I have passed **many times** pass through Fukushima prefecture since the March 11, 2011, tsumami and nuclear power plant disaster. It's interesting that suddenly a large area of Japan named Fukushima gets the stigma of being a nuclear catastrophe like Chernobyl. Some people, even from the alternative media have called it, "worse than Chernobyl." How can the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster be worse than Chernobyl when you consider only one person that worked at the Fukushima power plant after the disaster has died? And whether or not that person died as a result of nuclear radiation has *not* been validated!

I know without doubt the drivers of the vehicles passing by me take notice of both me and the paper sign I am holding. They all veer toward the middle of the road as if avoiding to hit me. Even if they didn't veer they wouldn't hit me because I am standing far enough away out of their path. The Japanese are taught to veer away from pedestrians when attending course in driver's school. The Japanese law has zero tolerance for drivers hitting pedestrians. That means even if a pedestrian purposely jumps in front of a vehicle, the driver is still at fault! You can now understand why a driver would take no chances. I wish they would implement such a law in Russia. The most dangerous thing to do in Russia is to walk across a road. The drivers won't even slow down and actually expect you to jump out of their way! I lived in Russia from March 1994 to October 1997 and know what I'm talking about.

It's sometimes a long wait to catch the first ride on Route 345. I have a beautiful view of the ocean which is on my right when turned around facing traffic. Seagulls often fly over my head to keep me entertained. The waves are sometimes choppy and water splashes from time to time all the way to the road where I stand. There is no traffic light to stop the cars but because the road is a lonely one I know from experience that drivers from other areas of Japan will stop for me when they see they are going as far as the sign says I want to go.

Today was such a case. After only a short 10 minute wait, Mr. & Mrs. Suehiro from Kanagawa Prefecture (the prefecture just southwest of Tokyo) stopped for me. They were going all the way to Akita Prefecture! This meant that they would be going past Tsuruoka in Yamagata prefecture and I would be able to skip Yamagata Prefecture entirely! They took me to the Kisagata road station in Akita.

After waiting 20 some minutes at Kisagata, Mr. Saitoh stopped for me. He said

he would go to Akita City, a good distance up the road of at least 60 kilometers. Unfortunately he let me off right in the middle of town, a place not well suited for hitchhiking. The traffic was heavy but most of the drivers are not going very far. I have experienced hitchhiking there before and knew I might not catch a ride at such a place, and so I walked backwards pulling my suitcase with wheels and held out the sign of my next destination, NOSHIRO, some 60 kilometer further up the road.

The time was now 12:30 p.m. There was a train leaving at 1:43 from from a train station, Tsuchizaki, which was few kilometers away. I thought I might have time to catch that train if I started walking to the station immediately, but after an hour walk I realized I wouldn't make it. I often walked backward with my thumb out hoping to catch a car, but it was fruitless. The traffic was going by too fast with not much room on the shoulder of the road for them to stop.

At 1:40 p.m. I arrived at the closest point to Tsuchizaki station though still standing next to Route 7. A teenage boy approached me asking if I have a problem.

"No problem," I replied, "I'm hitchhiking on my way to Aomori City."

"You don't have any money?" he inquired.

"I do."

I reached into my bag and handed him a Gospel tract which he received, and I shook his hand. Handshaking was not part of Japanese custom until fairly recently, say within the last 20 or so years. When I first came to Japan in 1972, I didn't like to shake hands with a Japanese person because they just didn't know how to do a good firm handshake. They do better now.

Though I missed the 1:43 p.m. train, I knew there would be another one around 2:30. I had plenty of time to catch it because the train station was now only a 10 minute walk. Around 2:00 a lady stopped for me and saved me the trouble of walking any further.



Mrs. Hanga

Her name is Mrs. Hanga. She is now the president of a construction company since her husband passed away a few years ago. Mrs. Hanga saw my sign that said NOSHIRO and told me she was going only part way, but it turned out that because she was going all the way to Takanosu which is past Noshiro by a different route, I told her I would be delighted if she would take me to Takenosu! It's much further down the road than I had hoped for.

As we approach Takenosu Mrs. Hanga pointed out the buildings that her company made. That included large stores.