

Visit to Hirosaki Park during Cherry Blossom Time



Visit Hirosaki Park in Aomori Japan to see beautiful cherry blossoms.

Spring hitchhike adventure: Nagano, Osaka, Tokyo



The red line shows my route from Niigata to Nagano, Osaka, Tokyo, and back to Niigata. You can see that Niigata Prefecture is neighbor to Fukushima. The damaged nuclear reactors are only 160 kilometers away from my home. I hope you do not believe the hype of extreme radiation levels that some alternative media people are broadcasting about Fukushima! (Soon to be posted on this site.) Click on the map to see more detail.



Two young men who took me from
Sakae PA to Yoneyama SA in Niigata



Mr. and Mrs. Hamada of Mie
Prefecture. They took me from
Niigata to Midoriko PA near
Shiojiri City, Nagano Prefecture.



Mr. Tanaka who took
me to Osaka



Tomoko (32) who took
me to Tokyo from the
Makinohara SA in
Shizuoka Prefecture

On Wednesday, April 18th, I began another week long hitchhike adventure. This time I hitchhiked 1430 kilometers (894 miles) in 17 vehicles. Among these were only 2 trucks. The drivers and passengers consisted of 6 married couples, 1 single lady, and the rest male company employees. The total cost of the trip was about 10,000 yen or around \$78 US. About 4000 yen was used for transportation in and around Tokyo. The Kanto area of which Tokyo is the center is always more expensive than Kansai (Kyoto / Osaka / Kobe) because it's much larger and my destinations are usually from one end to the other. When in Kanto, time for me is more important than saving money by hitchhiking. It's a nice place to visit, but I'm glad I don't live there. I especially would not want to be in Tokyo in the event of a major earthquake!

My first stop was Shiojiri in Nagano Prefecture to see a dear friend, Esther who has stomach cancer. The second, Osaka to see a friend, and the third, Kanto, Tokyo and vicinity where I visited 5 different homes, fixed one PC, setup Skype on another PC, and attended an inspiring fellowship dinner with old and new friends.

Day 1, Wednesday April 18: Destination Shiojiri City, Nagano Prefecture

Car #1: An older couple who took me to Sanjo city. They stopped for me after a 30 minute wait. The wife was very talkative.

Car #2: Two young men (see photo) driving a truck on their way to Gifu. They

are some kind of engineers fixing farm machinery. They dropped me off at Yoneyama SA on the Hokuriku expressway.

Car #3: Mr. and Mrs. Hamada from Mie Prefecture (see photo). They went to a spa in Niigata and stayed 3 days. The closest route to Mie Prefecture from Niigata is through Nagano and they would be passing the Midoroko Parking area! Esther's house is close enough to walk to from Midoriko! Well, it's still 4.5 kilometers and so I hitchhiked.

Car #4 An older man the 4.5 kilometers to Esther's house. I spent 3 hours with her then took a train to Chino (because it was too late to hitchhike further) and stayed a night in Tateshina and another night in Fujimi Town with friends.

Day 3, Friday April 20. Destination Osaka:

Car #5 A truck from Suwa SA to Okurogawa PA on the Chou expressway. The driver's company markets Shingen Mochi, a Japanese sweet made with rice. He gave me a box to give to friends.

Car #6 A foreign couple from Peru! It's not often I meet foreigners. Neither of them could speak English and my high school Spanish is practically non-existent. I talked mostly with the wife all in Japanese. They were going just north of Nagoya, a bit out of my way. At first I asked them to drop me off at Enakyo SA because it is before a junction that goes south of Nagoya connecting to a faster route going to Osaka, but after 30 minutes of waiting for a ride and still nobody stopping, and because the Peru couple had stopped at Enakyo for lunch, I was able to catch them again before they left the service area and asked them to take me further to Uchitsutoge which is closer to Nagoya.

Car #7 Mr. Tanaka (see photo) to a bus stop just before Osaka! It was great to talk to Mr. Tanaka. He told me his wife is somewhat fearful every time he has to travel on business. He called her on his cell phone so I could introduce myself. I gave a Japanese New Testament to Mr. Tanaka to give to his wife and wrote a little message in the side cover for her.

Day 4, Saturday April 21. Destination Tokyo:

Car #8: The distance from Osaka to Tokyo was the longest leg of my journey, some 530 kilometers. I tried to get an early start and arrived at the Suita SA by 9 a.m. After a 30 minute wait two men on their way to Kyoto offered me a ride. One of them remarked he thought I was probably a Christian missionary of some sort. Both men were friendly and talkative. They took me to Katsuragawa Service close to Kyoto. Just before we parted, one man offered to buy me a cup of coffee but then gave me a 1000 yen bill instead! It's not often drivers offer me money. Of course I never ask them for it.

Car #9 A friendly married couple to Otsu SA in Shiga Prefecture, just past Kyoto.

Car #10 Mr. Setto on his way back home to a city near Suwa in Nagano. At first I thought to go all the way with Mr. Setto to Nagano because it's only 200

kilometers from Tokyo. But because it is on the Chou expressway and my destination is the end of the Tomei expressway, I decided to get off at the Owari Ichinomiya service area hoping for a ride toward Shizuoka on the Tomei.

Car #11 A man to Akahata PA on the Tomei expressway. It was a bit of a wait to meet him.

Car #12 Mr. and Mrs Maesada in their little car to Makinohara Service area in Shizuoka. It was such fun talking to them because they laughed often after hearing of my adventures. It could have been because I mentioned that the first driver today gave me a gift of money that Mr. Maesada pulled 3000 yen out of his wallet and handed it to me! I felt embarrassed and said I don't expect to receive money, I am thankful for just the ride, but Mr. Maesada insisted on giving it. Recieving a gift of cash from drivers twice in the same day is probably a first for me.

Car #13 Miss Tomoko (see photo) all the way to Tokyo! I had to wait a whole hour for Tomoko to come, but it was worth every minute! She was on her way back home to Saitama after surfing with a friend. Because she was going to Saitama, she would be getting off at Yoga, the end of the Tomei, which is exactly the place I would be meeting a friend. Tomoko listened attentively while I shared with her basic Bible stories from the Book of Genesis and the Gospels for the next 2.5 hours. I hope to continue to communicate with her through Facebook.

Day 7, Tuesday April 24. Destination Niigata and home:

Car #14: Mr. Nozaki who took me to Kamisato SA from Miyoshi SA on the Kanetsu Expressway. He said I'm the first foreigner he's ever met. I hope to stay in touch with him.

Car #15: An elderly couple to Komayose PA just past Maebashi in Gunma Prefecture. The husband who drove seemed to have a hearing problem but his wife understood me better.

Car #16: A company president to Akagi Kogen. I bought lunch there, a bowl of curry rice.

Car #17: The final driver, Mr. Tanaka (the second Tanaka this trip, not related), is from Kawasaki and had an appointment in Niigata city after 5 p.m. He was the most interesting person yet to meet because though he said he is a member of Sokagakkai – a sect of Buddhism which is very aggressive in proselyting others to their cause – he did not push his religion on me at all. Instead he told me of his interest in the Bible. He likes the stories of the Old Testament, and is interested in learning more about Jesus Christ. Not only that, but Mr. Tanaka is one of those very rare Japanese who is very knowledgeable about the Freemasons, the [Bildersbergers](#), the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) (CFR), [the Illuminati](#), and even the [Vatican / Jesuit connection](#)! I asked him how he came to learn about the New World Order conspiracy of world take over. He replied that he thirsts for knowledge and spends much time in bookstores buying and reading any book he thinks can help him in his journey in life.

Mr. Tanaka graciously took me all the way to my home in Niigata city. It was not really out of the way for him, but because my area is far from the expressway, the detour added at least 30 more minutes to the arrival time of his destination. He said he would still arrive in time.

Cherry blossom viewing is extremely popular among all Japanese. Families and friends often have a picnic under the cherry trees in full bloom. They sit on tarps and eat lunch and or drink rice wine. When I left Niigata on April 18th, the cherry blossoms had not yet bloomed and I wondered if I would see them this year. Nagano is a bit further south but higher elevation and the cherry blossoms hadn't bloomed there either. But both Osaka and Tokyo have already finished their cherry blossom season this year. When I returned to Niigata the following Tuesday, the cherry blossoms had bloomed and were 2 days past mid point. The blossoms last one week and at the time of this post are already nearly gone. I'll have one more opportunity to see them in Hirosaki Park this coming Sunday, April 29. Hirosaki is 400 kilometers north of Niigata.

Hitchhike adventure to Hirosaki



Couple who took me from Adatara to
Bandaisan SA on the Banetsu
Expressway

March 2, 2012: It's been nearly two months since my last trip. Sometimes I wonder if getting older will discourage folks from picking me up, but this adventure proves to me otherwise. It was one of the least expensive considering the distance traveled. The round trip was 906 kilometers in 11 vehicles.

At 7:35 a.m. I began hitchhiking along route 345 from Majima station, just past Murakami. This road runs parallel to the Sea of Japan and very close to

it. The day was sunny and views of the coast lovely. Only 10 minutes later a lady picked me up and took me as far as Sanboku, about 20 kilometers up the road and just before the connection to route 7, the main highway going north.

From Samboku I walked about 3.5 kilometers in 55 minutes to Fuya. There were several tunnels along the way. One was about 600 meters long, too long and dangerous to walk through seeing it had no sidewalk for pedestrians, and the traffic was medium. Adjacent to that tunnel closer to the coast was another tunnel that ran parallel to it. It was shorter and for some reason closed to traffic. I could see the end of the tunnel and hoped that there would be a road going further. I walked through it and found yet more short tunnels, all closed to traffic, and walked through them. All the way I saw no one but apparently some do walk through them because I saw footprints and bicycle tracks entering the tunnels. Finally I came back to the main highway, route 7, close to Fuya station. I walked to an intersection with a traffic signal and began hitchhiking again.

From Fuyu an older man took me to Atsumi Onsen, a tourist area with a large "Michi no Eki" or parking area with shops and restaurants.

From Atsumi Onsen a mother and son took me to Tsuruoka city, about 140 kilometers from home. Often I get stuck for a while at this point, but shortly afterward a truck driver took me to Sakata city, 20 kilometers further.

I've been stuck for a while at Sakata as well. The next large city is Akita, a good 80 kilometers away. But today a man coming all the way from Osaka picked me up when seeing my Akita sign, and it turned out he was traveling all the way to a town in Aomori right next to my destination! His name is Mr. Kajiwara, and we had a great conversation the entire trip, about 4 hours. He bought me lunch and took me to Hirosaki station, actual walking distance to the hotel where I stayed that night.

Meeting a man from "the strongest country in the world"



Meeting a truck driver in Japan from Afghanistan

First hitchhike adventure of 2012 – Kobe and back via Tokyo



Ms. Mitsuko and Mr. Nakazawa who
took me to the Oyabe Service area
from Sanjo city

From January 4 to January 8, I traveled to Osaka, Kobe, Hamamatsu (Shizuoka Prefecture), Tokyo, and back home to Niigata in 10 cars. The actual distance hitchhiked was 1386 kilometers.

It was a snowy day when I began my journey at 8AM. My destination was Osaka, some 580 kilometers from my home in Niigata city. I had some serious doubts I would make it. Over half of my route would be the Hokuetsu Expressway that runs parallel close to the Sea of Japan, and the Sea of Japan is often stormy in the winter. It sure was that day.

I believe that where God guides, He also provides. To test that, today I didn't try to make it easier for myself by taking a short highway bus to the Sakae Parking area, but instead I hitchhiked at the Sanjo Tsubame IC. with the condition that if I was going to go to Osaka today, God would provide a good ride within the first hour or I would return home. Within 10 minutes a car pulled over and the driver said he was going to Kanazawa city in Ishikawa prefecture, just about half way to my destination! Now I knew for sure I was going to make it no matter what!

End of year 2011 hitchhike analysis



The graph shows the distances I traveled over the past 7 years in Japan by hitchhiking.



Since I've been keeping records from August 2003, the grand total of distance traveled is 124,321 kilometers in 2338 vehicles. As you can see, I traveled a bit further this year than last. But the prognosis for 2012 will probably be less traveling. I have more work locally.

Final hitchhike adventure of 2011



Shuhei and Natsumi, (both 27) who took me to Kamisato Service area near Takasaki

December 22, 2011: I was invited to attend a meeting in Tokyo of the NPO Leap High, 300 kilometres from home. It had been raining all day yesterday and today the weather forecast predicted the same, but by 10AM it stopped raining to the point I ventured outside and walked to the highway.

Within 10 minutes I caught a ride from a man going all the way to Nagaoka city! This meant he could take me close enough to walk to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku expressway. This saves me the 180 bus ride from Sanjo city.

The driver, Mr. Sodeyama, is involved in a humanitarian aid project to help poor children in Nepal get an education. He goes to Nepal yearly and said he visited Mt. Everest South Base camp, elevation of 5,364 meters.

At Sakae parking area, a expressway patrolman saw me hitchhiking and warned me not to do anything that would cause somebody to phone the police. He said this was the *second time* to warn me! The first time some driver did phone the police thinking I was doing something illegal. I wasn't, but my days hitchhiking via expressway may be numbered if the highway commission decides to forbid hitchhiking at parking areas.

I waited over an hour and a half for the next ride, but it was worth the wait. The driver was on his way to Yokohama which meant he would be going right to my *very destination* of Yoga Station on the Denentoshi Line! I hoped to be there by 5PM and arrived just after 4PM.

On Christmas Eve I hitchhiked in 2 vehicles back to Niigata. The first car, young lovers, Shuhei and Natsumi, took me to Kamisato Service area. The second car was a lady, Mrs. Itou, going to Tokamachi in Niigata and would therefore be getting off the expressway at Muika Machi. I asked Mrs. Itou if she knows my Tokamachi friends, Keiji and Miyoko and their family, and she said that she was one of the caretakers of their youngest daughter, Marin, at the Hokuetsu Preschool! I immediately phoned Keiji and told him Mrs. Itou had picked me up. He was really glad to say the least. I would have gone with Mrs. Itou to Tokamachi and visited Keiji, but he said he wouldn't be home then. Instead Mrs. Itou took me to the Muika Machi train station from where I took a train the rest of the way home. It was past 5PM and too dark to hitchhike.

[Traumatic trip to Aomori city](#)



Went the wrong way! The blue line from Nikaho City to Akita City was my intended route. The orange line going to Daizen city is the detour route the truck driver took me, 38 kilometers out of my way costing nearly an hour extra time! The end of the orange line points to Route 13 where the driver intended to drop me off. The dark green line is the Akita expressway which took me from Daizen City to Hachiryu Station. It made up for the lost time of the detour.

September 19: Today was warm, bright and sunny, a very good day to travel by hitchhiking. I was on my way to Aomori city, about 480 kilometers from my home in Niigata city. It was imperative that I reach Aomori by evening because I had to travel further the next day to Misawa city, 70 kilometers from Aomori, and be there by 10PAM to do a job assignment.

My motivation to hitchhike is not just to save money, but to make new friends. The very first driver who picked me up was a talkative lady, Miss Tsuneko, who took me to Tainai city on Route 7, about 60 kilometers from home, a very good distance for the first ride. Tsuneko is not a Christian but she is interested in helping her Christian friend find a Christian husband.

From Route 7 I walked 4 kilometers to get to the Arakawa-Tainai interchange of the Nihonkai-Tohoku Expressway. I hoped catching a ride on the expressway would speed my journey by getting a vehicle going at least as far as somewhere in Yamagata Prefecture and thereby bypassing Murakami City entirely. Expressway drivers tend to go longer distances. Moreover, traffic on Route 7 past Murakami is minimal. In times past I had to wait more than an hour in Murakami to catch a ride going any significant distance.

The 40 minute hike to the expressway bore fruit – I got an immediate ride to Atsumi Onsen in Yamagata! From Atsumi Onsen I caught 3 more cars and got as far as Nikaho City in Akita Prefecture. It was about 3PM. I hoped to catch a

ride from Nikaho to Akita city. There was just enough time for me to catch the 4:30 train from Akita station which would arrive in Aomori at 8PM.

After just a few minutes wait in Nikaho, a truck stopped and the driver said he would take me to Route 13 in Akita. I assumed he meant the intersection of Route 13 and Route 7 in Akita City, but I was terribly wrong! The driver was a foreigner, a man from Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. He's lived in Japan for 18 years and spoke good Japanese, the only common language between us. The driver got off Route 7 to take a free expressway heading toward Akita City, but partway he got off the expressway at Ohuchi and took Route 105 toward Daizen city. I didn't know it at the time, but Daizen city is the new name for Omagari city. Had he said he was going to Omagari, I would have immediately asked him to let me off at Ohuchi for I knew that Omagari was way out of my way! But the name "Daizen" confused me. The driver was so positive and tried to be encouraging. "Don't worry! This road runs through the rice fields with very few stop lights and little traffic! I'll take you to Route 13 and from there you can catch a ride to Akita city which is next to Daizen! But looking at the map, I realized I made an awful mistake!

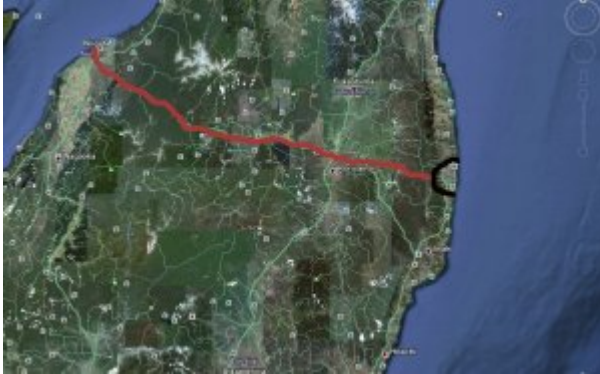
Why did I heed the driver's advice and go with him further? It could be because he is Vietnamese, and I don't ever remember meeting anyone from Vietnam before. It's always interesting to meet people from difference countries and cultures. On September 9th two young men from Nepal took me to Akita city. They corrected me when I said the founder of Buddhism was from India. "You're twice our age and know many things, and yet you didn't know that Buddha was born in our country, in Nepal!" □

There was now no way I could arrive Akita city in time to catch the 4:35PM train. After that there was only one more train left, the one leaving Akita station at 6:46PM which would get me to Aomori city at 10:40PM. If I missed that one too, I would be in bad trouble indeed. It would mean hitchhiking in the dark. I have hitchhiked after sunset occasionally, but it's not nearly as easy as hitchhiking during daylight hours. It's harder for drivers to see me and more dangerous at night.

I began to realize I had to stop listening to the driver and start to follow what I knew from experience to be best. Letting him take me to Route 13 was no guarantee I would make the 6:46PM train. From the map I saw the Omagari Interchange of the Akita expressway a few kilometers before Route 13. It was right on Route 105. I asked the driver to let me off at the expressway entrance, and he did so but expressed doubts I would catch a car going on it. I didn't listen to him this time, I knew catching a ride on the expressway had the potential to make up for the time I lost on the detour.

The decision to take the Akita Expressway paid off! After only a couple minutes wait, a driver stopped and took me to the Nishisenboku Service Area. I got off there because the driver was going to Akita Airport. From Nishisenboku an elderly couple took me to the train station at Hachuryu, about 30 kilometers past Akita city. Because of the speed of the expressway, I actually caught up with and past the 4:35PM train from Akita city and caught it at Hachiryu with 5 minutes to spare! It was a happy ending to an otherwise traumatic trip. God is good. □

Attempt to hitchhike to the Fukushima Pacific coastline



An attempt to visit the damaged nuclear power plants in Fukushima, Japan.

July 31 hitchhike adventure from Aomori city



Women's Table Tennis
Coach Ohka Iwao

July 31: I was on my way back home from Aomori city to Niigata. I decided to take the Tohoku Expressway which passes through Sendai and Fukushima and the Banetsu Expressway from Fukushima to Niigata rather than the much slower Route 7 that runs along the Sea of Japan. Though the Tohoku / Banetsu route

is 125 kilometers longer, it's faster because it's expressway and because most drivers are going longer distances.

I didn't have to walk to Aomori Chuo Expressway Interchange today like I did on July 18th. An off duty taxi cab driver saw me and offered me a ride which saved me an hour. But unlike July 18th, I had to wait over twice the time I waited before, 2.5 hours, to catch the next ride.

It was sunny but not too hot. After over an hour of rejections, I decided to stand at another traffic light. Most of the cars turning right at that traffic light were going on the expressway. This way I could walk past each of the drivers hoping for positive eye contact. Most of them ignored me. Some waved their hands in the Japanese manner that means, "NO!"

Two drivers offered me rides but both were going only as far as Hirosaki, only about 8% of the distance back home. I actually got into one of the cars but after thinking about it for a few seconds I decided I needed to look for "bigger fish." I consider hitchhiking to be akin of fishing. You don't have to take the small fish even if you catch one, you can return them back. Usually it takes longer to find a big fish, but when you do catch one, it's worth the wait. This is especially true when looking for cars going an expressway. My first ride on the Tohoku expressway needed to take me at least 200 kilometers or 1/3 of the way toward home if I was to get home that day without having to resort to take a long train ride. When hitchhiking on a regular road, I'm happy for little fish that comes along no matter how short a distance the driver is going. But today via the expressway, I had to catch a fairly "big fish."

It was indeed worth the 2.5 hour wait for I finally caught one! At 11:30 a man who was going all the way to Sendai offered me a ride. His name is Mr. Ohka Iwao and he is a head coach of women's junior table tennis and one of the representatives of all of Japan in international tournaments! Mr. Ohka took me to Chojahara Service area, the largest one before Sendai, a distance of 304 kilometers and **over half of the way home!** I now knew for sure I would make it home by evening.

It's always great to ride with educated and influential people for the conversation is usually deep and interesting. In 1973, one year after China and Japan established diplomatic relations, Mr. Ohka took his team to China to compete with Chinese teams. He said his team never won even once though he made many subsequent trips. According to Mr. Ohka, the main reason the Chinese are so strong in table tennis is because good players can gain quite a bit of wealth. There's no money in table tennis in Japan, he says. During his first visit to China, Mr. Ohka met the Chinese premier Chou En-lai and was photographed with him.

Mr. Ohka's home is in the Shichigahama area of Sendai and close to the ocean. He was in Aomori city at the time of the earthquake and tsunami of March 11th. His wife witnessed the tsunami from the window of their home! Their house is on a hill and therefore was not hit by the tsunami, but she saw all the houses below swept away. For the next 3 weeks there was no electricity in Sendai. Mr. Ohka was unsure of road conditions, so rather than return home by

car he took trains and buses in a circular route to get home carrying as much food with him that he could hold.



Sachi, Masako and Nozomi at
Chojahara SA.

I told Mr. Ohka that I would be fine at Chojahara Service Area. It was 3PM when we arrived and I've never experienced long waits for the next ride there. Three smiling young ladies, Sachi, Masako and Nozomi approached me and asked where I was heading. They all spoke some English (probably why they were interested in me) and said they would ask the driver of their van if he would take me. They all wanted to talk to me to practice their English. Unfortunately for both them and me, the driver said the van was too packed with luggage and there was no room for me to sit.

Almost immediately after the 3 girls left, a passing driver made eye contact with me and then stopped a few meters up the road. I walked cautiously to the vehicle not knowing for sure if the driver meant to pick me up or not. I've been wrong before. Sometimes drivers stop not far from me but with other intents in mind such as making a phone call. But this driver indicated he was stopping for me.

It was yet another sports coach, this time High School Soccer, Mr Shun. He took me as far as Kunimi SA in Fukushima Prefecture.

It was raining in Kunimi and so I decided to wait a bit hoping the rain would stop. After about 15 minutes and rain subsided and I walked out again to the parking area. After a few minutes, an older couple picked me up and took me to Adatara Service Area. Their daughter is married to a man from the UK where she is now. I've often been picked up by parents whose son or daughter is married to a foreigner.

The Adatara Service Area is always challenging for me. It's the closest point just before the Banetsu junction heading to Niigata, but the preponderance of the traffic is going a different direction toward the Kanto area, Tokyo and vicinity. This time in an effort to work around the problem, I held out an Aizu sign instead of the Niigata sign. The city of Aizuwakamatsu in the Aizu area is about 1/3 of the distance home from that point. I knew there were probably more cars going to Aizuwakamatsu than there would be to Niigata. This bore fruit. Within a relatively short time an older man picked me up. He took me to the Bandaisan Service Area which is just before the Aizuwakamatsu exit.

Now I was in an excellent situation indeed! The sky was clearer with no more threat of rain. A far higher percentage of cars were heading to Niigata from that point. After only a few minutes waiting, and just before sunset, a young married couple who were headed to Joetsu picked me up and took me to an expressway bus stop on the Banetsu expressway which is relatively close to home. From there it was a short 10 minute walk to the train station, and only

180 yen train ride 2 stations the rest of the way. I arrived home 8:50PM. □

Forced to hitchhike due to heavy rain



Miss Maiko who went
out of her way to
take me to Higashi
Noshiro station.

July 29: I needed to go this day to Aomori city, 470 kilometers from my home in Niigata. It was raining hard. I attempted to take the very first train out at 6:16AM but after arriving at the station was told that all trains were stopped on that particular train line. When a rainfall reaches a certain level, the railroad company cancels all trains to make time to check the tracks. Landslides due to heavy rain are not uncommon in Japan.

To make any progress at all, I need to take a different line using going a slightly different direction but which would take to me the main station of Niigata city where another train line going to Murakami city would take me further. But due to heavy rains, that train had to stop at Nakajo, about 2/3s of the way to Murakami.

I'm now in a do or die situation. It was imperative that I be in Aomori city that evening. My only recourse was to hitchhike. It continued to rain hard for the first 30 minutes after arriving to Nakajo, but then the rain subsided to the point I could walk outside with an umbrella.



Terata Kouki who took
me to Iwawa Sakura

Station in Akita
Prefecture

The day turned out to be another miracle day of hitchhiking! Six drivers took me as far as Noshiro city in Akita Prefecture. It was 5:30PM by the time I got to Noshiro, just in time to take a train the rest of the way arriving in Aomori at 8PM. Five of the six drivers went out of their way for me! One man went as far as 1 hour or about 60 kilometers to take me to Yamagata Prefecture. The last two drivers, a young man and young lady want to see me again, and they will therefore be meeting each other for the first time when they do when I pass through Akita city again next month.

Mr. and Mrs. Kudo take me to Aomori city



Hiromi, baby Hayato and Taiki

July 17 It was another day after rainy season. I walked a little over a kilometer to route 7 in Hirosaki hoping to hitchhike to my friend's home in Aomori city, a distance of only about 44 kilometers. But most of vehicles consisted of city traffic and I waited what I considered to be longer than usual, about 30 minutes.

A young man, Taiki Kudo with his one year old son Hiyato strapped to a child-seat in the back, pulled up and offered me a ride. Taiki said that he saw me standing with my Aomori sign and circled back toward me hoping I would still be there waiting. He said that he was just about to go to Aomori city with his family and needed to pick them up first. I replied I wasn't in a hurry. So Taiki took me to his apartment building where we waited for his wife Hiromi to come and join us. I had a great time talking with them and they

took me all the way to my friend's house in Aomori city saving me 810 yen train fare.

Picked up by young mother with two little boys



Mrs. Takahashi with 5 year old son Raima and 3 year old son Shuga who took me 478 kilometers toward my destination.

Monday, July 18: From Aomori city in northern Tohoku I needed to go in one day to Noda city, Chiba Prefecture, a distance of around 700 kilometers. It took me one hour to walk from my friend's house in Aomori to Aomori Chuo Interchange, the beginning of the Tohoku expressway, and it took yet another hour of waiting to catch the first ride. It was worth all the effort considering the very first car took me 70% of the 677 kilometer length of the Tohoku expressway! The driver was a mother, 30 some years old, Mrs. Takahashi with her two sons, Raima (5) and Shuga (3).

When I first saw Mrs. Takahashi waiting for the traffic signal just before the expressway entrance to turn green, I thought, "No chance with her! She has two little kids in the back seat!" And so I was therefore surprised when she turned into the gas station by the expressway entrance where I was standing and waved to me to come.

The front passenger seat was filled with belongings. Mrs. Takahashi had to arrange things a bit to make room for me and my suitcase. I greeted the boys and they were both very friendly. The older of the two, Raima, was quite talkative throughout much of the trip.

Mrs. Tahahashi said, "Let's have a good trip!" I was so happy to know she was going all the way to Nasu City in Tochigi Prefecture. This would take me past the big city of Sendai which is sometimes hard to cross.

It was the second time Mrs. Takahashi picked up a hitchhiker. The first time was with her husband. She took a young Japanese man toward his destination. I was glad too to be of some service to her in helping her keep her two boys from fussing with each other too much and making too much of a racket. Every time I turned around to talk to them, they would calm down.

Mrs. Takahashi seemed to be in a hurry to go home and often approached a speed of 140 kilometers per hour! "Don't worry," she said. "The car won't go any faster than this!"

I had a receptive audience of 4 hours to share with what the Holy Scriptures have to say about God, creation of the universe, the history of Adam and Eve in the Garden, why people became what they have become, why evil exists, why we are all criminals in the sight of our Creator, and why we need to be saved. Mrs. Takahashi was impressed to know that Adam put the blame on his wife for eating the "apple." Most people in the West have heard all these things in church much of their lives, and they have either accepted them as fact, or rejected it all to the point they don't care to listen anymore. It was the very **first time** for Mrs. Takahashi to hear it, and because she seemed interested I was glad to keep sharing more. I've *hardly ever* been turned down by a Japanese person an offer to share with them stories from the Bible. I can only think of a handful of times out of 10s of thousands of people I've talked to in the 34 years I've lived in Japan.

We stopped for a restroom break and Raima held out his hand toward mine for me to hold hands with him to walk with him and his mother toward the parking area facilities. He then followed his mother into the restroom.

The next day at the Miyoshi Service area on the Kanetsu Expresway heading home, I met another young mother with her son. They were from the USA and are now living near Yokota AFB. There were many American service personnel with their dependents around who were on their way back to the Air Force base after a field trip. I told the lady I'm about to hitchhike to Niigata. She didn't believe me at first. I showed her the picture of Mrs. Takahashi and sons that I took with my cell phone. "It wouldn't happen in America" the lady replied. I tend to think that Japan is now, "the land of the free and the home of the brave", more than the USA is, don't you? America *used to be* so back in the 19th century.

Picked up by two members of the Akita

Prefecture Parliament



Akita Parliament member Jun with me in the background. Jun is holding my cell phone trying to include Teru Kun in the photo, but missed him because he couldn't see the camera viewer from his position.

July 15: Today I hitchhiked in 11 vehicles from Niigata city to Hirosaki city in Aomori Prefecture, a distance of about 430 kilometers. The highlight of this trip was car #9 with two lawmakers of the Akita Prefecture Parliament, driver Obara Masateru and front seat passenger Numaya Jun who took me from Akita City to Odate City, a good distance of around 100 kilometers. They told me to call them Teru Kun and Jun.

It's an absolute first for me to get picked up by active politicians! Once I was picked up by the former mayor of a city of 50,000 people, Mr. Kobayashi of Niitsu city, but he was retired then and not serving in any public position.

Well, you can imagine the fun I had talking to these guys and telling them all the things I heard about crooked American politics! **Two Illinois governors in a row**, George Ryan and Rod Blagojevich were arrested and convicted on corruption charges. George Ryan is sitting in prison and will be there till July 4, 2013, and Rod Blagojevich was recently convicted and about to go to prison.

Teru Kun and Jun became Akita Parliament members just last March. They said they're good guys who will not be corrupted by money. They promised never to take a bribe. I tend to think they are sincere because they had nothing to gain by picking me up, and they gave me presents when parting, an expensive looking bottle of grape juice, Japanese daikon and cucumbers. And they seemed

to know nothing about the Secret Societies in America that formulate policy behind the scenes.



3 presents from Teru
and Jun

Japanese public servants receive quite good salaries, perhaps double of many other countries. Teru Kun and Jun acknowledged that they are well paid, but said that the budget of a politician is quite high and they have to struggle to make ends meet. The meeting in Odate they were required to attend would cost them 10,000 yen each. They referred to themselves as “poor politicians.” Indeed their car was nothing fancy, just a regular type of vehicle that most salary men drive.

Hitchhike adventures since the March 11th earthquake



Mrs. Ayami who took me from
Hirosaki to Namioka city in
Aomori Prefecture on July
9th.

I haven't felt it appropriate to write about my adventures meeting people hitchhiking in Japan since the catastrophe of March 11th. People are still suffering and I want to do what I can to help those who are going directly to the disaster areas to treat people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

This is just to say I'm still hitchhiking, people still pick me up, and I still need to travel this way to do my job and save money at the same time. Since March 11th I hitchhiked 22 days in 75 vehicles and traveled 6400 kilometers. Some of the people I've met have been directly involved in the relief efforts. One man came from as far as Sasebo city in Kyushu to Soma city in Fukushima.

On July 11th I passed through Fukushima city on the Tohoku Expressway. Radiation levels in Fukushima city are higher than other places in Fukushima Prefecture where people are still allowed to live, even higher than in Soma city which is 20 kilometers closer to the damaged nuclear power-plants. This is because the wind happened to be blowing toward Fukushima city when one of the plants had a chemical explosion. The no-go zone is a 20 kilometer radius around the powerplants. The inhabitants of that area have not only lost their homes and land, but any livestock and crops they happened to have.

Merely passing through Fukushima city presents no danger from radiation. The Fukushima city people have not been reporting any radiation sickness. So far not a single person has died from radiation, not even the ones who worked close to the plant to cool down the reactors. For this reason IMHO I consider comments from so called "experts" that Fukushima is far worse than Chernobyl to be nothing but hype and fear mongering! According to world-nuclear.org 30 operators and firemen died within three months since the Chernobyl accident. It's now been four months since the Fukushima powerplant meltdown, and **not one power plant worker has died** or is even ill from radiation!

Day 5 after the Japan earthquake: Hitchhiked back home



The red line shows the route I took back to Niigata. The right arrow

points to one of the nuclear powerplants in trouble.

March 16, 2011: While in Kobe I joined a NPO project and worked nearly all my waking hours for two days to setup a new web site, Help Japan 2011, to help raise aid for the earthquake victims. The next day I traveled back to my home in Niigata partly by train but mainly by hitchhiking. I started off at Kanda parking area on the Hokuriku expressway in Shiga prefecture. It was surprisingly cold and snowing the front license plates of the cars were covered with wet snow and unreadable. I brushed off the snow from several license plates to determine how far the driver may be going.

Parts of the Hokuriku expressway run very close to the Sea of Japan. There was no threat of tsunami danger as they rarely occur on this side of Japan. However, on 26 May 1983, [104 people were killed in close to the Sea of Japan in Akita](#) by a tsunami after an earthquake.

You can see from the map that I traveled back to an area closer to possible danger. But I do not believe Niigata will be affected much even if the situation in Fukushima worsens.

God was good to me and I saved thousands of yen getting lifts as far as Uozu city in Toyama Prefecture in 5 cars. It was past dark by that time and so I took trains the rest of the way. To save money, I took local trains. However at Joetsu the trains were stopped due to a plastic sheet that had wrapped itself around a power-line of the train. In order to get home that day, I was forced to take an express train from there for which I was charged an extra 1150 yen express ticket to Nagaoka city. For some reason I wasn't charged for an express ticket the rest of the way.

The first driver was a young man who listened intently to the Bible stories I shared with him. The second was a father and son who run a Buddhist Temple. The son was dressed in a Buddhist monk's clothing and had a shaved head. They asked me to explain who Jesus Christ is and what He means to the world, and of course I was more than glad to do so.

You may wonder why I would talk of matters of faith at such a time of crisis as Japan is in now. Most Japanese are very apathetic to matters of religion, but now they are seeking comfort, and are open to hearing answers from the Bible about their problems. One man even told me to pray for the earthquake victims!

One of the drivers was a young single lady, Kana Chan, who lived in Australia for two years. Thank you Kana Chan for the ride!

Day after the Sendai earthquake – hitchhike adventure from Tokyo to Osaka



Saturday, March 11, 2011: The morning after the major earthquake in the Pacific not far from Sendai, the largest city in the Tohoku area, I accessed the Internet news and saw more horrific photos of destruction by the tsunami. A friend with whom I stayed with said, “Over 10,000 people were killed!” I began to weep but learned later he got it wrong. So far the number of reported deaths is 1/10 of that number, but it will probably go much higher.

I have been to the city of Sendai many times, and even lived there once from 1976-1978. The year I left there was a major earthquake that destroyed part of the city. I used to visit from time to time the very towns along the Pacific coast that were destroyed by the tsunami.

The purpose of my trip is to search for employment to earn more money. Jobs are now scarce at home, and my previous source of income was terminated. I had considered visiting friends in Yaizu city in Shizuoka Prefecture, but because their house is right on the coast, I didn’t consider it a safe place to be at this time. Osaka was a better option for me. I had only 1500 yen left in my pocket, but I knew it would be enough to get me to Osaka. This is why I headed the opposite direction from the destruction in Tohoku. I am not running from danger. I know another earthquake can happen at any time no matter where I am, and I’m now in Osaka, not far from Kobe which was destroyed in 1995 by a major earthquake.

The trains in Tokyo all stopped immediately after the earthquake, but the next morning they were all running again. I took a 260 yen train ride to Fujigaoka station on the Denentoshi line and walked from there to the Kohoku Parking Area on the Tomei expressway. In just a few minutes a car with 3 men offered me a ride as far as Nagoya.

Part of the Tohoku expressway in Shizuoka Prefecture runs right next to the ocean, and there was a tsunami warning alert out. The police closed that section of the expressway till the alert was lifted. In spite of the alert,

vehicles waited in a long line for many kilometers in anticipation that the alert would be lifted. I don't know how long the first cars waited but we had to wait only 15 some minutes.

In order to keep some of the impatient drivers from speeding after the expressway re-opened, a police car and an expressway maintenance truck led the procession of traffic at a slow pace at first, only 60 kilometers per hour. A few kilometers later they increased the speed to 80. Finally both left at the next exit and the traffic took off! The driver in the car I was in started to cruise at 150 KM an hour and reached up to 180 KM an hour from time to time, 60 KM over the limit. It would have been a hefty fine and his license taken away if he was caught.

From Nagoya a 31 year old man took me to Kyoto. From there it was only a 360 yen train ticket to Osaka.

During times of major catastrophes such as the earthquake, the Japanese become more open to hearing about God and matters of faith. The man listened intently as I shared with him the meaning of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The first 3 chapters of the Bible hold the key of understanding all the rest of the Scriptures. Most Japanese have no interest in religion per se, but are highly interested in history. I try to share faith with them from this point of view.

As i write this I am siting in my friend's apartment in Osaka walking the news about the earthquake on CNN. I know as much as you do about it. Osaka is far from Sendai and nobody here even felt the quake.

Niigata to Kanto – tramatic 4th 2011 hitchhike adventure



Walls of snow along road in Japan

February 1, 2011: I started out very well with the first ride on my trip to Noda city in Chiba prefecture, just east of Tokyo. The purpose of this trip was to attend a fellowship meeting at 7 PM. It was good weather and I left home at a very good time, just after 10 AM. Tokyo is 300 kilometers away but

it usually takes me less than 6 hours, only half a day. I found that weekends are best for hitchhiking, but today was a weekday, a Tuesday. I finally arrived in Noda at 8:25 PM!

After waiting only a minute, the first driver took me all the way to Sanjo city, the entrance of the Hokuriku Expressway. He kindly went out of his way to do so. From there I took a 180 bus ride to Sakae parking area on the Hokuriku. The preponderance of the traffic was local. Hardly anybody was going to the Kanto plain.

After waiting at Sakae PA in Sanjo for over 90 minutes, I accepted a ride from a young single couple to Ozumi parking area. This is further down the road but just past the Nagaoka junction going towards Joetsu city which is not the direction I needed to go. However I knew I could walk to the other side of the expressway and catch traffic that could go toward Kanto.

I found my situation at Ozumi even worse than it was in Sakae! There was much snow and ice in the parking area, and most of the traffic was going back in the direction I just came from. After waiting another hour and a half, I accepted a ride from a lady going to Nagaoka city. Normally I would not want to get off the expressway in Nagaoka, but the situation was so that my only hope was to hitchhike from Nagaoka down National Highway route 17 and get back on the expressway – this time the Kan'etsu – to catch a car to Kanto.

The lady took me only as far as National Highway route 8, too far to walk to route 17. Snow was piled up so high along the road I had very little room to stand between it and passing cars. A police car approached me and the officer said in very good English, "Don't enter this road! There are many truck accidents here!" Oh my, things could hardly be worse! It was already past 2PM and I have yet 250 kilometers to go. I couldn't walk further down the road without disobeying the police officer. The only option was to stand at a rather poor intersection with more room to stand hoping to catch a car. Cars whizzed past me. Drivers coming to route 8 from the road perpendicular to it were only 2 or 3 every few minutes.

Finally, after waiting there for about 20 minutes, an older man in a pickup truck took pity on me and offered me a ride. He went out of his way to take me to route 17.

At route 17 I caught the next ride within a minute! The driver offered to take me to the Yamaya Parking area on the Kan'etsu. I had never been to Yamaya before because it is a rather small parking area with few cars. It took a while to find it. Snow in that area is one of the deepest in all of Japan. Walls of snow higher than our heads lined the roads everywhere making navigation harder than it would have been without them.

The driver, being a local man, was able to figure out Yamaya's location and took me to the back entrance. As soon as I got there, I saw a man and told him I needed to go to Kanto. He looked at me warily and asked me who I was, and if I didn't have anything dangerous in my luggage. He was a Yamazaki bread truck driver with a load of bread going all the way to Tokorozawa in Saitama and offered me a ride to Higashi Tokorozaka station. But because of

company rules, he couldn't go any faster than 80 kilometers an hour which meant at least 40 minutes longer than most cars would take me. But in this case, it was a "bird in the hand" situation and I was happy just to get to Noda. It turned out being an hour and 25 minutes late wasn't such a big problem after all, for the meeting continued to 10 PM, and I had a good time and made new friends. The trip was worth the effort.

My return trip was the exact opposite of the previous day. It only took one car with hardly any waiting to get all the way back home. A 25-year-old man named Takuma who sells wasabi offered me a ride to Niigata station but then decided to take me a bit further to my area.

The first hour of our conversation was just asking him questions about his life and background. It didn't seem to be leading to anything deeper. I feel I owe to every driver who picks me up a message of Salvation in knowing the Author of life, Jesus Christ, but because Takuma wasn't asking me anything about what I do, I didn't see any openings to the subject of Biblical/spiritual things. Finally, I got the inspiration to ask him if he knew the story of the Garden of Eden. This worked and lead to deeper talk! Most Japanese are open to hearing bible stories, and Genesis chapters 1-3 is a good place to start because it explains so many things about why the world is as it is today.

Saitama to Niigata – 3rd hitchhike adventure 2011



January 25: Today in 4 cars I hitchhiked back to Niigata. The third driver would have taken me to Nagaoka train station, but because it was not too late, still 4PM with a hour of sunlight left, and because I would have had to wait 50 minutes at the train station for the next train, I decided to try to try to hitchhike a bit further. It was now the beginning of the rush hour, in spite of many cars on the road, nearly everybody was ignoring me. The ones who didn't gave me a cross arm sign meaning, "NO!". I always turn my eyes away from them when they do that and don't take it personally. This is the

only type of rejection I find no trouble to handle. ☐

The 20 minutes wait on snowy route 8 proved indeed to be worth it, for Miss Mao, a young lady in her 20s, took pity on me and turned around to pick me up! Miss Mao is one of those special people who I know God especially has His eyes on, for she has love for others, and she listened intently as I told her stories from the Bible.

Hamamatsu City to Tokyo – 2nd hitchhike adventure 2011



Mr. Yasunori who took me to
Nihonzaka service area

January 24: Today I traveled in 3 vehicles to a train station in Kawasaki which is close to Tokyo. Two of these were trucks which is pretty rare seeing that only 6% of the vehicles are trucks and hardly any of them on the expressway. It was a fine day and I had a great view of Mt. Fuji.



Mt. Fuji as seen from the Tomei
Expressway