

Spring hitchhike adventure: Nagano, Osaka, Tokyo



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



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. Receiving 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 [Bildbergers](#), 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.