

Tribulated trip to Osaka



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



Kana and Rami (the driver) who took me from Kusatsu to Taga in Shiga Prefecture.

It's been about half a year since visiting the Kansai area of Japan. "Kansai" literally means, "Western Barrier" and consists of three main cities, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. You might ask, "Is there an Eastern Barrier? Yes, there is. It's called the Kanto plain with Tokyo being the main city. "Kanto" literally means "Eastern Barrier." This all has to do with Japanese history from the Samurai times of 500 years ago.



Torhu, a university student, who took me from Osaka to Kyoto

Japan is divided into political regions called *ken* in Japanese or Prefecture in English. Prefectures are similar to states of the USA or provinces in Canada. There are 5 prefectures between Niigata Prefecture and Osaka spanning a distance of 500 kilometers or 315 miles.

Thanks to expressways that go that entire distance, it's actually easier for me to make in all the way to Osaka from Niigata in one day, a distance approximately 100 kilometers further than hitchhiking to Aomori city. Now with 2 hours less daylight than in the summer, I often cannot catch the final car before dark and have to take a train the rest of the way.

I left home at 7:00 a.m. took a train to Sanjo city (25 kilometers from home), and got to the Sakae Parking Area on the Hokuriku Expressway around 8:30 a.m. It was a warm and bright sunny day. Three cars took me to the

Tokumitsu Parking area just past Kanazawa, about the half way point arriving just after 3:00 p.m. But the weather had changed and it was raining heavily! I stopped for lunch hoping the rain would subside, but it didn't. Even though I had an umbrella, I knew from experience standing near the parking area exit where cars would re-enter the expressway in the middle of the rain would get me nowhere. Drivers have rarely stopped for me in such a case. I stood under a covered area next to the parking area and walked out holding a sign that said either "Fukui" (the next Prefecture" or "Osaka" depending which way I turned the sign. Many of the vehicles had Fukui plates but everyone I asked turned me down.



Two men who took me from Kyoto to
Kusatsu Service Area in Shiga

Though I stood under the covering most of the time, my legs and left arm got wet from the rain. An hour and a half past and it began to get dark. If I was going to Aomori city, I would have stopped hitchhiking at this time and opted for the train. But in Ishikawa prefecture, I had no such recourse. I was nowhere near a train station.

I was in a desperate situation but remembering that I've been in worse gave me comfort. I prayed asking God to supply my needs – the need of a driver going to Osaka! It wasn't absolutely imperative that I arrive to my destination that evening, but I was facing an uncomfortable night if I didn't. There is no long bench to sleep on at the Tokumitsu Parking area like there was at Adatara in Fukushima Prefecture. (another story).

It gets dark early in the Japan in Autumn, Rather than stand in the parking area under heavy rain, I stood next to the entrance of the parking area's restroom and showed my A4 paper sign to all which said "Fukui" the next Prefecture on the way to Osaka. After many rejections, at 5:55 p.m. an man said,

"I'm going to Osaka, not Fukui." I turned my plastic case of A4 signs around, showed him the Osaka sign and replied, "Osaka! Yes, I want to go to Osaka! Would you take me please?"

He replied, "Sure, just wait where you are now till I have some dinner."

I replied as he left toward the restaurant in the parking area, "Don't forsake me!"

The man is a truck driver and true to his word, he took me to Osaka, and quite close to my actual destination! Because of the rain, waiting for rides and the fact the truck driver got off the expressway at Tsuruga and took the regular road along the western shore of Lake Biwa to Kyoto and Osaka, the entire trip took 16 hours.

In contrast the return trip to Niigata on Sunday took only half the time, about 8.5 hours. It was sunny weather and a weekend. Saturdays, Sundays and

holidays are always better for me when hitchhiking. People on their day off are more likely to pick me up than those going to work or back. There was little waiting time. An elderly couple took me from Shizugatake in Shiga Prefecture to Nadachihama in Niigata, a good 300 kilometer distance! And I made 3 new Facebook friends!