

February – March 2014 Adventure in Kansai



February 28, Day 1

It's the first day of a one week adventure traveling mainly by hitchhiking! I'm on my way to Kansai of which the principle cities are Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. Today's destination was Osaka.



Mr. Washio, the Subaru Car Company worker who previously picked me up two weeks before.

I hitchhiked again from Niigata City to Osaka. This time I made it in record time arriving directly at my friend's house at 4:50 P.M.! And it was totally void of any cost for transportation.

The first driver was a young man, Mr. Washio. I met him three weeks before during my last trip to Osaka. He took me to the same place as before on Route 8.

In less than a minute waiting on Route 8 a driver stopped and took me close to the Sanjo-Tsubame Interchange of the Hokuriku Expressway. Normally from that point I would take a highway bus 6 kilometers further up to the Sakae parking area, but this time I felt led to hitchhike at the interchange, a practice I used to do. This was probably the main reason I arrived to Osaka so quickly, for at 9:15 a.m. a man going all the way to Kanazawa picked me up! Kanazawa is just over half the distance to Osaka, about 300 kilometers from home. Catching a ride at the interhchange saved time waiting for the bus and the time I probably would have waited at Sakae.

The driver's name was Mr. Shimada. He has a rather dangerous job of repairing the surface of the insides of underground gasoline tanks at gas stations. Sometimes they explode sending the worker flying in the air.

Mr. Shimada took me to Oyabegawa Service area in Toyama Prefecture. I choose to get off there rather than go all the way to Kanazawa before it's always best to hitchhike at major service areas of the expressway rather than get off the expressway and hitchhike at the interchange entrance.



Young man from Fukuoka who has been hitchhiking for the past 40 days in Hokkaido and Tohoku

At Oyabegawa, lo and behold, I saw another hitchhiker was standing waiting for cars! He was a young man from Fukuoka City in Kyushu. His signboard says, "Ishikawa" the next prefecture past Toyama. As I talked with him two other men approached us. One asked me how old I am, "I'm 63," I replied. He put his hands on my shoulders and said, "You're really healthy and going strong!" The second man offered to take both me and the young man hitchhiker to Tokumitsu Service Area in Ishikawa which is just past Kanazawa.

At Tokumitsu I parted with the young man saying it was best we stand in different places. The place where he stood gave him the first opportunity to meet people while I stood near the exit of the service area just before cars reenter the expressway. An older couple on their way to Fukui stopped. They said they saw the young man which meant I caught the first ride.



Mr. Sakamoto who took me to my very destination in Osaka.

The final Car, driver #8, took me from Taga Service Area in Shiga Prefecture all the way to my very destination in Osaka! He name is Mr Sakamoto and he was very friendly and talkative.

March 1st. Day 2

Today my goal was to hitchhike to Kainan City in Wakayama Prefecture to meet up with a Facebook friend, Naomi, who I had never met face to face before. We have been in touch for at least a couple years. She's an English teacher. I first came in contact with her after she saw my web page about fixing Japanese paper shoji doors and wrote me an email about it.

I had never tried to hitchhike to Wakayama Prefecture before and didn't know the roads well. Mr. Sakamoto from the day before advised me to stand at the Chou Kanjo bypass entrance which is just a 10 minute walk from where I was. In only a few minutes a man in a light truck stopped. He said he would take me to entrance of the Kinki Expressway which connects to an expressway going to Wakayama.

The spot where I ended up was too dangerous to hitchhike. There was a great amount of traffic. Cars were whizzing by past me too fast. I left the Chou Kanjo bypass and searched for a safer place on the regular road that would run into the Kinki Expressway entrance.

After walking a considerable distance getting lost and walking even the wrong direction, two people gave me guidance and I found a good road to hitchhike on. I held out to the drivers a paper sign that says "To Kinki Expressway" but everybody ignored me. I realized then that most of those drivers would probably *not* be entering the Kinki Expressway.



Mr. Aoki, the Nichirensu truck driver who took me to the Kinki Expressway entrance.

It was still 9:00 a.m. and my appointment in Kainan was not until 2:p.m. I was pacing myself. If I could not get a ride in an hour, I would take the train so as not to be late for the appointment.

About 30 minutes later a truck driver offered to take me further up the road which would bring me to the very entrance of the Kinki. His name is Mr. Aoki and he was driving a large truck, the kind that normally does not stop for me. Mr. Aoki is a member of the Nichirensu Buddhist sect. He zealously explained the doctrines of Nichiren, but they made no sense to me at all. However Mr. Aoki is such a friendly guy, and we became Facebook friends.



Mr. Tatebayashi who took me to Kainan city in Wakayama Prefecture. Behind him is his friend who will accompany him to see the other friend in the hospital.

The final ride was a total miracle! After about 30 minutes, a man on his way home to another part of Osaka stopped for me. His name is Mr. Tatebayashi and he seemed surprised to learn I was on my way to Kainan city. Kainan is his home town and he was thinking of going there to see a friend in the hospital who just had a serious automobile accident. Though Mr. Tatebayashi was on his way back home without intending to go to Kainan that day, he decided to go there for my sake and because he needed to make the trip eventually anyway!

He told me a Japanese proverb I had often heard from drivers while traveling, "Tabi wa michizure, yo wa nasake" which means, "No road is long with good company". I arrived at Kainan City a little before 11 a.m. – 3 hours before my appointment to see Naomi.

March 2st. Day 3

Today I successfully hitchhiked from the Suita Service Area in Osaka to Otsu City in Shiga. This is going back the direction I came from Niigata. But it's not far and was a piece of cake to get to.

The first car were 3 ladies. The driver said they were on their way to Kyoto and could not take me to Otsu. I asked if she would take me only as far as the Katsuragawa Service area just before Kyoto. No problem she said.



The driver of the first car which took me close to Kyoto.

They were on their way to a concert. All were friendly and talkative. Most Japanese find it interesting that a man of my age travels by hitchhiking.

The second car was a young couple married only two years. When I told them I do Christian wedding ceremonies, they asked me if I could do the wedding vows for them. I replied the vows first to the husband and then his wife. The both replied, "Hai, chikaimasu!" "I affirm."



The married couple who took me to Otsu.

March 9, Day 10

I hitchhiked back to Niigata from Osaka in 5 cars. The last car was a nice couple who asked to photograph me. I subsequently photographed them!



A couple who took me from Nadachitanihama SA to Mitsuke station which is only a short train ride home.

[February 26, 2014 Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori](#)



Route 345 and the Sea of Japan near Majima Station, Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture.

Today was partially overcast with dark snow clouds. It snowed from time to time. Nevertheless I made it as far as Odate City in 8 vehicles.

Car #2 was Mr. Kawahara who works with Honda motor company selling car parts. I may see him again at the local Home Center in March. He took me to Tsuruoka city. From there a lady took me a bit further to the Route 7 bypass in Tsuruoka.

Car #4 was Mr. Masayuki Morita who took me from Tsuruoka City to exactly where I wanted to go in Sakata City, about 20 kilometers up the road. His destination was actually only part way to Sakata. Mr. Morita understands hitchhikers well because he himself is an experienced hitchhiker who traveled 10 years ago all the way to the southern end of Kyushu island to the city of Kanoshima! It took him 5 days!

It was snowing rather heavily when I got to Ikura Sakura just past Akita City. A lady, driver #7, offered me a ride. She saw my sign that said "Noshiro" which is the next major town up the road. Before getting in the car, the lady confessed to me she suffers from panic attacks. After sitting next to her in the front seat, I immediately laid my hand on her shoulder and prayed for her healing in the Name of Jesus Christ! She smiled and seemed to appreciate it. She's on medicine. I told her panic attacks is a spiritual problem that can only be solved though spiritual – good counseling and reading wholesome books, especially the Bible.



Ishikawa in HIrosaki City, a scene on my way walking to the Tohoku expressway IC.



Truck that took me to Chojahara SA
in Miyagi Prefecture.

The next day on the way back I successfully hitchhiked all the way home on the Tohoku Expressway! The very first vehicle was a truck on the way to Sendai. It's very rare for long distance truck drivers to pick me up these days.

The second car was two ladies on their way to Murata city just past Sendai. I was thankful to go with them to get past Sendai. They took me to Sugo parking area.



Tourist Bus to
Adatara SA

The 3rd vehicle was a tourist bus with two ladies, the driver and the guide! I think this is only the 3rd or 4th time ever to get picked up by a bus! They took me to Adatara SA which is just before the Banetsu Junction in Fukushima Prefecture. It was getting dark by the time we arrived which made a blurry photo.

Mid Winter Hitchhike Adventure to Aomori



Route 345 near Majima station, Murakami City, Niigata Prefecture

February 15, 2014 According to yesterday's weather forecast, I expected it to

snow all day and was prepared to take a train from Niigata City to Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture. But at 7:30 a.m. because the weather was fair, I decided to get off the train at Majima station and hitchhike.

The traffic was sparse. After 30 minutes waiting at the spot on the road which you see in the photo, I decided to walk. This way I would stay warmer. I hoped drivers would take pity on me seeing me in a more isolated spot away from the town. Today was the longest walk I had up Route 345 – a full hour. A man in a fine car offered to take me 10 kilometers further. Later he decided to take me as far as Route 7 which was much better for me. Route 7 is the main highway going to Hirosaki.



Couple who took me 190 kilometers
to Akita Station

After a relatively short wait near the intersection of Route 7 and Route 345, a couple on their way to Akita City pulled up and offered me a ride. Going all the way to Akita city in a single ride is outstanding! It has taken me as many as 6 cars to get that distance! The ride was a good 3 hours. They were interested in why I hitchhike and all the various experiences I've had hitchhiking.

From Akita station I took a train to Ikawa Sakura station, 400 yen distance, and hitchhiked again. Three vehicles with two drivers who were ladies took me to Odate Station from where I got a train the rest of the way. It started to snow and was getting dark by the time I got to Odate.



Route 7 Nagamine, Akita Prefecture. Home is 400 kilometers ahead.

After my business the next day, I took a train to Nagamine Station and hitchhiked on the road you see in the photo above. The driver, a young man, took me to the desolate area you see in the photo which was about 15 kilometers further up the road.



Part way from Nagamine to Odate.

I didn't exactly relish getting off there because I knew traffic would be sparse, but the first driver who saw me stopped! It was a light truck. The driver was on his way to Odate City. He took me to the entrance of the bypass which would take me to the other side of Odate.



Miss Ako who took me to Akita Station from Odate, about 100 kilometers distance.

My last experience at that location was a long wait of over an hour. I decided to now show my sign showing the destination of Akita City and held out my thumb instead. I learned there is a time to use a sign, and not to use one. It bore fruit and I got a ride to the other side of Odate from an older gentleman only a few minutes later. He took me to a convenience store and advised me to wait for cars from customers who stop at the store. He also advised me to show drivers my Akita sign. I heeded his advice. Only a few minutes a young lady pulled up, smiled and offered me a ride!

Her name is Ako Yoshida, 36, single and works as a personnel director at a shopping center in Odate. It was very pleasant to talk to her the next hour. I hope to see her again.

2014 Winter Hitchhike Adventure to Osaka



On a snowy morning of January 17, after a 5 minute bike ride to the local train station where I park my bicycle and from where I walk to the highway, just a few meters away from the station my right foot slipped on the snow, hit a rock in the road, and my ankle twisted badly with excruciating pain! January 17th was to be the first long hitchhike trip this year. I was headed to Tokyo which is about 300 kilometers or 188 miles from home.

I hobbled back to the train station to inspect the damage. My ankle was visibly swollen as you see in the photo. I thought I might still be OK to travel. There was a train coming soon that would take me as far as the

Hokuriku Expressway interchange. But upon further reflection and increasing pain, I decided to abort the trip. Thankfully I didn't have to limp in pain back home. I had the bicycle to ride back with.



Medical equipment consultants from Sendai. They took me from Yoneyama SA to Kureha parking area in Toyama Prefecture.

After praying for healing in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and applying a liberal amount of God's natural peppermint oil from the [Young Living Essential Oils](#) company thanks to the good advice of my friend Jonas who lives in Satama, by February 7th the ankle healed to the point I could walk without a limp again! There was no urgent need to travel to Tokyo at this time, and because my friends in Kyoto and Otsu city in the Kansai area wanted to see me, so I decided to travel to Kansai which includes Osaka and Kobe.

The first destination was Osaka, 606 kilometers or 379 miles from where I live in Niigata City. It's only 40 some minutes drive past Kyoto. This time I hitchhiked it in 9 vehicles in 13 hours. This includes time walking from home to the local highway, and taking a short bus ride in Osaka. The total cost of transportation was 210 yen or about \$2.00 US.

It took me two rides to get to the Hokuriku expressway in Sanjo city, about 27 kilometers from home. The second car was a man in his 70s. He stopped about 100 meters up Route 8. I wasn't sure he was stopping for me but sure enough, he was! The man was on his way to Nagaoka City. He graciously took me to Sakae parking area which saved me the usual 180 yen bus fare from Sanjo where most people drop me off.

The weather was mostly fair. It snowed a little bit at Yoneyama service area. In this part of Japan sprinklers are used to melt the snow. I had to be careful where I walked not to get my feet or legs wet.

I got stuck for about an hour at Fudojo parking area just before Kanazawa. A van with 4 ladies and 2 men took me just past Kanazawa to Tokumitsu SA, a much larger service area. This is the halfway mark and it was only 2 p.m.! I knew I would make it to Osaka that day.



Driver #8: Man from Noda City who took me from Onagatani parking just before Fukui City to Shizugataka Service Area in Shiga Prefecture.

The final car, #9, was the most fun. A lady with 4 young children on her way to Kobe saw my Osaka sign and pulled over. She spoke in English and asked me

what I was doing. I told her I am a missionary who shares the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the Japanese. She asked me for an ID and I handed her my alien registration card. Normally people do not interrogate me before boarding their vehicle, but I could understand her concern seeing that the ages of her four children ranged from 14 to only 11 months old! Her name is Kanako and she became convinced I am who I say I am and told me to get in the back with her 3 younger children.

It was fun because I was able to help care for the 11 month old baby. I fed him small pieces of bread. When he began to cry Kanako asked me to sing him, "Amazing Grace". The baby stopped crying immediately! And I had a lively conversation with Kanako who lived 4 years in Kentucky studying at a university. First we spoke mostly in English but then for some reason toward the end she switched to Japanese. Was it to test me? If so, I passed.

After visiting friends in Osaka, Kyoto and Otsu city in Shiga Prefecture which is the neighboring city to Kyoto, I hitchhiked back to Niigata from Otsu Service area in only 4 vehicles.



American Sherry and Japanese
Takashi



Takashi's and Sherry's 3 legged
dog.

The drivers of car #2 who took me to Toyama Prefecture from Shiga were the most interesting. It was a Japanese / American couple, Takashi and Sherry who were on their way home. They had 3 little dogs with them, and one of the dogs only has 3 legs! It was born that way. They rescued it from an animal shelter.

I love dogs and showed her the photos of the 3 dogs I've cared for so far since living in Niigata. Sherry is from Sacramento where I used to live when an Airman stationed at McClellan AFB in 1971. I was very impressed at how well Takashi spoke English and the amount of his vocabulary. He even knows words like "oxymoron". Probably 99% of Japanese people who speak English do not know that word.

The last driver, car number 4 was on his way to Noda City in Chiba. At first he said he would take me to Nadachitanihama which is just before Joetsu City but then changed his mind and took me all the way to Ozumi Parking area just before Nagaoka.

The man is a mountain climber who climbed most of the famous mountains in Japan. He also climbed mountains in the USA, and hitchhiked with two other men from Yosemite Park in California to Yellowstone park in Wyoming. It took them four days!

It was dark when I arrived at Ozumi parking area near Nagaoka. The parking area is small and the cars few. But this parking area had a convenient highway bus stop which many parking areas do not have, and it was only 10 minutes wait till the next bus. I took it to Tsubame Sanjo. From there I walked about an hour to Higashi Sanjo station, and then took a train home. The total cost of transportation that day was 1070 yen, about \$11.00.

End of Year 2013 Hitchhiking Stats



This year I hitchhiked 24,048 kilometers (15,030 miles) which is 4518 kilometers more than my previous record of 19,530 kilometers in 2009! The chart below shows the years from 2005 to 2013 the distances in kilometers traveled by hitchhiking.



At 15.4088 yen per kilometer on a local train, it means I saved 370,551 yen this year.

Rainy Autumn day trip to Aomori City and Back



October 25, 2013: My destination was Aomori City, 470 kilometers from home. I hitchhiked from Murakami City as far as Sakata City in Yamagata Prefecture, a distance about 90 kilometers. After that I had to abort due to rain.

It was worth the effort! Mrs. Fujiwara picked me up for the 6th time and she seemed happier than ever to do so. After her a young doctor who works as an anesthesiologist took me nearly all the way to Sakata. He left me near a highway viaduct. I stood under it while hitchhiking to be protected from the rain. Cars trucks were whizzing past at high speed! Often I had to draw back from the road to keep from getting splashed with water. It was an undesirable situation to say the least, but I had plenty of time to spare. After 20 minutes Mr. and Mrs Mikuni picked me up and took me to Sakata Station from where I caught a train.

The Return Trip:



Yuzo Yamada and his friend. They took me nearly half the distance home by taking from from Hirosaki to the Chojahara service area which is not far from Sendai.

A bus of people, all 65 years old, who went to the same elementary school in Ofunato city, took me to Kunimi service area in Fukushima Prefecture. It's pretty rare for the bus driver to offer me a free ride! He did because the passengers liked me. Ofunato city is one of the towns that was devastated by the tsunami of March 11, 2011. One lady told me she was trapped on the second floor of a building. The tsunami washed out the stairway! About an hour later the fire department rescued her.□



The bus and some of the people who took me to Fukushima Prefecture.

After a few minutes wait at Kunimi, a couple offered me a ride as far as the Fukushima Matsukawa parking area which is just past Fukushima City. But after

talking with me a few minutes, they decided to take me as far as the Adatara Service Area which is much larger and just before the Banetsu expressway junction. It is an idea place to catch cars going on the Banetsu expressway toward Aizuwakamatsu and Niigata.



Mr. Negishi who went over 60 miles out of his way for me to take me home! He also bought me lunch.

A man named Mr. Negishi stopped for me. Though he was on his way to Tokyo, he said he would take me to Aizu on the Banetsu expressway. After getting on the Banetsu, he said he would take me all the way home! I replied, "But going to Tokyo via Niigata is way out of your way!" He replied, "I don't have to be home till evening and so I don't mind. Later I calculated the extra distance to be exactly **245 kilometers or 153 miles** out of his way! It turned out that Mr. Negishi is a kindred spirit because he himself used to hitchhike when he was young. "I was very poor then," he said.

[Autumn Hitchhike Adventure to Shizuoka, Osaka and Toyama](#)



From October 4th to 6th over three days I traveled in 15 cars 1358 kilometers or 849 miles passing through Tokyo to Hamamatsu City in Shizuoka Prefecture, and then to Osaka, and then back home to Niigata. Total transportation costs was 590 yen, about \$6.00. The trip was one of the most fun ever! You can be the judge of that by seeing the photos.

The hardest part of the trip to Hamamatsu City from Niigata is crossing the Tokyo area to get from the Kanetsu Expressway to the Tomei Expressway. I did it in a single car from Echigo Kawaguchi in Niigata Prefecture! The driver was on his way to visit his daughter who lives near Ebina service area on the Tomei. I was now certain I would get to Hamamatsu before dark.



The green sign shows day 1 of my journey, the hardest part going around Tokyo. The red line is day 2 to Osaka, and the blue line shows my return along the Sea of Japan.



Mrs. Tamami who took me from Ebina SA in Kanagawa to Ashigara SA in Shizuoka.



Yorika and friends who took me to Hamamatsu from Ashigara

I arrived at Mikatahara Parking Area at 3:40 p.m. My final destination that day is still 15 some kilometers, too far to walk. A driver saw me looking confused and asked me where I wanted to go. He took me to Kamijima station about 2.5 kilometers away. From there I took two trains to my friend's house.



Mr. Kohara who took me to Nagoya on the way to Osaka.



The "Kansha Box" that Mr. Kohara gave me. Kansha is the Japanese word for thankfulness. Shinto priests pour rice wine in it and give it to the bride and groom on their wedding day..

On my way to Osaka, Takayuki Kohara took me to a parking area near Nagoya. He asked a stranger to take this photo, and then when we found out the man was going to Osaka, Mr. Kohara asked him if he would let me ride with him. He did! Mr. Kohara is newly married only one month ago. He gave me a gift of the wooden box. In Japanese weddings the bride and groom and relatives drink rice wine out of it.



A man driving a Porsche took me 200 plus kilometers from Otsu SA near Kyoto to Kanazawa City in Ishikawa Prefecture. This is half way home to Niigata. He

said supernatural events happened that convinced him he and his family are being protected by a power from on High.

His mother was in Hiroshima when the atomic bomb fell and only 3000 some feet away from ground zero while waiting for a train at Hiroshima Station! Her hair burned away and suffered burns on her skin, but she survived though most of the people around her died. And she had 3 normal children and now normal grandchildren and is still going strong!

His older sister and her son was saved from the fatal Jumbo 747 crash that killed 500 people in Gunma Prefecture in 1985. Her son got a fever just before the flight and so she decided not to take it.

He says there were yet more miracles of protection.

The last driver to take me was Koichi Takagi, 25, who is studying to be a doctor. We met at Oyabegawa Service area in Toyama Prefecture. Koichi asked me if I wouldn't mind him stopping for an hour or so at the Toyama Coast off Uozu City so he could do some spearfishing. He told me he would take me all the way home, and so I readily agreed. I had no idea he would actually be diving in the water and disappearing for a whole hour! Below are the photos:



[April 2013 Hitchhike Adventure to Tokyo](#)



The other day, (September 13, 2013) I ran into a man at a park who said he picked me up hitchhiking during Spring this year! His name is Katsuhiro Itoh. He took me from Sakae parking near Sanjo City to Echigokawaguchi SA. He told me he checked out this website but didn't see the photo I took of him! Apparently I promised him I would post it. I felt bad about that and made a note to find the photo I took of Mr. Itoh and post it. Though I have not always faithfully wrote up each and every hitchhike adventure on this blog, I

have kept records of names, places and distances in an MS Excel format file. Sure enough, I found the entry of the trip and all the information I need to write this belated post!



Mr. Bamba who took me from Niigata City to Kamo. He said this is the second time for him to pick me up! The first time was in 2012.



Katsuhiro Ihoh and his cherry picker truck. He took me to Echigokawaguchi. I met him again on September 13.



Another man named Itoh, a software developer. He took me in that tiny sports car to Ikebukero in Tokyo!



People crossing the street in front of Shibuya Station in Tokyo.

Summer 2013 Hitchhike Adventure to Nagano



I hitchhiked some 300 kilometers in 3 cars to the Shangri-La mountainous wonderland of Japan, Nagano Prefecture, the source of the longest river in Japan, Shinano. Some of the beautiful people who picked me up:



Haruka and Minako, sisters who took me from Niigata city to Sanjo City going 40 kilometers out of their way! Minako's two little boys were in the back.



Takahiro, Sumie and Masanori. They saw me hitchhiking at Yoneyama Service area and offered me a ride. It turned out they were going to the exact location I needed to go in Yamanashi, close to Nagano.



Lady with her son in the back seat of the car that took me to Nagano City on my way back home. Her husband was driving and there was one more little boy sitting next to me.

2013 Summer Adventure to Osaka



Trip Highlights:

- I hitchhiked 1077 kilometers from Niigata to Osaka and back and though I was out for 4 days, I spent less than \$15 US. for food and a short train and bus help me on my way
- Got rides to areas only walking distance to the places I need to go.
- Met a man who picked me up some 15 years before! He asked a driver for me and found my next ride!
- Picked up by a group bus full of religious pilgrims! The driver asked me to pray for the trip just before we departed.



Megumi and Risa who took me to Otsu SA from Taga SA



A group bus and its driver, Kensuke Inoue. He took me from Otsu shiga prefecture (near Kyoto) all the way to Ishikawa Ken where he treated me to lunch. The passengers of the bus are of a religious sect of Shinto called "WorldMate".



Fumio and Yukimi Igawa and sons who took me to Oyabegawa in Toyama ken. One more son is in the car.



Atsushi, a man who said he picked me up hitchhiking some 15 years before! He was not going far and so searched and found another driver to pick me up!



I actually got on this truck with the 666 license plate but got off before the driver left after learning he might not be stopping where I needed to get off! Significant, don't you think?

[Another hitchhike adventure up north on a rainy day](#)



Carrying an umbrella in one hand while riding my bicycle through heavy rain, I road 15 minutes to the local train station to catch a train just after 6 a.m. It was imperative for me to travel to the city of Aomori, 470 kilometers to the north, and I intended to take trains all the way. But upon arrival at the train station, I learned the trains were not running past Murakami City, only 60 kilometers!

I was glad that just the day before I checked the map for a new route. Hirakida station is the closest to the Arakawa-OKi expressway interchange and appeared to be close enough to walk to. When I arrived at 7'10 a.m. the rain had stopped.

It took me 50 minutes to walk to the expressway interchange but it bore fruit. Only a few minutes wait and I got a ride. Four vehicles later I got as far as the southern border of Akita Prefecture, 200 kilometers from home. By then the rain was so hard I asked the driver to take me to a train station. Happily the trains were running from that point and I made it to Aomori by 7 p.m.

[Hitchhike Adventure to Tokyo – July 6-7, 2013](#)



First driver who picked me up. He repeated to me 4 or 5 times in English, "Enjoy my life!" I'm not sure whose life he meant.



Miss Akiko Abe and friends who took me to Kamisato SA from Takasaka SA

Highlights of this trip:

- Had to wait 2 hours and 40 minutes for the first ride! But the next 2 cars picked me up relatively quick and I arrived at my destination in Tokyo (300 kilometers from Niigata) on time.
- The third and final car to Tokyo took me exactly where I wanted to go. He was headed to Yokohama which meant my destination of Yoga in Tokyo was exactly on his way.
- On the way back to Niigata the next day, after an hour wait at Takasaka SA in Saitama, the first car was Miss Aikiko Abe and her two friends. We became Facebook friends! See my [Facebook page for more photos](#).

**[June 29 to July 1 2013 Hitchhike
Adventure to Hirosaki, Sendai and
Niigata](#)**



Route 345 in Niigata Prefecture
along the Sea of Japan



Helicopter pilot Lt. Abe who took
me to Tsuruoka



Midori, Marie and Nagisa who took
me to Noshiro City.



The Shoji family who went 100
kilometers out of their way to take
me to my destination, Hirosaki.



Mr. Tateyama who rescued me from
what he deemed a dangerous place to
stand on Route 4



Dr. Masegi who took me from
Bandaisan SA on the Banetsu
expressway to Niigata City.

Highlights of this trip

- Mrs. Fujiwara, the fish market lady, picked me up for the 4th time to date. It's likely I'll see her again unless I change my route.
- A helicopter pilot, Lt. Abe who serves in the Self Defense Force took me to Tsuruoka in Yamagata Prefecture. He says he can also fly light

aircraft.

- Approached at a highway rest stop between Akita City and Noshiro by two sisters, Midori and Marie. They offered me a ride to Noshiro City.
 - Got stuck for 2 hours in Noshiro City! One possible reason is I let Midori and Marie take me further to Noshiro Minami rather than Hachiryu which is the beginning of the free expressway where it was more likely to get a ride further past Noshiro. The expressway entrance at Noshiro Minami is narrower and harder for drivers to stop.
 - Rescued from my plight by a man who took me to Higashi Noshiro station. I approached him at a convenience store parking lot asking him where the closest train station was, and he offered me a ride. From there I walked to Higashi Noshiro IC. I knew was only 10 minutes away by foot. The next train was an hour later which meant I had plenty of time to both hitchhike and walk back to the station if I didn't catch a ride in time. But after only 10 minutes wait at Noshiro Higashi IC, I caught a ride from the Shoji family who were on their way to Kita-Akita City. At first they said they would take me to Fatatsui just past Noshiro, but then they decided to take me all the way to my destination, Hirosaki in Aomori! It was at least 100 kilometers out of their way.
 - Pioneered a new way to get out of Sendai. Took a train from Minami Sendai to Tategoshi and hitchhiked on National Route 4 which leads to the Shiroishi interchange of the Tohoku Expressway. Mr. Tateyama took pity on me because he thought the place I was standing on Route 4 was too dangerous. It was indeed narrow and hard for cars to stop.
 - Got a ride on Route 4 by an elementary school teacher on his way to Aizu, the very direction I needed to go. Moreover, he took the expressway from Shiroishi which saved me the time I would have needed to hitchhike there.
- Dr. Masegi, a professor at a university in Niigata, took me back home to Niigata city. One of his hobbies is wind-surfing.

June 21-23 Hitchhike Adventure to Hirosaki





Young man who took me back home.

June 21st is my birthday but I had to celebrate it on the road traveling. The Sea of Japan was a bit choppy than last week with an overcast sky.

The first car was a mother and her son on the way to Yunohama in Tsuruoka city. Because Yunohama is on the coast and away from the main National Route 7, I debated going with them all the way. However because the map showed me the coastal road that passes through Yunohama was more direct to my destination, I decided to pioneer it. I regreted my decision after a few minutes of arrival. The traffic was sparse. I walked up the road a couple kilometers to get past the village and 40 some minutes later caught a ride from a man going to Sakata City.

Unfortunately the driver's destination in Sakata did not pass close to Route 7. He told me it was a couple kilometers further and showed me a road perpendicular to the one we were on that connects to the closest point of Route 7. Instead I opted to hitchhike further straight ahead. I knew the road would eventually meet up with Route 7.

A lady saw me hitchhiking and turned around to come back for me. It turned out she is a Christian and attends a local church! It's quite rare for me to run into Japanese believers in Jesus Christ. Official statistics put the Christian population of Japan at 1%, but for sure much less than one out of a hundred drivers who pick me up are Christians.



Truck that took me from Higashi
Noshiro to Odate City. You can see
my luggage on the side.

At Higashi Noshiro on the road leading to an expressway, a large truck stopped for me. It's not common for truck drivers to offer me a ride these days. Only 6% of the vehicles are trucks, and probably less the type of trucks you see in the photo.

The truck driver took me to the center of Odate City and pointed out the road I needed to continue on to Aomori. My favorite hitchhike spot in this city was around 5 kilometers further, too far to walk. I saw a Lawson convenience store a hundred meters further and walked up to it so I could use the store's free WIFI to connect my Google Android to the Internet and see a map. In the process of doing so, a young man approached me and asked where I want to go. He said he would take me to Odate Station. I went with him not because I intended to get on a train, but because the station was on my way. From there I walked a couple kilometers further to my usual spot in Odate. A few minutes later a man picked me up and took me exactly where I wanted to go in Hirosaki.

The return to Niigata



Mother and her 7 year old daughter,
Chiehiro.

Two days later I headed back home, this time intending to take the Tohoku Expressway which runs through Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures.

The first car was a mother and her 7 year old daughter who were on their way to a children's marathon. They took me to the Hirosaki / Owani Tohoku Expressway interchange.



Mr and Mrs. Miyamoto who took me to
Iwatesan Service Area.

The second car was a young couple on their way to Morioka. They are shop owners dealing in antique furniture. I hope to see them again when I return to Hirosaki next Saturday for their shop is quite near where I have my business.

The next driver was on his way to Sendai, a very good distance toward home, over 150 kilometers further. I asked him to take me to Chojahara Service area. We expected to arrive by noon but due to a big accident on the expressway, the road was closed from Maesawa to Ichinoseki. A large truck had overturned which affected traffic in both directions. It took us some 40 minutes to travel only a few kilometers on Route 4 which runs parallel to the Tohoku Expressway. Sunday traffic was congested.

Though I arrived at Chojahara later than expected, the next car more than made up for it. I caught a driver from Hachinohe going all the way to Niigata! This is possibly a first for me. Usually from that point it takes 2 or 3 more cars to get me home.

June 14-15 Hitchhike Adventures to Aomori and back



This trip I broke the 150,000 kilometer mark of distance traveled by hitchhiking since keeping statistics from August of 2005.

After only a few minutes wait at my usual spot near Majima Station at Murakami City, a man driving a large van stopped for me. He lives in Osaka but is originally from Okinawa. Some of my readers may not know that Okinawa used to be part of what is known as "Ryukyu Okoku" or the Kingdom of Ryukyu. The peoples of Okinawa the many islands of Ryukyu are ethnically different from the Japanese. They have their own language and culture but have accepted Japanese rule over them. The driver told me there is no such word as "pitiable" in the Okinawan language because everybody equally in Okinawa has toils and troubles in life![]

We stopped frequently along the way to take photos. The man was in no hurry to get anywhere and drove the longer scenic route along the seacoast. I worried a bit that it might take longer to go with him and considered getting off if he veered too far from the main route. But because of previous experiences waiting up to an hour for the next ride, I figured a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. We basically stayed not too far from Route 7 and though we even stopped to have lunch at a noodle shop, we arrived in Akita city around 1 p.m. Sometimes I don't get to Akita till after 2 p.m. From Murakami to Akita City is a considerable distance of 210 kilometers. That's very good for a single ride on regular roads.



The noodle shop the driver treated me to lunch.



The driver and his treat

On the way we noticed the Sea of Japan was unusually calm! I've never seen it such. On most days it's choppy and windy. It was a windless day.



The Sea of Japan near the border of Niigata and Yamagata



Couple on their way to Sapporo who took me to Aomori City from Odate.

The 4th and last car took me from Odate City in Akita Ken all the way to my destination of Aomori city, a good 80 some kilometers. I was surprised to learn the driver, a software developer, was only 23 years old but his wife is 48! I asked her age after asking his because I couldn't see her face clearly while sitting in the back seat and had no idea she was that old! But she didn't seem to mind. Because she asked permission to take my photo when getting off I was emboldened to ask permission for theirs.

On the way back to Niigata the next day, I arrived at the Tohoku Expressway IC at Hirosaki at 12:30 p.m. which is rather late. But in only 3 rides I got as far as Adatara S.A. which is just before the Koriyama junction of the Tohoku – Banetsu expressways. The Banetsu takes me home to Niigata, about 137 kilometers away.

After a relatively short wait I caught a ride with a family on their way to Aizuwakamatsu. The husband was driving quite fast while I engaged in lively conversation with him. The distance to the junction from Adatara is only 7.3 kilometers (distance learned at the time of this post) and because of the speed we were traveling, after 5 minutes I wondered why we hadn't made the turn on the junction yet. I asked the driver but he replied, "It's 20 kilometers further up the road." I accepted his word but when after 10 more minutes we *still* hadn't made the turn on the junction I knew we had definitely missed it! It was raining hard, visibility was poorer, and the driver had his navigation turned off! He acknowledged that I was correct. We pulled off the Tohoku Expressway at the first exit and got back on at a further point the other direction. The mistake cost me at least 30 minutes of time and I got to the Bandaisan Service Area at 7:00 p.m.

It was almost dark but to get to Bandaisan at any time means a certain ride home. After a few minutes two ladies on their way home to Niigata picked me up. I told them of the mistake the previous driver made, but said that as a believer in the providence of my Creator, I know nothing happens by accident, it was all part of a [Divine Plan](#). If the driver didn't miss the junction I probably never would have met them. The ladies agreed with me.

Record time hitchhiking back from Aomori



This trip I hitchhiked 951 kilometers from Niigata Prefecture to Aomori Prefecture and back in 16 cars. Again the first person to pick me up in Murakami city near Majima station was Mrs. Fujiwara, a lady who buys and sells fish. It was the third time to meet her! It's highly likely we will meet again.

The return trip from Hiroshima to Niigata was via the Tohoku Expressway though Fukushima in 5 cars. A man took me directly to the train station where I park my bicycle. Fifteen minutes later I was back home at 3 p.m.! This is the best time ever. The previous record was 4 p.m. The distance traveled was 560 kilometers.



Steep hill close to Nezugasaki near the border of Niigata and Yamagata



Mr. Saito who took me to Atsumi Onsen in Yamagata. He looks a bit like the current Japanese Prime minister Abe.



This car was so small I had to hold my luggage on my lap!



Lady who took me from Kisarazu to Honjo City in Akita Prefecture. She's a dance teacher. Her husband passed away 2 years ago from cancer leaving her and two daughters, 1 and 5 years old.



Two men who took me to Higashi Noshiro from Akita City. The older man says he always stops for hitchhikers!



On June 9th on the way back to Niigata, a minivan of two men and 5 ladies took me from Hirosaki in Aomori Ken to Iwate. The fifth lady took the photo. Mt. Iwate is in the background.



A high school gymnastics teacher and his friend. They took me all the way from Iwate Prefecture to Kunimi Service area in Fukushima Prefecture.