

Adventure hitchhiking from Osaka to Tokyo



Muslims praying just after sunset at Fujikawa Service area on the Tomei expressway in Shizuoka prefecture. The cherry blossoms over their heads are in full bloom.

April 3, 2010: Osaka was still cold but sunny when I arrived at the Suita Service area on the Meishin expressway at 10:30 AM. The Meishin expressway runs from Nagoya to Kobe. The first driver took me to Gozaisho on the Shin (new) meishin expressway which is just before Nagoya. He said he is 50 years old and married. Both him and his wife are afflicted with some type of mental illness and cannot hold a job. The man was friendly but his driving caused me some alarm at times because it was a bit erratic.

At Gozaisho a van with four ladies and an elderly man took me to Hamanoko Service area just before Hamamatsu. Hamanoko SA is a good place to hitchhike because it is on the Tomei expressway, a direct road to Tokyo. One of the ladies is studying English and spoke it fairly well though she has never been abroad. She studies on her own only with the aid of NHK radio English classes.

After an unusually long wait of about an hour at Hamanoko, a young single couple named Dai and Marika took me to the Enshutoyota parking area just past Hamamatsu, only 20 some kilometers further up the road. He would have taken me a bit further to a larger service area, but I didn't want them to go out of their way and there seemed to be enough vehicles at the parking area to easily catch a ride. But after a few minutes at the parking area, I realized most of the traffic was local and wondered if I made a mistake getting off there. I had yet another long wait for the next ride. However, I've learned from experience that the times I waited the longest often ended with the best results. God would send somebody special that would make it worth the wait.

At Enshutoyota I saw a group of young men wearing what appeared to be an Islamic type of garb. Some had beards. An hour later a van with the same men drove past me but stopped about 20 meters down the parking lot. I picked up my luggage and approached them. There were 7 in all averaging 22 years old, all university students on a scholarship. Most were from Pakistan but at least one was from Bangladesh. I saw their van had Aomori plates and knew they would pass through Tokyo! All spoke English but would also speak either in Japanese or their own mother tongue to each other. All were friendly and seemed glad to offer me a ride.

Their names are Mustafiz, the man from Bangladesh who I sat next to, Mahatir who sat on the other side of Mustafiz, Arif the driver and another Arif, the front passenger next to him. Behind me sat Shazree, next to him Pika, and Izzul on the far window side. Mustafiz, 24, had the longest beard.

After two hours we arrived at the Fujikawa Service area. Mustafiz said they needed to stop and pray. It was 6 PM and the sun was about to set. They said I could wait in the car while they prayed, but I thought it would be wonderful to witness them praying, and asked if I could be with them. No problem they said. There was a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji and I hoped to take their photo in front of it. After prayer, they said, but by that time it was already too dark.

I was greatly impressed at the young Muslims' dedication, faithfulness and devotion to God. I asked them many questions about their life and religion. We exchanged different views and doctrines about faith, but there was no debating or arguing. I told them I never ever believed that Islamic fundamentalists had anything to do with [911](#).