
Will Ferguson

Hokkaido Highway Blues: Hitchhiking Japan



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Description

Hitchhiking may be an ancient mode of travel but in Japan it is considered folly. Which is precisely its attraction to henna gaijin ("weird foreigner") Will Ferguson, who is determined to thumb the entire length of the country following sakura - the surge of cherry blossoms that each year ignites the landscape. Starting out from tropical Cape Sata, the small southernmost metropolis where gardeners dust volcanic ash from their flowers, he heads north for distant Hokkaido, still snow laden. It is a journey full of hilarious misadventures and revelations. Whether Ferguson is doing the forbidden and not knowing it, or holding "conversations by non sequitur," he experiences Japan in unusual and even profound ways.

Insightful reviews

J.: At the time of writing the book Will Ferguson was a Canadian EFL teacher working in Japan. He sets out from Cape Sata the Southern most point of Japan to travel to Hokkaido in the farthest Northern tip. The purpose of the trip is ostensibly to chase the progress of the sakura or cherry blossoms traditionally a time of festivities and drinking of copious glasses of sake in the company of said cherry blossom trees. He decides to hitch hike for most of the journey as he believes that that is a more intimate way of getting to know people. 'Hokkaido Highway Blues' is not the title he wanted, his preference being 'Hitching rides with Buddha'.

He is aware of the tradition of spiritual travelers and discusses Matsuo Basho who set off solo in the late 15th century. He also mentions Kobo Daishi the legend of whom gave rise to an ancient pilgrim route and a famous Saul/Paul figure Emon Saburo who followed the route leading to his redemption.

I enjoyed the parts about the Rikishi (sumo wrestlers) and Chiyonofuji a small but muscular sumo wrestler who uses his larger opponents momentum against them. The origins of Shinto are intriguing to say the least, what the?! Musings from a sex museum- Early pornographic prints show women as taking control and being dominant but in modern day Japan women are depicted as being passive. He is good on Sengoku Jidai the era of the Warring states, especially on castles he mentions one in particular Uwajima castle. The story of Lord Asano and the story of the 47 samurai is interesting also.

In terms of the people he meets on the road the one that stands out is his powerful meeting with Mr. Nakamura whose memories of war still haunt him. He also parties with a group of Japanese salary men. The Japanese have a hereditary lack of the liver enzyme that breaks down acetaldehyde.

His summation of what it is like to be a foreigner or a Gaijin in Japan is interesting. He cites the Seidensticker Complex 'it describes the ambivalent feelings that torment long-term foreign residents in Japan, a pendulum of emotion, alternating between attraction and repulsion, affection and anger – back and forth. But the image is false. These feelings do not alternate. They are inseparable. As inseparable as the scent of urine and incense on the same wind.' He is mostly mistaken for an American and is almost always pointed out or hailed whilst in a large crowd. In terms of racism he mentions the indigenous Ainu people who were subjugated and

had their language banned. They were officially recognised in 1992 by the government. There is also a caste system in Japan the victims of which are the Burakumin who were traditionally leather workers and butchers of cattle. A list of Burakumin communities circulated among companies in the 1980's.

Ultimately the book is tinged with melancholy, a long goodbye. 'I came to Japan looking for some kind of realignment. A new start. A game plan. But somehow, along the way, I had become a collector of trivia and souvenirs, writing postcards addressed to a future self who would- somehow – make sense of it all. Deferring judgment to a later date resolves nothing, and all you are left with is a box of jumbled slides and a collection of knickknacks and odds and ends. Here a face. There a sunset'. This jumbled reading was the impression I was left with.

For some reason this book seemed to take me ages to read. There is an inevitable comparison with Bill Bryson. Will Ferguson is not as funny or learned unfortunately. Bill Bryson has obviously researched his travels and arranged to meet some of the more interesting companions along the way and also has a structure in mind. As Will Ferguson says himself 'I think there is a fear, somewhere in the mind of the traveler, an unease with emotions laid raw and bare. I prefer width to depth, variety of experience to intensity of experience, quantity to quality.' That is what the reader should expect. There are a few interesting snap shots of Japanese life but it is ultimately insubstantial and hasn't left a lasting impression on me.

Juli: Another wonderful travelogue... the traveler this time makes astute observations of the Japanese nationals he encounters as he hitchhikes north from the southernmost tip of Japan.

Being an Asian-American, I can see both sides of the espy. It is easy to relate to the often awkward, big-hearted, intensely curious, 'liberal' American being given an opportunity to look through a usually closed window into the private lives of the average Japanese citizen in Japan. I can also see how the Japanese use their social customs of thousands of years of traditions that dictate how Asians should behave among foreigners with the strange but benign American.

Hilarious, heartwarming and a real eye-opener for those who have not been really exposed to the traditions of the East -especially traditions in the home (or in the car as this case is).

Ainsley: Greatly enjoyed this - found myself giggling a lot and reading bits out loud to my husband. Many of the author's experiences mirrored my own, and the whole thing is free of the pompousness and attitude of having attained deep insights into the "other" that afflicts so much writing about Japan. Don't know what those who haven't been to Japan, or who led a different sort of life there, would make of it, but it worked for me.

coriolinus: now not many stuff that publicize themselves as blues truly carry the emotion. It was once just a little startling, then, to find that this publication is actually deeply, profoundly

melancholic. Ferguson began with not anything yet a boast, increased via coworkers extra enthusiastic than he's right into a grand plan. To hitchhike the size of Japan is not a very sane or rational plan, yet stuck up within the enthusiasm of these who pay attention of it, he ultimately is going via with it. In the beginning, all is well. this can be exciting! this can be an adventure! this can be an adventure, and the keenness is palpable; it evidences itself during the vigorous interactions with the folk who supply him rides and the enthusiastic descriptions of the areas during which he passes. Extroverted and chatty, Ferguson is having a grand time making his manner northward from Cape Sata within the corporation of strangers. the journey of following the Sakura entrance is a thrilling quest. Quests are difficult things, though. Weeks in, midway around the nation, Ferguson outruns the Sakura. he is now not following the blooming rush of spring; he is migrated into locations the place wintry weather nonetheless reigns, and the full tone of the company adjustments accordingly. He supplies up at the thought of paying just for interisland ferries. He starts consuming heavily. he is not having enjoyable anymore, yet he by no means considers giving up. ultimately achieving Cape S?ya, good overbudget and late again at work, he discovers he's not finished; there stay tiny islands, issues farther north. Ferguson isn't Don Quixote; if not anything else, his adventures are extra engaging. There are robust structural similarities, though. just like the Don, he's engaged in a quest finished via superficially precise yet eventually exact subquests. just like the Don, his pursuit of the hunt extends way past the purpose of reason. just like the Don, the final word result's tragic. Ferguson books a ferry additional north, to Rishiri Island, the place he's stranded by way of a storm. not able to accomplish his quest, activity and visa in jeopardy, incomplete and unsatisfied, the e-book ends. The publication suits the tone of the textual content in its structure; early chapters are lengthy anecdotes approximately fun incidents, yet later chapters easily lay down the naked proof in terse language. Ferguson may be an attractive and pleasing author, yet he chooses as a substitute to urge his feelings of the time within the reader. As a consequence, this can be a difficult, powerful, anticathartic story. The hero's trip ends frustrated. This is greater than a go back and forth story. it is a dissection of the soul of Japan. it is the story of the elation of embarking upon a special and demanding quest, and the dissatisfaction of achieving it. it really is a few guy learning that he has evolved. None of those are effortless themes, yet Ferguson manages them with all of the grace possible. you could unlike the e-book after examining it, yet you will not remorse it.

Tom Barker: not only one among my favourite commute books or books approximately Japan, but one among my favourite books period. Nice to learn a go back and forth e-book approximately Japan that really will get underneath the outside and moves a pleasant stability among fawning or bashing, in contrast to many others via those who remain for a 12 months and look at themselves experts*see "Learning to bow" for example. He makes enjoyable of Japan a lot but in addition doesn't take himself too heavily which makes for a few humorous stuff.

Hollowspine: This publication is the reply i wanted all these years in jap category whilst my fellow scholars looked as if it would idolize the japanese as though they have been a few kind of large race which may do no flawed and had invented every thing that was once cool. This publication indicates what a gaijin could face in the course of their time in Japan. Like Will Ferguson they might have their proportion of adventures and conferences with rather nice, useful humans after which they'd have these occasions once they simply wanted they were not taken care of as leisure and simply approved as a person. i used to be surprised at what

number jap humans informed Ferguson that he could by no means discover a experience hitch-hiking, but he appeared to have little hassle discovering prepared (or much less willing) trip mates. I additionally came upon it fascinating that frequently as soon as he have been picked up the person that picked him up may invite him to affix their trips or may try and sign up for him on his travel. I additionally enjoyed how Ferguson did not draw back from "debating" with many of the fogeys he hitched rides with. I enjoyed the best way he gave the racist Monkey specialist a few afflicted moments or even although it was once a piece mean, i could not support yet snicker out loud concerning the advanced he gave the guy within the bar whose eyes "just seemed Korean"...The booklet used to be either a get up name to those that could imagine that eastern everyone is continuously accommodating and accepting of foreigners and but it nonetheless made me lengthy to visit Japan.

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