

Hitchhiking_a_truck

Hitchhiking a truck is the classical form of hitchhiking. Many people think that hitchhikers only hitchhike on trucks. That is far from the truth, but still, many hitchhikers get a big part of their rides from trucks. So it's good to know some things about this.

Trucks are big, so it takes more time and space to start driving, and to stop. On many good places for hitchhiking it's really hard for trucks to stop so you might want to spend less energy on them. Still, sometimes you will be pleasantly surprised.

How to

To limit the amounts of unsuccessful talks in crowded parking lots you can analyze a truck at sight checking a few characteristics:

1. A truck which has its curtains closed is obviously not immediately leaving and might even be asleep or stay in that parking lot for a while, only approach if the driver might be outside
2. in some countries there are days when trucks aren't allowed to drive. For example in France and Germany they can't drive on Sundays till 22:00 and in summer even some Saturdays. The only trucks who can are the one with a fridge, because they transport fresh products. You can recognize them because of a running engine while parked (to keep the fridge cold) and because of a differently constructed trailer. A normal trailer is covered on the sides with a plastic canvas, while a fridge has solid, hard sides, which obviously are meant to isolate the carriage.
3. in the evening most truckers go to sleep, so after 20h your chances of hitching a truck dramatically decrease. Once again the exceptions are the fridges, who carry fresh products and have to reach their destination as fast as possible. Unfortunately this also means they sometimes have two drivers. Then again, this might mean their insurances aren't cut by the crisis (??). Also, if you hitch a truck throughout the night you might have a comfortable place to sleep - while still progressing your journey.
4. most truckers hardly speak any other languages, so talking to them in their own language will certainly increase their sympathy for you. You can play with this. Check the plate for the country, and if you speak their language, first ask if they speak English or another language you speak (and they probably don't), they mostly don't and seem a bit annoyed by it. This gives you the opportunity to do the effort of switching to their language. Pretending you just speak a bit of course increases the value of your effort and mostly automatically evokes a smile of sympathy on their face.
5. as some countries are difficult to hitch, probably their drivers might be equally difficult. Maybe something to take into account. My experience is that Eastern European drivers don't even let you ask and always say no. Then again, cliches always have their exceptions and it's not as if I made a scientific research on it.

If you're on a big parking lot, where trucks can leave as well in your direction as in the opposite, there are a few specific characteristics which make it more clear which trucks might go your way:

1. usually truck companies let their employees work in weekly shifts. This means they leave their country more or less on Monday, go deliver somewhere a few thousand kilometers away and return to their country. On their return they will try to load somewhere else (so they aren't driving empty) and deliver their cargo on a location on the way back, before they return to their company's headquarters more or less on Friday. So, you might start approaching trucks by country and day of the week. For example, if you're in France and going to Spain and you're hitchhiking on a Tuesday, you'd want to talk first to trucks coming from Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium. On the contrary, in the end of the week try to catch Spanish and Portuguese trucks. If none of those work, turn to the others.
2. you can also distinguish direction depending on the cargo. For example, a truck from a southern country transporting German cars, will logically be going south.

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Of course it's better to approach drivers, but cars go much faster. So guaka usually walks around gas stations with a sign with one or two destinations (e.g. in Germany: Wien / Budapest), catching eye contact with drivers, and just let them nod. Most of the time it's no.

Various

Most truckers spend more time in their truck than in their home. Or well, their truck is like their home. Show respect. Give conversation when they feel like it. Some Turkish truckers expect you to take off your shoes, especially if you're the second person that goes into the space in the back.

It seems that the majority of truckers smokes inside the truck. They will open the window if you ask them to.

Legality

As of 2010 companies had to cut costs because of the economic crisis. A consequence is that in many countries (such as in the EU) most truckers can't officially take a second person, because it's no longer assured for. They can't even take their wife or kid with them anymore. A lot of truckers don't seem to mind too much though and it shouldn't restrain you to ask them anyhow. But, if you see trucks of the same company driving together, they might be more reluctant to disobey this rule, assuming there is too much social control from their colleagues.

Also in many countries (such as in the EU) there's a law that forbids more than 2 people in the front of a truck. If you're hitching with 2 people you probably shouldn't spend much energy on trucks in these countries.

Officially most companies allow their trucks to drive for only 9 hours in a row (at least in the EU). After that they have to take a long break. Of course, in some countries these rules will be different and less obeyed than in others. If you're talking to a trucker who heads your direction you might think about asking him how much hours he has left.

Zenit heard from a Slovak hitchhiker that Spanish trucks cannot pick up hitchhikers any more after February 2011 due to an ominous change in laws or insurance policies. His personal experience showed that indeed Spanish truckers aren't willing anymore to give anybody a ride. Also trucks from the UK will hardly ever pick you up for insurance issues. Zenit found German trucks to be your most probable candidate for picking you up, but that could also be because his native language is German.