

Top_tips

There are some essential things you should remember when you are going hitchhiking. [Hitchwiki](#) suggests you keep these in mind when starting your career as an enthusiastic thumber:



You'll be seeing a lot of this.

Contents

- [1 Take the most used route](#)
- [2 Carry a good map](#)
- [3 Be in a good, safe spot](#)
- [4 Stay positive, smile and laugh](#)
- [5 Avoid tight deadlines](#)
- [6 Make eye contact with drivers](#)
- [7 Making conversation with drivers](#)
- [8 Work with the weather](#)
- [9 Types of clothing](#)
- [10 Signs](#)
- [11 Safe hitchhiking](#)
- [12 In the car](#)
 - ◆ [12.1 Stuff](#)
- [13 If you're lost...](#)
- [14 If you've gone the wrong way...](#)
- [15 Finding accommodation](#)
 - ◆ [15.1 You are sure to reach your destination before the night](#)
 - ◆ [15.2 You are not sure to reach your destination before the night](#)
- [16 Getting to the nearest city](#)
- [17 Use buses and trains](#)
- [18 Highway hitchhike](#)

- [19 Avoid mistakes](#)
- [20 Related links and references](#)

Take the most used route

The shortest is not the best in all the cases. If there is no traffic, there are no rides to share. Think where the trucks are going: industrial areas, ports/[airports](#), etc.

The fastest and easiest routes are usually ones between two major cities, passing a lot of countryside on the way. If you're planning to go through an area with dense population (eg. [Ruhr Area](#), [Randstad](#), [Southeast England](#)) and out the other side, then remember that many vehicles will be local traffic, so it's often a good idea to find a route that avoids these areas or to find a car going trough. When going to the South of [France](#) from the [Netherlands](#), for example, it might be best to avoid [Paris](#) and go through smaller [Luxembourg](#), passing through less densely populated areas, instead.

Avoid trying to get lifts along routes that don't make sense to the drivers; pick a logical A to B route between two major towns or cities that many drivers are likely to be making.

Carry a good map

A list of recommendations can be found in the [maps article](#). You want to know where you are going. It also helps if [petrol stations](#) are marked, and you don't need city maps. Try and find a map that you don't have to open out to one large sheet of paper every time you want to use it; you will be using it often. Book-style maps are best. A lot of times, you'll be okay without owning a map, though, if you use your chances well to have a look at one - petrol and service stations and lifts - and keep in mind all you need to know. If you have a digital camera, photographing the map and using the zoom function later has proven invaluable.

It's recommended you have a map that is at least 1:1,000,000 ratio. 1:750,000 is usually good enough. A map with a scale of 1:250.000 will still allow you to recognize enough details to walk somewhere if you get lost. Remember that petrol stations often have maps for sale, including very local ones. If you need to find out the geography of the local area, simply walk into the shop, pick up a local map, study it, get the information you need, then put it back and walk out. Many service stations also have large maps on walls or notice boards.

For the digitally inclined, Google maps now offers the ability to create and save your own routes and landmarks, and to share them. Consider making your hitch-hiking route public with comments about it's hitch-ability.

Be in a good, safe spot



Top_tips

This could be a good spot. You're easily visible, the drivers slow down at the junction, and there is an obvious place for them to stop.

It is basically possible to hitchhike from everywhere, just keep a single rule of thumb in mind: The faster the cars the more space for the cars to stop is needed.

Be in a place where the cars can see you from a distance and stop safely. You don't want to be run over. This is maybe the biggest danger in hitchhiking. Also, you should provide some space for the driver to stop, not to create dangerous situations for traffic that follows.

This is the case that the drivers consider as well. Few drivers stop unless it is safe for them. Some do, but you shouldn't count on them, as they are the minority. Therefore consider the safety of the driver as well, you don't want to involve them in an accident if they can't pull over safely. Make sure to not stand on the way, the driver will usually make their decision to stop or not when they see you from a distance and will get ready to pull over just next to you or right behind you. If you stand too much on the way (of the normal pulling aside triangle) you will make it complicated for them and they might change their mind. So one good option is to 'make sure' that your body language point out the area they would pull over in total comfort.

Stay positive, smile and laugh

It is easy to become bored or frustrated when waiting for a ride, but remember that a good attitude will help you get rides. Keep your spirits up by singing, humming, laughing and simply smiling. A grumpy hitchhiker may get rides out of sympathy, but a happy hitchhiker will get better rides and go further distances in less time. If you're in a group, try dancing or clapping your hands at the same time, it makes the drivers smile and lifts come much more often!

Avoid tight deadlines

It's easier to stay positive when you have nowhere to be. Getting stranded on the autobahn isn't so terrible as long as you're not trying to meet some friends in Berlin by nightfall; not only are you suddenly worried about how to catch a ride, you don't want to miss out on what's happening at your destination. Hitchhiking is a mental sport, and planning in enough time will allow you to enjoy the road and keep your head in the right place.

Make eye contact with drivers

Hitchhiking means making a connection with a person driving by, convincing him or her to stop. To best do this, make sure drivers can see the 'whites of your eyes'. Remove sunglasses and keep your hat higher on your head. Smile while you look at the oncoming cars. If you are looking a different direction or your head is down it is easy for drivers to pass by without relating to you. If you cannot see the person in the car, just look at the windshield where a face should be. Focus on each car until it passes. If traffic is light, let your gaze follow each car expectantly. If there is too much traffic, pay attention to each nearby car for a moment. The more you do this, the less time you will wait for rides.

'Mark Snyder and his co-workers (1974) found that hitchhikers doubled the number of ride offers by looking drivers straight in the eye. A personal approach, as my panhandler knew, makes one feel less anonymous, more responsible.' (Source: Social Psychology, Myers. p.503 Social Relations)

Respectable eyes for male drivers and puppy eyes for female drivers seem to work quite well.

Making conversation with drivers

Drivers pick up hitchhikers for lots of different reasons: some because they are genuinely helpful, many because they once hitched themselves, some because they think you might be fun/interesting to talk with. On the chance that they want to interact with you, it is great if you can meet them there in a friendly engaged place. Some hints on how to start conversations are listed under [hitching etiquette](#). Also talking with drivers is the one of the best ways to get longer rides or better drop off places. Have a list of open questions ready: 'Where have you come from today? How long have you been driving trucks? What made you decide to buy this car?' If the driver is reticent it may be that they're still wondering if they've made the right decision in picking you up. Don't be afraid to say a simple 'Thanks for picking me up, it's kind of you.' then going quiet, waiting for them to indicate whether they want to talk. Some drivers are just shy humanists.

Work with the weather

If it's hot, choose a hitchhiking spot where you can get some shade, in case you have to wait for some hours.

If it's wet, drivers may feel sorry for you, and choose to help you out. No-one likes a soggy hitchhiker in their car, so keep an umbrella handy. Better: stay dry at a [petrol station](#).

Thunderstorms are a blessing. If, during a dry day, you notice that a thunderstorm is coming, don't worry. When the storm hits you, keep you and your possessions under an umbrella and keep signalling. Drivers will feel **very** sorry for you, and many will stop for you. While waiting on the roadside, [Tom](#) was hit by three thunderstorms in 2006, all of which got him a ride in less than ten minutes. The best example was in [Cologne](#) - after waiting for two hours without a ride offer, a storm came and there were three offers in five minutes (took the third one, it was a short ride and at the next petrol station another ride came within two minutes).

Types of clothing



Many hitchhiking spots are dusty. White shoes not advised.

Although this may seem to be a small matter, types and colour of clothing are very important. Try to wear light, even bright and colorful clothes, and have your non-thumbing hand visible since light coloured clothes inspire more [trust](#) than darker clothes. Also, if the weather permits it, try to keep your forearms visible. If people can see your hands and arms, they'll be less likely to see you as a threat, or as someone trying to conceal something. A fun and colorful clothes/hat is a great way to inspire people to pick you up, but be careful not to appear weird!

Top_tips

If you can, don't wear your old clothes or clothes that might frighten a driver (such as a T-shirt with a skull). Conservative people only take well shaved guys with proper clothes. Liberal-minded people always take you, but even conservative (or old) people can be very helpful on your trip. (I don't think this is of overwhelming importance. I often hitch wearing red tartan pants, punk/metal t shirts and black leather boots and I get rides just as often as the next guy!)

Avoid wearing black. (Not really, it had positive impact (in comparison with a similar trip some time before) on one of my over-Europe hikes where I got on road wearing completely black clothes. Even women were picking me up regularly on that trip.) Even having a smart black shirt could keep you stuck in one place for a long time. Some have found that caps might have a negative impact. (Though Simon from [Sweden](#), with shaved head and beard found it much easier wearing a cap always, because people seem to be afraid of people with shaved heads.) Black or blue woolly hats are awful too. If the weather permits, wear light coloured shorts and a bright colourful t-shirt or a smart short sleeved shirt. Although you may have no choice on whether you have luggage, some hold that hitching without luggage is quicker as the driver knows you're not concealing anything. But some drivers think that carrying a backpack makes you more of a traveler and will only pick up people with backpacks (e.g. [Guaka](#) and [amylin](#) experienced this in [New Zealand](#)).

Signs



A sign saying "Por favor" ("please" in Spanish)

A thumb or hand gesture will work fine for hitchhiking (depending on the region). But in some cases, the use of a sign displaying your destination or general direction will increase your odds.

A sign just saying **PLEASE** (in local language) can help sometimes.



Top_tips



True or Not, people will laugh and pick you up!

Making people laugh with funny signs is a great way to lift your mood, have fun with passing cars and get rides.

When you're hitchhiking on a road that goes to plenty of destinations: The driver will be more likely to stop if he knows that you're going the same way he does.

When the traffic is too heavy: The driver will be less likely to say "Somebody else is going to stop" if he sees that you want to go exactly his way.

If you're going from Barcelona to Amsterdam, consider writing "Paris", or just Perpignan, on your sign, when you start in Barcelona. Few people will be going to Amsterdam or even Paris, directly. There's a dilemma, though, because if the destination you write is too close, you won't make good time, and if it's too far, nobody will be heading all the way there and so won't feel confident in stopping for you. A good solution to this is to simply use your direction of travel, e.g. "East" or maybe "France".

It often helps if you write the sign in the same language as the drivers you're trying to attract. If you can show some affinity to the drivers' country, it usually increases your chances of a lift. If you want to make a sign in a language that you don't know (whether you need it now or in the future), try asking drivers or petrol station staff for help. Note: In countries where hitchhiking is a very common thing to do by locals, e.g. Romania, it could be advisable to make it clear that you're in fact not a local; be it your sign or well-displayed huge backpacks.

To make the sign, it's better to use cardboard or similar with a thick black marker or India ink (works well with cotton buds), if possible ? other pens/pencils will do as well, but require more work. Write neatly in big, block letters the name of a city or the name of a road, or both. Make it easy to read for the drivers: Write a big capital letter and then lower case characters (the varying forms of lower-case letters, especially ascenders 'd', 'k', 'l'.. and descenders 'p', 'g' etc. make at-once reading easier).



MayaCova was using a white board with considerable success.

If you have a chance to plan a long hitchhiking trip in advance, some find using an erasable white board as a sign to be very useful for making big, clear and reusable signs. Remember the sign has to be read from a distance. At 100km/hr, a vehicle is covering approx 30 meters/second. The average reaction time when driving is 1.5 to 2.5 seconds, so 45 to 75 meters has gone before they start to stop. If you want them to stop, then you not only have to place yourself in the right location so they can see that you are a traveler and not just cagging a lift (this is what the sign does), you also have to have a sign that is readable. The more space between each letter the better to be read from a distance. (This is called Kernel, e.g. see road signs specifications.)

Top_tips

If space doesn't permit a long city name shorten it to something everyone will understand. For example Amsterdam could be **A'dam** and Hamburg could be **HH**. Have a look at the country's license plates, the short forms featured there will probably be known in the population.

Signs don't just have to list a place - Much success can be had (in the proper setting) with more off-the-wall signs like "We're Awesome!", "Free Cookies!", "Runaway Bride" or even "Not Far", "that way ==>", etc.

Artwork on a sign can also be helpful, particularly if there are simple images that are commonly related to your context. For instance, when hitching out of Austin, Texas (home of the Longhorns, which are absurdly popular there), adding a Longhorns logo to the sign was a big improvement.

While living in a small village near a larger town my housemates and I found that using a sign decreased waiting times from 20-40 minutes average to about 10-20 minutes even though there were no other villages on the way. When I put this to my drivers some of them said that the sign made me look like a proper hitch-hiker.

If you have the chance, adding "Please" onto your signs could be a great idea. As well as being polite, writing "Please" in a certain language can indicate that you are a good speaker of that language, and this can be used to attract certain groups of driver who were ignoring you before. However, your main message is the destination/road number/compass direction. "Please" is an extra word for the driver to read, and trying to read that word can become a big distraction from the main message. Also, as you're clearly in a desperate position it's already accepted that you are being grateful for any assistance; once a driver stops, you can say "Please" as much as you like. Experiment with "Please" for yourself, and see what happens.



In the UK, road names work well.



Keep the signs bold and simple!

Safe hitchhiking

Wear bright colored clothes or a reflective warning vest while walking along the road. Next to that, a hitchhiker should consider keeping a small first aid kit with him/her at all times. While these might be mandatory in many Western European countries, not every driver on the planet carries these with them. In terms of an accident, the most dangerous part of hitchhiking, these might come in very helpful, especially when travelling in remote areas of the planet.

Say no, if you don't feel safe! Trust your instinct, when it says no. This doesn't happen often, though. Minimizing risk is not being a coward, it's being smart. If you don't feel comfortable with someone, just don't ask him/her, there will be enough other cars. Most people who pick up hitchhikers are friendly and don't mind a no.

Top_tips

Tip: If you want more security, send an SMS of the number plate of the car to a friend (or at least pretend you do so). A nice way of getting out of a car without offending a driver if you're uncomfortable, is to pretend that you're going to be sick. Tell the driver not to wait, and run away from the road. If you should need to get more radical, a pepper spray or a pocket knife may help and improve your self confidence. (A knife may be a confidencebooster bit is useless in a situation turned bad. By the time you have your knife out it is probably too late, it can be used against you. The most important thing is to get out/away from your attacker. Pepperspray is probably a better option (if legal).

Girls check out the safety guide tailored to your needs at <http://girls.hitchbase.com>

In the car

Once you've actually managed to get in the car and start heading towards your destination, it's all a matter of being courteous. Remember, your driver didn't have to pick you up at all. Settle in, get comfortable, but of course, not too comfortable. Keep your shoes off the dashboard, don't pass any form of gas (from either end), etc. In other words, don't do anything to offend your driver!



Your driver may have picked you up for many possible reasons. One of the main reasons is companionship on a long journey. That means you have to talk to the driver. Have a few things to talk about in mind before you get in (What's your name? Where are you headed? Oh yeah? What's there?). If the driver doesn't seem too interested in talking you can relax or read a book.

If not, keep it simple to begin with. A solid rule that should be followed by any hitcher is to try to shy away from talking about politics with a driver who has differing view points than yourself. People have a tendency to get worked up when it comes to politics or religion, so if they mention something that your political or religious views disagree with, try to use a reply like "I'm not going to get into that", "I never thought about that", or pretending to be in vague agreement. Many hitchers have been thrown out of cars following a fiery political debate.

Some drivers will go a few extra kilometers off their route to help you, if you ask very nicely; be prepared to graciously accept a no, however.

Make sure you know where the driver intends to drop you off, and if you know the city or have discussed the city with the driver, try to choose the best drop-off point yourself; drivers can sometimes be "trying to help", and despite their best intentions leave you in what turn out to be very bad places. If the drop-off point is not helpful to you, then say so, and the driver may take you to a different location instead, particularly one on their way.

Top_tips

Don't get lost while you're in a car! Some drivers have a terrible sense of direction and may need your help; so keep track of your journey using road signs and your maps. Also, knowing exactly where you are when you leave the vehicle will save a lot of time; if necessary, ask the driver exactly where you are.

Stuff

Keep your stuff organized. Make sure you don't lose any of your own stuff and very important for the image of hitchhiking: make sure not to take anything that's not yours. That includes watching out when you leave the car.

If you're lost...

...then it's maybe a good idea to stop traveling until you know where you are. Ask whoever you can for help. Look on road signs for city names and road numbers, and try to match them with your map.

If getting lost isn't a problem because you have no fixed destination, then stop worrying and enjoy the ride ;).

If you've gone the wrong way...

...then work out whether it's best to turn around, to carry on in the new direction (either trying another route, or changing your destination), or to stop hitchhiking. If you're on a motorway, then it might be tough to turn around.

If you decide to turn around, then watch out: it can be hard to find a lift that gets you back to your route, *and* travels in the right direction. You could easily get back to your route, and have to turn round a second time.

Finding accommodation



At night, it'll get tougher. Apart from much less traffic, people may trust you less (especially if you're male) and you may be in more danger (especially if you're female). Also, you're not as visible as you were before. But if someone does decide to help, they will probably help you as much as they can...

You are sure to reach your destination before the night

If you make small distances, you can plan in advance where you will sleep. If you have Internet access, you can check out those websites for free accommodation:

- CouchSurfing.com (more active);
- BeWelcome.org;

Top_tips

- Hospitality Club (good for finding phone numbers in smaller places).

If there's a YMCA centre in town, see if they have a room for the night.

You are not sure to reach your destination before the night

On longer hitchhiking trips, you may need to sleep along the way.

If it's not too cold outside and if you have a sleeping bag and a tarp or a tent with you, begin a few hours before the sunset to look out for places where you could sleep. It may be a hidden place in the nature, McDo games, an inhabited house.

If you don't want to sleep outside, consider those possibilities:

- Are you ready to pay for a hostel? If yes, can you find one?
- Is there a (big) airport on your road or close to the place you are? You may sleep there.
- Can your driver host you?
- Can you find a car/truck driving overnight and crash out on the way? In this case, is the driver really reliable?
- Are many people around you? If yes, a paper with a big "Couchsurfing?" on it may help you to find someone that would host you.

If you can't find anywhere to sleep, there are still other ways to get out of the situation. If you are lucky enough to be at a 24-hour petrol station, just keep drinking coffee and keep hitching through the night. Keep in mind that it gets really quiet between 2:00 and 5:00, even at motorway service areas.

Getting to the nearest city

It's tough to hitchhike out of city centres. But sometimes (if you're tired, hungry, thirsty, ill etc.) you'll need to go off your route and take a pause in the nearest city. Hey, if you're flexible with your travel arrangements, you may decide to stay there for a bit longer...

If hitchhiking to the city is too hard for whatever reason, and the city is too far to walk, then take public transport. Head for nearby areas of houses: they often have bus stops.

Most petrol stations on motorways have a special access road for staff and delivery/emergency vehicles. Many petrol stations also have local maps you can look at to find bus stops near you, if you exit via the special access road.

Use buses and trains

It's not worth trying to hitchhike at all costs. Sometimes it's just more convenient to take a bus to get to a highway or to your final destinations. This is the case especially when leaving or arriving at big cities or at night.

Sometimes you can get away without paying on public transport, although in some countries or cities you have to be more careful than usual: check a "Public Transport" (or "Blackriding") section (if there is any) of a country/city you travel to. If you do blackride anyway, sit or stand preferably by the door; sometimes quick reaction (last second jumping off) to suspiciously looking folks who might appear to be ticket controllers can save your butt. It is usually better to sit in the front of the bus so you can quickly scan all the people waiting for the bus while the bus approaches the station and stops. Also, it helps to direct sight in only one way to look for ticket controllers

you missed before already in the bus.

Highway hitchhike

If you need to travel over long destinations, taking the highway may help a lot, and in some place is almost unavoidable. Most highway entrances are bad spots, and many are dangerous. A good way to "hitchhike" on highway is to practice "station hopping": you only stop in petrol stations. Petrol stations (or rest areas, often the same) are the best spot ever, because you can go directly talk to people (show them you are nice and smile) and the car is totally stopped. Enjoy. This works particularly well in Germany and France. In Italy, hitching from toll stations seems to work a little better.

Do realise that in most countries, hitchhiking directly on the highway is forbidden! In rare occasions however, you might be forced to. Keep in mind that it is very unsafe for drivers to stop on the highway, and that your own safety is also in danger. The police might force you to leave the area, but in some cases they just don't care.

Avoid mistakes

Last but not least, try to avoid common mistakes and you will save a couple of hours and loads of frustration.

Related links and references

- [Hitchhiking Guide to Europe](#)
- [Sparkie Hitchhikers Forums at digihitch.com](#)
- [Worldwide Database of Places for Hitchhikers](#)