

Hitchhiking Around the World

• *Yakov M. Wagschal*

A Frenchman named Jeremy Marie decided to travel around the globe. His transportation expenses? \$0.00. That's right - zippo. He got everywhere exclusively by hitchhiking, sampling every conceivable form of transportation. These included cars, motorcycles, airplanes, boats, tractors, camels, donkeys and other types of transportation you would never dream of. Here is the fascinating account of how he did it.

Despite the inherent dangers, hitchhiking remains a popular means of getting around. The habit is particularly strong today in *Eretz Yisrael* where it is referred to as “tresp,” possibly from the English word tramp, or more directly from the German in which it means “hitchhiker.” The practice is common in many other countries around the world as well. In Cuba, there are so few passenger cars that by law all government cars must stop for hitchhikers. In the Netherlands, signs indicate the sites where it is permitted to stand and wait for a hitch.

French-born Jeremy Marie decided to take hitchhiking to an extreme. His goal was to circumnavigate the globe – and to do so without spending a penny on transportation.

By his own account he became curious about the world at a very young age. His parents took him on trips to faraway places such as Portugal, Tunisia, Turkey and Malta. By the age of eight, he began assembling a collection of coins from around the world.

When he was in high school his class took a trip to Poland. The students were quartered with local Poles and Marie had an opportunity to observe a foreign culture firsthand. This further ignited in him a burning desire to meet people of other cultures. He later joined friends on a trip to Belgium and the Netherlands. Then he went to England and Dublin, Ireland. In that hilly region he began taking hitches.

At first he was forced to ask for rides because he did not have a car of his own, but he continued the practice simply because he enjoyed it. He developed an appetite for riding with different people, chatting with them and learning about their feelings and way of living.

In October 2007, Marie graduated university and decided the time had come to make his dream a reality. He stood on the side of the road outside of Caen, France, and caught his first in a long, convoluted series of rides that would lead him around the globe.



Jeremy Marie at Niagara Falls.

Two Years Become Five

Marie hoped to complete his trip in two years, but at that point his understanding of the hardships involved was limited. In the end it took him five years, five months and five days, covering 112,282 miles and visiting hundreds of countries before he returned.

The journey began by hitching across Western Europe, then Eastern Europe; he then hitched across the Middle East to Egypt and East and South Africa, from where he boarded a boat that took him across the Atlantic Ocean to Panama. Then he found his way to Central America, Mexico, United States, Canada, Alaska, Cuba, the Caribbean Islands and so on.

Along his way, Marie landed in Australia, New Zealand and other countries as well. He did not intentionally leave any country out, but sometimes he was forced to adjust his travel plans and avoid countries that had overly strict regulations for obtaining entry visas.

Only If It's Free

Marie began his grand *Tour du Monde*, or World Tour, without much money and did not have the means to pay for his travels. As a result, he was forced to rely on the goodwill of the people he met along the way. In the end, he hitched a total of 1,752 times with various methods of transportation and never once paid.



Left: Marie in Peru. Right: At the pyramids in Egypt.



Marie's story is verifiable. He even has photos to prove it. They show both wealthy and desperately impoverished lands, advanced and primitive societies, friendly and unfriendly and even some war-torn locals.

For the most part Marie did not step into a bus or train station, port or the like. He simply parked himself along the side of the road and stuck out his thumb pointing upward in the more-or-less internationally recognized way. When he was fortunate, a driver took him along on a ride for several hundred miles. However, more often than not the driver let him off after a mile or so. Then Marie stood next to the road and tried his luck again.

How did he manage to get around the world like that? Marie shares several tricks. He always made sure that he appeared neat and put together. His genial and optimistic attitude certainly helped as well. His half-smiling, half-questioning expression disarmed drivers.

Sticking out a thumbs-up does not work everywhere. Specifically, in Arab lands it is taken as an extreme insult. US servicemen in Iraq learned that lesson the hard way when they offered a friendly thumbs-up at passing Iraqis. The Americans were shocked when the Iraqis responded with looks of distaste



Marie trying to find his first hitch from his hometown of Caen, France.

or outright hatred. It took a while for the two sides to learn that an innocent message was being misinterpreted due to cultural differences.

Inhospitable Americans?

Marie's experiences transformed him into an expert on unique customs and cultural nuances between one land and the

IMPORTANT: Although the main character in this article successfully hitchhiked around the world, it goes without saying that hitching rides with strangers is very dangerous. Recently, the local police in Monsey, New York, have been asking members of the *frum* community to be on the watch for strangers trying to lure children into their vehicles. It is extremely important for all parents to discuss these dangers with their children and for children to speak to their parents about the possible dangers of talking to strangers, let alone taking a ride with them.