

## We made it! Home away from home in France



This is why France is so cool. What cyclist can't relate to roadside signs advertising PAIN?

The long travel day over, a decent night's sleep and we're almost ready to go. Well, more on that later.

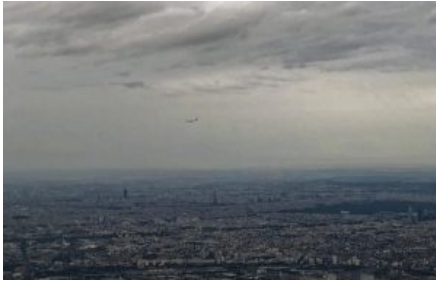
Thursday morning we got up much earlier than anyone but a true morning person would want to, and trust me, I'm not even a good fake morning person. 5:45am, quick shower, out the door headed to the airport by 6:09, just 4 minutes behind schedule. Flight at 8:05am, and you'd normally think that arriving at the airport at 6:40am for an 8:05 flight should give you a lot of extra time, but it really didn't.

Pleasant-enough flight to Newark, other than both the wi-fi and entertainment system being down, and this was an otherwise "dark" plane, with no seatback screens. Flying transcon is a long way to go without being connected or having a dumb movie to watch! Kevin, of course, used some of the time to sleep.



Check out the young lady apparently checking out Kevin who's checking out her...

In Newark Kevin and I both had our very first "Philly Cheesesteaks." Not sure what all the fuss is about. I mean sure, not bad, but not that much different from an Arby's y'know? The Newark airport is a lot nicer since the remodel, but they've hidden the temporary United Club (lounge). The food court is a bit confusing too; one of those setups where you pay for food (and anything else, including, for example, magazines) separately from where you order or pick it up. There's no signage, and nobody tells you when you order the food, until you look appropriately confused. That's actually not true. A very nice employee did assist me, and other confused people, regarding how things work, and did so without making us seem like idiots.



First-time ever landing with view of Paris instead of fields. And the ugly Montparnasse tower!

The flight to Paris was better in terms of working wi-fi and entertainment system ("Blockers" is a better movie than it should be, by the way). Still, you felt OK at the beginning and start to feel a bit "ripe" towards the end. Would be nice to have showers at CDG for sure, but we didn't have time to do the 2-hour room thing at the nearby IBIS, because we weren't sure how long it would take to retrieve our rail discount cards at the CDG train station. Too bad because that meant way too much time waiting at a really inadequate train station. Funny thing how trains in France are for the most part a fantastic way to get around, but major train stations are abominable places to have to spend time, with limited seating, few bathrooms (which you have to pay for, by the way), too hot, too humid... just not fun places to be. Same can be said for most major stations around France (Lyon, Montparnasse in Paris, Marseille).

The connection in Bordeaux was not much fun, since we arrived 10 minutes late and our connection time was... 10 minutes! Fortunately they were hold other trains for ours, at least it seemed that way, so we made it. Should mention that the train from CDG to Bordeaux felt a bit dated and not terribly fast. The Bordeaux-Lourdes train was much newer, had wi-fi that actually worked (good luck trying to get a decent cell signal from a high-speed train moving through the countryside) and the temp was bit cooler as well.



Getting off the train in Lourdes, happy that our very long travel "day is over.

Arrival in Lourdes, well, about time. Long day, nice to see our hotel right after exiting the train station, same as it ever was. We've used this place for a number of years now. Inexpensive (about \$75/night), fairly large room for France, mini-kitchen with fridge, elevator large enough for both our bikes at once, coin-op laundry, what's not to like? No daily made service but I don't need the bed made every night (good thing, that, since if I did, my wife would be asking why I'm not doing it myself).



Immediately outside the station and there it is, our hotel, with a much-needed shower waiting for us!

Eventually we got around to dinner (favorite pizza place 100 meters from the hotel) and I used what consciousness I had left to build the bikes. I managed to successfully stay awake long enough to guarantee I'd actually sleep and wake up at a reasonable hour (11pm-6:40am). Would have liked to have slept a bit longer, but this was good enough to get me onto France time.

The plan for today was to initially head out on the bikes into town and pick up some supplies and breakfast, before going out for a moderate ride. That plan was shelved because the time change did a number on Kevin's epilepsy med schedule; any deviation from the norm can give him double-vision and that's what he got this morning. So got to head out myself to get breakfast and let Kevin try to sleep off the effects of his meds. The new plan is to head out around 2pm or so (an hour from now), get in a ride, and pick up supplies on the way back. We'll see how that goes soon!



What a Bike Friday looks like, before closing the lid for the last time.



Say good-bye to our bikes! See you in France!



Crowded morning at SFO!



&#8220;Breakfast&#8221; at SFO. Food (on the ground) got better after this.



Kevin, asleep, again&#8230;



Surprised to be served breakfast on the SFO-Newark flight. Usually have to pay for food.



Check out the young lady apparently checking out Kevin who&#8217;s checking out her&#8230;



People do not know how to queue up for a line in Newark.



More proof of Russian meddling in US affairs. Vodka in the pasta dish!



The pasta was actually not half bad.



Yay! Not Mango this time. Tired of Mango. They always serve Mango.



Almost there..



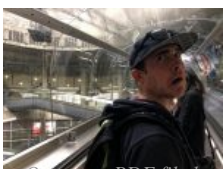
&#8220;Breakfast&#8221; prior to landing in Paris. Umm&#8230; nothing to see here, move along&#8230;



Kevin taking a photo as we fly over Paris.



First-time ever landing with view of Paris instead of fields. And the ugly Montparnasse tower!





The infamous chamber of tubes in the middle of CDG.



Our three bags marked &#8220;priority&#8221; made it quickly!



Our final bag arrives, 8 minutes after the first. This didn't have the &#8220;priority&#8221; tag.



The TGV at CDG airport.



First Fanta Orange in France! They taste so much better here.



Kevin? Asleep? No, can't be;



Getting off the train in Lourdes, happy that our very long travel day is over.



Immediately outside the station and there it is, our hotel, with a much-needed shower waiting for us!





Arriving at our hotel, just steps away from the train station in Lourdes.



Home sweet home. It's not elegant, but it's much larger than normal, has a mini-kitchen and runs \$75/night.



Kevin chose a more-traditional pizza.



Yumm. Only in France can in indulge in anchovies! Not allowed in my house.



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