

## France/Don't order the fish/Raining Redux

With all the talk about United Airlines falling apart after the merger with Continental, there was no small measure of fear & trepidation that something would go wrong getting from Redwood City, California, to Lourdes, France. Plenty of opportunities; Flight from SFO-Chicago, Chicago to Frankfurt, Frankfurt to Toulouse, bus from Toulouse airport to Toulouse Train station, train from Toulouse to Lourdes... what could possibly go wrong?



Hardly a TGV, yet our low-rent "Intercity" train from Toulouse to Lourdes still does a better speed than Caltrain's so-called "Baby Bullet."

Lots! But fortunately the only snag was that our Lufthansa flight from Frankfurt to Toulouse landed late due to having to fly a longer route than normal (weather issues) and then it took forever for our baggage to arrive from the plane. Thus we ended up taking a train two hours later than planned, but y'know, not that big a deal.



Malfunctioning seat control copied from a Trilobite, the movie Tron, or a tribal mask?

But that's not to say there wasn't some grief along the way. For starters, I ended up upgrading to business class (at my son's expense; he was on an award ticket in First, using miles I've earned). OK fine, maybe I can get some sleep. Or maybe not. You see, my lie-flat seat wouldn't do anything but put up the footrest and alter the lumbar support. Everybody else was sleeping away, all stretched out and semi-comfy (including my son in First), and me? I'm all contorted trying to figure out a way to relax. Yeah right. That much was United's fault, and yes they did try to fix it by "resetting" it but to no avail.

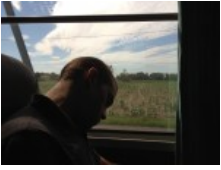
The rest was my fault. About the fish thing. A long-running joke, championed by the movie "Airplane", says whatever you order, don't order the fish. People always get sick eating the fish. Well, my choices where a beef thing with mushrooms, a pork thing with



I should have known better than to order an unknown fish dish.

mushrooms, or a shrimp & fish thing with a mexican-sounding name. I'm not a mushroom person, so I went for the fish, knowing full well that I should never order mixed fish dishes that I don't know about because I react rather violently to many types of shell fish, in particular scallops & muscles. And when I got it, yes, there should have been red flags all over the place because the plate had a couple of muscles or clams or something in closed shells but it tasted good and it's been years since I've had any issues

(because I've avoided scallops, muscles & clams) so maybe I'm fine now.



Did I tell you that Kevin can sleep anywhere, anytime?

Two hours before landing it became clear I was not fine. It wasn't long before I had to make a run to the toilet because a barf bag in business class is so gauche, and the last hour of the flight I was breaking out in a pretty bad sweat. I was just barely feeling alive wobbling off the plane in Frankfurt, and was wondering how in the world I was going to make it the rest of the way. But two more trips to the toilet and I was suddenly all better. Dramatically so. As in feeling pretty darned good the rest of the way.

And the rest is history. We're in Lourdes, it's raining outside but should be nice by morning, and I'm feeling surprisingly perky for hour 31 or so of this travel day. Tomorrow we get the bikes put together and go out for an easy spin, likely no more than 50 miles. Nothing having to do with the Tour de France; they're miles away right now, and we'll intercept them on Sunday.Â --Mike--