

## The adventure starts before getting to the airport (thanks United!)



Once in a while you find a departure screen in need of a reboot. Rarely do you see one quite this messed up! Not even the final (SP3, not SP2) version of Windows XP. United's IT (information technology) department is not putting its best-foot forward.

What, back in France, again?

The fun started with my first phone call from United, at 5:30am, telling me that my flight from SFO to Newark was delayed. 50 minute connection time between flight at Newark, and the flight was delayed (at first) 30 minutes. Not good. Another call says an hour delay. Itinerary now shot; won't be able to make train connection in Brussels to Paris. So I call United to see what other flights can be had and, of course, while she's trying to fix things up with a later flight, as soon as she puts me on hold the connection dies. I call back, get someone else who is having trouble dealing with the record because it's "locked" (probably by the first person). But that gets dealt with, and it works out that we can fly through Chicago and directly from there on to Paris, killing the need for the extra train ride. That's actually workable, allowing us to leave about an hour later than originally planned.

Too bad that I ended up losing an extra hour of sleep due to having to get up earlier, when the first phone call warning of the late flight came in!



Lunch in domestic first isn't bad. Very nice salad, cold & crisp, with fruit bowl.



Dinner in international coach. Whatever the beef thing was, it wasn't bad, but the salad was pretty sad.



"Breakfast" in international coach was pathetic. Not that I really cared that much (very little sleep). But a half-burned tiny roll, 4 small pieces of fruit and a cup of juice.

Thankfully, I was still able to use one of my remaining regional upgrades to sit up front (domestic first class, not that much to write home about, but better than coach) with my wife. She was originally booked in first all the way to Brussels, but the best we can do for her on the new itin is what United calls "BizFirst" which is basically a plane where "business" class is the highest level, not first. That's fine, not so bad for her, and me, back in coach on that segment? Not too bad at all since it's only 1/3rd full.

One of the flight attendants knew that Karen (my wife) was up front in business, and asked if I'd like any of the better wines offered to them. She was rather surprised when I declined (not much of a wine drinker). But Karen was nice enough to send me back a plate with two rolls and some butter. The FA told me she said I liked bread. Right. Just give me bread & water and I'll do fine, while the aristocrats up front are dining on whatever my imagination will allow. :-)



Landing at CDG we can see a United plane that's a lot smaller than anything else at the international terminal, one of the 757s they fly across the pond. Yuck!



The infamous "gotta go up before you can go down" tubes inside CDG airport

Upon arrival at CDG (Paris airport) we got through passport control very quickly and, with carry-on luggage only, we were on the RER train to Paris in no time. About \$8 each way, takes about 40 minutes, and drops you off at Gare Nord, from which you can take another train or metro to get to just about anyplace you want.



The Velib cheap city-owned rental bikes are everywhere in Paris! When we get back to Paris on Friday and Saturday, I may just be desperate enough to rent one of those clunky monsters and get some exercise.

Today we took another RER train to Gare Lazare, and then just a three-block walk to our hotel, the Bellvue, just opposite the SNCF station from which we leave tomorrow morning for our trip to Bayeux (D-Day beach tour). That evening we rent a car and drive to Mont St. Michel and then Wednesday morning drive to the Loire Valley. What, no mention of any bike rides? I'm going to be in pretty sad shape by the time I get home next week!

If you haven't figured it out yet, this trip has nothing to do with cycling. It's all about castles ("Chateaux") and touristy things and a trip to the D-Day beaches. In other words, this is my wife's version of a vacation. But that's cool; I'm seeing ares of France I've never been to (basically anything in the Normandy region, west of Paris). Should be fun. --Mike--