

It's Tour Time; all roads lead to France!

Not that it's a habit of mine or anything like that, this thing about heading to France each year for the past 13 (OK, I did miss 1). The combination of France and this little bike race they have over there seems to be irresistible. Thought that maybe I'd gotten over it just about the time that Kevin became strong enough to ride with me, so these pilgrimages have gained new momentum.

Today has been another long travel day to France! Fortunately it began better than planned, as a nice customer service agent agreed with me that the 35 minute connection at Dulles (DC) wasn't a good idea so, instead of flying from San Jose to Denver to DC to Paris, Kevin and I were able to fly from SFO to DC to Paris, with the added bonus of being able to get up at 5:15am (yuck!) instead of 4:45am.

The flight from DC to Paris was probably the most-pleasant flight I've ever had, and yes, it was on United. The flight attendants were disarmingly friendly, the service was great (your water cup was never less than half-full), the food was by far and away the best I've had on a plane, and yes, this was in business class, not coach. The first time in my life I've ever paid for a business-class seat, but it was an odd situation in which a business-class seat was actually cheaper than coach. Computer glitch? Don't know; the fare lasted a full day before it was taken down. I've flown business a few times before, using upgrade certificates or miles, but it was never this good. Good enough to pay the normal \$4000 price instead of the \$1550 we paid? Don't think anything could be that good; the \$2500 price difference would pay for some nice wheels or camera equipment that I'd appreciate for a lot longer than a day on a plane.



One of the perks of flying United Business or First is being able to take a shower at the Sheraton at CDG airport.

We did leave DC almost two hours late ("late arriving aircraft" was the reason given) but made up a fair amount of time in the air and arrived in Paris just over an hour late. Not an issue for us, because arriving at 8am still gave us plenty of time to make our 10:16 train connection to Lourdes, even including a stop at the Sheraton Hotel (which sits right on top of the TGV train station) for a shower, a little-known and rarely-used perk of flying on a paid business class ticket.

We are, however, in danger of misconnection our train from Bordeaux to Lourdes though. This is the first time the TGV has ever let me down; it's never before been even a minute behind schedule, but we had a couple of unexplained stops in the middle of nowhere which have put us 15 minutes behind schedule, and our time between trains is 10. That's not looking too good!