

## On our way to France

Been a long time since last flying, and an even longer time since it felt like I was flying home. But today, July 8th, I'm back in the air, with my son Kevin, heading to France to catch up to the Tour.

The airport experience was a bit more of a hassle than normal; first, I hadn't notice that Kevin's TSA-PRE number had become unstuck from his reservation. Again. And the airport seemed as crowded as I've seen in years, perhaps ever. Long lines everywhere except, thankfully, the Premiere Access area. Airports are a much nicer experience when you have some level of airline status that gets you into the shorter lines. People were probably waiting 45 minutes to drop off bags in the normal line; we were through in 5.

First leg, SFO-Newark, got off to a slow start, with the plane finally leaving the gate about 25 minutes late. Boarding seemed to take much longer than usual, and we are in a bit of a hurry, as a hurricane is moving up the East Coast and could cause delays getting in, and our connection is already tight (just over an hour). But so far, a very smooth ride as we pass over Salt Lake City, good seats (premium economy, which isn't that far removed from domestic first), not so bad breakfast (a bit of apprehension over the eggs featuring Kale but they were actually pretty good!) and having to wear a mask again? well, it seems almost normal but it's a nicer world without.

Kevin didn't get to sleep quite as fast as usual; the saying is, wheels up, Kevin down. But I did have to wake him up for breakfast. The plane's wifi isn't working well so I didn't subscribe to it this time, plus yikes, \$29.99 for just the flight to Newark, no 24 hour day pass to go all the way to France. Potentially \$60 for the day? that's way too much for spotty wi-fi!

We arrive CDG (Paris) 7:45am and have three hours before catching the TGV train to Lourdes. Actually two trains; we transfer at Massy after an hour, then the 4.5 hour trip to Lourdes. Arrive Lourdes 5pm, and then, for the first time in Lourdes, need to take a taxi to the place we're staying because the apartment complex adjacent to the train station has remained closed due to COVID. Which means one of our daily rituals, double espresso shots from the Relay (think mini-7/11) at the train station, is a thing of the past. We'll actually really miss that! Plus being able to leave the apartment just 10 minutes before a train taking us closer to one of the stages? now we have to ride a whole half mile or so. Tough life.

The good news is that the new place is within just a couple blocks of both Monoprix (a combination supermarket & mini-department store) and Carrefour (supermarket), along with at least three bakeries. Also closer to the main restaurants too! The new place is also much bigger, at least on Booking.com anyway, and has enough room that Kevin won't be complaining about my snoring.

We'll get some food after we arrive, build the Bike Fridays, take a shower and sleep. It will be a very long travel day for me, beginning 6am west coast time on Thursday and ending maybe 11pm France on Friday. Subtract 7 hours (the amount of time France is ahead of us) and you have me sleeping at the equivalent of 4pm Friday so? 34 hours straight? Sure would be nice if I could sleep on planes and trains like Kevin!

I'll try to send this when we land in Newark. More likely once in the air on the way to CDG, since the connection time will be so short. Still too far out from Newark to know if the weather is going to be a factor. I did look up alternative routings to get to Lourdes, and it's pretty tough. There are a couple later flights via Frankfurt and Munich, but they'd arrive too late to catch a train to Lourdes, and I haven't yet had to figure out how to exchange TGV tickets. Perhaps a new skill to be mastered this trip! Alternatively we could fly to Toulouse and take the train from there. Since we're on Star Alliance, there's no option in the Tarbes/Lourdes airport, although something could possibly work out to Bordeaux. Most likely it would mean a night at the Ibis at CDG and take a train in the morning, missing a day of riding. Would rather not do that!

Riding. The first day of intercepting the Tour should be Sunday, for the Andorra stage. Not much distance riding that day, but lots of climbing. Like 7 miles and 2000ft I think. We'll definitely need a good ride on Saturday to get the legs working again; one possibility would be the Col St Marie Blanc, one of the few in the Pyrenees we have yet to do.

As I type this I'm thinking how much I could use an internet connection right now! But waiting at least until just two hours to go, to get the lower rate, and see what the arrival time might be changing to. Just recently it now shows us landing 10 minutes ahead of schedule. A good thing!

So much for what I wrote above. We landed on time, even a bit early, but they wouldn't let the ramp workers do their thing because of the nearby thunderstorm. So we sat for a very long time, before finally being let in. What about our connection? They were stuck in the air, circling forever, a 4.5 hour flight from LA taking 7.5 hours.

And the United Club lounge in Newark? It wasn't labeled as such, but pretty sure they were serving up prepackaged Soylent Green. No bottled water to be had (or any other type of water) unless you stood in a long line at the bar. The automated coffee machines? They worked, but nothing decaf, and I need to sleep a bit on the flight to France.

Would have been SO much nicer had United not killed the direct SFO-CDG flight that we had originally booked!!! But here we are, whining about little things and not focusing on where we're going. Half the reason for going to France is the food. I mean seriously, breakfast to die for. And then there's the bike thing. More soon.