

Day... 3? 2? of vacation with Karen

So we left San Jose on Sunday afternoon, arrived Amsterdam Monday afternoon, and right now it's 6:15pm Tuesday on a train heading from Amsterdam to Paris. Feels like just two days, but that's what happens when the first day becomes "extended" by flying east, leaving in the daytime and arriving at your destination in the daytime as well. Do you count that day? My iPhone says I slept 3 hours, which doesn't help much with my ability to discern time.

Flights went well, no issues. Nice to arrive 30 minutes early in Munich, making immigration/Passport control less stressful. Curiously, this time we stayed "airside" the entire transfer and didn't have to go through security. For that matter, there was no extensive passport checking at SFO, just a quick look at it at the gate by someone roving through the line of people waiting. I'm thinking that right now the people who try to punish travelers by creating new security mazes are focusing on the Brits after Brexit.

The train from Schiphol (Amsterdam's airport) to the center of town (Amsterdam Centraal) was PACKED! Fortunately just a 19 minute ride, but I really felt sorry for Karen having to stand that long. The first part of this vacation has too many moving pieces, required by her bucket-list desire to see Anne Frank's house in Amsterdam.

Moving pieces. One of those pieces moved sideways or backward, not sure which. We had a relatively-early reservation for Anne Frank's house, so we'd have enough time for some other things before getting on the train to Paris. I set the alarm for 7:10am, and woke up (in a panic!) to my iPhone's weird secondary alarm at 8:05am... yikes! Barely enough time to make it, not enough time to get food. Thank goodness I'd done all the prep the night before, getting our luggage ready to go since we wouldn't be coming back to the room later. What happened? I'd set the alarm for 7:10 PM, not AM. The sort of thing that 3 hours sleep makes almost a certainty.

Anne Frank's house is definitely worthwhile. Lots of very-steeply-pitched stairs, which Karen handled amazingly well! But by the end it was definitely wearing on her, which made the canal tour we'd be doing afterward seem like a really good idea... being able to just sit in a boat for 90 minutes, resting.

Except that... I'd planned things just a bit tightly, wasn't thinking that it might take a bit longer in Anne Frank's house because Karen wouldn't be fleet on her feet, plus no food! Fortunately, I found a way to text the tour operator (just 15 minutes prior to the tour leaving the dock!) and he got back to me almost immediately, offering to pick us up right outside the Anne Frank's house museum! Yay! Even had enough time to pick up a couple pastries at the museum cafe.

The plan, after the canal tour, was to have lunch and head to the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam's version of the Louvre (think HUGE), where, in order to see as much as possible, I was going to get a wheelchair for Karen so we could zip around the place. That didn't work out; it was easy to see that would be just a bridge too far for her today. Instead, we headed back to the hotel (which was keeping our bags for us) and she just kinda crashed in a chair for a while, while I went out and hit up an ATM and brought back coffee for me, hot chocolate for her (coffee didn't seem like a good idea for her since she needed rest).

And at 4pm we headed out to the train station, a whopping 1000ft away (if that) and presently heading on a Eurostar to Paris, about three hours away.

Just a single night in Paris; original plan was for two, after which we'd take an 8am train to Le Havre, where our 9 day cruise awaits. But the cruise is on Thursday, the 19th, which happens to be when the various French rail unions have called a nationwide rail strike. So rearranged things, leaving Paris Wednesday night 6:40pm, by train, and spending the night in a hotel adjacent to the train station in Le Havre. That plan held up for a few days, until reading that the strike on the 21st would actually start on the 20th, at 7pm. Not a comfortable feeling, knowing that a strike is going to be 20 minutes after your train is scheduled to leave!

So enter plan C. We now have backup tickets for a bus from Paris to Le Havre. The bus terminal is adjacent to train station in Le Havre, so no problem at that end. But the departure bus station is about 3 miles from the Paris train station, and just 20 minutes after the train. Not much time to figure out if the train is actually going to run, and make it to the bus station if it doesn't. SNCF (the

French train company) says they'll post the list of running vs cancelled trains at 5pm tomorrow. If it confirms our train is running, do I trust it?

OK, Paris. Not much time there! Just one thing on Karen's list- visiting the Catacombs. We can even sleep in and do that; no need to buy tickets ahead of time. Yay!

Thursday, embarkation day, will be a new first- first time boarding a ship in the snow! Forecast now shows 34F and snowing from 11am-5pm. Thankfully this cruise heads south, into warmer weather, and not north. Even more thankfully, 9 nights of sleeping in the same room, no packing and repacking every night or two!

But for tonight, I'm looking forward to sleeping through the night instead of waking up frequently, not having a good feel for what time it is.