



Around the World in 80 Hours



INTRODUCTION:

This journey was taken in December 1996. It was probably the most unusual trip I have undertaken in my life, and although totally crazy, and done before deep-vein thrombosis was known, I'm so grateful I had this opportunity. As I read back the diary for publication, I couldn't help but notice how many things had changed in 22 years. These changes have been highlighted with footnotes where applicable. Enjoy the journey!

THE BEGINNING:

The hardest part of this journey wouldn't be the three days of airline food, brain-numbing jet-lag, the boredom or the swollen feet. The hardest part would be explaining why I was doing the journey in the first place.

I was taking Robert Louis Stevenson to the extreme – “For my part I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake.” I wasn't really going anywhere, but travelling nearly 37,000km to get there. I don't know what I'm looking for; that's why I travel. I am not even sure I am looking for anything. If I knew what I was looking for, I would have already gone out of my way to find it.

Try explaining this all to the passenger sitting next to me, when I try to drum up a conversation. I couldn't possibly tell the passenger what I was doing. He would probably give me a very confused look, press the flight attendant button, and request a seat move.

Phileas Fogg and Michael Palin both travelled around the world in 80 days. I recently challenged Air France I could travel around the world, using only their services, in 80 HOURS. It seemed relatively easy. Board my first flight in Edinburgh, change planes a few times, and in three days I would be back in Edinburgh. What could possibly go wrong? ^[1]

SUNDAY 1st DECEMBER 1996:

While writing notes, I kept a stopwatch running. Any entry also included GMT, which I planned to live on, and local time (LT) if possible/ time of next destination. Local time would be irrelevant at 35,000 feet. Where applicable, these times would precede all diary entries.

-03hr08min / 0815 GMT / 0815 LT

I leave home and walk into town because I knew I would be there in 25 minutes. This is more reliable than wasting time waiting for a bus which might not turn up. I needed to catch the first train of the day to Glasgow Central and then the 0930 bus to Edinburgh. I will save half an hour of travelling time by jumping off the bus in the western suburb of Drumbrae and catching the airport bus from there.^[2] I boarded the airport-bound bus, and the driver just gestured for me to get on and don't bother paying. “This is your lucky day” he said. I hoped so, but how long would this luck last?

Rain. wind and some blue sky; an ominous sign perhaps? Was there perhaps a bit of everything coming my way? After the first of many expected teas in the next few days, I checked in for my flight early – very early. I needed an 'official' photo of my check-in, so thought by avoiding the busiest check-in time might get more cooperation.^[3] If I had known what was ahead of me, I wouldn't have checked in so early. As expected the man at check-in looked a little nonplussed as he studied my flight coupons to see where my ultimate destination was.^[4]



"I can certainly check your luggage through to Tokyo" he said. I told him I only had hand luggage as I wasn't really going anywhere. This just confused him more. I had requested a letter of introduction from Air France in English and French to help me out of any confusing situations that might arise, but this just seemed confuse the situation more when I showed the letter to him. He eventually understood the concept of what I was trying to achieve, although he might not have grasped the reason why. I must admit for some time I have had this problem too.

With his Servisair ^[5] colleague taking the 'official' photo, the stopwatch starts to tick at **0hr00min / 1125 GMT / 1125 LT**. There was no fanfare; just continued confusion as the clerk forgot to check my passport. I had requested window seats to Papeete. Despite being in darkness until approaching Tahiti, I thought it would be interesting to see lights on the ground.

There is just so much you can write about when on a long haul flight, even less when your fellow passenger

doesn't speak your language. Unless I go out of my way to look for something to write about, there will be little to write about. This journey could be as interesting as a long distance bus journey without windows, or the curtains pulled on an overnight train.



Outside the airport I asked one of three men standing by the entrance door to take my photo with the 'Edinburgh Airport' sign in the background. ^[6] Unfortunately he asked me about my journey, and unfortunately I told him. The confused expression made me realise I mustn't keep blabbing about the 80 hour trip. These people must think I'm mad.

I made the most of the quiet airport duty free shop, and while sitting quietly contemplating the journey ahead of me, I was joined by a lady conducting an airport efficiency and cleanliness survey. I had to give Edinburgh an 'excellent' on most aspects of its appearance and operations. My early arrival resulted in no queues experienced at check-in or at security. After the flight was called, an elderly couple decided to have an argument in the stairwell leading down to the tarmac. This effectively delayed most of the A320's passengers a short while until a ceasefire was called.

While sitting on board 'Ville de Lyon', ^[7] I watched the rain begin to fall. A squall from the west was approaching, appearing like a menacing wall of grey. The wind buffeted the A320, which was a concern. If we were expecting turbulence on the ground, what would the take-off be like? I watched a British Airways 757 ^[8] take off, heading westwards into the rain, and it was engulfed by the approaching squall after thirty seconds.

I studied the passenger next to me. It wasn't difficult as he was fast asleep. Takashi Fuji (according to his luggage label) dozed during take-off, picked at his food, and dozed all the way to Paris. I tried to imagine where he lived. His socks had the motif 'Paris', which was where our flight was heading. Did he live there?

Fortunately the take off and ascent were perfectly smooth. Our take-off was bathed in sunshine just like Lothian below. I had a glorious view of the Forth Road Bridge, Rail bridge ^[9] and the Edinburgh-bound traffic already backed up past Junction 1 of the M9 due to the Newbridge Roundabout ^[10] work. Grangemouth and its ugly storage tanks and chimneys sailed below, and then we were in cloud. The tops of the clouds over Southern Scotland reminded me of hills and glens dusted with snow.

The clouds broke as the first of ten in-flight meals were served over Morecambe Bay. This first meal was a salad. I identified the River Wyre, Fleetwood and then Blackpool and its dwarf-like tower. I had visited Blackpool several times, but it never looked mesmerising as it did from a height of almost seven miles. The piers were visible, jutting into a choppy blue Irish Sea.

The cloud cover increased from then on, with turbulence over Birmingham. The cloud cover lasted until Paris. There is something reassuring about seeing the ground after ten minutes of descent through thick cloud. We touch down at Charles de Gaulle airport, 23km/14 miles northeast of Paris at **03hr12min / 1436 GMT / 1536 LT**.

I find CDG a large, daunting airport, and I'm always disorientated here. The planes on arrival, taxi for ages, you then board a shuttle bus which zips you around the airport, and the result is complete and utter reliance on the design of the airport – which works... well usually, but not for me. I once gave up in complete frustration looking for a passage between terminal buildings, and resorted to walking outside and along a road used by buses and taxis.



Terminal 3 ^[11] is an unexciting, but well-lit structure. When no long-haul flights are due to leave it's eerily quiet. I could only wander about the terminal for so long before resigning myself to another cup of tea. It is embarrassing having to ask strangers to take your photo; lost tourists, check-in staff, restaurant till staff etc. I am standing in front of a display of clocks showing times from selected cities from around the world. This seemed to sum up the time dilemma I would have over the next three days. I was updating my note book, with an Air France pen, when a French traveller asked to borrow it for a moment. She was surprised to see it had the Air France logo, so I told her she could keep it, which pleased her greatly. I had plenty of others with me.

The journey had not been an ordeal so far, with a flying time of just under two hours from Edinburgh, but night was falling. When I boarded the 747 for Los Angeles and Papeete, my disorientation and feeling of isolation was complete. All my fellow passengers and cabin crew would be tucked up in bed or relaxing in less than 24

hours. This wouldn't be the case for me.

The departure lounge was modern, metallic, functional and lacking just a little warmth. The television in the lounge was showing a Jacques Cousteau documentary on Australian marine life. I could only see four other passengers. A girl at the transfer gate x-ray check slouched behind the conveyor belt, using it as a footrest while chatting to her colleague. Things were certainly slow at Terminal 3. I calculated how much of my journey had been completed. I frowned when I learned it was under 3%.

I ate two bananas. I had read in a newspaper article a chemical in the fruit helped the oxygen supply to the blood and therefore helped fight jet-lag. We would find out in a day or two.

07hr57min / 1921 GMT (Sun) / 2018 LT (Sun)

I tend to get selfish on flights. I sit down and wait in suspense to see if you have someone to fight with for the shared arm rest. Of course I would like a free inside seat next to me. As it turned out, the seat next to me was left free. The seat next to that, the aisle seat, was occupied by a large hamper of Italian wine, olive oil and other unidentifiable objects. It was too fragile for the luggage hold and too large for the overhead luggage compartment. I hoped it wouldn't go flying around the aircraft if we hit turbulence.

How would I survive the shortest of the four long haul flights – a mere 3,513km/5654 miles and 11hr 35 minutes in the air? I have a feeling of apprehension and anxiety. It was the feeling I always have when I fly to destinations without accommodation booked in advance. I don't need accommodation because Air France is my hotel for the next three nights. I still feel apprehensive. CDG air traffic control was busy, with our aircraft being tenth in line to depart.

09hr 07min / 2028 GMT (Sun) / in transit

I spotted Edinburgh out of the starboard window, 31,000 feet below. The flight path from Paris to Los Angeles forms an arc over central Scotland. I was back where I had started from, but it had taken nine hours to get here. I could see Kirkcaldy and Dundee's lights twinkling in the distance far below. As expected, the dry atmosphere inside the plane dried my lips and was playing havoc with my contact lenses.

10hr 25min / 2050 GMT (Sun) / in transit

I was intrigued by the in-flight navigation show.^[12] We were over eastern Iceland at an altitude of 35,000ft/10,700m and travelling at 570mph/918kmh. It had been a long day, and tomorrow would be much longer. I should try and get some sleep. There were two Paris-Los Angeles routes in the in-flight magazine route map, and our course wasn't one of them, being hundreds of miles further to the north. I hoped the pilot knew this.

16hr 40min / 0404 GMT (Mon) / in transit

After some disturbed sleep. I woke to find a documentary on the video screen on pond life and dung beetles. I appear to have slept through most of the movie 'Independence Day'.^[13] I did some calculations and was disappointed to see we would be flying in darkness until near Papeete. In fact, the Tokyo-Paris flight would also be in darkness. Only the Papeete-Tokyo flight would have any daylight. My calculations placed us over the north-western states of the USA. There were no lights on the ground, but how the stars shone above.

17hr 30min / 0454 GMT (Mon) / in transit

The video on board showed our location as Idaho, 11,900m/39,000ft, 569mph/914kmh, -51°C, and the passengers began to stir with the smell of a cooked breakfast passing through the aircraft. At this point in the trip I was starting to feel quite grotty and unwashed. My hair was a mess, my lips were dry, my teeth were furry and my feet were slightly swollen. I am certainly not bored, although it is hard to believe only one quarter of the trip has been covered.

18hr 00min / 0534 GMT (Sun) / in transit

Breakfast has arrived with Quiche, salmon, a fruit tart and orange juice. Not a bad way to start the day. We have just flown over Reno, Nevada. It appeared almost like a cross of yellow lights. Is that Sacramento in the distance? Yes, with San Francisco and Oakland on the horizon.

Los Angeles at night from the sky is breathtaking. It is an enormous grid of yellow lines of street lights, filled with white sparkles of headlights. Its size is difficult to comprehend even at several thousand feet in the air. The urban sprawl swallows hills, plains and the horizon. It is the American dream at its most extreme.

18hr 59min / 0624 GMT (Mon) / 2224 LT (Sun)

Touchdown at Los Angeles. The airport is a myriad of lights, some stationary, many flashing on vans and cars scuttling around parked aircraft and along taxiways. I saw six lights to the west in the sky. I first took them as helicopters hovering, but in fact they were a line of approaching aircraft.

It's 11pm on a Sunday night and I am sitting in a transit lounge at Los Angeles airport.^[14] I can't buy a drink because I have no US currency. The Bureau de Change is closed. So is the newsagent W.H. Smith, so a newspaper is out of the question at this moment. I can't buy duty free because that shop is also closed. I decide to have a shave (my battery-powered shaver attracts quite a bit of attention, as it did when I travelled through India.) I also had a wash and a wander about the lounge. Right on cue, after writing this, the duty free shop opens and is immediately inundated with Polynesian-looking people stocking up on cheap cigarettes and booze, due to the exorbitant prices at home.

An announcement over the tannoy states the Bureau de Change will open shortly. It doesn't.

20hr 47min / 0810 GMT (Mon) / 0010 LT (Mon)

The chocks were away, and my next flight was nudged backwards. We finally leave the ground 19 minutes later. My fellow passengers were a couple in their late 40's. They spoke English, but preferred to speak French. The husband joined her after the flight took off – he had been sitting in business class, but came down to sit with his wife in economy class. I tried to read the titles of the woman's two books, but she pushed them deeper into the seat pocket in front, now out of view.

In-flight meal number four consisted of a ham and cheese sandwich, orange juice, yoghurt and a banana cake. I puzzled over these small containers of juice, milk and yoghurt which explode their contents onto your shirt when you open them. After a few hundred miles I realised it was because these containers are sealed close to sea level, but at air pressure equivalent to 8,000 feet, the pressure inside the container is greater

than the pressure outside. The solution was to pierce the lid with the point of a fork before opening the container.

24hr 40min / 1204 GMT (Mon) / in transit

I did a quick mental check and realised we would be in Papeete in around four hours. With UK time at 12 noon, it was about time I rose to avoid the dreaded jet-lag. Another quick calculation and I guessed we are close to the equator. My two talkative seat companions had left. Perhaps the husband had managed to score a seat for his wife in business class.

26hr 07min / 1230 GMT (Mon) / 0330 LT (Mon)

I am determined to stay on GMT. I think it is the only way I can get any pleasure out of this trip. We will land at Papeete in just over two hours. The local time being what it is, most passengers are sensibly trying to sleep. A small number of passengers are reading or lining up for the toilet in anticipation of the landing. These are the people who will suffer from jet lag the worst, unless, they are all round the world in 80 hours flyers. I am refreshed and wide awake after a clean-up in the toilet (quiet time during the movie) and as far as I am concerned it is early afternoon (GMT). This is very confusing stuff for the brain.

26hr 45min / 1410 GMT (Mon) / 0410 LT (Mon)

I have been searching the sky from my starboard window for any sign of a sunrise. My flights have now been in darkness for about 20 hours now as we are flying against the rotation of the earth, but still spinning with the earth away from the sun. Out of the port side window, to my delight was a window of indigo, orange and red. Finally I saw my first daylight since leaving Paris.

27hr 05min / 1430 GMT (Mon) / 0430 LT (Mon)

The smell of a cooked breakfast causes most to stir. If this wasn't enough, the video screens come alive with colourful sunrise footage (mist over lakes, farmers entering fields for a solid day's work, sun rising from behind hills etc.) with multi-lingual message warning us 'breakfast will be served soon' and 'start the day with a smile', all to tranquil music. The smell seemed to work best.

Breakfast was scrambled egg, bacon, fruit salad, yoghurt and orange juice. My jeans are taking a hammering. Firstly my Pepsi sprayed everywhere, then the orange juice carton exploded when opened (I forgot to pierce the lid with a fork), a cooked tomato burst when forked and most recently half a cup of tea went flying. Fortunately the passenger to my left had stayed in business class until breakfast was served. When she saw the state of my breakfast accidents, she must have wondered what had been happening here.

I was lucky enough to witness another amazing sight – thunderclouds – cumulonimbus soaring to what must be at least our altitude (39,000ft/11,900m). The clouds had flat, anvil-like tops, caused by wind shear or inversion near the tropopause. The top mushroomed out and with the rising sun at such a low aspect, a shadow was created, a huge inverted 'V' shape over fifty miles in length. This was an absolutely amazing spectacle. Who said you can't see anything from an aircraft?



I eventually spotted my first sight of French Polynesia, an almost perfectly round atoll, dark green in colour surrounded by white surf. A little later I slid my shoes on and noticed a surprisingly minimal amount of swelling in my feet. Later still, I witnessed a stunning view of Moorea as we approached Papeete. What a beautiful part of the world.

28hr 36min / 1600 GMT (Mon) / 0600 LT (Mon)

Our wheels hit the tarmac at Faa'a Airport, Papeete.

29hr 38min / 1702 GMT (Mon) / 0702 LT (Mon)

I am sitting on a bed at the Maeva Beach Hotel near Papeete. Something has gone terribly wrong.

If there was ever proof needed for the importance of tourism in the French Polynesian economy, it is evident once you have walked from your plane to the airport building at Papeete. You are greeted by a traditionally clothed handsome man and beautiful Vahine (woman) and you are handed a white-petalled Tiaré (Gardenia taitensis)

to slide behind your left ear if happily partnered, or the right ear if available. There is also a Tahitian quartet with guitars and drums to welcome you and to get you into the South Pacific swing of things. Don't expect this sort of welcome at Heathrow Terminal 3.

The immigration check wasn't too lengthy. While the official studied my passport, I thought I heard my name being paged over the tano, but almost unrecognisable due to the thick French accent. I thought to myself "That couldn't be for me". If it was, who would want to page me? Perhaps Air France wanted to congratulate me for making it half way around the world. The immigration officer asked "Did you know your flight to Tokyo is delayed twelve hours?" In a split second I realised it was my name being paged, and now my 80 hour quest was in serious jeopardy, especially as the 8½ hours layover in Paris was to be my buffer in case of a delay.

I quickly walked to the information desk run by Air Tahiti, and there I was given the bad news. Due to a technical problem with hydraulics, the inbound flight had been delayed in Tokyo. The aircraft was left stranded overnight at Narita due to their airport curfew. Instead of leaving Papeete at 1345, I would now be leaving at 0145 tomorrow morning. This meant I would miss my connecting Tokyo-Paris flight, and my 80 hour quest would collapse like a house made of cards.

The very helpful lady at the information desk had already re-protected me onto the first flight out of Tokyo for Paris, which would leave 1½ hours after my arrival there. When I mentioned the RTW80H trip, she was confused. I showed her my letter of introduction from Air France and this only added to the confusion. I mentioned the misconnection in Paris by three hours and she said, in true French style "There is no more I can do", with a slight shrug of the shoulders. The domino effect was taking place. There was no way I would make it to Edinburgh in 80 hours, but I wouldn't give up, just in case there was a glimmer of hope.



To make up for the inconvenience, I was provided with a complimentary taxi to the Maeva Beach Resort for the day and evening, given lunch and dinner, as well as a return taxi voucher to the airport, so overall things weren't too bad. If I was going to be stranded somewhere in the world, I could think of worse places than a luxury resort in Tahiti. The gent at the hotel reception desk told me a total of 15 passengers had been stranded. I was the only non-Japanese passenger.

I will have to try my charm on Air France staff and see whether any other airlines will have connecting flights from Paris to Edinburgh or Glasgow, and whether I can use my existing ticket. London would work, but I didn't fancy the overnight bus to Glasgow.

43hr 52min / 0716 GMT (Tue) / 2116 LT (Mon)

I had to have a short nap otherwise jet lag would have caught up with me. My worry was if I fell asleep due to general travel weariness, I would oversleep and miss my

flight. That really would cause problems. The first course at dinner was a cold meat platter followed by fish. I had read somewhere the locals do not eat locally caught fish, due to possible radioactive poisoning from the nearby underground nuclear tests. [15] While I ponder this, mynah birds and pigeons fly from table to table, or through the rafters. At least the birds seem unaffected by eating the food scraps.

I had been enthusiastic about this trip, but when I learned this morning the 80 hour deadline was in jeopardy, my enthusiasm started to dip. I felt jet-lag starting to kick in, due to the twelve hour delay here. I suppose if I have to be stranded somewhere on this trip, this is the place, and it makes a more interesting and exotic story. Tokyo doesn't concern me. My thoughts are dominated by my actions at Paris. I have 5½ hours to make it to the UK. There is an Air France flight into Heathrow which gets me back into the UK within 80 hours, but my goal is Scotland from where I started.





Tahiti - the name brings up television travel programs of an exotic South Pacific paradise. Before I arrived, this image of Tahiti was supported by her currency. There can't be too many currencies in the world which have surprised and pleased me than the CFP Franc (French colonies of the Pacific). I see a Tahitian beauty with a tiare flower behind her ear. Palm trees, Polynesian thatched huts, mysterious wooden carvings and that was just the CFP1000 note. ^[16]

I caught 'Le Truck' into downtown Papeete. This is the local bus service, frequent, cheap and cheerful. They are battered trucks, the chassis made up of two parallel padded benches, permanently opened windows, low metal ceiling, and a lack of shock absorbers. They are certainly not made for comfort but for price and practicality. I was able to observe some of the locals close up, as we bounced along into town. It was fortunate the windows were down as the women were smoking like chimneys. They can't afford those expensive imported brands, so the locals roll their won cigarettes. Some of the results looked like joints.

It was the beauty of the Tahitian girls which encouraged people like Gauguin, Robert Louis Stevenson, Captain James Cook and Marlin Brando to visit and linger amongst these islands. Unfortunately I didn't see too many girls worthy of jumping ship over. Anyway, I had a plane to catch. For the early explorers and visitors, it may have helped if they had been on the high seas for six months. The girls I did see fell into two categories – the minority were gorgeous, and the majority were plump and not to be messed with. Their long, dark hair and flowers behind the ears did help though. I tried tuning into the Tahitian language, a musical combination of vowels and words that seemed familiar. It reminded me of the Maori language. I believe the two are related. ^[17]



I have always wanted to visit Tahiti, and my brief, 18 hour visit only managed to whet my appetite. I wasn't put off by the unfriendly restaurant staff, but enjoyed the smells, and the laid back South Pacific attitude which I knew so well, having had past business dealings in New Zealand.

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote "We are in heaven here". That is very true - the azure sea, the beautiful bougainvillea, camellia, orchids, Jasmin and the national flower tiare. I wasn't put off by the expense. Things were not as expensive as I had expected, but pricey enough. This is because the islands export little and the government slaps large import taxes on most consumables, along with the extra cost of shipping to this remote part of the Pacific Ocean. If Gauguin was disappointed in 1891 at what little remained of Tahitian native art and culture, he would be heartbroken now. Tacky gifts (I particularly hate those souvenirs covered by small, glued shells – what is the purpose of that?) dominated the souvenir shops, but there must be a demand otherwise they wouldn't be made.

The tourist wave hasn't all been bad though. When Captain Cook arrived in June 1769 to follow the transit of Venus across the sun, he introduced watermelons, oranges, limes and lemons to the islands. For the tourist this is a good thing. It saves his poolside cocktail costing an extra dollar due to imported citrus slices in his glass. Tahiti has exported one thing to the English speaking world – the word taboo. I love Tahiti and I'm sad to be leaving so quickly.

46hr 21min / 0945 GMT (Tue) / 2345 LT (Mon)

I was the first passenger to arrive at Faa'a airport, but was joined ten minutes later by the first of the Japanese travellers. They were all travelling first or business class. I recognised some from the lunch and dinner at the Maeva Beach Resort.

A rather bubbly check-in gent gave me my forward window seat all the way through to Paris, or so he claimed. He studied my Tokyo-Paris ticket coupon and disappeared behind a partition for five minutes. I hoped he was checking with a supervisor about the onward connection from Paris.

I have just calculated the next 28 hours of my life will be on the next aircraft as it operates Papeete-Tokyo-Paris. If the check-in clerk's word is good, I will have the row of seats to myself. That's my travel greed kicking in again. This route is very popular with Japanese visitors. Over 90% of the passengers were Japanese. Even the airport announcements were made in Japanese, then French, then English.

48hr 56min / 1221 GMT (Tue) / 0221 LT (Tue)

Our aircraft lurches backwards slightly, and I realise the next 28 hours are in the hands of Air France and completely out of my control. No sense in worrying about missed Paris connections. I will have plenty of time to do that later.

49hr 13min / 1237 GMT (Tue) / 0237 LT (Tue)

Our flight takes off, and I reluctantly leave beautiful Tahiti behind. I feel I need to return. I saw a curious effect which had me concerned for a while. There appeared to be a torrent of rain falling in front of the left wing. The landing light was piercing what looked like a sudden downpour, but it wasn't rain. The water was streaming out from the front of the wing. I was later to discover this was called a condensation cloud, and it is more common when there is water vapour in the atmosphere. This was the same effect when I was opening my cans of in-flight drink. The tiny cloud of condensation sprays out with the pressure difference, lightly spraying the seatback in front of me, or on occasions, the front of my shirt.

On this flight the video navigation maps were in English, French and Japanese, and this appeared to be a very short flight. 15 minutes into the flight, the 'Distance to Destination' read just 90 miles. The crew had better get moving with the in-flight meal.

When the meal did arrive, it consisted of a choice of lamb or chicken, both with rice to satisfy the Japanese contingency on board, and also Japanese tea if required. It was an interesting selection on offer, considering the local time in Tahiti was 3am. I chose the lamb and a bad choice it was too, being very fatty and stringy. There were also veins in the meat...

55hr 07min / 1831 GMT / in transit

I am wide awake. It is sunrise outside, but these poor passengers around me don't deserve the equivalent of a 3.30am wake-up. I'll keep the window blind down. I will try and stay awake until we have left Tokyo otherwise the jet-lag which has been following me will catch up and bite me hard.

57hr 42min / 2108 GMT / in transit

It's just gone 6am Tokyo time and people are beginning to stir. A few reading lights are on, and every now and again someone lifts a window blind to flood the cabin in bright morning light. This causes more people to stir. A short time ago, I thought I smelled breakfast being prepared. I feel that's all I've done on this journey – eat. This will be Air France meal number seven and although the quality and quantity has generally been good, you do start to tire of this cuisine. What I would do at this moment for a bowl of muesli and ice cold milk for breakfast.

It appears when we were asleep as we all crossed the international dateline and lost a day. Tuesday the 3rd December didn't really exist for me, being in transit for the duration. It's now Wednesday the 4th.

58hr 26min / 2150 GMT / in transit

It's suddenly all lights on, window blinds up and immediately the breakfast is being served. This time it's pressed lamb, rice mixed with ham, corn with peas and salad with cold chicken in a red onion sauce, and melon.

60hr 17min / 2340 GMT (Tue) / 0840 LT (Wed)

I spotted two ships far below and within minutes the Japanese coast appeared, followed by the urban sprawl of greater Tokyo. South of Tokyo there were miles upon miles of empty beach, but then it wasn't even 9am, so that might help explain things.

We flew along the coastal plain, descending as we went. I could see individual cars, and then I noticed the smog, which Tokyo is infamous for. There were red and White electricity pylons, factories and farms, villages and forests. The late autumnal colours were still visible between the green pine trees. Then we touched down at Tokyo Narita airport with a bump.

60hr 27min / 2351 GMT (Tue) / 0851 LT (Wed)

I am sitting at transit gate 46 after speaking to a very helpful Mr. Kobayashi. I hate being paged at airports. He has re-booked my Paris-Edinburgh flight for Thursday morning and instructed me to see Air France on arrival at CDG regarding my complimentary overnight accommodation. I don't particularly want to stay in Paris, despite the generosity of Air France. I just want to get back to the UK, and preferably back to Scotland, within 80 hours.

The Japanese don't like giving out bad news, and I could tell Mr Kobayashi had bad news for me. My previous seat had been allocated to someone else, and I could only have an aisle seat in the smoking section. At least there is a chance, being an inside aisle seat, that the two centre seats may be free. I'm not keen on cigarette smoke, so this may be the worst flight of all on this journey. ^[18]

I'm still sitting at gate 46, next to the Air France cabin crew. I am observing the passengers slowly forming an impatient line from the desk. They appear to be mainly Japanese, which means those who smoke, may smoke heavily. I was really looking forward to a window seat on this flight. We should be flying over land most of the way to Paris, in daylight.

The Japanese staff manning the gate are starting to look uncomfortable. They are glancing at their watches, whispering to each other or fidgeting. Delays are something which I thought were rare in Japan, and from the actions of the gate staff, something's possibly going on. Otherwise, I'm just imagining possible delays that aren't there. It is 09:43 and AF271 is due to leave in 7 minutes. Somehow I don't think so.

Firstly, an announcement is made in Japanese and signs of frustration from the Japanese passengers, then an announcement in French. A few French passengers start murmuring. There is finally an announcement in English – boarding in seven minutes. The Japanese woman making the announcement was *very* apologetic for the delay. Three minutes later there is another announcement and another announcer with another sincere apology. I love the Japanese!

61hr 51min / 0115 GMT (Wed) / 1015 LT (Wed)

Our aircraft nudges backwards. The two centre seats are indeed free, so this flight, the longest sector of the entire journey, may not be so bad after all. The safety video, I must admit, is becoming a little boring. Although my mind tends to wander now, I still look for the nearest emergency exit ("which may be behind you"). While ascending to cruising altitude, the pilot apologises for the delay due to a hydraulic problem.

69hr 01min / 0825 GMT (Wed) / in transit

I was awakened by the general noise in the plane. Breakfast was being served, causing most people to stir from their sleep. I say it is breakfast, but for those passengers on Japanese time, it is dinner. For me, it is breakfast – mushrooms, fish and rice. General fatigue and relying on airline food has started to take its toll. I only picked at the meal because the novelty of onboard cuisine has well and truly worn off.

73hr 27min / 1251 GMT / in transit

My feet are quite swollen, due to the lack of exercise on board these flights. Every other sector on this journey has been relatively swell-free, but on this Tokyo-Paris sector, I have slept a fair bit, resulting in less movement and being able to exercise my feet.

Our approach into Paris was aborted, and we will try again. Unfortunately I could not understand the reason, due to the heavy French accent of the pilot. This also delays my arrival into CDG, and gives me less time to decide my next move once my feet are on the ground.

74hr 32min / 1356 GMT / 1456 LT

We touched down at CDG. At least I made it around the world Paris-to-Paris in 72½ hours, originally the expected time to fly Edinburgh-to-Edinburgh. I now have 5½ hours to get to the UK, and in particular across the border into Scotland. I think my target is doomed, but I mustn't give up, because miracles do happen.

75hr 29min / 1433 GMT / 1533 LT

It has been less than an hour since touchdown. I spoke to a man at the Air France ticket counter who told me there was a 1735 flight to Edinburgh, but my ticket was non-endorsable to this flight, so the Ibis Hotel had been booked for me, due to the compulsory overnight stay in Paris. I showed him my Air France letter which helped a little. Due to my determination to get back to Scotland tonight, he suggested I speak to the supervisor at terminal 2B.

The lady there was Scottish, and was probably the first person who I met who could really grasp what I was attempting. I don't think the French are on the same wavelength as the eccentric British. My ticket couldn't be changed over to the 1735 Edinburgh Flight, as this was operated by British Midland,^[19] despite being a joint service. I could have flown to London, but after three nights on a plane, I didn't fancy another overnight journey to Glasgow by bus. While pondering my next move, she suggested the 1605 Air France flight to Manchester – 28 minutes before departure! From Manchester Airport I could catch a train to Scotland. Could I make it?

75hr 49min / 1513 GMT / 1613 LT

We are sitting on a taxiway somewhere in the sprawling grounds of Charles de Gaulle airport. I am looking for a sign of anything happening outside, but we are not moving. All I can see is my tired, anxious reflection in the glass. Four minutes later we were in the air.

Descending into Manchester, just above the clouds, a glorious yellow, orange, red and purple sunset was setting the clouds on fire. It seemed a fitting end to this journey, but it wasn't completely over. I still had a target to meet, and a race to win against my stopwatch.

76hr 48min / 1611 GMT

We made it. The aircraft tyres smoke as they hit Manchester airport's runway.

77hr 01min / 1625 GMT

I exit the airport terminal building. I have travelled from Edinburgh to Manchester in 77 hours. Now I have just three hours to reach Scotland.

77hr 10min / 1634 GMT

I'm sitting in a train bound for Windermere at Manchester Airport. There seemed to have been some confusion with the passengers. Apparently the train should have been a through service to Glasgow Central, but this was cancelled. I would have to catch this regional train to Bolton and change there. At least this was better than waiting for the 2am bus. The train will cost me £30.90, but I don't really mind. I will be in my own bed tonight, and I can't wait.

I can feel a cold coming on. I read the circulation of air on an aircraft also circulates germs. One passenger with a cold can, in theory, infect everyone on board. I have been on flights for three days. Who knows what bugs I have caught? My head is numb, possibly due to the continued pressurisation and depressurisation. My left ear is partly blocked on descents due to my slight cold. My stomach is full of airline food and I am constipated. I feel very dirty and my ears are buzzing from three days of aircraft engines. I am fatigued by not jet-lagged.

77hr 21min / 1645 GMT

The train rolls out of Manchester Airport station. I dearly would like to reach Gretna Green, on the Scottish side of the border, inside the 80 hour deadline. The train will take approximately 4½ hours to reach Glasgow Central, and I have 2 hours 39 minutes to play with. There's not much space for error. In fact I wish I had a TV documentary crew with me. This is action-packed stuff, and the adrenalin is pumping.

We are now approaching Bolton, and I contemplate my fight to escape from this very crowded train. I have one of three backpacking girls sitting next to me. She looks tired after a long day's travelling. I wonder whether I look as if I have been travelling non-stop for three days, circumnavigating the globe. My thoughts are with home, and a comfortable bed. If everything goes according to plan from now on, I should be home by 10pm.

There is confusion at Bolton. Our Windermere train has just departed from the platform, and is followed immediately by a train with an Edinburgh destination board, and not Glasgow. The platform is busy, the air is cold. I just want to go home. It appears the wrong destination is on the front of the train. I hope the train driver knows.

78hr 05min / 1728 GMT

We're on our way. Two hours to reach the border. I think I will miss out by around ten minutes. I hear a Scottish woman sitting at the front of the car "I've been travelling since quarter past four and I'm exhausted." I want to tap her on the shoulder and tell her something to put her problem into perspective, but I don't.

Our train is heading for Penrith, then Carlisle then the border. I have calculated I have only 35 minutes left. This is going to be ridiculously close.

79hr 43min / 1906 GMT

I've looked at my stopwatch and frowned. We have just left Penrith, and are now heading for Carlisle, the next stop. I guess the 80 hour mark will be reached at Carlisle. The driver might put the foot down, or whatever the train driver equivalent is, but I have resigned myself to failure. This is especially frustrating because I do not have a timetable. If I did have one, I would have known at Manchester airport whether I had a chance of succeeding or not.

79hr 56min / 1919 GMT

We crawl into Carlisle. It is now a case of how much of a deficit I will record until Gretna Green is reached. The man across the aisle has just poured himself a glass of McEwans Export. The station attendant has blown his whistle and as we accelerate out of Carlisle station the stopwatch has reached **80hr 00min**. It isn't a great loss. I gave it a go and failed, but how close I was! We eventually sped through Gretna Green at 1933 GMT, **80 hours and 10 minutes** after checking in at Edinburgh airport.

I immediately start on a post mortem. Where could I have made up time? Edinburgh! I was the third passenger to check-in. I wanted a few photographs taken, but didn't want to disturb staff when they were busy, or hold up a line of potential passengers, so I checked in very early. If only I had checked in fifteen minutes later, and started my stopwatch then. It doesn't really matter though. No one would have guessed what lay ahead of me. At least I have proven one thing – the world is really round.

OBSERVATIONS (1996):

Cabin pressure diminishes the sense of taste, so food, usually strongly flavoured, tastes quite bland. Too much salt hydrates, garlic could be unpleasant on long-haul flights, cabbage has a lingering smell, and long-haul hell could take place when baked beans are consumed. Airlines are heading away from heavy puddings and excessive alcohol; they are offering more fruit and easily digestible foods, pastas and vegetable-based dishes. Indian and oriental meals are becoming increasingly popular. They travel well.

I have thought for a number of years that airline travel makes your finger nails grow faster. I trimmed my nails before the journey, and they required another trim when I returned home – after just three days. Friends have suggested heat makes your hair grow, and with hair and nails being made from keratin, heat should affect both nails and hair. There's no scientific evidence to support heat has any effect on growth. Some claim less oxygen can slow hair growth, so being on an aircraft, in theory, should show down the growth, and not speed it up. I think there's more research required here.

Jet-lag aware travellers suggest putting your watch forward or backwards to the time of your destination, to prepare the mind and body. As my destination was my origin, my watch stayed on GMT. The non-flying hours of the journey (airport transits) corresponded with normal woken hours in the UK, so by sleeping on the plane I managed to avoid jet-lag. I did suffer from some fatigue, but that was to be expected.

Due to the reduced air pressure in the aircraft cabin, there is less oxygen. A reduction in oxygen in the bloodstream apparently adds to the jet-lag effect. The caffeine in tea and coffee will increase your heartbeat rate. Would the consumption of tea and coffee help fight off the effects of jet-lag? Something to be explored in the future?

Time became an obsession with me. Not only did I have a stopwatch, but my right wristwatch was on GMT so I knew when to sleep and when to stay awake, in an attempt to avoid jet-lag. My left wristwatch was on the time of my next destination, so I knew what time to expect and so I knew how long I had on the plane for sleeping etc. I was trying to convince my brain I was still in the UK. Our circadian rhythm runs on 25 hour periods. Modern society insists on a 24 hour period. The airlines do try and convert your rhythm by serving meals as they should be, based on your origin or destination. This caused some interesting scenarios, such as a main meal for breakfast.

UPDATE (2018):

[1] At the time Air France flew around the world. Sadly, no one airline does such a journey today. You can certainly do such journeys by changing carriers within the same alliance, but not with one single airline. The problem today with this route is the Papeete-Tokyo leg, now only operated by Air Tahiti Nui.

[2] This time-saving trick still works, but Edinburgh now has an efficient tram operating from the city centre to the airport.

[3] Check-in is still required, especially if you have luggage, but today, with just hand luggage, online check-in would be expected from 24 hours before departure

- [4] Flight coupons are no longer issued. Speak to travel agents and airline staff from this era, and they will reminisce about the good old days of the administration required in keeping tickets accounted for and how the red carbon on the back of each coupon would stain your hands and clothes. Paper tickets were easy to revalidate and (ehem..) amend without airline approval. Airlines now use e-tickets, with many providing the option of bar-codes on phones.
- [5] Servisair was an aircraft ground handling company which was acquired and merged into Swissport in 2014.
- [6] The front of the airport terminal airport has been revamped with a more attractive corporate logo.
- [7] 'Ville de Lyon' is no longer part of the Air France fleet, as their oldest aircraft in service is 13 years of age.
- [8] British Airways no longer operate Boeing 757 aircraft.
- [9] These two bridges were joined in 2017 by a second road bridge called the Queensferry crossing. The structure is a three-tower cable-stayed bridge, with an overall length of 1.7 miles/2.7km.
- [10] This notorious bottleneck was replaced with a larger roundabout and fly-under.
- [11] Air France flights Edinburgh-Paris and Paris-Los Angeles now use Terminal 2 at CDG.
- [12] Moving Map Systems were still a novelty in 1996. Today most long haul flights offer this as part of their in-flight entertainment system.
- [13] Most modern, long haul aircraft now offer a choice of viewing channels, with individual screen in the seat back in front of you. In 1996 it was communal viewing, whether you wanted to watch pond life and dung beetles or not.
- [14] The entire journey was made on a GB passport with no visas required. Today, an ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorization) would be required to allow a transit at LAX under the Visa waiver Program. Air France still operates the Paris-(LAX)-Papeete route, along with Air Tahiti Nui. Air New Zealand operates the Heathrow-(LAX)-Auckland route. ESTA's are now required for transits on US soil.
- [15] French underground testing in the South Pacific ended in 1996, but the fear of radioactivity lasted for years.
- [16] These attractive bank notes were withdrawn from circulation in 2014.
- [17] Both are part of the Tahitic group of Polynesian dialects.
- [18] Smoking was banned from all international airlines by the late 1990's.
- [19] British Midland was a domestic and short-haul carrier based in the UK. The airline became BMI in 2001, acquired by British Airways in 2012.