

EUROPE 2023



4 months | 6 countries | 8 house swaps | 10 journey legs

The Train to Barcelona

We don't typically travel by train, so we were eagerly anticipating the 6-hour journey from Marseille to Barcelona. However, it turned out to be quite a frustrating experience, though not due to the train ride itself, but rather two other aspects of our day that caused us significant stress.

We woke up on time, did some last-minute cleaning, bid farewell to our host, and drove slowly to the Marseille airport to return our rental car. We had plenty of time to spare since the car needed to be returned by 1pm. My plan was to drive to the drop-off point, set the location on the GPS, leave our bulky bags with Heather at the railway station, return the car, and then ride my bike back to the railway station. But, alas, things didn't go as planned!

The issue was that I had mistakenly identified the wrong railway station. The train to Barcelona actually departed from Sant Charles, not the one adjacent to the airport. Oops! Heather quickly figured out that we could have taken a bus, but unfortunately, buses didn't allow our sort of cumbersome bike bags on board. So, we hailed a cab to get to the correct station and because it took only 30mins we still found ourselves with several hours to kill before our train departed at 3:30 pm.

The station did have a waiting area with free Wi-Fi, but the seats were uncomfortable. The crush of people was palpable.

Just as we were about to board the train, we received an email informing us that our house swap in Barcelona had to be cancelled. The previous guests had caused a severe sewage blockage, resulting in a flood on the top floor, and the stench was unbearable. Talk about adding to our stress!

However, after a frantic hour on the train, exploring various options, The Home Exchange website came to our rescue. They sent out a last-minute SOS to homes in the vicinity of our intended exchange, and miraculously, we received three offers, one of which we accepted. Suddenly, the train journey took on a more relaxing tone as we now had a home to go to, just a couple of blocks away in the same neighbourhood. What a relief!

Now, our next challenge is to locate our hotel for the night when we arrive late at the Barcelona station.

