

Simplified Speech #135 – Suzanne’s trip to France

Episode description

In this episode, Suzanne tells us about her experience of flying internationally during the pandemic, which didn’t go as smoothly as planned. If you are thinking about taking a trip abroad, listen to this episode to get some useful tips on how to avoid problems at the airport.

The Simplified Speech series is the perfect way to learn from native speakers who use easy-to-understand English. In this study guide, there are detailed expressions to explain the more difficult words and phrases you hear, with examples to improve your understanding.

Fun fact

Did you know that there is a rule to make sure that pilots and their copilots don’t eat the same meal before a flight? This is so that if one of the pilots were to become ill due to food poisoning, the other could take over.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Travel bug
- To scratch an itch
- Gee
- Hours on end
- Hubbub
- A piece of cake



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone, my name is Andrew.

Suzanne: Hey, guys. I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Hey there, everyone. Welcome back to Culips. You're listening to Simplified Speech, which is our series for English language learners that features clear, natural, and easy-to-understand English conversations about interesting topics. And joining me today is my cohost, Suzanne. Hello there, Suzanne. How's it going?

Suzanne: Hi, Andrew. Hey, everyone. Good, it's good. How about you? How's it going?

Andrew: I'm doing pretty well, Sue. But you know, lately, I've been feeling the **travel bug**. It feels like it's been eons since I visited anywhere.

Suzanne: Yes, I know what you mean, Andrew. And I think a lot of people can relate to that, right?

Andrew: Yeah, but not you, Suzanne. I don't think you can relate.

Suzanne: Yeah, I mean, I know how you feel. But, you know, I was lucky enough to get **to scratch that itch** recently, because for the first time in a long time, I was able to take a trip from Montreal all the way to France.

Andrew: Yeah, that's so great. I'm happy that you were able to take that trip. And slowly it seems like the world is kind of returning back to normal.

Suzanne: Yeah, yeah. Andrew, if it's all right with you, I thought we could maybe talk about my trip to France today.

Andrew: Yeah, that sounds good to me. And I'd be happy to talk about your trip and hear all about it, as I'm sure our listeners would be, as well. But before we get into it, let's tell everyone about the study guide for this episode.

Suzanne: Right. Yes, very important. So, you guys, we've made a study guide for this episode that includes a full transcript, a comprehension quiz, and detailed explanations of the difficult expressions and vocabulary you'll hear Andrew and I use in this conversation.

Andrew: That's right. Plus, you can download the study guide in a PDF file and print it off. Or you can view a mobile-friendly version that looks great on smartphones or tablets or computers. So to access the study guide, everyone, you just need to visit our website, Culips.com, and sign up and become a Culips member.

Now, we also wanted to give a shout-out to one of our listeners from Saudi Arabia named Zah, who left us a five-star rating and a very kind review on Apple Podcasts. Zah wrote, "Hi everyone, I want to say thank you for this podcast. I've been listening for a month and I feel like my English is getting better and my listening is improving. Thank you very much for this podcast." And, Zah, thank you for writing that awesome review.

Suzanne: Yes, thank you, Zah, for the great review. We're happy you found us. Welcome to the Culips community. Listeners, don't forget that you can help other English learners from around the world connect and learn English with us by liking, subscribing, rating, and reviewing us on your favourite podcast app or service.

Andrew: All right, Suzanne, so let's get into it. And why don't we start with a very basic question. And that question is out of all the places that you could visit in the world, why did you choose to go to France recently?

Suzanne: That's a really good question, Andrew. Well, my fiancé, Olivier, is from France and his family lives there. And we hadn't seen them in, you know, almost two and a half years, actually. So a little bit more than the duration of the recent pandemic. So we decided that it was time to go see our family. And, I think we'll talk about this in another episode, but we also had quite a few tasks on our list to cross off regarding our wedding planning, because our wedding is going to be in that same town where Olivier is from in France. So we had a lot to do for the wedding and a lot of people to see.

Andrew: Wow, so it sounds like you had a pretty busy time over there in France, seeing friends and family and relatives and also planning for a wedding. Suzanne, how long were you gone for? How long was your trip?

Suzanne: We were there for about 2 weeks, actually, 2 weeks.

Andrew: Two weeks. And what's it like travelling during the pandemic? It seems like things are kind of winding down with the pandemic in certain places in the world. Unfortunately, here in South Korea, we still have some restrictions in place. But I'm not sure if those restrictions are in place in France, as well. Maybe you could tell us about what it's like to travel these days?

Suzanne: Yeah, it's definitely different and a little bit confusing and frustrating, because, like you said, different countries have different regulations and rules. And, lately, many of the plane tickets contain layovers or stopovers. So this means you don't have access to direct flights. You have to usually make one or two stops, maybe even in another city or a different country. The problem with that is that whenever you are going to your destination country, you might check the rules, regulations regarding COVID and travel. But you also need to check the rules and regulations for your stopover or layover country. And this is where we kind of got into trouble.

Andrew: Oh, no. What happened?

Suzanne: We booked these flights about 2 months in advance, before we were going to fly. And we booked it with a Portuguese airline. And the day after we booked our flights, Portugal changed their regulations to requiring a COVID test, a PCR test, to be exact. So this is the one where they swab your nose and check even a little bit more profoundly. It's a more accurate COVID test.

So they changed their rules the day after we booked our flight. So we didn't know that these rules changed. And we thought that the airline would have informed us if there was a change in plan. But apparently they did not.

So we didn't need a test to go to France. As long as we were vaccinated, we were fine. Now, my partner is from the European Union, he's from France. So he was able to acquire what's called a *passe sanitaire de l'Union européenne*. So it's like the European Union sanitary pass. So it's like the vaccine pass for the whole EU. So he was able to acquire that quickly. I applied, but because I'm not from the EU, I'm an American with a Canadian permanent residency, I don't have quick access to that kind of pass. If I did, I wouldn't have to have a test. My vaccine proof would be enough. But that wasn't the case. So we get to the airport with plenty of time for our flight on a Friday night. We usually fly at night when we go to Europe. This way we can kind of sleep all night and then wake up and it's the morning already.

Andrew: Sure. Good idea.

Suzanne: Yeah. And our jet lag is a little bit minimized in that case. So we get there, we're in line. And, again, even there, nobody says anything. Nobody in line, you know, sometimes they ask questions, just making sure you have your passport, just making sure you have this document that you need, just everyone have their test results available. Nope. They didn't say that. Nothing.

And what's even worse is that apparently there is a place in the airport where you can test. They have testing sites in the Canadian airports. However, they close at a certain time. Well, you'd think that even with this information, they may even do like a last call for tests, maybe 20 minutes before the, you know, testing site would close, which we were there for. We were there for sure during that period.



Well, the testing sites close at 8 pm. And it was now 8:05 and we get to the window and the attendant asks us, "Where are your COVID tests?" And we look at each other and we look back at her and we're like, "What? What COVID tests. We're going to France, we don't need COVID tests." And she's like, "You do to get on the plane to Portugal." And so Olivier says, "Well, I have this." And she said, "Oh, OK, you're fine, because you have the *passee sanitaire* for the European Union. How about you?" And I said, "No, but I have my vaccine proof. I don't know what else I can give you." And she's like, "No, you need a test." And we said, "Well, we didn't know that, nobody told us." And she said, "Well, there is a place you could go, but it's too late. They just closed." Like, **gee**, thanks. So glad that you warned us for, like, 10 minutes ago, that would have been great information. So we can't get on the flight.

Andrew: Oh my gosh.

Suzanne: Now, we have to book our flight to the next available flight, which is 2 days later, Sunday night, which means we have to rebook all of these wedding appointments that we had booked for Monday, because now we weren't going to make it to those appointments. And they have to rebook our flight. And guess what? It costs 950 extra dollars.

Andrew: Per person?

Suzanne: No, this was total, and they quote, unquote took some charges off to be nice.

Andrew: Oh my gosh.

Suzanne: So we had to pay an extra \$950 right there. And, you know, our original tickets aren't cheap, either. So, you know, that's like, on top of our already expensive flights, because during this COVID period, it's already expensive.

Andrew: And it's not like these flights were direct, right? You still had to do the indirect route to Portugal and then to France.

Suzanne: Exactly. So gonna be like a 12-hour, you know, whatever, flight.

Andrew: Right.

Suzanne: With waiting and everything. Not only that, but now we have to go and get a test. And here in Canada, for flying, for travel, you have to pay for a test. It can be between \$150 to \$300. So we changed the flight.

Also, at this time, the woman said, oh, by the way, when we were checking our luggage, she said, "Well, you can take this back with you and bring it back on Sunday. But just so you know, you have a bag each included in your check in." We're like, oh, great, so we can maybe bring two suitcases, because they're free instead of just one, because we thought we would have to pay, so that was a plus.

OK, so we go back home. I got my COVID test, negative. All right, we're all set. We go back to the airport on Sunday and we fly to France. I just want to say this one little thing about the way home. On the way home, when we're checking in in France to come back, we both had COVID tests because also we needed to get COVID tests for Canada. Because to return to Canada, no matter what, you need a COVID test. So to fly into Canada, you need to have your vaccine passport, vaccine proof, and a COVID negative test to get on the plane.

So we had that already, but when we got to the check-in, the woman said, "OK, that will be €100 per suitcase." And we said, "I'm sorry, what?" And she said, "Yup, it's €100." Not dollars Canadian, not dollars US, euros per bag, not total. Usually it's like \$50, maybe, a bag, €100 per bag. We said, "But they were free on the way here. We would never have taken two bags that cost €100." Like, that's insane. And she's like, "I'm sorry, but you're supposed to pay for it." So this ticket that was kind of like a good deal at first, cost us an extra maybe 1200, 1300 Canadian plus COVID tests, you know?

Andrew: It's like the price of an additional plane ticket.

Suzanne: Yup. Or, like, one and a half I would even say. I would just say travel at your own risk. Like, know that there may be extra costs incurred and really check every day because the, because the regulations change so quickly without, you know, announcement. You might need to really research where you're going to be landing, even if it's for a couple-hour layover, you may need to get a test. So, lesson learned, Andrew, lesson learned. Portugal, who knew they had such rules?

Andrew: Wow. So at the top of the episode, I said that I was happy that the pandemic seems to be winding down and the world's opening up. And it's true, I am happy about these things. But it still sounds like it's not too easy to travel from place to place. Although we can do it, there are a lot of hoops that you need to jump through in regard to getting tests and having your vaccination records. And as you mentioned, also, there's not as many flights available, as well. So you have to take these indirect routes to get places. So it sounds like it's quite complicated to travel these days.

Suzanne: It is complicated. And you really have to do extra work, because it's not like there are general rules, right? Like, you know, when you go to the airport that you have to go through security and that you can't have liquids. Now we know that. We don't bring bottles of water that are full through security. But in each country now, there are different regulations. And so it can be so confusing to have this paperwork for this layover. And if you have two stops, then you might need to even have three different, you know, dossiers or three different groups of information for your travel.

Plus, you have to wear a mask the whole time. Usually, N95 masks are the best way to go, because they're going to offer you the most protection, because some flights are really full. They don't adhere to or obey the rules of social distancing. So you might want to double mask or have an N95 mask. And when you wear that for **hours and hours on end**, it can get really, really, really annoying and uncomfortable. So that's also something to think about.

Andrew: It almost reminds me of some of the new rules and regulations that were put in place after 9/11, right? And I remember travelling, you know, now it seems like most of the rules are standardized across every country. But for a while there, that wasn't the case. And, you know, I never knew in this country, do I have to take off my belt? In this country, do I have to take off my shoes? In this country, can I have a water bottle or not have a water bottle? It was kind of different for every place. And it just made for a lot of confusion when going through airport security. And so maybe it's going to be the same situation here for the next year or two until things get settled and return back to normal.

But now hearing your story Suzanne, I'm a little bit apprehensive about travelling. Maybe I'll wait a little bit longer before I go on any international trip.

Suzanne: Well, I don't mean to, you know, discourage you because the actual trip, once we were there, everything was really beautiful. The countryside is gorgeous. There are vineyards, and we were by the ocean, this, I should say the Mediterranean Sea. So we saw such beautiful countryside. We saw the Mediterranean, and we saw the Pyrenees. So it was gorgeous and beautiful just to be in a different culture and a different environment and different air.

It just felt good eating different kinds of seafood and ceviche and there is a big Spanish influence because it's very close to Spain and Barcelona. It's the Catalan region of France. So we had some delicious food and really enjoyed a lot of meals and outings, because we had our vaccine proof. And eventually I did receive my European Union *passe sanitaire* so I was able to move freely throughout all of the restaurants and bars. So that was good. You know, and seeing your family.

So all in all, it was a beautiful trip. And I was really grateful to get out of Canada for a moment. But it does take work, right? It does take research and patience. And I would say a sense of calm to get through all of that travel **hubbub**.

Andrew: Well, it's a good warning for all of our listeners who are thinking about doing an international trip. Although we can travel again to many different places around the world, thank God those travel restrictions are being eased a lot, it's still maybe not **a piece of cake** to visit other international countries yet.

Personally, I'm planning, hopefully, to visit Canada in the summer of 2022. So it's a little way away from now. But I'm hoping by that time things will have opened up quite a bit and it won't be as difficult for me then, Suzanne, as it was for you when you visited France.

Suzanne: Yeah. Oh, I hope I get to see you.

Andrew: Yeah, we'll have to plan a meeting and hang out, it's been a while. I would love to get to Montreal when I visit. There's no better place than Montreal in the summer.

Suzanne: This is true.

Andrew: Well, I think we'll wrap this episode up here. So thanks again for listening.

Guys, if you like listening to Culips and learn a lot with us and find Culips helpful for improving your English language skills, then we would love it if you could support us. There are many ways that you can do that. The best way is by signing up and becoming a Culips member on our website, Culips.com. And when you're a member, you get access to a lot of awesome tools that we've developed to help you become better at English, faster. For all of the details, just visit the website, Culips.com. But that's not the only thing you can do to support us. You could also follow us on social media, like YouTube and Instagram. You could tell your friends who are learning English to check us out. Or you could leave us a five-star rating and review and subscribe on your favourite podcast app.

If you want to get in touch with us, our email address is contact@Culips.com. And we'd love to hear from you. That's it for us for now, but we'll be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Suzanne: Bye, guys.

Detailed Explanations

Travel bug

Noun

If you have the **travel bug**, this means you have a strong urge or desire to travel. **Travel bug** has a very similar meaning to the word wanderlust.

You may say that a person with the **travel bug** is addicted to travelling and excited to discover new places in foreign countries, and once they visit one new place they are desperate to travel more. The word bug is used to describe an illness that isn't too serious but is infectious, like a common cold. As such, having the **travel bug** can be contagious, as the desire to travel is irresistible and easy to catch. Therefore, we can also say that someone has caught the **travel bug**, which usually happens when travelling to a new place increases your desire to travel more.

Travel bug is also used to describe a metaphorical bug that has bitten you and infected you with the desire to travel. Similarly, the word lovebug describes someone who is so full of love and is figuratively infected by love! For example, someone in a new relationship might say, "I'm so in love with her, I think I've been bitten by the lovebug!"

Here's one more example with **travel bug**:

Antonio: I have saved up enough money to travel to Japan this year, but I'd also like to visit other countries in Asia.

Marcus: If you really want to travel, why don't you find a job while you're away so that you can stay longer?

Antonio: You see, I don't want to stay in one place. I just want to keep travelling and see as much as possible!

Marcus: It sounds like you've **caught the travel bug**.

Antonio: I definitely have! It's all I think about, and I've been planning this trip for over a year now.

Marcus: Have you thought about selling all of your possessions and using that money to travel?

Antonio: Fantastic idea! I'll definitely get good money for my car, and that will pay for at least another few flights.

To scratch an itch

Idiom

To scratch an itch is to satisfy a desire or urge to do something. This is often used to describe satisfying a desire to travel, so if you book a holiday you are **scratching the itch** to travel. As another example, someone who is extremely hungry goes to a restaurant and orders food to satisfy their need to eat something. Once the food arrives, they might say, “This food has **scratched my itch**,” meaning they have been wanting to eat for ages but now they have finally fulfilled their desire for food and satisfied their hunger.

When you feel an itch, it can be quite irritating and persistent and it doesn’t go away until you scratch it. Therefore, if you are constantly thinking about your urge to do something, it can feel like a craving that grows stronger the more time goes on. For example, if you have an itch to go to sleep, the longer you choose not to sleep, the worse the itch gets. You can only **scratch the itch** to sleep by going to bed.

Here are a couple more examples with **to scratch an itch**:

Patricia: I’ve handed in my notice and I’m leaving my job at the end of the week. I am scared, happy, and relieved—all at the same time!

Jean-Claude: Congratulations! Have you got another job lined up?

Patricia: I don’t have anything planned yet. All I know is that I want to be a dancer.

Jean-Claude: That’s so cool. You’ve been working at that office for years. What changed your mind?

Patricia: I’ve always loved dancing since I was a kid and I just need **to scratch that itch**.

Jean-Claude: Good for you. I hope you can make it work!

Fabian: This has been the longest week at work. I am dying for a drink.

Kiki: My week has been hell, too. Let’s go to the bar and we’ll **scratch that itch** together!

Fabian: Awesome! That’s just what I need.

Gee Slang

Gee is a noun used to express surprise or enthusiasm for something. This word is most commonly used in North America. Similar expressions to **gee** are **oh my goodness** or **wow**.

The word **gee** is an abbreviation of Jesus, which is also a commonly used word to express shock or anger. However, this can be considered as blasphemy in Christian culture.

In today's episode, Suzanne expresses her discontent when she says, "**Gee**, thanks" in response to the airport staff not notifying her that the COVID testing site was about to close. Therefore, **gee** can also be used to express frustration or annoyance.

Here are a couple more examples with **gee**:

Ángel: I had to go to the emergency room last night for a really bad cut. Look at it!

Maurizio: **Gee**, that looks nasty. I can see they gave you sutures.

Ángel: Getting those sutures was actually the most painful part of it all.

Maurizio: I hope it heals quickly!

Catherine: My boyfriend proposed to me. I said yes!

Hannibal: Congratulations! I'm so happy for the two of you.

Catherine: Thanks. Can you believe my engagement ring is a two-carat diamond?

Hannibal: **Gee**, that's insane, but it is beautiful. I can't begin to imagine how much that must have cost. You are a lucky girl!

Hours on end Phrase

When something happens for **hours on end**, the activity is continuous and it doesn't end for an extended period of time. If you say something has gone on for **hours on end**, you may also be emphasizing or exaggerating how long the activity went on for, because it felt never-ending at the time. For example, in today's episode Suzanne says that she wore her face mask for **hours and hours on end**, so although she did wear the mask for several hours during her flight, she is also implying that it was strenuous and lasted an excessive amount of time. As another example, if someone says they could talk on the phone for **hours on end**, this means they love talking so much that they could continue talking for a very long time.

The phrase **hours on end** can be used with any unit of time. For example, the pandemic has been going on for **years on end**, meaning it has continued for more than a year and it isn't ending. Another example is to say your cold has lasted for **weeks on end**, meaning you have been suffering from the illness for several weeks and you want to emphasize how long it's been affecting you.

Here are a few more examples with **hours on end**:

Semra: I need to phone my mom. She's been asking me to phone her all week.

Costas: Good luck with that. When I speak to my mom she talks for **hours on end** about absolutely nothing.

Semra: She's probably lonely and it's nice for her to speak to someone. Luckily my mom has my dad so she doesn't talk for too long. That's unless I mention gardening, then she really can talk for **hours on end**!

Jake: This weather is horrendous. I can't stand the rain.

Gulseli: Well, get ready for it to rain for **weeks on end**. There's a storm coming our way.

Jake: I think I'd better book myself a holiday out of here, in that case!

Freya: I just got back from vacation in the Maldives. The beaches were stunning. I've never seen anything like it.

Iris: I know! It made me so jealous seeing your photos while I was in the office.

Freya: I loved it so much! I just spent **days on end** sunbathing on the beach.

Hubbub

Noun

A **hubbub** is a situation or environment with a lot of noise, excitement, or movement. We can use the word **hubbub** to refer to a particularly busy place, such as an airport, where there is a lot of movement from crowds of passengers and noise from people and overhead announcements. As another example, there can be a **hubbub** in a café because of the combined noise of coffee machines buzzing and hissing, people chatting, and music playing in the background. An example of a **hubbub** where there is a lot of excitement would be movie fans on social media posting about their excitement for a new film release. Collectively, this forms a **hubbub** for the new movie.

Here are a couple more examples with **hubbub**:

Richard: Are you enjoying life in the countryside after you moved?

Clare: I love it! It's so peaceful and quiet. I don't know why I ever lived in the city.

Richard: That's great to hear. I couldn't live in the countryside, I love the city **hubbub** too much. There is so much to do, and so many places to visit and people to meet.

Clare: New York was just too busy for me. I don't miss hearing sirens outside my window every night, or the drunk college students partying next door.

Elizabeth: With all the **hubbub** over the Black Friday sales, I forgot to pick the kids up from school! I'm a terrible mom.

Duncan: You aren't a terrible mom. I think that's hilarious. People go crazy over a good bargain. Did you buy anything nice?

Elizabeth: I didn't get anything for myself. I only bought Christmas gifts for the kids. I managed to get some good deals, even though it was super busy. I even saw two teens fighting over the last Nintendo Switch in the store!

Duncan: Black Friday stresses me out for exactly that reason. Good for you for getting through it!

A piece of cake

Idiom

Something that is described as being **a piece of cake** is something that it is easy to do. The phrase is often used to reassure someone who is worried about doing a difficult task. For example, if someone were to say that they were worried about riding a bike, their friend would say to them, “It’s **a piece of cake** once you’ve learned how to do it.” **A piece of cake** also shows that someone feels confident and competent about doing a set task. As another example, if your eye doctor asks you to read letters off the screen and you have really good eyesight, you might say, “Sure, **piece of cake**.”

Here are a few more examples with **a piece of cake**:

Ruth: Hey, do you think you could help me hang this picture on the wall?

Domokos: Of course—let me do it. That’s **a piece of cake**.

Ruth: Thank you so much! I’ve really struggled to do it on my own.

Edie: Can you teach me how to play Frère Jacques on the piano?

Lars: Sure. Have you played piano before?

Edie: No, I haven’t.

Lars: Well, don’t worry. That song is **a piece of cake** to learn.

Ilona: How did your driving test go? Did you pass?

Stanzi: I did pass and I wasn’t nervous at all. Honestly, it was **a piece of cake**.

Ilona: Well done! I think driving just comes naturally to you. It took me three attempts to get my driver’s licence.

Quiz

1. When something is a piece of cake, it is _____.
 - a) delicious
 - b) easy
 - c) happy
 - d) difficult

2. Which of the following situations scratches the itch to travel?
 - a) buying a plane ticket to visit a new country
 - b) watching a travel documentary
 - c) reading a travel blog
 - d) dreaming about travelling

3. Which word goes in the blank? That meeting went on for hours on _____!
 - a) end
 - b) high
 - c) forever
 - d) ever

4. Which of these situations best describes a hubbub?
 - a) a peaceful and boring environment
 - b) a crazy and scary environment
 - c) a noisy and lively environment
 - d) a stressful and dangerous environment

5. If you have the travel bug, you _____.
 - a) love being on a plane
 - b) are ill on vacation
 - c) are homesick
 - d) are excited to plan and go on trips to new countries

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. Have you had any difficult experiences while travelling during the pandemic?
What were they?
2. Has the pandemic stopped you from travelling abroad? Why?
3. Which things are a piece of cake to you?
4. What do you like and dislike about the airport hubbub?
5. What activities could you happily do for hours on end?

Quiz Answers

1.b 2.a 3.a 4.c 5.d

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