

The Motoroamers

Ask us Anything



The Motoroamers



Ask us Anything!

About how we
navigate Schengen

THE MOTOROAMERS

April

This brand new monthly feature for 2025 is driven by 3 things; our desire to add value, a surge in followers and the fact that we are soon entering our 10th year travelling.

Over the years people have regularly got in touch with questions they have about their own travel and commitment to Vanlife. So we have decided to make this a public feature so that the whole community can benefit from the Q&A experience.

So on the first Sunday of every month, we will post a themed Ask us Anything where we invite our Facebook community to pose any burning questions about that theme or anything else come to think of it. We don't intend to show up as experts, although we do want to share our experiences from our full time travels since March 2016. This summary aims to bring together the questions and answers from our monthly Facebook post, so that our wider audience can benefit from the exercise. Feel free to add your questions in the comments.

The option for a visa in France is this a 6 month touring visa or do you need a residence? Do you need to spend the whole 6 months in France or can you use it to visit neighbouring Schengen countries? Have you investigated Digital Nomad Visas and found any benefits or flaws?

As we understand it, it is purely a one off tourist visa, (i.e you have to reapply once that visa has finished) and you do not need to be resident. You are allowed to have 90 days before and after the six months giving you virtually 12 months out, minus your MOT requirement. If you scroll down, Dawn has provided a bit more information as they had the visa a couple of years ago. And no you do not need to be in France for the whole six months.

We have dabbled a bit with the Digital Nomad visa; we looked at the Croatia one a few years back. Although at the time you had to have a working contract with an organisation to be eligible. I think things may have evolved. We have the next 2 years pretty well planned out although it is something that we may explore more after that.

How zealous are the border controls regarding duration of visits 'on the other side'? Are some countries more tolerant of over stay or is it a rule that really must be kept to?

Our sense of it is that France are definitely more vigilant, from what we've heard. Spain not so. I think until the electronic set up comes in, in the coming year or two, it is almost impossible for border controls to check if there are multiple stamps in a given period.

Last year we had 30 days left, so flew over to Iceland for 28 days. It was the first border control who took their time to look at our stamps. Very sweetly they said, 'we hope you know where your allowance is up to.' That said there was much less traffic going through their gates than Spain. So for now I don't think they check for overstay as there's far too much work involved. But unless it's by miscalculation, I wouldn't recommend it as a practice. It'll be Sod's Law you come up against someone who is intent on checking. And we have heard of fines given. So our advice is plan around the rules, give yourself a 10 day buffer as a contingency and keep to the practice for when Biometrics and and Etias comes in.

We've just flown back to UK as our motorhome broke down and the fiat garage said they can't look at the gearbox for at least a week and then it could take weeks to source parts. We had a window of 14 days left out if the 90 allowance so we had no choice but to fly home to UK. Hopefully if they fix it we can return and pick it up and bring it home, if not, I assume they'll transport it back to UK. I am wondering if we can't get a ferry back within the 14 days, will we be fined? Has anyone else had this problem?

That's a really interesting conundrum. I don't think you should assume they will transport it back, unless it's part of your breakdown or travel insurance cover. It might be worth a conversation with your providers about the options. I've not come across this scenario before.

However as I think about it, in theory, as you will have been back to the UK, you will still have your 14 days in the Schengen bank. So once the van is fixed, just do a quick calculation using the website I've popped up on the feed and as long as you can fly back, pick the van up and drive and cross the channel in that 14 days, then you are fine.

We have a plan to go for a six month French tourist visa which also allows other Schengen visits on top. We have to pre organise the six month French dates... but in reality... if we use cash for all our

purchases... how can anyone know how long we are staying in France, or Spain or anywhere over the the period. My point being if one wanted to stay in Spain for longer in the winter, its a dodge. I think this is already being used but no one wants to fess up. Have you heard of this being used?

I can't talk directly from experience as we won't be applying until November. However, as I understand it from the French Govt, you can have 3 months before and after your 6 month visa. Although because there are no borders, as long as you enter France after your first 6 months and have a purchase to prove your visit, you can then travel elsewhere as there are no borders to check.

An additional response from someone who has the visa...

The rules when we applied 2 years ago were that on the expiry of the visa you need to be able to demonstrate (if challenged upon leaving France at a hard border) that you exited France at this point, even if only for one day, and then you can return into France for your 90 days. Therefore a supermarket or fuel receipt from Spain for example would suffice as evidence of your exit.

This is all on the basis that you are supposed to be spending the majority of your visa time in France as this is the county you have applied through for the visa. In reality, we, as well as others, haven't spent the majority of our time in France during the time span of our visa and have chosen to travel elsewhere in Schengen on the basis of no hard borders to be able to check.

I don't know much at all about Schengen. I assume there is a list of countries that participate? Can you pop out of one country (in Schengen) into another (not in Schengen) to restart your 90 day period? A bit like visas used to work? And are the fines hefty? Is there any leeway or is it a strict 90 days? Would 91 days mean you are over? And you have bust? Are there plans afoot for more European countries to join? Does it just apply to Brits abroad?

1. There are a list of 29 European and non EU countries in Schengen. So it is easier to list who are not members (yet); Ireland, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Cyprus, Turkey, Albania and of course all the countries of the UK. All the rest are now part of the Schengen Community. Albania and Montenegro are in discussions, although a way, away, as I understand it.
2. The Schengen Shuffle, as we call it does allow you to stay out travelling for longer, although it is not as easy as pop in for a day to reset. The allowance is a rolling 90 days in every 180. So imagine it like a conveyor belt. So yes 91 days is an overstay. And although at the moment without the Etias visa scheme it is hard for Borders to check, it is not worth actively going for an overstay. So calculations are required now for our travels, unless your lucky enough to have an Irish or EU passport.

3. Schengen isn't just for the UK, it is for all other non EU countries. So Australians and Canadians for example have the same restrictions.

4. There have been stories of fines although not many since 2022. However it isn't worth risking.

5. The one thing that catches most people out is that day 1 of leaving a non Schengen is also day 1 of your Schengen Allowance. And similarly your last day leaving Schengen counts also as day 1 of the allowance. So we tend to see it only as 88 days so we don't get caught out. In fact we never plan for using our full 90 days. We generally allow a buffer of 10 days, so that if something happens we have plenty of days to play with. That's why we enjoy coming to Ireland as its not Schengen and it allows free travel without having to spend 3 months in the UK.

6. It's also worth noting that principalities like Andorra, Gibraltar, San Marino, Monaco, are not officially classed as Schengen although we cannot use them to reset as they are all surrounded by neighbouring Schengen states and there is an agreement of free passage between their Schengen neighbours.

So the bottom line is use an App to calculate your in and out days for each trip so you don't get it wrong. And the key for the planning is to actually focus on where you were in the last 180 and where you will be in the next 90. The Schengen Visa Calculator is the best option.

For us we have seen this as an opportunity to see travel more broadly. So we look at travel to Morocco where you can reset their 90 day visit allowance pretty easily, Turkey, Scotland and Wales, fly over to Cyprus and sometimes put Scobie in storage and fly further afield. Just needs jiggling a bit more.

I occasionally use the free version of Park4Night. I know that you use this app quite a lot. Do you use the subscription version? Is it worth paying the subscription? How much more do you get for the paid for version?

Yes it is our go to app for finding places, for sure. I use the app and I don't notice much difference to the paid and free aspect. The big difference is if you access it on the website, then a lot of the spots and their details are greyed out. When we go to countries where we can't use our data roaming, like Morocco, we do buy the annual subscription then it gives us off line capability. Although these days most local sim cards are coming down in cost that it doesn't make a huge difference. Download the app, if you haven't got it already and see if it gives you all you need.

I thought I understood this but that calculator has just blown my mind. We first went in the Schengen on Jan 18th (having not been away for the past 6 months) so I thought my 180 days start on Jan 18th taking me to July 19th. We are planning to be in the Schengen on July 19th and

would be at 88 days over 3 visits, I understood that then each day a day comes off ie 18th Jan whilst a new one is added ie July 19th so keeping us in the 90 days The calculator doesn't seem to say this say this... help have I misunderstood

So, when I add your dates to the calculator, you are overstaying by 7 days. You would need to exit by 1 August. I think the issue is that whilst your 180 days is 19 July, it doesn't reset on that date as it's a rolling 180 days. So what you need to do in your mind's eye is focus on the date that you want to be out until; so 8th August and go back 180 days. This takes you back to 9th Feb. So from here you can calculate how many days you will have been in Schengen. Which is 97 days. So if you change your return date to 1 August then you would be OK.