



ENROUTE JOBS

The Schengen Shuffle Planner & Tracker

A print-friendly, year-long workbook for mastering Europe's 90/180-day rule. Turn the legal puzzle of Schengen vs. non-Schengen stays into a clear pen-and-paper system you can carry alongside your passport.

INSIDE THIS WORKBOOK

- The 90/180 rule explained in plain language, with worked examples
- The 2026 map: who counts against your clock and who resets it
- A year-at-a-glance shading grid and a full trip log
- The lookback method: count your days with nothing but a pen
- Shuffle route strategies, buffer rules, and monthly check-ins
- Border-day checklists and what EES means for your count

START HERE

How this workbook works

The 90/180 rule is simple to state and easy to fumble: as a visa-free visitor, you can spend at most 90 days inside the Schengen area within any rolling 180-day window. Fumbling it used to mean an awkward conversation at passport control. Since April 2026, the EU's biometric Entry/Exit System (EES) logs every border crossing digitally, so the math is now checked by a database, not a border guard squinting at stamps. Your count needs to be right.

Good news: the counting is genuinely easy once you have a system, and a paper system has real advantages. It works offline, it never mis-syncs, it forces you to actually understand your own numbers, and it lives in your daypack next to your passport where you will see it.

The workbook, in order

1. **Learn the rule** (pages 3–4): the rolling window, the day-counting rules, and the mistakes that catch people
2. **Know the map** (page 5): the 29 countries that count against your clock and the neighbors that do not
3. **Master the lookback method** (page 6): the five-minute pen-and-paper count you will run before booking anything
4. **Track all year** (pages 7–9): the shading grid and trip log, the heart of the system
5. **Plan your shuffle** (pages 10–11): route patterns, the buffer rule, and monthly check-ins
6. **Stay clean** (pages 12–13): overstay consequences, border-day checklists, and paths beyond 90 days

Three habits that make it work

- **Shade on arrival.** The day you enter Schengen, shade today's box in the year grid. Ten seconds, no exceptions.
- **Log every crossing.** Entry and exit go in the trip log the same day they happen, not "when you get to it."
- **Check before you book.** Every flight, train, or ferry into Schengen gets a lookback count first. Booking, then counting, is how overstays happen.

READ THIS FIRST

Rules in this space change: countries join Schengen, visa policies shift, and systems like EES and ETIAS roll out in stages. Everything here reflects mid-2026 and applies to visa-free short stays; different rules apply if you hold a national visa, residence permit, or EU citizenship. Verify anything you are relying on against official sources (europa.eu and the embassy of the country in question) before you travel. A workbook is a tool, never legal advice.

THE RULE

90 days in any 180: what it actually means

Picture a 180-day window that ends today and slides forward with you, one day at a time. On any given day, look back exactly 180 days. Count every day you were physically inside the Schengen area during that stretch. If the count is 90 or more, you cannot be in Schengen today. That is the whole rule, and everything else is bookkeeping.

The day-counting rules

- **Entry day counts. Exit day counts.** Land at 11:55 pm, that day is a full day used. Leave at 6:00 am, same. A "quick overnight" in Schengen costs two days.
- **Partial days are whole days.** There are no half-days in this system. Airport layovers where you pass through passport control count too; staying airside in international transit generally does not.
- **The area counts as one country.** Days in Spain, France, and Estonia all draw from the same 90. Crossing internal borders changes nothing about your count.
- **The clock never "resets."** Leaving Schengen does not wipe your history. Days only stop counting against you when they slide out the back of the 180-day window, one day at a time, exactly 180 days after they happened.

The misconceptions that cause overstays

THE MYTH	THE REALITY
"I leave for a weekend and my 90 days restart."	Nothing restarts. Your 3-day trip to Serbia just means those 3 days are not Schengen days. Every prior Schengen day within the last 180 still counts.
"It's 90 days per calendar half-year."	The window rolls daily. January to June vs. July to December has nothing to do with it.
"It's 90 days per country."	One shared budget for all 29 countries. 60 days in Portugal leaves 30 for everywhere else.
"Nobody actually checks."	They did not always, reliably, before. EES now records every entry and exit biometrically and calculates your balance automatically.
"After 90 days out, I get a fresh 180."	Closer to true but still framed wrong. There is no "fresh" anything; the lookback simply finds fewer used days once older ones age past 180.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Jan 10 – Mar 10: You spend 60 days in Portugal and Spain. **Mar 11 – May 9:** You move to Albania for 60 days (0 Schengen days). **May 10:** You want to re-enter for a 30-day stay in Italy, ending June 8.

Check the worst day of the proposed trip, the last one. On June 8, look back 180 days (to roughly Dec 11). Inside that window: the 60 days from winter, plus the proposed 30 in Italy = 90 exactly. Legal, with zero margin. One delayed flight home on June 9 would make you an overstayer. The buffer rule on page 10 exists for precisely this.

THE ONE-LINE VERSION TO REMEMBER

Before entering, ask: "In the 180 days ending on my planned exit date, will my total Schengen days stay at 90 or fewer?" If yes for the exit date, it is yes for every day of the trip.

Who counts, who resets: the 2026 lineup

Schengen and the EU are different clubs with overlapping membership, which is where most confusion starts. Norway and Switzerland count against your 90 despite not being EU members. Ireland is EU but never counts. Here is the working map.

Counts against your 90 (Schengen, 29)

Austria · Belgium · Bulgaria · Croatia · Czechia · Denmark · Estonia · Finland · France · Germany · Greece · Hungary · Iceland · Italy · Latvia · Liechtenstein · Lithuania · Luxembourg · Malta · Netherlands · Norway · Poland · Portugal · Romania · Slovakia · Slovenia · Spain · Sweden · Switzerland

Bulgaria and Romania completed full Schengen integration in January 2025; their days count. The microstates (Monaco, San Marino, Vatican City, Andorra) are reached through Schengen territory, so treat days there as Schengen days for planning purposes.

Does not count (popular shuffle bases)

United Kingdom (generous separate allowance for many nationalities) · **Ireland** (EU, permanently outside Schengen) · **Cyprus** (EU, not yet Schengen; see warning below) · **Albania** · **Montenegro** · **Serbia** · **Bosnia & Herzegovina** · **North Macedonia** · **Kosovo** · **Türkiye** · **Georgia** · **Moldova**

Each has its own entry rules and stay limits tied to your nationality. Check yours before relying on any of them; a few (like Georgia for many passports) are famously generous, others cap at 90 days with their own clocks.

WATCH THE MOVING PIECES

Cyprus is actively working toward Schengen membership and could join soon; the day it does, Cypriot days start counting. Several Balkan reset favorites are on the EU accession path with Schengen to follow eventually. If your shuffle strategy leans on one country, recheck its status every few months. Pencil, not pen, for long-range plans.

EES and ETIAS in one minute

- **EES (live since April 10, 2026):** biometric entry/exit registration at Schengen's external borders, replacing passport stamps. It records your crossings and computes your 90/180 balance automatically. It changes enforcement, not the rule, and it makes your own accurate count more important, since disputes now run against a database.
- **ETIAS (expected late 2026):** an online pre-travel authorization (about €20, multi-year validity) for visa-exempt visitors, similar to the US ESTA. An approved ETIAS does not add days; the 90/180 rule applies unchanged.

KEEP YOUR OWN BOOKS ANYWAY

EES tracks you; it does not plan for you, and you cannot easily query it from a hammock in Tirana. The tracker in the next pages is how you stay ahead of the database instead of arguing with it.

THE METHOD

The lookback count, with nothing but a pen

Run this five-minute count before booking any travel into Schengen. It answers the only question that matters: can I take this trip legally, with margin?

The five steps

1. **Pick your test date.** Use the planned *exit* date of the proposed trip; it is always the tightest day of the whole plan.
2. **Find the window start.** Count back 179 days from the test date (the window is the test date plus the 179 days before it). Write both dates down.
3. **Count your used days.** Go to your year grid and trip log. Count every shaded Schengen day that falls inside the window, including your proposed trip's entry and exit days.
4. **Add the proposed trip.** Used days + proposed trip days = projected total on the test date.
5. **Apply the verdict.** 85 or fewer: book it. 86–90: legal but fragile; one cancelled flight puts you over, so shorten the trip. 91+: change the plan, not the count.

LOOKBACK WORKSHEETS (ONE PER PLANNED TRIP)

Trip: destination _____ entry date _____ exit date

Window: 179 days before exit = _____ through exit date

Schengen days already used in window: _____ + proposed trip days: _____ = total:

Verdict (circle): **BOOK IT** (≤85) · **TIGHT, SHORTEN** (86–90) · **REPLAN** (91+)

Trip: destination _____ entry date _____ exit date

Window: 179 days before exit = _____ through exit date

Schengen days already used in window: _____ + proposed trip days: _____ = total:

Verdict (circle): **BOOK IT** (≤85) · **TIGHT, SHORTEN** (86–90) · **REPLAN** (91+)

Trip: destination _____ entry date _____ exit date

Window: 179 days before exit = _____ through exit date

Schengen days already used in window: _____ + proposed trip days: _____ = total:

Verdict (circle): **BOOK IT** (≤ 85) · **TIGHT, SHORTEN** (86–90) · **REPLAN** (91+)

CROSS-CHECK WITH THE OFFICIAL CALCULATOR

The European Commission publishes a free short-stay calculator online (search "EU Schengen calculator"). Use it to verify your pen-and-paper result before big commitments. When paper and calculator agree, book with confidence.

Year-at-a-glance shading grid

How to use it: shade every day you are physically inside the Schengen area, including entry and exit days. Leave non-Schengen days blank. To run a lookback count, find your window and count shaded boxes; the grid makes a 180-day stretch visible at a glance. Write your year here: _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
JAN																																
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OCT																																
NOV																																
DEC																																

Grey boxes are days that do not exist in that month. In a leap year, Feb 29 exists; shade the first grey box if needed.

TWO-YEAR TRICK

Your 180-day window will often reach back into last year. Print two copies of this page, label them with consecutive years, and keep both in the workbook. January lookbacks become as easy as July ones.

RUNNING BALANCE SNAPSHOTS (FILL IN WHENEVER YOU CHECK)

DATE CHECKED	WINDOW (FROM – TO)	SCHENGEN DAYS USED	DAYS REMAINING

Shuffle patterns that actually work

Once counting is under control, the shuffle becomes a design problem: arrange Schengen and non-Schengen stays so you get the Europe time you want without ever white-knuckling the math. Three proven patterns, plus the rule that protects all of them.

Pattern 1: The clean split (90 in, 90 out)

Spend up to ~85 days in Schengen, then a full 90+ days outside before returning. Simple to track, maximally efficient, and by the time you return, your old days are aging out of the window as fast as you spend new ones. Classic pairings: spring in Iberia, summer in the Balkans; or summer in Schengen, winter in Türkiye or Georgia.

Pattern 2: The rotation (short alternating blocks)

Alternate 4–6 week blocks: Lisbon, then Belgrade, then Athens, then Tirana. You are never far from your favorite Schengen spots, and the regular non-Schengen blocks keep your rolling count comfortably mid-range. The trade-off is more moves and more counting; the lookback method before each re-entry becomes non-negotiable.

Pattern 3: The basecamp

Establish a home base just outside Schengen (Tirana, Belgrade, Istanbul, Tbilisi, and Podgorica are the usual suspects) and take Schengen trips from it: two weeks in Italy, a conference in Berlin, a month in Greece. Your Schengen count stays low year-round, the base gives you routine and community, and short-notice Schengen trips are always affordable, count-wise.

THE BUFFER RULE (PROTECTS EVERY PATTERN)

Plan to a maximum of **85 days** used in any window, never 90. Those 5 held-back days absorb the things you do not control: cancelled flights, strikes, illness, a ferry that does not sail. Treat 86–90 as an emergency reserve, not a planning target.

Monthly check-in (10 minutes, first of the month)

- Grid current? Shade any missed days, reconcile against the trip log
- Run a lookback count as of today; record it in the running balance table
- Run a lookback for your next planned entry or exit; still ≤ 85 ?
- Any rule changes? Two-minute check on any country your next 90 days depend on
- Onward tickets, insurance, and passport validity (3+ months beyond planned exit, 6 is safer) still in order?

MY SHUFFLE PLAN FOR THE NEXT 6 MONTHS

Pattern I'm running (split / rotation / basecamp / hybrid):

Schengen blocks planned (places + rough dates):

Non-Schengen blocks planned:

Projected peak day-count in any window (target ≤ 85):

Overstays, borders, and staying clean

What an overstay actually costs

Consequences vary by country and circumstance, and none of them are worth it: fines, formal removal, an overstay flag on your record, and entry bans that can run from months to years across the entire Schengen area. Even a "minor" overstay resurfaces at every future border check and can complicate later visa and residence applications. With EES computing your balance automatically, the era of the unnoticed extra week is over.

IF YOU ARE ABOUT TO RUN OUT OF DAYS

Leave for non-Schengen territory before day 90, even if it wrecks the itinerary; a cheap flight to Belgrade or Tirana is the escape hatch. If a genuine emergency (hospitalization, force majeure) makes leaving impossible, contact the immigration authority of the country you are in *before* your days expire and document everything. Silent overstaying and explaining later is the worst available option.

Border-day checklist (external Schengen crossings)

- Passport valid 3+ months beyond your planned exit from Schengen (6+ months of validity is the safer standard), issued within the last 10 years
- Your own count run within the last week; you know your number if asked
- Proof of onward travel out of Schengen within your remaining days
- Proof of accommodation (first nights minimum) and means of support
- Travel insurance active (many nationalities and the coming ETIAS framework expect coverage; €30,000 medical is the common benchmark)
- First EES crossing since April 2026? Budget extra time for biometric registration
- This workbook packed with the passport, trip log row started

When 90 days stops being enough

The shuffle is a short-stay tool. If Europe is becoming your center of gravity, the durable answers are national long-stay (type D) visas and digital nomad or freelancer visas, which many Schengen countries now offer (Portugal, Spain, Croatia, Greece, and Estonia among the best known). Time spent on a national visa or residence permit in the issuing country sits outside your 90/180 count, and several of these programs lead to longer-term residence. Requirements typically involve proof of remote income, insurance, and clean records; specifics vary widely by country and change often, so verify with the relevant consulate.

The days are counted. Now fill them well.

A working shuffle needs one more ingredient: income that travels with you. EnRoute Jobs curates verified remote and location-independent roles from employers who genuinely hire across borders, so the work is as portable as the plan you just built.

enroutejobs.com

Work from anywhere. Count your days like it matters.

This workbook is general information for short-stay, visa-exempt travel, current to mid-2026. It is not legal or immigration advice, and rules change: Schengen membership, national visa policies, EES/ETIAS rollout details, and individual entry requirements all evolve. Always verify against official sources (europa.eu, national immigration authorities, and relevant consulates) before making travel decisions. Your nationality, visa status, and history can change how these rules apply to you. © EnRoute Jobs, LLC.