

90 days in 180 days - the Schengen Rule

Our motorhome was booked and we were ready to book our air tickets. We intended to leave on 25th March and arrive back in Oz at the end of July 2015. But then it dawned on us we had stupidly forgotten about the Schengen Agreement. Once we checked our dates, everything changed.

We knew about Schengen and travelled comfortably within the rules in 2009 and 2012. Why not in 2015? Or beyond?

So what is the Schengen Agreement? Its simple. Australia has an agreement with a group of European countries called the Schengen countries. Australian travellers do not have to have a visa to visit any of these countries but there is one major proviso. We can travel within and through these countries as long as the length of time is no more than 90 days in 180 days. Sounds simple? It is until you decided that you want to spend longer than 90 days - like we intended to do. Then the trouble starts.

We did book our motorhome for 90 days and intended to travel from the Netherlands (where we had booked our van) through France and on to Spain and Portugal for a month before heading north through France and up to the Scandinavian countries to Helsinki and then back down through the Baltic countries and into Poland for a quick family visit and back to The Netherlands to drop the van off. We even extended the motorhome hire for another week. The intention was to then fly to Iceland for a two week tour. That would have made our trip approximately 127 days, Sounds fine but for one thing. All the countries we were going to visit, including Iceland, are in the Schengen Agreement. This meant we were going to spend more than the prescribed 90 days in 180 days. As soon as we realised our mistake we contemplated cutting our motorhome hire in mainland Europe down to 90 days but that was no good either - we had the 2 weeks in Iceland to worry about.

It should be easy enough to get a visa to extend our stay in Iceland? Well it is not!! We asked what we would have to do to get a visa for Iceland. Perplexingly we were told that Iceland (or Denmark) does not give out visas to citizens of countries who are free to visit Schengen countries except if you wish to become a permanent resident, a student or a working visa (only for those under 30 - not old fart like us). So there you have it. We spent a week enquiring and thinking that we could solve this issue but have come to the final conclusion - it is not possible to sensibly apply for a visa to extend your stay in Schengen countries for more than 90 days in 180 day period. The rigmarole involved in applying for a visa to become a permanent citizen is convoluted and not worth the effort.

We were therefore forced to rearrange our itinerary. We will now be flying in to London and visiting eastern UK for a couple of weeks before we undertake our tour of Europe as we planned. Iceland is in our itinerary but it is going to be within the 90 days. Crazy but true. Last week we had a visit from a young couple who were planning to tour Europe for 7 months. They are hiring the motorhome after us and were keen to find out any info we could give them. 7 months!! In Schengen? Not possible. They will now have to plan their trip so that they spend 3 months in Schengen and 4 months in non Schengen. Non Schengen countries include UK, Croatia, Turkey and Rumania. Its a real pain.