

Leave Google Photos.

Self-host your memories with Immich.

A practical migration guide — hardware you need, install, and how to move every photo out of Google Takeout without losing albums or dates.

Who this is for

Anyone tired of paying Google for storage or uneasy about cloud scanning, who has a spare PC, mini-PC, or NAS to run a small always-on service. No prior Docker experience assumed.

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Why move off Google Photos

The free unlimited tier ended in 2021 — every photo now counts against 15 GB shared with Gmail and Drive. Beyond cost, your library is scanned and analysed in the cloud, and export is deliberately awkward. **Immich** is an open-source, self-hosted photo and video backup with a near-identical mobile experience: automatic phone backup, timeline, search, albums, face grouping — running entirely on hardware you control.

What you keep vs Google Photos

Automatic background upload from your phone · shared albums · search by place and thing · face recognition · multi-user. What you drop: the monthly bill and the cloud.

Immich is under active development and self-hosted — *you* are responsible for backups. Keep a copy of irreplaceable photos elsewhere until you trust your setup. Treat Immich as your library, not your only backup, on day one.

1 · What you need

Immich runs as a set of Docker containers. Any always-on 64-bit Linux machine works: an old desktop, a mini-PC (Intel N100-class is popular), or a NAS that supports Docker (Synology, TrueNAS, Unraid).

Component	Minimum	Recommended
RAM	6 GB	8 GB (libraries > 50k photos)
CPU	2 cores	4 cores
OS	64-bit Linux / *nix	Ubuntu or Debian
Storage	Your library size + 20%	SSD for the database

Storage math

Thumbnails and transcoded video add roughly 10–20% on top of your originals, and the Postgres database is usually 1–3 GB. So for a 200 GB Google Photos library, plan for about 250 GB free.

Only 4 GB RAM? You can still run Immich by disabling machine learning (face/object search). Everything else — backup, timeline, albums — works. You lose smart search only.

2 · Install Immich with Docker

Install Docker with the Compose plugin first (the official Docker docs cover every OS). Note: Immich needs the modern `docker compose` command — the older `docker-compose` is no longer supported.

Create a folder for Immich and download the two official files into it:

```
mkdir ./immich-app && cd ./immich-app

wget -O docker-compose.yml \
  https://github.com/immich-app/immich/releases/latest/download/docker-compose.yml

wget -O .env \
  https://github.com/immich-app/immich/releases/latest/download/example.env
```

Open `.env` and set two things: `UPLOAD_LOCATION` (where your photos will live — point it at your big disk) and a strong `DB_PASSWORD`. Then start it:

```
docker compose up -d
```

Docker downloads the images and starts the containers. When it finishes, open `http://SERVER-IP:2283` in a browser.

Checkpoint

You should see the Immich welcome screen. If the page doesn't load, run `docker compose logs` and check for a database error — on Windows the DB cannot live on an NTFS/exFAT folder, so keep it on a Linux filesystem.

3 · First login & API key

The first account you create becomes the admin. Then generate an API key — the migration tool needs it to upload on your behalf.

- 1 Create your admin user on the welcome screen and log in.
- 2 Install the Immich app on your phone (iOS / Android), point it at `http://SERVER-IP:2283`, log in, and turn on backup. New photos now upload automatically — this alone replaces Google Photos going forward.
- 3 For the old library: go to **Account Settings** → **API Keys** → **New API Key**. Copy the key somewhere safe.

4 · Export from Google Takeout

Google's own export tool hands you your whole library as a set of ZIP files, with a JSON sidecar per photo holding the original date, location, and album.

- 1 Go to `takeout.google.com`, click **Deselect all**, then select only **Google Photos**.
- 2 Choose export once, file type `.zip`, and the largest size (50 GB) so you get fewer parts.

3 Wait for Google's email — a big library can take hours to a day — then download every part.

Why not just drag the photos in?

If you unzip and upload the raw files, you lose the real capture dates and albums — everything gets stamped with today's date. The next step reads the Takeout JSON so your timeline stays intact.

5 · Import with immich-go

immich-go is a free open-source tool built specifically for Google Takeout archives. It reads the JSON sidecars, restores dates and albums, and skips duplicates by file hash — so photos already backed up from your phone won't import twice. It's a single downloadable file for Windows, macOS, and Linux (from its [GitHub releases page](#)).

Always dry-run first. This tests everything and writes nothing:

```
immich-go upload from-google-photos \
--server=http://SERVER-IP:2283 \
--api-key=YOUR_API_KEY \
--dry-run \
/path/to/takeout-*.zip
```

Read the summary it prints — files to upload, duplicates it would skip, any errors. If it looks right, run the exact same command **without** `--dry-run` to do the real import. Point it at all the ZIP parts at once with the wildcard; immich-go handles them together.

How long?

Roughly 30–90 seconds per 1,000 photos, plus extra time afterwards while Immich builds thumbnails and (if enabled) runs machine learning in the background. A large library realistically takes overnight. You can watch progress in the immich-go output and in the Immich web UI.

6 · Verify, then decommission Google

- 1 Check total counts roughly match between Google Photos and Immich.
- 2 Spot-check a few old photos: correct date, location, and album?
- 3 Confirm your phone's automatic backup is uploading new shots.
- 4 Set up a backup of the Immich `UPLOAD_LOCATION` folder and the database — self-hosting means the backup is now your job.
- 5 Only once all of the above is solid, free up (don't rush to delete) your Google storage.

Common snags

Symptom	Fix
Web UI won't load	<code>docker compose logs</code> ; usually the DB folder is on an unsupported filesystem (NTFS/exFAT).
Photos dated 'today'	You skipped Takeout/immich-go and uploaded raw files. Re-import via immich-go.
Out of memory / killed	Disable machine learning in <code>.env</code> , or add RAM. 6 GB is the real floor with ML on.
Import very slow	Normal for big libraries; ML runs after upload. Leave it overnight.

Found this useful?

This guide is free — pay what you want if it saved you time. More offline & one-time-purchase alternatives to subscription apps, plus other migration guides, at **payoncehq.com**.

Sources: official Immich documentation (docs.immich.app) and the [immich-go](#) project. Commands current as of 2026; check the projects' pages for the latest. This guide is independent and not affiliated with Immich or Google.