

# Vanlifezone

10.2023

English Version

N° 10



Journey Through Europe's Wild Places, Navigate Amphibious  
Adventures Across the English Channel, and Savor Culinary  
Delights of the Basque Region



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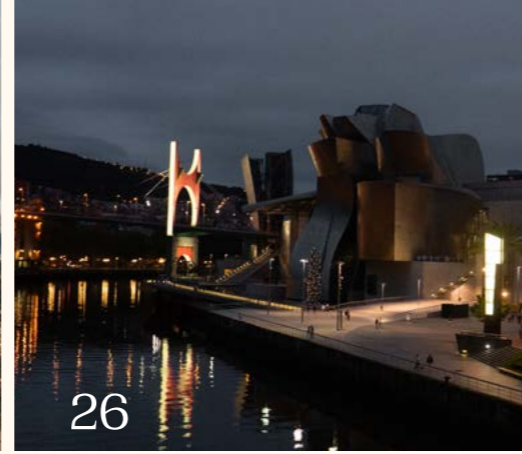




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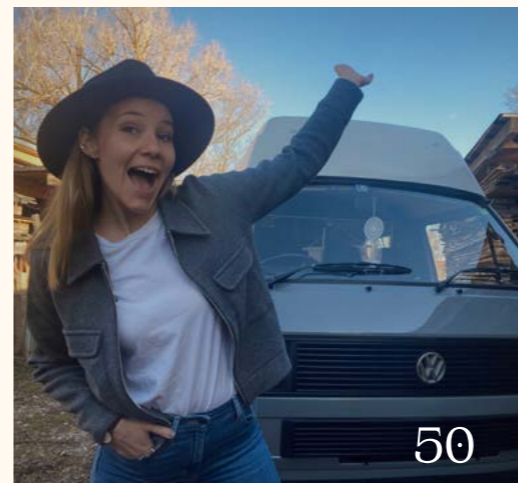
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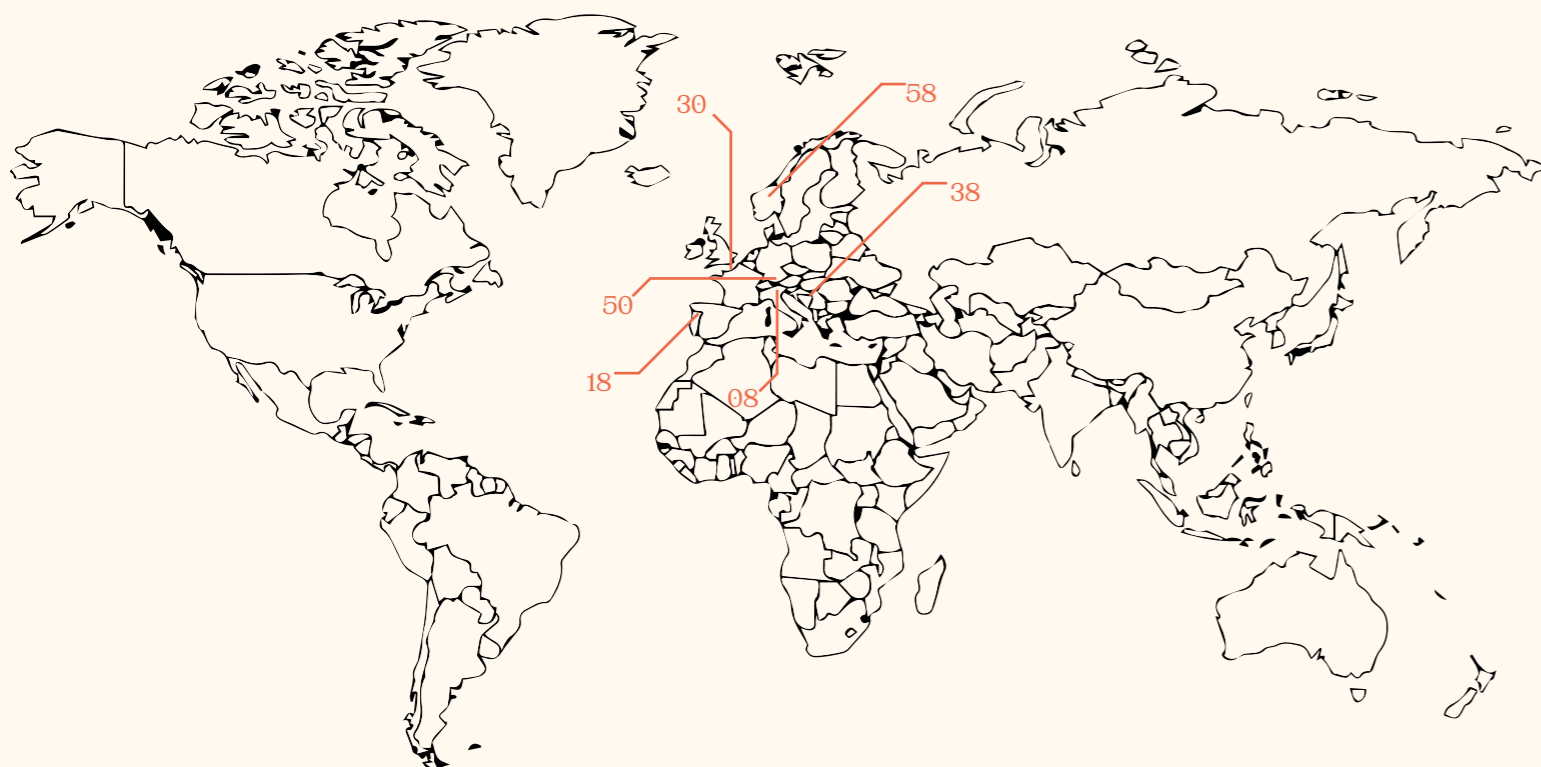
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## Issue 10, What's New?

Dear reader, for the past couple of months we've been working diligently on our new website which will be launched on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Many new features as well as some more information on the project will be included and we've already got a few further updates scheduled. We will include a better accessible digital version of our magazine while also keeping this style of our magazine alive.

In this magazine you will find exciting and inspirational stories that will ignite your passion for adventure.

Our contributors have traveled to different parts of the world, bringing you unique perspectives and experiences that you won't find anywhere else. Join us on new paths and enjoy stories from all over the globe!

Vanlifezone is a project powered by passion dedicated to sharing and exchanging vanlife stories and adventures from every corner of the planet. Regardless of what type of van or camper you own, be it a vintage kombi, a modern transporter or a massive overlanding truck – every story bears the thrill and beauty of challenging experiences at new frontiers. Stay tuned!

## What to Expect

In this vibrant edition, we explore a tapestry of tales from the vanlifezone community, each narrative uniquely weaving stories of freedom, resilience, and adventures on the open road.

**@helloaelita** invites us on a journey through Europe, exploring the possibilities of vanlife. Dive into some insights by **@anna.scheucher** on how to become a digital nomad. Next, join myself (**@fluadlwirt**) on a tale of unexpected challenges from Austria to Portugal and back. Explore Bilbao's transformative journey from an industrial hub to a cultural magnet and dive into a culinary adventure with **@vanlife\_eats**, as they explore and adapt the rich flavors of the Basque region to van cooking.

Then, join **@sbssafetyboatservices** and **@defender.x** on an ambitious venture over the English Channel, navigating through innovative solutions with amphibious Landrovers. Charlotte and Nico from **@mauiandus** share their transition from 9-5 jobs to exploring Europe's wild places, embracing the unknown and navigating the complexities of running businesses on the road. **@joshjmclean** offers invaluable tips for navigating vanlife in vibrant Portugal. **@kathaiina** introduces us to Xavi, a former Austrian army Volkswagen T3 Van, now a vessel for adventures and a life of freedom on the road. In addition, **@alice.inwondervan** delves into the old vs. new debate in the vanlife community, exploring the charm and challenges of

maintaining classic vans. And last but not least, Nora and Simon from **@diehoptimisten** take us from the Swiss Alps to the Arctic, reflecting on the highs, lows, and spontaneous joys of vanlife, and invite us to explore the rugged beauty and ancient inhabitants of Norway's Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park.

Each story offers a unique glimpse into the diverse experiences that define the vanlife community, from tales of culinary adventures and innovative journeys to embracing the unknown and navigating through unexpected challenges.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions, and we hope that you enjoy reading this edition of our magazine

## Your Own Story

As always we're more than happy to receive and share your stories. The best time to send them in is **right now**, after the release of a new issue. This gives us the most time to work with the topics at hand and enables us to produce the magazine at the highest possible quality.

So go ahead and send us your story at [www.vanlifezone.com/submit-form.php](http://www.vanlifezone.com/submit-form.php).

We'd also like to invite you to join our community group at [www.facebook.com/groups/vanlifezone](https://www.facebook.com/groups/vanlifezone).

Until then, happy reading and happy travels and don't forget to get out there!



**Florian Jaunegg**  
Editor in Chief & Project Manager





In March 2018, my husband and I joined our friends for our annual climbing trip in Spain. Little did I know that this trip would become a defining moment, forever changing my life.

# From Dream to Reality

Approaching the big 3-0, I was ticking all the boxes of adulthood: hustling at work, climbing that career ladder, squirreling away cash, paying bills, and squeezing in two vacations a year. I was playing it safe and comfortable, until that fateful climbing holiday.

On our way to the crag, we stumbled upon a buzzing parking lot

full of vanlifers. I mean, who even knew this was a thing? Sure, we dabbled in wild camping and even snoozed in our car on occasion, but living full-time in a vehicle? It never crossed my mind!

There were folks sipping coffee, others chowing down breakfast, and a few strumming guitars. The whole scene radiated a conta-

gious sense of community, with joy and freedom dancing in the air. In that instant, I couldn't help but feel, „Holy guacamole, what an epic way to live!“ It was like stumbling upon the secret recipe for boundless freedom. Thankfully, my husband was equally obsessed. That very evening, we started making plans and crunching numbers.





## Everyone Starts the Same

Back in jolly ol' UK after the holiday, we connected with more vanlifers and noticed a recurring pattern. Many of them saved up for a year-long adventure, only to return to the daily grind with a sense of emptiness. We made a pact, pinky-swore and all, that we wouldn't fall into that trap. Saving up for a year of vanlife won't cut it for us.

We craved something more sustainable, a life on the road without the relentless tick-tock of deadlines. Plus, being Lithuanians who had called the UK our home for a solid 12 years, with families snug back in Lithuania, we needed a cozy spot to call home upon our return.

Time zoomed by, and before we knew it, we were proud homeowners, edging closer to our vanlife dream.

These were reframing years; we embraced minimalism, which sparked a deep shift in our perspectives. The appeal of climbing the career ladder or accumulating material possessions gradually lost its grip on us. We no longer felt trapped in those societal expectations. As we crunched the numbers, our calculations pointed to a two-year wait until vanlife could become a reality. Little did we know that our dreams were tiptoeing closer to reality sooner than expected.

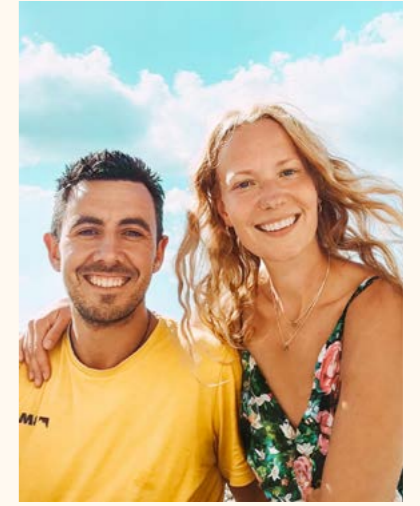
In 2021, on an ordinary December day, extraordinary news crashed into our lives—a fully remote international position for my husband. Within days, his start date and European location were locked in. We had a mere three months to seize this golden opportunity. Renting out our home, finding the perfect van (no time for DIY builds, unfortunately), and packing up our lives, it was all a mad chaos. But destiny had our backs! Just four weeks into our frantic search, we stumbled upon our cozy home, Challenger. It rolled into our lives two weeks before our grand departure, leaving us with a modest fortnight to whip it into shape.







Against all odds, we pulled it off! March 2022 marked the day when our long-loved dream of vanlife transformed into our living, breathing reality.



It had been a four-year journey of determination, but finally, we stood on the threshold of our newfound adventure, ready to embrace the open road with open hearts and a world of possibilities before us.

And so, for a whopping 471 days and counting, we've embraced vanlife and everything that comes with it. And of course, it hasn't all been sunshine and rainbows. Picture this: an ant colony decided to invade our van during our

usual 4-hour climbing session, unleashing chaos that lasted for days. Or the time our water pump went kaput, leaving us high and dry (quite literally) without running water for four days in the middle of nowhere. Ah, and then there was that day as we were happily hiking in the Picos de Europa, the wind literally ripped our skylight off, crashing down onto the road. It was a valuable lesson learned: strong winds and open skylights simply do not mix!

But you know what? With every setback, our gratitude grows deeper. March 2018 woke up our souls, liberating us from the clutches of old norms. We've scooped the recipe for genuine joy in life's simplest things. Who knew that 4 wheels, a cozy home on the move, and a dash of dreams could create a life so rich and fulfilling?





# How to Become a Digital Nomad

## Why become a digital nomad?

Imagine a life where your office is a beach in Bali one month, a bustling café in Barcelona the next, and a cozy mountain cabin in Colorado shortly after. The digital nomad lifestyle seems like a dream. You get to travel the world, explore new cultures, and make money while you're at it.

But it's not just a fantasy—it's a reality for a growing number of individuals who have embraced the freedom and flexibility of working remotely from anywhere on the globe. Today, we'll unravel the secrets to becoming a digital nomad, offering practical insights, tips, and resources to turn your wanderlust into a sustainable, fulfilling lifestyle.

## Why become a digital nomad?

Van life is amazing, but some people don't want to save up time and money for a while, just to go on relatively short trips and return to their regular lives. And for good reason! Why would you, if you could travel full-time while making money from your laptop?

Have you been wondering on how to make the digital nomad lifestyle a reality for you? The truth is, making money online has never been easier, and you don't need to be an influencer to do it! In fact, you don't even necessarily need a college education to work remotely. If you are starting from scratch, this guide will tell you exactly what to do to get your online career going.

## What are you good at?

The first crucial step on your journey to becoming a digital nomad is to introspectively ask yourself, 'What are you good at?' In a world where the internet has become a vast marketplace for diverse skills and talents, your unique abilities can be your ticket to financial freedom and location independence. Take a moment to consider your passions, interests, and the skills you've honed over the years. Are you a gifted writer, a skilled graphic designer, a proficient coder, a talented photographer, or a persuasive marketer?

The digital nomad lifestyle thrives on individuals who leverage their strengths to provide value online. By identifying your core competencies, you'll not only pinpoint your potential niche in the digital world but also set the foundation for a sustainable income stream that can support your globetrotting dreams.



# Some ideas that you might not have thought of before:

- Copywriting
  - Graphic design
  - Programming
    - Translation
  - Virtual assistance
    - Coaching
    - Marketing
  - Online teaching
- Project Management
    - Online Customer Support
    - E-Commerce
  - Content Creation
  - Remote Accounting
  - Remote Recruiting
  - Data Entry / Data

If you have already established a career for yourself, that could make matters a lot easier, since you will have the experience and knowledge to land a remote job in your field.

However, you can also start from scratch, that will just take a little more willpower and determination. You don't need to be a master at what you choose to do, but you should have some passion for it.

## Watch out for opportunities.

The first crucial step on your journey to becoming a digital nomad is to introspectively ask yourself, 'What are you good at?' In a world where the internet has become a vast marketplace for diverse skills and talents, your unique abilities can be your ticket to financial freedom and location independence. Take a moment to consider your passions, interests, and the skills you've honed over the years. Are you a gifted writer, a skilled graphic designer, a proficient coder, a talented photographer, or a persuasive marketer?

The digital nomad lifestyle thrives on individuals who leverage their strengths to provide value online. By identifying your core competencies, you'll not only pinpoint your potential niche in the digital world but also set the foundation for a sustainable income stream that can support your globetrotting dreams.

## Time to grind.

If you have a career already, it might be easier to land a remote job in the same field, in which case you got really lucky. However, most people are not that fortunate, which doesn't mean that you can't succeed! In that case, it's time to grind. Let's be honest; those initial days and weeks of searching and applying for remote positions can be tough. Rejections will come your way—perhaps more than you expected. And that's perfectly normal! The important thing to remember is that each 'no' is one step closer to that 'yes' you've been working towards. Resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to learn from every setback are your greatest allies.

One of my biggest tips when starting out with no experience, especially on platforms like Upwork, is to take any job you can get at first, even the one-offs that are not exactly what you want. This will build up your experience and credibility with other clients in the future. It's hard to say how long it will take, since it depends on each person, but sooner or later you will find a job that fits exactly what you are looking for!

## Never give up!

So, here's the deal: becoming a digital nomad isn't all glitz and glamour. It takes some hustle and a thick skin. Rejections are part of the game, and in the beginning, they might sting a bit. But that's alright; it's all part of the journey. In the world of digital nomadism, the possibilities are endless. You can work from practically anywhere and live life on your terms. As we've explored the steps to get there, remember that this lifestyle is about more than just cool destinations; it's about personal growth and freedom.

So, go chase your dream, use your skills to find work, and don't let the bumps in the road stop you. Whether you're just starting or you've already taken a few steps, the digital nomad lifestyle is all about embracing the adventure, learning along the way, and making the world your workplace.



# Curb Your Expectations



Less is more- Journeying from Austria to Portugal and back, a lesson in the pitfalls of high expectations and overplanning.



To begin lets rewind to 2019. Before I had even started the Vanlifezone project, I was on a gap-year adventure. After traveling to Peru, Ecuador and Ukraine I threw my savings into a somewhat rusty old Volkswagen T4. Despite its challenges, I transformed it into a home on wheels and was ready to embark on an adventure of a lifetime. Over a period of three months I covered a distance of 16.000km and traveled through 12 different countries. I went surfing, met amazing people and had plenty of time with myself in remote places where I was able to find absolute inner peace.

Jump to this summer. Naturally, when I headed out for Portugal I subconsciously was hoping to have the exact same experience. My girlfriend, Lena, was set to join me in Porto. I made sure to take 3 weeks to travel there just by myself to be able to spend some time on my own and reflect on things.





## But Life's Got Its Own Plans, Right?

Working as a 3D artist and Designer, all while managing the Vanlifezone project on the side, takes its toll and I had to postpone my departure by a week just to finish off a few projects. My plan was also to work a few hours every day while on the road. With the new Vanlifezone website in the works, my calendar was jam-packed with virtual meet-ups.

You can probably guess where this is going. Trying to cover 2.800km in two weeks, work, see a bit of the places I'm passing through and meeting up with a few friends along the way made the first part of the journey a bit hectic and it felt like a race against the clock. Especially in my old T4, who isn't a fan of highways. The usual issue: we're always the ones holding up traffic.

So picture this: I'm visiting Cinque Terre in Italy and afterwards I'm soaking in the sunset on top of the hills whilst on a call about some website tweaks. The next day, in the Southern Alps of France, I was in another meeting with our design team to ensure the best implementation of those features. Then, a

quick beer in Toulouse, with a good friend, followed by a meet up with some friends on the west coast of France. We had a fun time but the weather wasn't really on our side so we mostly hung out near the vans, camping out in the hills of the French Basque country. 6 people jammed into my van making pancakes for breakfast is a delightful sight!

After a few days of balancing work and quality time with friends there I headed to Porto to pick up Lena. We were all set for a relaxed adventure along Portugal and northern Spain's coastlines. But Lena arrived feeling under the weather, and to top it off, we hit one of the coldest summer weeks on the coast. Our beach plans turned into both of us being tucked in into our hoodies and we hardly got past dipping our toes into the water. As her symptoms lingered, we headed backup to the Peneda-Gerês national park. I've been there before in 2019 and had loved every part of it. The expectations were high - and we were lucky! The temperatures upcountry were more like what we had expected and we were able to comfortably jump into the pools underneath some waterfalls.



Goats, wild horses and dogs made our stay in the national park yet another beautiful experience.

Even though the symptoms still showed up at night Lena began to feel a lot better and we were ready to continue our travels up north.

Our initial plan of sharing the driving was no option until then and I wasn't able to work as much on the side as I had initially intended. A few days later, on our way through northern Spain a hospital visit in A Coruna confirmed a viral infection. After some rest and meds we were back on track and by the end of week two of us traveling together we finally managed to both be fit and really enjoy the journey.

Of course, contrary to how it might sound right now, up to this point not everything was bad and stressful! Even though we stayed near the van most of the time we made the best of the situation. From making friends in Arnados, having conversations about our travels on a hill overlooking a beach and seeing dolphins in the reflection of the sunset to having perfect moments of solitude for just the two of us on almost empty beaches. The north of Spain showed itself from its best possible side.

When Lena was perfectly fit again, we headed to Bilbao for two days.





We explored the old town and, in true tourist fashion, visited the Guggenheim museum. (Check out the article on the following pages for more information on Bilbao.) On the second day we had two strange encounters: a near mugging and a van breakdown in an inconvenient location. Fortunately a stranger helped us out. I'd love to tell you in detail about both incidents but you'll be able to find more on that in the journal on our new website on October 11<sup>th</sup>!

We then had the pleasure of visiting San Sebastian during their "Semana Grande" showcasing traditional music, dances and culture. The city, already vibrant, was further enlivened with parades and live performances, culminating in a spectacular firework competition that left everyone in awe. Back in France we spontaneously met up with some friends and

spent a few days with them surfing before we started our journey back home to Austria. The takeaway from this trip? Don't compare road trips with one another and don't expect everything to go according to plan.

**Every adventure is unique, going with the flow with fewer plans can really take a lot of stress out of it.**





# The Powerness Solar Generator 1500 on the Road



On our trip, while I was crafting the new Vanlifezone website and managing a few other projects, reliable power was essential. My laptop, phone, and camera couldn't afford downtime. Powerness approached us with an offer: their Solar Generator 1500 in exchange for an honest review. With the challenge of staying connected, this generator turned out to be a reliable source of power.

This set, with its 1536Wh Powerstation and 200W Solarpanel, ensured our devices never ran out of juice. Its high capacity and multiple outlets allowed us to charge various gadgets simultaneously. We harnessed the sun's energy all day when parked up and the van's power while driving. Its size was just right for our van, fitting perfectly under our foldable table. However, if you're eyeing this device, plan its placement in advance.

While its performance was great and we had plenty of power at all times, there is room for minor improvements. The generator has only one primary

power inlet. This meant we couldn't simultaneously feed in solar power and draw power from the van. There's an option to also input power via a USB-C cable, but in our experience, this was slow and not particularly efficient.

The cable connecting the solar panels to the generator was a tad short for our liking. Given the fixed position of the generator in our van, this occasionally posed challenges in optimally positioning the panels to capture sunlight and resulted in less efficient charging. Yet, in remote locations, the generator's reliability shone through, and it is intended to be carried outside anyways.

The Powerness Solar Generator 1500 wasn't just a tool; it became a vital part of our journey. It ensured uninterrupted work and enhanced our travel experience. For those hitting the road, this generator is a great pick! If you're interested, Powerness has thrown in a **"VANLIFEZONE"** discount code, granting a 5% reduction on their website.







# Bilbao

## A Metamorphosis

Bilbao, located in northern Spain's Basque Country, stands as a testament to the power of transformation, seamlessly blending its rich history with a forward-thinking modernity. Once a city known for its heavy industry, Bilbao has reinvented itself into a place where innovative architecture and art attract visitors from all over the world.

One of the city's most famous buildings is the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Created by the famous architect Frank Gehry, this museum is a wonder of modern design with its bold shapes and shiny surfaces. It is a symbol of rebirth and has played a pivotal role in revitalizing the city. The building became a magnet for art enthusiasts and its charm has spread to the whole city. After completion, many celebrities and travelers were suddenly interested in Bilbao. Notably, even the iconic James Bond couldn't resist its allure, with the city featuring in the 1999 film "The World is Not Enough." This surge in global attention and appeal, attributed to a single architectural entity, birthed a phenomenon coined as the "Bilbao Effect." Numerous cities worldwide have attempted to replicate the effect by using a special building to attract more visitors and make the cities more popular.

However, Bilbao's journey to this renaissance was not without its challenges. Despite the city's heyday in the industrial revolution the following periods of crisis, high unemployment and drug crimes shaped the city's appearance. Yet, Bilbao did not succumb. Instead, it harnessed these challenges and emerged with a resilient spirit that defined its new identity.

The Casco Viejo, or Old Town, is a vibrant reminder of Bilbao's rich and varied history. Strolling through its charming, cobblestone streets, you'll find the Santiago Cathedral, a magnificent piece of Gothic architecture, and the lively Plaza Nueva, a square that buzzes with life and is famed for bars and restaurants serving delectable Basque pintxos. The Old Town is not a mere relic of the past; it's a lively hub where history and the present coexist in harmony.

As you explore Bilbao, from its ancient heart to its innovative architectural wonders, and interact with the friendly locals, you'll find yourself immersed in a city that tells a story of transition from the industrial to the cultural, from the historical to the innovative. Bilbao offers an experience that stays with you, weaving itself into your memories and stories of travel.



# Basque Country Flavors



For this issue we, at Vanlife Eats, were set the challenge of cooking a recipe from the Basque region. The basque region is in Northern Spain. Basque cuisine traditionally includes meats and fish grilled over hot coals. This is ideal if you are at a park-up where you can set up a bbq or campfire safely. However, for those stealth spots this is not ideal! Locally sourced ingredients are key to the flavors within this cuisine. Stews feature quite often too, as well as sheep's cheese.

Autumn is a great time to enjoy stews in the van. The weather is perfect for going out and getting

active, and returning to a hearty and warming stew. They aren't always the best option for in the van as they take a long time to cook.

When making meals in the van that take a long time to cook, we like to use the Wonderbag. This is a non-electric slow cooker. It is a very similar concept to a traditional haybox. The food needs to be brought to a cooking temperature. Once placed in the bag, it continues to cook for up to 8 hours. The food needs to be in a pan that will retain the heat to continue cooking. We left ours in the bag while we went kayaking on the canal to visit a local castle.

The Wonderbag organisation help to support those in need. Wonderbags are donated or provided at a highly discounted rate to those in need. In 2022, over 2,500 wonderbags were delivered to families in Ukraine. The Wonderbags are donated in Africa and save young women hours cooking, freeing them time for education and paid work.

We visited a local farm shop to buy some local produce and decided to make Sukalki, a traditional meat stew. There are often sulalki making competitions within the region!

# Basque Inspired Sukalki



## Difficulty



## Time

Prep Time: 15 min  
Cook Time: 3hrs 45 min

Try it out yourself, and don't forget to post it and tag [@vanlife\\_eats](#) and [@vanlifezone](#) so we can see your results.

## Ingredients

diced beef	400g
red potatoes, peeled & cut into chunks	2
white onion finely chopped	1
red onion finely chopped	1
large carrot	1
leek	1
pepper finely diced	1
tbsp sliced piquillo peppers	2
tbsp	
can chopped tomatoes	1 can
ml brandy	50ml
ml white wine	50ml
litre beef stock	1l
frozen peas	50g
Olive oil for frying	2
tbsp	
Salt & pepper to taste	

## Instructions

Add the olive oil to a large deep frying pan or casserole dish. Add the beef and brown all over. Then remove and set aside.

In this pan add the chopped onions, carrots, leeks and peppers. Cook for 10 minutes or until soft. Add the brandy and flambe. This bit may be better outside the van! Add the white wine and reduce by half. Add the can of chopped tomatoes and stir.

Return the beef and add the diced potatoes to the pan. Add the stock, and season. Bring to the boil for 15 minutes. Take off the heat and place into the Wonderbag.

After 3 hours remove from the heat. Add the peas, return the stew to a boiling temperature, and simmer for 15 minutes.

Serves 2 People. We recommend to serve with a crusty bread and a glass of wine each.





# Land



# and

# Sea

Safety boat services, a small Norfolk company, was approached in 2020 to provide a safety boat for two adventurers who had developed an amphibious Landrover. This was the start of nearly 3 years of work until September this year when they crossed the channel.

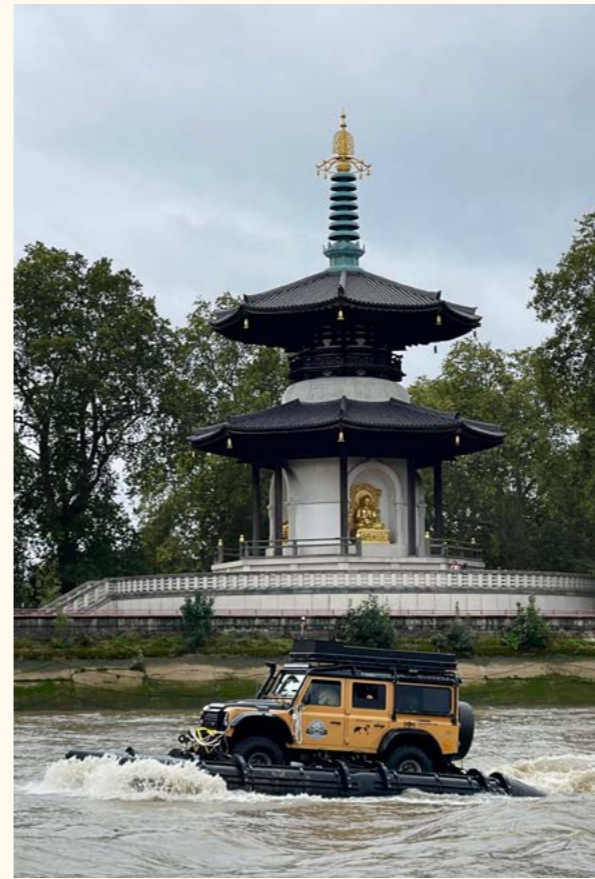




Jeff Willner and Steve Brooks had a vision: to drive from London to New York, something that has never been completed. Unfortunately, the original setup was not robust enough to go round a lake, never mind the English Channel, and resulted in being towed back into Dover after around half a mile. In stepped SBS. They decided the setup was not right and needed a full upgrade so, with the blessing of the clients, started from the ground up. Problems: The float system was originally fixed so the tubes had to be dragged across the ground to get into the water. The drive system was fixed and had to be fitted in the water by two guys in dry suits. It was also chain-driven from the PTO, which had a habit of snapping. The steering was via a cable from the steering rack, which always popped off at the worst time, like in front of a ferry approaching Dover in 2 mtr seas.

The first thing they did was to upgrade the float system to a mark 2 version, which entailed fitting a hydraulic pack in the back of the vehicle to give them the option to lift the tubes clear of the ground, then

lower them once afloat, lifting the vehicle up and out of the water. Next was the drive; this had to go. The thought of standing in the water in the Bering Straits, even in summer, was something they had to avoid, so the Mk2 or "X Drive" drive system was built. While SBS were developing the system, Jeff decided to buy a 3<sup>rd</sup> trials Landrover; this gave them the chance to continue the land side of the expedition while the team developed the unique x drive. This is the bit some can't get their heads around. The guys are not trying to spend the next year on the road doing it all in one hit; they are doing it for fun and, as such, completing the drive in stages. Off the two vehicles went, driving across Europe and up into Russia. Unfortunately, when Putin invaded Ukraine, the adventurers made best speed south, and with the border into China closed due to Covid, they had to come back via Mongolia and store the trucks until the border opened again. The Mk 2 drive, while good, did not provide the speed required. This was linked via the PTO to a transfer gearbox on top of the rear axle, then a small shaft to connect to the drive system.



## Let's Get Started

Time to develop Mk3 (The one we use today). This was one of those lightbulb moments; keeping it simple is the way to go here and as light as possible. Safety Boat Services decided they needed to try an Arneson drive system, which is basically a long shaft sticking out the back with a propeller on it; for steering, the whole shaft moves side to side, and for launching and recovery, the shaft can be lifted up and down, all on hydraulics, no cables, and no getting in the water, all operated from buttons in the cab. Numerous trials were carried out on a lake in Norfolk with further changes from 4 separate tubes for floats to two longer tubes (baffled so they can take damage and still float). Anyone who knows boats knows that a longer waterline length helps with speed and also fuel economy.

Different props were tried to achieve the speed needed for the longer water crossings, chassis protection, after all, salt water and Landrovers is not normally a good mix, plus a ton of other small changes. After about 100 hours of water testing, they got where the vehicles are today. The time had come; the main water stages were here. We were ready to cross the channel, that was until we were told the clients wanted to transit the Thames, followed by the channel, followed by the Seine. Unfortunately, this is not as simple as driving into the water at Chiswick and driving under Tower Bridge. Neil at Safety Boat Services needed help with the logistics; in comes Megan Hinde, in a nutshell, she keeps Bear Grylls safe on his expeditions and, with her company, was able to work in conjunction with SBS to make things happen, and they couldn't have done it without her. 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023 saw the team on the banks of the Thames at Chiswick in the mud and rain, building up the vehicles to go afloat.

This made for some epic pictures; unfortunately, "Mothership" Steve's Landrover developed clutch issues but was still able to complete the leg, driving out of the water in Greenwich under its own power.









## The Channel Crossing

The vehicles were quickly broken down and moved to Dover, ready for the crossing. This was the big one; this wasn't just a few miles up a river, this was just short of 19 miles across one of the busiest waterways in the world. Unfortunately, the weather had other ideas; with 3 mtr seas, the crossing was delayed, so rather than lose days, they took the ferry to Calais, then drove to Paris. The Seine went well, once again in the rain, before heading back to the UK, ready for the channel. September 23<sup>rd</sup>, everyone was up bright and early to a sunny and calm day; this is it, time to prove the system properly. The two safety boats were there; the vehicles were afloat. In the words of Steve Brooks, we were "Running out of reasons not to go." The small safety boat (SBS Seeker) set the pace; it was agreed 6 knots was comfortable and put less stress on the system.

The second safety boat (NR Cougar) had the film crew on, and off we went. The weather started to pick up mid-channel to about a 1.2m wave; this was slightly over the agreed limit but too late now, keep on truckin'. About 4 miles from the beach at Sangatte,

Mothership had issues; Steve did his best to nurse it, but unfortunately, 2 miles from the finish line, he lost all drive from the prop. Taken in tow by the small safety boat, he was taken right to the beach, then lowered the vehicle and drove ashore, welcomed by the Mayor of Sangatte, Champagne, Trophies, a huge crowd, French TV, and of course, Immigration, who had been told we were coming to prevent any arrests.

This is not the end, not by a long shot; the vehicles then returned to Norfolk to check any issues and upgrade weak links (The transfer gearbox between the PTO and the x drive failed with Steve's) and a list as long as your arm. As you read this, the vehicles are in Canada for the next overland leg. In the meantime, Safety Boat Services are working hard on getting the endurance needed for the Yukon River leg, which is the best part of 800 miles, plus various other water stages needed around Alaska and, of course, the Bering Straits. The plans, once the upgrades are complete, are to prove the system locally in Norfolk before heading to Lake Windermere for endurance testing.





# From Office Jobs to Open Roads



The journey of Maui and us where we learn to embrace van Life, adventures and remote work. We are Charlotte and Nico, and for the past 12 months, we have been living and working on the road whilst chasing adventure in Europe's wild places with Maui, our old Mercedes Vario 814D.

We are Charlotte and Nico, and for the past 12 months, we have been living and working on the road whilst chasing adventure in Europe's wild places with Maui, our old Mercedes Vario 814D. During lockdown, we boldly decided to break free from our 9-5 office jobs and start our own companies. We bought a rusty old van and began transforming it into our perfect cabin-on-wheels.

The mission was to build Maui to be completely self-contained, with an off-grid setup to let us work and travel sustainably, exploring the true meaning of remote working. We've travelled thousands of miles and explored over 14 countries and counting. From a magical winter wonderland, Christmas lost in the majestic Alps, to camping amidst the untouched splendour of Croatia's national parks, to slow days exploring the wide stretches of Portugal's rugged coastline, we've seen the beauty our continent has to offer—and this is just the beginning.







Our van life journey began with the search for the right van. After ruling out the classic VW camper (because it was too small for Nico), we stumbled upon the Mercedes Vario. Bigger, stronger, better! We loved the retro, boxy style and its high roof. Nico is 6'1, and since we planned to live in the van full-time, he needed to be able to stand up. The Vario suited us perfectly, and we soon found a rusty old model falling apart after years of neglect by its previous owner. So began the ambitious task of bringing Maui back to life.

We started by stripping Maui down to his bare metal, de-rusting, and rebuilding from scratch. We then moved on to the mechanical tasks, welding and respraying, after which we could finally start building

our interior. Nico is a designer by trade, so he meticulously planned the conversion, while Charlotte, with her marketing experience and love for yoga, infused the van with her personal style. The theme was boho-beach-cabin. We learned all the skills we needed by watching YouTube videos, from welding to wiring the electrical system to insulating Maui for sub-zero temperatures. With perseverance, we made our dream camper a reality.

The van lifestyle is magical. It's not for everyone the uncertainty of tomorrow, but for us, it's incredible. It truly feels like you are part of the world, seeing a new place everyday, a new adventure, a new memory, around every corner. It is truly a gift that we're

having this wonderful experience as a couple. There is a saying in the van build community; you have to earn the experience. The hardship of building your van, of struggling through the mistakes and breakdowns, and suddenly you break through the clouds, and it's everything you dreamed it would be.

On top of that, we started our own companies, and covid was a big catalyst for this change. It prompted us to take our work online, and in doing so have learned to embrace a sort of digital nomadic lifestyle. From the overpacked streets of London to the quiet landscapes of Europe, the view outside our office window has now changed.

«Part of embracing van life is understanding that you are going into the unknown. You might not know where you will be tomorrow or the next day. In our case, uncertainty is always certain with Maui because he's old. You never know when he might have a mechanical problem.»





# Balancing Work and Adventure

Nico founded a design agency, KINGPIN, which specialises in creating high-end liquor brands. He works with clients worldwide and can run his company completely remotely. Charlotte launched a Yoga & Wellness brand, Hello Spirit, focusing predominately on Youtube. The change in locations suits her needs and brand positioning perfectly.

The transition from a normal office job to working from Maui is smaller than you might think. You do have to be highly motivated and driven to put in the hours, but that's the same whenever you run a start-up; no one will tell you what and how to do it. You have to be your own driving force. But rather than staring out an office window at a busy London street, we look at a new incredible landscape every day.

We set out to prove that remote working from the road is entirely possible and not just feasible but just as effective. It might only suit some people, just like travelling with your partner for months in such a small confined space might not suit everyone, but it works for us.



We have a 5G Mifi system consisting of a portable Wifi router with a housing inside the van that connects to a satellite booster mounted to the roof. Whenever we enter a new country, we first get a local unlimited data sim for the month, which usually costs around €20 - €30.

The booster on top of the roof quadruples our signal so that we can be in very remote places and usually always have a signal good enough to upload files, stream and run our software. Our 1050W solar system lets us run out laptops all

day without even dropping past 97% battery charge on sunny days. On cloudy and rainy days, we might drop to 20% efficiency on the solar output, which means we drain slightly more battery; however, that's where our 24V 210amh lithium leisure battery comes in handy. It's a powerful battery that has never run out so far!

So technically, we have a great setup, but we must also be disciplined. We are careful to manage our time zones, especially Nico, with his clients all over the

world, and we always make an effort to ensure our environment fosters productivity. It's not all play; we emphasise the importance of balancing work and travel!

Part of embracing van life is understanding that you are going into the unknown. You might not know where you will be tomorrow or the next day. In our case, uncertainty is always certain with Maui because he's old. You never know when he might have a mechanical problem.



We've formed meaningful connections with fellow van lifers, proving that the road is not just about the destination but the journey itself.



## We decided to build Maui with sub-zero temperatures in mind to add to the adventure and throw ourselves in head first.

This meant several important design decisions and insulation layers to the build to ensure that we and our water systems didn't freeze. In December 2022, we ventured into the breathtaking beauty of the Alps, navigating through Austria and Slovenia. It was -15 degrees at the time, so we put old Maui to the test, and he passed with flying colours. Except for his air compressor, which releases the handbrakes, which we soon learnt to fix.

We then continue South through Croatia, Montenegro, and Albania. Along with the freedom of van life comes the responsibility to mini-

mize our environmental impact. We accept the burden we put on the environment by having an old Diesel van, so we adopted as many sustainable practices as possible, such as using a compostable toilet, reducing waste, eating a plant-based diet on the road, and only relying on solar power for our electricity. Where possible, we encourage others to consider their ecological footprint while living on the road.

As our next adventure phase starts, we look towards Sweden and Norway's fjords. The freedom and fulfilment that comes with embracing the unknown are beau-

tiful, and exploring whilst running our companies and experiencing it all with your partner is truly special.

We hope our story inspires others to chase their dreams. We took a lot of inspiration from people in the community who shared their incredible stories. We want to encourage people to step out of their comfort zones and savour the adventure that awaits beyond the horizon. If you're considering van life, reach out to us at @maui-andus for guidance, as we are always excited to connect with fellow travellers and share our passion for living life on the road. Happy travels!







# Vanlife Portugal

## Top tips for Vanlife in Portugal

Portugal, a place known for its stunning coastline, hundreds (yes hundreds) of days of sun per year, and more relevant for us its vibrant Vanlife community. For those among the population who dabble in outdoor sports, like surfing and hiking, it's a veritable haven.

If you are considering heading towards Portugal in your van, there are a few things we think you should know first.

## Is wild camping allowed in Portugal?

In my head, this is one of the first things I consider when planning a move or trip in my van. So it's important to know that wild camping is not technically legal in Portugal, like many other European countries.

However, just because you can't park anywhere you like, you shouldn't be put off, because overnighting in your van is actually legal in Portugal. You just need to bear in mind that you are limited to only 48 hours in a place where there are no local regulations or restrictions.

There are also restrictions in place that prevent you from overnighting in protected areas, and being caught here comes with a hefty fine, for good reason in my opinion. To sweeten the deal there are also designated overnight areas for motorhomes and vans (both free and paid), alongside a plethora of amazing campsites.

So you won't be running wild camping exactly anywhere, but Portugal does have pretty good laws and regulations in place to allow van dwellers to enjoy the freedoms that come with a nomadic lifestyle.



## It has something for everyone

Portugal is a diverse country with so much to offer the adventurous explorer, but on the flip side its beautiful culture, cities, and cuisine also provide a lot to do for the less adventurous. In the south you can spend a day kayaking in the Algarve, hike through the mountains on the Via Algarviana or get lost wandering the streets of Faro enjoying delectable Pastel de natas.

As you head north you will encounter Lisbon, Portugal's capital, which is a hotspot for stunning architecture, delicious food, and a lively night-life if that's your thing. Some of Portugal's most famous surf spots, like Nazare, are also located not far from Lisbon, so why not plan to spend a few days enjoying a chilled surfer vibe.

Towards the top of the country you have Porto, nestled amongst some of Portugal's famous wine regions, and the breathtaking Peneda-Gerês National Park. Peneda-Gerês is a must see if you find yourself in the northern parts of the country, it is home to charming hamlets, ancient ruins, and gorgeous natural beauty.



## What is driving like in Portugal?

As you may expect Portuguese roads and highways are well maintained, and make for fairly easy driving in your van or motorhome. Some towns do have smaller roads, so if you are in anything particularly large I would do some research before you set off, Google streetview can be really handy for this.

As with other European countries there are also toll roads, which can be avoided if you choose to take slower and smaller roads. We would always recommend traveling the slowest, most scenic routes possible.

Fuel is reported to be slightly more expensive compared with other countries, like nearby Spain. So make sure you keep on the lookout for cheaper fuel stations and budget accordingly.

## When is the best time to visit?

The answer to this question is always, "it depends". However there are a few things to bear in mind. The first is that summer will be the busiest, and most expensive, time of the year to be in Portugal. School holidays mean that lots of people flock to Portugal to soak up the sun and good vibes.

The shoulder seasons of Spring and Fall can offer a really attractive balance between summer crowds and worse winter weather. If it was me that would be the perfect time. The sun will still be out, and the days are nice and warm to enjoy being outside, but there will be slightly less crowds everywhere you go, win-win.

Winter in Portugal does typically bring more rain, but it will also be at its most quiet. The southern areas can still provide warmer climates, so if you do find yourself there in winter heading south could be a great option.

## Our Closing Thoughts

Overall Portugal is a fantastic destination for anyone part of the Vanlife community. It has fair and favorable laws making cheap travel easy, good roads and exceptional culture which is really all you can ask for. Throw in a dramatic and beautiful coastline, and plenty of adventure hotspots and you have a real winner.

Tag us in your Vanlife adventures in Portugal @vanlifezone





# Xavi



A Spark Of  
Happiness by My Side





## Military Hero Enjoys Freedom in Retirement

I found Xaver 4 years ago in Erding, a small town North East of Munich in Germany. The Volkswagen T3 Van (Xavi!) was for sale because his time as a radio vehicle in the Austrian army had come to an end. My gut told me he was the perfect old car, crying out for more adventure as he stood there with old olive green military look. His past was imprinted on the paint. A story that started in 1989 and now had to be continued!

Yes, I, from a small village near Munich, at the age of 22, asked myself the question: what defines the federal army? It protects us from attacks when internal security is threatened. I think this is a nice outlook for life in a van,

because sometimes everyday life takes over and the stimuli outside become too loud. Once you get into the van, with the first step, you feel a sense of security and at the same time you feel freedom when you look through the big windshield. You can only enjoy freedom when you are safe, and the van gives you the space to feel safe at all times.

You have a firm grip and yet, the possibility to be at home anywhere in the world because you are in your home. What a great feeling! Because any time you don't feel comfortable in a place, you can jump in and move on. It's not running away, it's pursuing your own happiness. No matter what

day it is, no matter what place, just live the moment. Create your own favorite day, every day. That's in our hands.

I was also able to experience my New Zealand trip with an old van named Dori. This old girl gave me a feeling of home despite the distance and the unknown ground under my feet. It was an old van that needed a break after an hour to catch its breath. Fish were painted all over it - one fish for each owner. I counted, there were 15! 15 owners and each one contributed a part to Dori and each one told their part of Dori's story. After this trip, it was clear that I needed a van here in Germany as well. That's how I discovered Xavi.





# Discover Amazing Places



Xavi and I have discovered wonderful places, spontaneously, and mostly without a plan. Even if you do plan it, it always turns out differently. What I personally like is that it keeps you open to the wonderful things life has to offer! Sometimes the silence can become quite loud. But hey, right then is the time to take a deep breath and feel the stillness.

My Family and I turned him into my own home. I arranged everything so that I felt comfortable and have everything needed for my day. Xaver got a new look, a beautiful paint job, a floor made of local oak from the Freising forest, a practical kitchen and a super comfortable bed. Oh god it's so cozy inside!

Any spare time I have, I get in and explore new or even old places. With a van, it doesn't matter if you find a nice place around the corner or you have to drive miles away. It's all in your own flow. Go with the flow, as they say. I went with the flow and always with only two questions: Where do I feel safe and where do I want to spend my favorite day today? With Xaver, everything I need is with me and off I go. I take people with me who are up for adventure or I meet people on the spot.



Even if there are mishaps with the old man, Xavi, then there are helpful people who also have a story to tell. So you stay in touch not only with nature, but also with the people you meet along the way. It's not the destination, but the people who accompany you on the journey!

This mentality makes you more alive and with Xavi, I can experience it whenever I want. You just have to get in and drive - then you can quickly end up in the water with a beer, surrounded by mountains, waking up next to cows

or, just the complete opposite; with a yoga mat and incense sticks sitting in front of a lake or by the sea. And yeah of course, you definitely cook better in nature. With a van, you can make every day your own favorite day, because life can be so beautiful.

With all the little moments, I don't lose the feeling that I used to get when I danced around in my PJ as a kid. I'm just trying to never grow up. In the military you go where you're told; now I go wherever I want. Let's be more WE!



# Old but Gold

The somewhat controversial topic of old vs. new is an ever growing discussion within the vanlife community. Whilst a large majority of folk are fond of the designer, state of the art modern day van, camper and motorhome, with all the mod cons, there is still a strong community of all ages in a very different limelight powering through life in a beat up old box living life to the best they can, at a slower and simpler pace.

With the cost of living crisis in many countries and people being priced out of their homes, it's become the norm to sell your belongings and move into a metal shell with the bare minimum to survive daily life. For others, like me, it's a choice of freedom and a life goal that developed years before the popularity contest erupted.

The main ingredient, of course, is the vehicle itself. But how do you choose what's best for you? There are so many options out there it becomes a minefield and an extension of over researching can really make it a struggle and become overwhelming. Everyone has different needs, accessibilities and style preferences, but what really is the deciding factor for most is what fits within their budget.

I've spoken to some fellow full timers, all of whom live in different older vehicles, for further research alongside my knowledge and experience to see if we all have the same thoughts. I was not surprised when they all came back with similar responses on their pros and cons list, the main con being the fuel consumption. Nowadays the fuel prices are dearer than ever, so this may very well be a heavy point to deter you away from an old camper. They may all be drastically different to modern vehicles, but they also

vary between each other. Weight and engine will have a lot to do with this. If this is something that you're really concerned about, then make sure to do your research on averages for each engine. The other thing to think about is if you want a petrol or diesel. As a rule, petrol will be more costly in parts and fuel, but there is always the option to convert it to LPG if not already done. A conversion is pretty pricey, around £1,200 in the UK, but if you use the van regularly it will become worthwhile in the long run. In 2021, the amount of ethanol in the fuel (E10), changed from 5% to 10%, being damaging to old engines means it should not be used and have to use the more expensive E5 fuel, which isn't found at every station. However, don't forget about the dreaded ULEZ/CAZ zones popping up over the continent restricting travel on a non emission compliant vehicle.

No matter what engine you have, how popular, hardy or new it may be, parts will always and forever be needed at some stage of ownership. This is where age, models and communities come into play. For example the popularity of Volkswagens, in particular the Vanagon, alongside the bay window and split screen being an iconic model of motor history, the big brother LT is closely following in their footsteps in modern years due to their ideal living size and cheap price. The cult-like community behind these means there is a demand for parts, creating more companies restoring, refurbishing and developing brand new parts for sale. A popular and well recommended website for the Vanagon and LT is Brickwerks, a strong example of a company that is dedicated to helping keep these vans on the road. Not only do they supply and ship lots of independent parts throughout Europe, but they are very knowledgeable and help via email where they can.



There are many different models of vehicle, Mercedes D range being another popular and well loved classic, again having a variety of parts on offer to help keep them on the road is a big bonus. These are good size vans for full time living, more are being restored as of late, just like the LT's, and are much loved for their classic look and style. As well as the D range, their newer sibling, the Vario, is possibly one of the largest vans on the market. Bear in mind, if you decide on one of these, or another large vehicle, most models exceed the standard weight limit so be sure to check what you can drive on your license before committing to any purchase.

With many of these vehicles having the pros of being (or almost) historically registered (meaning they are tax, MOT/APK and clean air zone exempt), there is also the added bonus of having a basic engine. This usually means that most issues can be fixed on the side of the road with basic tools and mechanical knowledge. Be sure to have some spare parts and spanners on board, especially before setting off on a long trip with no real destination. Not only this, but if you are traveling to less advantaged countries you will find mechanics with the tools to work on these in less populated areas, instead of having all the electrical gear to read and repair a new engine which are mostly found in large towns and cities. This is purely down to the fact that these countries' standard cars are 20+ years old, so the repairs, parts and knowledge can be found almost anywhere as they are a civilization

of keeping what they have on the road, instead of our modern throwaway society where everything new is quickly swapped with an off the shelf replacement.

The last big concern I want to talk about is body maintenance, rust in particular. Wear and tear is expected with any vehicle, new or old, but the longer the vehicle has been around, the more body damage it would have developed, the scale of damage is dependent on where it's been kept and how often it has been used. The best thing you can do for the old timer is a full inspection by a mechanic before purchase. Having it undersealed and treated, cut and replacing any rust and rot you see before it takes over and becomes too late to recover from will be an extreme benefit to its lifespan. These added costs of restoration will affect your price of the vehicle over time rather than the initial purchase price, so being extra certain that a classic is for you is step one of ownership. The benefit of taking on a project is you know exactly what has been done to your van, at what time and cost and by whom. But, just because it's a project, doesn't mean it's not road legal and you can't move in and enjoy the road straight away! I believe if you go in with an open mind, expecting to put a little love, time and money into an older vehicle then it can be extremely rewarding. Plus, living in something with a little character and charm to call your home is a lot more soulful and exciting than any modern white van in my opinion.



# From Alps to Arctic



A Glimpse of Our Summer Spirit in the Nordics. A Journey of Discovery, Spontaneity, and Gratitude.



We just crossed the border to our 10<sup>th</sup> country (Finland, here we come!) since we gave up our apartment and office jobs exactly 5 months ago. I thought that's as good an occasion as any to put my thoughts on our travels and lifestyle on paper and share them with the readers of Vanlifezone Magazine.

While some parts of this article may sound like a love letter to vanlife (which it is), it should also serve as a reflection on this unique time of our lives and as a reminder for our future selves not to wait, but to make things happen, and to always take the bad with the good, preferably with a dash of good humor and a huge portion of gratefulness. Here and there you'll also find a few honest hints about the daily mishaps of vanlife.







## How It Started and How It's Going

Simon and I, Nora, have traveled from Switzerland all the way up to the North Cape (see some of our highlights below) and are now making our way southwards towards the Baltics. Our only plan is to drive north in summer and south in winter.

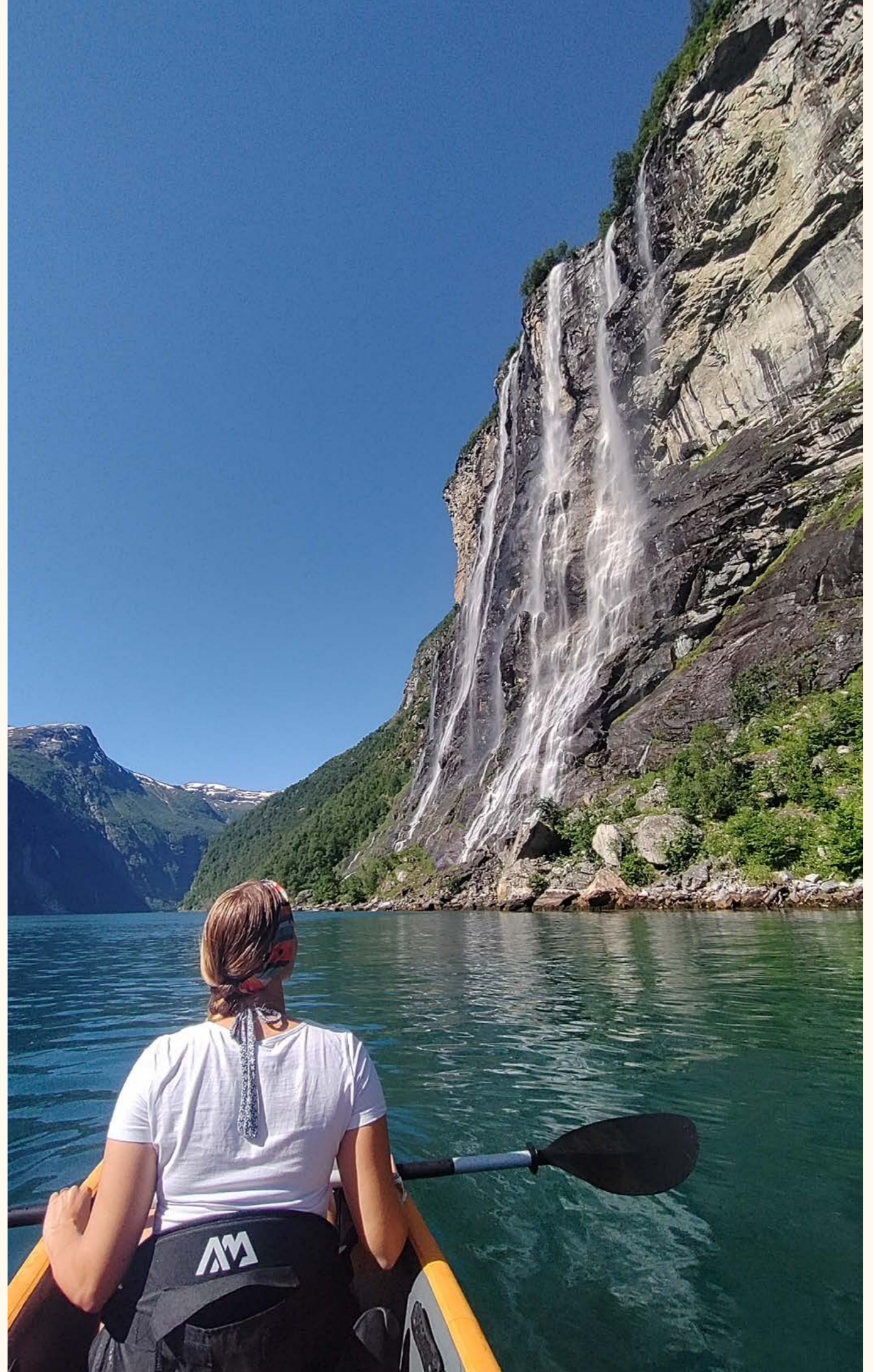
We were sitting in a cozy mountain hut in the Swiss Alps celebrating New Year's Eve when we decided to do it. We left behind permanent jobs and safe income. I was an assistant professor and Simon was a product manager. I gave up a tenure-track position and my title (which seems to be so very important in the academic world, but really who needs it?) I'm still working in research part-time from the road. What I make now isn't enough to sustain us, but it'll make our savings last longer.

As many of you know vanlife is a crazy ride. The highs are high and the lows are...well, mostly toilet-related (we'll get back to that). It's a cloudberry dream or a stinky toilet disaster - but seldom anything in between! It's probably not for everyone, but we are loving the unlimited freedom. On the bright side, now we have time to make fish tacos with our catch of the day, baking bread on the grill, watching the sunset (and the midnight sun), and swimming in fjords and lakes. So for as long as we can, we will enjoy it.

When we decided to live in our self-converted van, there were some luxuries we didn't want to live without, such as a dishwasher, enough power for weeks without sunshine, warm water, and a fixed 200x140cm bed. It took us almost

a year to convert our Peugeot Boxer L2H2 and to upgrade it from a vehicle for weekend trips to our full-time home.

We thought that after Covid we knew what living closely together meant, but we still use the phrase "too much information" multiple times a week. We're up for the challenge of living together on 8m<sup>2</sup>. After a few months, we got to know all the little tricks and quirks to move around the van and we even treasure our outdoor shower. While we're not stressing about work at the moment, we care about other things: Do we have enough water? How far is the next gas station? How are we ever going to make it down this hill or off this off-road campsite? And don't even get me started about the toilet overflowing...







# Go With the FLOW



The most important thing we have learned on the road is to go with the flow. Nature will decide when it snows or hails. The van will decide when the brakes overheat driving down to the fjords or the windshield wipers won't work in heavy north sea rain. Town infrastructures will decide where and when we can do our laundry ... So, what do we do? We park on the curb and wait for the rain to stop. We go out and collect berries or cast the fishing rod, and - if it is still raining - bake a blueberry cake and read a book.

Once you get used to the flow and adapt to nature's rhythm, it all becomes so much more enjoyable. And so much more contrasting to "real-life". By now we can safely say that we have found the flow. Sometimes after a sunny week full of adventurous hikes and beautiful kayak tours, we can't wait for a storm that makes us settle in the van and have coffee in bed (My husband can

make a latte complete with milk foam without getting up. New skill level unlocked.). We'll document our recent adventures or catch up on our creative projects. Who has the time to think about how the moss-covered hills in the Tivedens National Park in Sweden resemble the backs of sleeping dinosaurs, to build a wave from blue stones in the Piave while hoping for more rain or to research edible plants north of the Arctic Circle? We do, for now, and we are making the most of it. And the dirty laundry? Well, that just keeps accumulating...

While a musk ox safari tours in the Dovrefjell national park or diving in the Lofoten obviously have their own appeal, nothing compares to the unplanned events and spontaneous encounters we're having while traveling.

Let me tell you about a few of our favorite magically unexpected experiences. Mostly, they involve

brehtaking landscapes and wild animal sightings. It's so much more rewarding when it "just happens". No camera, no safari tour, just being at the right place at the right time. This is how we discovered the porpoises playing in the Skjerstad Fjord. On the island of Herøy, a quick parking-lot-stroll, as we call them, led to us sitting on top of a hill and watching sea eagles in front of a backdrop of hundreds of tiny islands with white sandy beaches.

Further north we took out the kayak and paddled to a small island, where we expected to catch a glimpse of maybe just a few puffins. Turns out it was puffin paradise. We were surrounded by thousands and thousands of these clumsy birds with their colorful beaks next to us in the water, swarming above us and sitting on the cliffs. Not to mention that we still get excited every time we see a reindeer on the road in Lapland.





## Our Status Quo

We rented a small hut in Finland for a couple of days. Yes, because it came with a washing machine (but the private sauna didn't hurt, either). And when going to bed, we truly missed sleeping in our home on wheels.

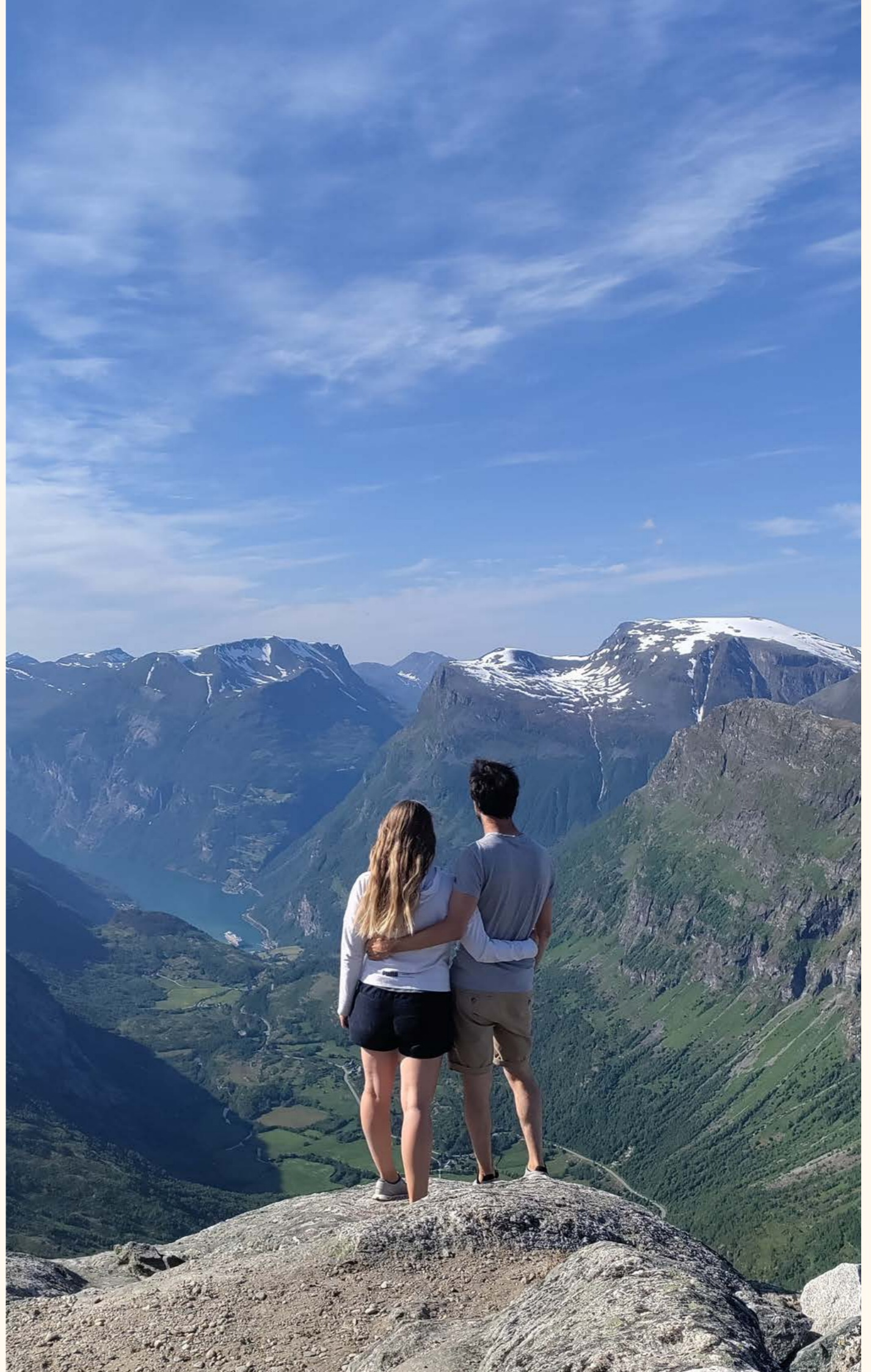
So, do we also miss things from before? Of course! A couch big enough for the two of us, cheese fondue (no space for the fondue pot in the van), and cooking for

our friends and family. But right now we wouldn't change a thing, not for all the money in the world.

We fall asleep in a different spot every night - tonight it'll be somewhere in the wilderness of Kainuu - thinking and dreaming of what our next van will look like (Simon), whether we will love the Channel Islands as much as I imagine (Nora), what mysterious electrical appliance is stealing

1% of our battery power (Simon), what the best way is to collect our memories in a jar (Nora), and — like all normal people — what we will have for breakfast tomorrow.

Comment: Thanks for creating VanlifeZone Magazine! I enjoy reading it, and I like to write and will be on the road for a while. So, if you ever need a volunteer to help edit or provide content for other articles, feel free to get in touch.





# Encounters with Prehistoric Giants

## The Musk Oxen of Dovrefjell National Park

Nestled in the heart of Norway, Dovrefjell-Sunndalsfjella National Park is a testament to the raw and untamed beauty of the Nordic wilderness. This destination offers a unique blend of rugged natural beauty and an opportunity to witness one of the world's most ancient and awe-inspiring creatures - the musk ox.

## Guardians of Dovrefjell

Dovrefjell National Park is home to approximately 250 musk oxen, making it a global hotspot for these ancient beasts. The impressive creatures were reintroduced from Greenland due to the belief that they once roamed this territory during interglacial periods. Today, Dovrefjell stands as one of the few places (and probably the most accessible) on Earth where you can witness these primeval animals in their natural habitat. Guided tours offer an almost certain opportunity to encounter the woolly giants, even in the winter months, providing a glimpse into the life of these majestic creatures.

## Crafting Your Dovrefjell Experience

Here's a suggested itinerary for 2.5 days in the national park: Arrival Day: Start your journey with a visit to the Snøhetta viewpoint at sunset. It's the perfect way to immerse yourself in the breathtaking landscape that awaits you. You might even spot a grazing reindeer from up there.

Day 1: Embark on a musk ox hiking safari. This is your best chance to witness these incredible creatures up close and learn about their behavior and history. The experienced guides will ensure you have a safe and educational encounter.

Day 2: Explore at your own pace by following parts of the Musk Ox Trail. With trails ranging from 4.5 to 15 kilometers, you can choose the route according to your preferences. Don't forget to bring your binoculars for spotting wildlife along the way.

Dovrefjell has more to offer, especially if planning longer tours such as an ascent to the Snøhetta peak (2286 m, accessible in July and August), it's worth spending more time here.



## Historical Endurance and Conservation

Dovrefjell is a place that caters to all types of outdoor enthusiasts. Skiing, cycling, hiking -- this national park has something for everyone. It's also a landmark for conservation in Norway, preserving a unique ecosystem found nowhere else in the country.

Throughout history, Dovrefjell has symbolized something eternal and unchangeable for Norwegians. It even played a role in their constitutional oath of 1814, promising unity until "Dovre falls." The Kongsvoll botanical mountain garden, established almost a century ago by pioneering botanist Thekla Ressvoll, is another demonstration of the enduring allure of Dovrefjell. Here, you can witness nearly the entire Norwegian mountain flora in one place, some of which predates the last ice age.

## Respectful Wild Camping

While wild camping is not permitted within the park's boundaries, the remote nature of the area means that there are plenty of idyllic spots just outside. Always check local rules and remember the golden rule of leaving no trace.

From its iconic musk oxen to its diverse outdoor activities, Dovrefjell promises a journey like no other. Pack your hiking boots and turn your van northward for your next wilderness adventure.



# Share Your Vanlife Story with Us!



If you want to share your own vanlife experience and become a member of our community you are more than welcome to do so. Follow the steps on the right page and fill out the submission form on our website.

This project isn't possible without every single one of you. You can share any aspect or story about your experience of living in a van. For inspiration look through our other magazine issues as well.

Here are the four steps on how to submit your article:

## 1. Complete Form

Go to [www.vanlifezone.com/submit-article.php](http://www.vanlifezone.com/submit-article.php) or follow the **qr-code** on the bottom of the page. Fill out all of the required fields and double check all of your info! Be thoughtful with the title of your article; it should grab the reader's attention and tease what the article is about!

## 3. Images

Equally as important as your text are your pictures. They make your article come to life and are a chance to add your personal visual style to your article. Go to [wetransfer.com](http://wetransfer.com) and add **15 - 20 high quality images** that fit your story. If you are unsure how to upload your images, click the „more info“ button next to the image field in the form.

## 2. Article

Write your article and please make sure that it has roughly **1000 - 1200 words**. You have total creative freedom and can write about what ever is dear to your heart! The most important thing is that you are authentic and that you tell your story how it happened, even if there were some bad experiences. Paste your finished article into the corresponding field in the form.

## 4. Submission

The final step is to **submit** the entire form with all of your info, the article and the link to your images. We are excited to read and share your wonderful stories. If there are any questions left, contact us on instagram or at [office@vanlifezone.com](mailto:office@vanlifezone.com) and don't forget to GET OUT THERE.



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