

VANLIFEZONE



Issue 3
08/2021

A PASSION PROJECT DEDICATED TO SHARING VANLIFE STORIES AND ADVENTURES

TWO CAMPERS AND A CORGI

Join Joriën, Sandra and their Corgi Fudge on their Adventure

LIKE BONNIE AND CLYDE

The Little Things in Life

A PERFECT DAY IN GLENCOE

Explore the Scottish Highlands with Josh

VANLIFE IN NORWAY

Join Peter and Mary on their Journey through Norway

RECIPE

Walnut & Banana Cake
by Van Life Eats





Vanlifezone

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ABOUT US...

Vanlifezone is a passion project dedicated to sharing vanlife stories and adventures.

Thank you so much and we cannot wait to read, see, hear and share more of your impressive stories!

It began in early 2020 as a small page on Instagram but soon gained a lot of momentum and is currently a community with more than 16.700 members. After the first and second issues were released we got a lot of great feedback and more stories but due to some issues with Instagram our organic growth stagnated and lead to a lack of stories. We took a break to reorganize and are now coming back stronger than before.

Enjoy!

16 Inspiring stories about very different topics related to living in a van and a delicious recipe await you in this issue.

The best thing about the stories is that they are your stories! You – our friends, our Vanlifezone-Family – had total creative freedom to send in whatever you wanted with whatever images you wanted to accompany the text... And it turned out amazing!

Vanlifezone

Life on the road during a Pandemic

We are Charlotte and Ken from Belgium. Two people who are madly in love and share a passion for travelling (and Whiskey). After being stuck in the ratrace for too long, we decided it was time for a new direction in our life. So instead of following the beaten path we chose to wander off the main road. We bought a 13 year old boxtruck, converted it into a tiny house on wheels and left off to see what's over the hill. Our journey started in January 2020 and the plan was to travel the European continent for about a year. We would be chasing the sun down south during winter and following her back up north during summer. The first 2 months everything went according to plan. We were able to enjoy the sun, sea and of course sangrias in southern Spain while it was freezing in Belgium. But shortly after we crossed the border to Portugal, shit hit the fan.



Covid-19 started its rampage tour all over the European continent and quickly everything changed. All of a sudden there were queues outside the supermarkets, masks and gloves were obligated inside and half of the shelves would be empty. Camping was closed and public beaches became forbidden territory. The biggest problem for us was that even water taps were shut and even though there was limitation of

movement, the police would chase us away. It was clear that fear had taken control. So after a couple of weeks hiding in some remote parts of Portugal and a quick visit to Lisbon, which looked more like a ghost town than a European capitol, we decided to get back to Belgium and wait for the Covid-19 storm to pass. Back in Belgium we were lucky to find work straight away and started saving up for our

future travels. After 3 months it became clear that the pandemic was not going to stop raging and we decided to test our luck once again. In the end, the van is all we have and if we want to wait for the storm to pass, we might as well do it in better weather... So by mid-September we left Belgium and set forward to Greece to hopefully spend winter in milder temperatures. The first thing we found out during the second part of our vanlife adventure is that fear is no longer in control. Everybody seems to be adapting to the fact that there is an incurable virus, but that the only thing that can prevent us from it is common

sense. Most people follow the instructions of wearing masks, using disinfectant and keeping distance from one another very well. And it's not longer a rare event to have a chat with random strangers, locals or other vanlifers despite the bigger distance. The second thing we found out is that it is impossible to make any plans when you're travelling during these unusual times. Borders may close, tests may be required, curfews and limitations of movement may be introduced,... You never know what to expect, but for the first month we did not experience any difficulties with crossing borders.

Most of EU countries did not have any regulations for travellers from other EU countries. It was only by the time we were travelling through Montenegro that we found out that the second wave of the virus was hitting hard. Belgium became the country with the highest infection rate in Europe and new lockdowns were announced in multiple countries. So if we wanted to get to Greece we had to hurry up and get there as soon as possible. From Montenegro we travelled to Serbia and over to Bulgaria in a couple of days. Since Promachonas is the only landborder open for non essential travels this was our only option to get into Greece. We felt pretty bad to not being able to enjoy these beautiful countries for a couple of weeks, but with the rapidly changing situation and winter breathing down our necks we did not have time to hesitate. Thanks to a Belgian couple living in Bulgaria we found out that we could take a covid-test in a lab in Sandanski, a Bulgarian town about 20 kilometers from the Greek border. A negative covid-test is mandatory for getting into Greece, so we had no other option than taking the test and hope for the best. After 24 stress-full hours the test results came back negative, which we had to celebrate with a fair amount of Bulgarian Rakia.



Armed with a negative covid-test and a serious hangover we were ready to cross the border and reach our destination for the coming winter. On the night of our arrival in Greece we heard from local media that a new lockdown would be implemented in the following days. And indeed, 2 days after our arrival the government announced a new lockdown and new regulations. Other than supermarkets and pharmacies, all shops are closed as well as bars and restaurants. A text messaging system was introduced to grant people permission to leave their homes only for shopping, work, school, doctor visits or exercising. As we are not Greek citizens, we are somewhat in a grey zone and did not really know what they expected us to do... But locals of the small town near the beach where we are parked assured us that the police would not bother us. On the first night of the lockdown however we were woken by the police around 1.30 am, who apparently were suspicious of the boxtruck by the beach. We do not look like a camper and they must have thought there was illegal business going on. When they found out we were campers, they apologized for waking us and assured us that it was no problem to stay at our 'wildcamping' spot, but that we

could not travel. So here we are, stuck on an idyllic beach, drinking Retsina and watching the most beautiful sunsets night after night, waiting for this 'horrible' lockdown to end.

@offthemainroad_



ADVENTURES WITH RUTH

KLAUS, DENISE & LULU



We are Klaus and Denise and we are both 27 years old, Denise is from Sweden where she grew up in the forests around Stockholm and Klaus is a countryside boy from the south of Denmark.

We are currently travelling Europe in our old Mercedes Sprinter 312D from 1995. We call her Ruth, as Ruth is typically the name of an old lady in Denmark and Sweden where we're from. With us, we

have our little Maltipoo pup Lulu, who has had the pleasure of growing up on the road.

Our vanlife dream really started about two years ago. We rented a van from Indiecampers to drive the entire coast of Portugal in 10 days. Those 10 days proved to us, that vanlife was definitely something for us! Along this we completely fell in love with Portugal. So much in love, that

we knew that we wanted to move here one day. The question was when and where?

We quickly decided to start working towards converting our own van, live and work on the road and find our little paradise somewhere along the Portuguese coast.

After a few months search for the right van, we found Barbara. Barbara was an old VW Transporter, with an old caravan box on the back to live in! Unfortunately we found out that Barbara was leaking... a lot... We had to give her up, as we simply couldn't save her.

This didn't kill our dream though! We quickly began the search, once again, and a few months later we found Ruth. This old beauty, that had been taken so good care of, that most people get shocked when they learn that she is 25 years old. Ruth was an empty shell, waiting to become our next home.

At this point we were living in Copenhagen and Klaus' father in the south of Denmark, agreed to let us store our van at his place. So every weekend when we got off from our jobs, we took the 3 hour drive to work on the van. This proved to be a sloooow way of working and it's surely not one to recommend!

At one point it simply got too stressful and we decided to take a winter break from the build and pick it back up in the spring of 2020.

During the past year, Denise had quit her 9-5 job in Marketing to start her own business as well as taking a part time role in a company from where she could work remotely. Klaus, working as a project manager within Marketing, proposed a new position for himself within his current company to become part time and remote as well. This all got sorted out early in 2020 and in March/April when Corona hit us all, we were completely remote and got ready to finish the van.



The finishing of the van took us about 2 months. We had never built anything before and the job became quite a bit bigger than we would have ever thought! In Denmark it is very difficult to find material for a van-build as the danish tax rules around cars have made the conversion of vans a rare thing in Denmark. We lived at Klaus' dad's place for the finishing of the car and on June 10th the car was finally done!

After a small celebration in the South of Denmark we headed towards Sweden to explore Denise's home country. Initially the plan was to head directly to southern Europe, but the Corona virus gave us an unexpected chance to explore Northern Sweden.

We drove up to Stockholm to meet Denise's family and spend some time there and then we took a drive to the very North of Sweden. A rainy, cold and very beautiful experience. Sweden is an enormous country! From Stockholm to Kiruna, where we went, there is as many kilometers as there is from Stockholm to Paris. Crazy.. After Sweden we drove back through Denmark, and headed south for France, Spain and Portugal.

We wanted to get to Portugal as quickly as possible, due to several restrictions in a lot of the countries we were driving through, but it ended up taking us two weeks (it was planned for 3 days). We spend a few nights in a small french vineyard near Bordeaux, saw the Sand dunes of Pilat and went down to Spain where we hiked in the mountains of Los Picos de Europa. Such an amazing place!

After this we entered Portugal where we've been for around 3 months now.

A few weeks after we arrived we sat on a cliff, watching the sunset near Ericeira on a Tuesday night. This was the night where Klaus



got down on one knee, to ask Denise to marry him. With the sunset in the background and the dolphins jumping in the ocean, Denise said yes!

Ever since Portugal has offered so many amazing experiences. HUGE waves in Nazaré, beautiful sunsets in Peniche and so many amazing people and new friends in fantastic Ericeira.

We have been on the road for half a year now and we are hoping to be able to travel a lot more around Europe some time in the new year. We plan to go see a lot of Spain and France and then skip over through Italy to the Balkans

and potentially Greece. Only time will tell, but we can't wait for more adventures!

We are both still working from the van in part time positions, which gives us time to explore during the weeks! Denise is growing her brand and will be releasing her signature programme in the beginning of 2021. She does soul work, through yoga, meditation and coaching and is helping women, like herself, to take the leap and dare to take action on their dreams.

Lulu is soon to turn 1 year and in her 1st year she has been visiting no less than 7 countries!

@ourlittledreamlife



TWO CAMPERS AND A CORGI

We are Joriën, Sandra and our corgi Fudge and we are from the Netherlands. A very flat country where in our opinion isn't much variety in. So we both wanted to explore the world. Starting with Europe.,

We started vanlife in April 2020. We had plans to travel with our Peugeot Partner. But you couldn't even call that a mini camper... It was a micro camper. We didn't remove the partition so we had very little space to sleep. This resulted in a sore back and sore knees. So unfortunately we had to decide to buy a bigger van and that's where our plans started for a very hippie camper.



Due to Covid we had lots of extra time. Sandra lost all of her assignments as a freelance florist, her main income is from the floral event industry, but everything got canceled. Joriën was already 1.5 years at home, starting with a burn out and a bad knee. He was in a law suit with his employer because his boss tried to fire him while he was recovering from a knee surgery. He finally won this battle, but it takes a lot of energy, and he's still waiting for the reintegration process to start. So we really wanted to focus on something new.

We bought our Toyota HiAce 4x4 mid-April. We did everything ourselves. The first thing we did was cut a huge hole in our roof for the pop up roof. That was so scary, but we had the biggest and hardest part covered right away. It took us 2 months to complete our van. Unfortunately we had a set back because our new camper needed to be inspected as a camper, and due to Covid they couldn't do that. So we had to wait for another month before we could start on our first journey.



But we were so excited when our final journey came. We had 7 weeks and wanted do a huge road trip. We started in the Netherlands and drove 6000 km and crossed 9 different countries. Our destination was Croatia, but we had not so much of a plan. Just looking for beautiful places, nice

hikes and always aiming for the most quiet places. 4x4 comes in pretty handy when you're looking for quiet places.

What we like so much about vanlife is that we see how little we need to be happy. And most of all, how much being in



nature makes us happy. We are disappointed when we need to stay overnight in a big parking lot with a lot of campers. Although we love meeting new people, and we meet lots of new people. Maybe it's because of the looks of our van. It's so great to get in touch with people who also love the vanlife. It still amazes us how happy you can be with a beautiful spot or just finding some nice river to camp nearby. This lifestyle really makes you appreciate the smallest things even more.

We love nature the most. Our idea of traveling before vanlife was that we needed to get on an airplane to get to beautiful countries. But now we see how beautiful Europe is. It is so versatile. One time we are in the mountains in Austria, the next time we are in the beautiful hills of Tuscany. And we discovered how beautiful Slovenia and Croatia are. We wanted to see so much more. But that's the downside of parttime vanlife you can't go away for that long. We try to go away as much as we can. Even if it's only a weekend.

Our plans for 2021 is to travel for at least half a year. But we are working on an steady online income first. Sandra is focusing

@twocampersandacorgi
Youtube:two campers and a corgi

on graphic design, she studied that 12 years ago and is taking a course to freshen up her memory. And Joriën is still figuring out what he wants to do. But for him that's hard because he's always been a pastry chef so it's hard to make a career switch, and he's dependant on the reintegration process. And we can tell you the Netherlands have a lot of rules. So this takes time . But we still have a whole year to figure everything out.

After this big trip we want to go fulltime, and we probably need a bigger van to do that. So traveling for half a year is a good way to test this, but of course we want to enjoy this hippie camper first.



MILES TOGETHER

HOW THIS VAN BROUGHT LOVE INTO OUR LIVES



This is the story of how I, Christina from Switzerland, fell in love with Ralf from Germany. Or should I say of how I fell in love with a white T4 and then accidentally also with its owner? What is even more important, it's the story of how we then gave a long distance relationship a go and decided to overcome the many kilometers in between us thanks to the mentioned T4.

But let us start from the beginning: It was back in the autumn of 2018 when we first "met" online and started exchanging messages via Instagram - thank you Algorithm for showing me that first picture! So all I saw was this cool T4 that was apparently from Germany but at the time travelling through Switzerland. As a people loving tourism student, I could not resist giving some tips on great places that are worth a visit and it then turned out that the owner of the van knew my country better than myself, suddenly giving tips to me. Without really knowing the owner I then agreed on accompanying him on a hike in the beautiful Alps.

Because why not? But as life is at times, we never made it due to a change in schedule at my university.

Our "relationship" from then on was a sporadic comment on a story or a beautiful landscape picture posted. We went on with our lives and pretty much forgot about each other. Until... it was clear that the T4 would come back to Switzerland for another vacation! Immediately it was agreed on making up leeway finally going together on a little adventure. We had many ideas - an overnight in a mountain hut or maybe sleeping in a tent on a mountaintop? Time went by and the vacation came nearer. We both did not think much about meeting each other - this was after all just this random person who lived many kilometers away.

In the end the plan was to spontaneously decide what we could do as the weather forecast was not looking peachy. And so we met personally in Bern on a Friday evening in September 2019. Ralf had driven straight from Germany. We both remember that first moment

and how I could not take my eyes off... the van! So of course I got a grand tour. I then straight away betrayed the cool T3 from a friend with whom I had been on vacation before, and announced that the T4 was not only lovely but I then gave it the title "luxury van". No convertible roof, nor a built-in kitchen but lovely lighting, a heater, solar panels on the roof



and handy usb charging ports everywhere! What else could a girl want?

On that weekend we went on rainy hikes and joined crazy Americans and curious Japanese on the "Top of Europe", the Jungfrauoch (but that is a story of it's own...). I spent my first night in the luxury van and decided that I liked it there. It was also my first time spending a night freestanding by the road and suddenly I had found a whole new world with many possibilities. Of course two days are a very short time, but I was luckily cheeky enough to add to our goodbyes a "maybe I'll just join you again next weekend". Somehow Ralf also enjoyed my company and I was welcome to accompany him for another two days... and then another two the

week after, before Ralf and the T4 returned to Germany.

We spent wonderful days in the Valais, went on hikes to lovely mountain lakes and huts and slept by a glacier and on a mountain pass. I was reminded how beautiful Switzerland is and enjoyed many conversations with the man I had just met. Suddenly those days together were coming to an end but we were both not willing to let that be the end of our time with each other. I might have opened my heart for a van but it's owner had also found his way into it.

A long distance relationship was something that we both never had considered beforehand. But we made it work and the van helped in so many ways! We were able to meet in between our hometowns, we explored new places during the day and spent the nights in the van, eating Swiss Raclette and watching movies. The time of the year did not matter. Until Covid came... and suddenly this border between us was a problem, something we both never would have expected. Those couple of weeks were hard but we stayed strong and afterwards enjoyed more vacations in the van both in Germany and Switzerland in June and September 2020.



However, Covid also made our wish of moving together even stronger. Luckily Ralf already loved Switzerland, my home country, long before he fell in love with me and we are planning on moving together. Before that happens though we will use the great opportunity of him changing his job to travel around Europe for a bit.. let's say for a year or maybe longer? We will see! Sadly the white T4 won't be joining us on that adventure. We have decided that he is a bit too old and small, plus he is no 4x4 and maybe, but just maybe, a girl after all also prefers to be able to stand in a van and to have a toilet and shower. I know we could live without those things but in the long term it is just nice to have that little luxury in our tiny home on wheels. Therefore we are soon welcoming a 4x4 Sprinter into our little family. Do you want to join us on our future adventure? Follow us on our new Instagram account to do so.

@miles_together



LIKE BONNIE AND CLYDE



Sometimes it's the little things in life that can make great things happen.

When we were standing on a parking space on the east coast of Italy in the summer of 2020 and received a call from a lady who responded to our apartment advertisement, we did not expect that we would exchange our apartment for our van for an indefinite period of time.

We actually planned to do a few longer trips over the year, but this lady made it a little easier for us. Lisa wanted to decline first and said: „You must have misunderstood something, we are only renting the apartment for a maximum of 4 weeks.“ But Daniel said directly after hanging up: „Hey, that's actually exactly what we want.“ So we agreed: our apartment is sublet until further notice and we are traveling the world in our apartment on four wheels. With that the travel



planning started and the first destination was Greece, as we had already gathered so much positive inspiration from other campers. Once there, we were completely confirmed: fantastic, natural pitches right by the sea, the water and the coast like in a picture book, incredibly lovely people and so much variety - nature and cuisine.

We will always remember Greece as it showed us camper life 100% and in a positive sense. Not least because of the little Freddo, a street dog with a broken paw, who stood on the road on our way back to the ferry and made us stop. Saving him was indisputably our experience of the 10 weeks in Greece.

We are incredibly excited about where the journey will take us next because one thing is clear, we will not be returning to our apartment anytime soon.

SOME FACTS TO OUR VAN

- Model: Nissan NV-400
- L2H2
- in total (with equipment) 3t weight
- bed: 140cm x 185cm
- 80l water installed
- 35l water portable
- no shower (just outside)
- kitchen fully equipped
- Diesel parking heater
- 100 Ah lithium battery
- solar on the roof + portable sunfolder

If someone needs some more infos regarding our conversion: we have some story highlights on our IG page:

@likebonnieandclyde



VIAJA Y REITE

We are Belu and Lucho, we started traveling and living in a Volkswagen Kombi three years ago. We want to share about our trip, about how we changed our style of living, our home, our routines and everyday activities, and why we choose this and not the ordinary routines (working eight hours in an office, paying a rent, for a car, and other expenses, complaining on Mondays and looking forward to Fridays). We also want to tell how we left aside everything to get into a world, uncomfortable and unknown at the beginning, and find freedom: from degrees and professions, roles and formality, structures

and mental paradigms, jobs and "security" by the end of month, and last but not least "what would people around us say"; because it is worth saying that we both were born in a town of about seven thousand inhabitants, without anonymity, with a way of thinking, wearing and going by very different of that of people in a city, and where to do something unusual to what is expected may bring about tears or applauses.

Now, we travel slowly in a Kombi which we call Blanquita, with our house on, at a snail's pace in times when the immediate is rewarded, and the "everything now" becomes the slogan of great companies. We move at 60 kilometers an hour, if no climb or high temperature make us drive at 15, to stop again anchored on four wheels. Sometimes is just for the night, others for a week or two, using the word freedom literally: if we like the place we stay and become it into a pleasant one, where we enjoy doing the activities we like best; otherwise we go on traveling and look for a better one. Blanquita approves this slow moving, if not she makes us know: she becomes stubborn,



because really she does not like going in a hurry like a pack of hounds which only sees its prey, its objective but not the way. For us it is just the same any day of the week, month of year and hour that clock hands indicate. The Gregorian calendar does not have any sense for us, we are not euphoric if it is Friday or depressed because it is Sunday; happy if it is summer holiday or nostalgic when work or school year begins. We eat when we are hungry, sleep when we feel tired and work in unusual hours. Sometimes we get up at six in the morning and go to bed at eight in the evening, some others, we have breakfast at midday and have lunch in the afternoon.

We always find a solution: people help without knowing us and are very kind, of course there are exceptions, but there are a lot of nice people rather than bad ones in the world. As we told you, we trust and they too, they open their homes, serve dishes of good food, and give us a shower without asking them. They are the best of the road and we coincide we would not last so long on the route without them, so there is not a day we do not ask ourselves: why do they give us so much?

The Kombi works properly, spare parts are easy to find and we can afford them, we are learning about mechanics and there are more fans of Kombis and old cars than Messi's ones in the world. Our health has improved a lot going slowly. We have not taken a medicine for three years. Traveling this way has been a therapy, where the "practice" was a good way to bring other type of life rhythm to the trip. A bit slower, but more conscious. We do not get ill (only some unimportant cold), we eat well



and healthy, perhaps we have lost some weight, but we do not starve, we simply do not eat in excess, we do not have a fridge and there is no chance of having something between meals, we do exercise, learn to meditate when we run out of gasoline, or the engine fails or have any other problem on the road and we have a shower everyday (or almost). We have learnt to live with only the essential, we lack nothing and go on with lightness. Imagine a life with less: less things, less disorder, less stress, less cleaning

or tidying, less worries, less distractions, less dissatisfaction. Now imagine life with more: more time, more freedom, deeper relationships, more growth, more pleasure, more calm, more peace. We have only what we need and everything has its utility. We have only two plates and if somebody comes we have two compote bowls made with two halves coconuts, we have two chairs, but the bed sofa has been suitable for four people, we have two glasses which we also use as cups, and

we have most important for us: the freedom of waking up every morning and choose how and what to do the rest of the day, not worrying about a future that is uncertain for everybody, living in the present, making space and time for the important things of the day, discovering who we are, what we like to do, why we do it, giving a pause to the robot we were becoming in the big city. We do not buy much, so we don't have souvenirs from every place, no T-shirt saying "I was in...", no magnet souvenirs for fridges (we don't have a fridge), we do not take so many presents either. We spend in things we do not need to load, such as gasoline to make more kilometers, trying a typical dish, sightseeing, attending some typical show; we spend in experiences.

In the last years, we have said more times "thank you" than any other word. "Thank you for the warm shower", "thank you for receiving us", "thank you for this tasty food", "thank you for letting us park in front of your house, "thank you for lending the tap", "thank you for helping with our Kombi", "thank you for your advice regarding dangerous, nice or unforgettable places", "thank you for buying a postcard", "thank you for trusting us", "thank you for coming to chat and sharing a mate".



We can say that there is no one day similar to any other, we have woken up in deserts, in front of the Caribbean sea, under the Andes mountains, in a dark parking in a subsoil, in the street, by the side of a route, at 4.800 meters high, in five-stars hotels, in a hammock litter, with hail, snow, rain and sun. It is like having houses in several parts of the world. We are not ashamed to tell that we have done much more different type of jobs than in all our lives: waiter/ waitress, cuisine assistant, glass washer, selling food, arranging gardens, delivering brochures, cleaning, making handicrafts, learning about everything. We invite you to read our travel stories and to accompany us in this roller coaster of our travel life in our social media:

@Viajayreite.



LEBEMANN



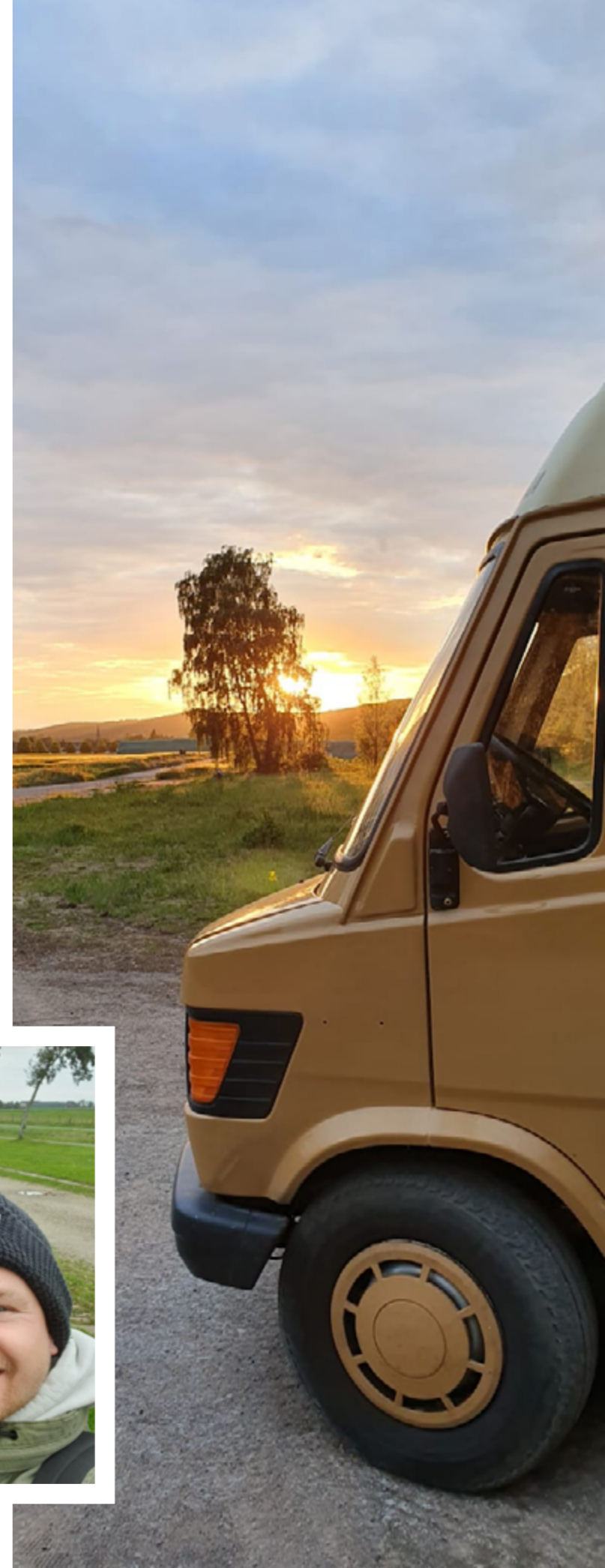
Hello dear Vanlifezone team, We would be happy to become a part of your magazine and would like to share our story with you. We are a couple from near Frankfurt on the Main in Germany. We are full blooded campers. I Rocco have been living on a campsite in my tinyhouse for 6 years now. Monique, my girlfriend, has been

living with me on the campsite for two years. We restored a Mercedes 309d James Cook for our travel. We can only travel intermittently. Monique loves her Job and that's why we only travel temporarily. I however,love freedom. In the cold season I work as a craftsman to have time for the summer. In

@Lebemann.lifestyle


the summer I am out and about with my Van, go to all kinds of techno festivals and enjoy life. We always plan longer vacations together when Monique is free from work. But I'm working on kidnapping her more often and making her work less. We love our tinyhome as much as we love our campervan. Both give us a lot of freedom and we only need a little money to live. And we dont need much too live. The way here until we had the tinyhouse and the camper and everything was not easy at first. We didn't want to go into financial debt, to be free from social pressures. Now that we have everything, it feels good and we only need a little money. To need little money means to have more freedom to be able to do what you want and love. That is of course traveling, being in nature and festivals.

We are very interested in building our dream van in the future. It should be bigger and wilder than our current one. But at the moment we are satisfied and enjoy what we have.



JOSH

A PERFECT DAY IN GLENCOE



Beep-Beep-Beep. The alarm shatters my deep sleep. I crack an eye open and wince at the cold blue light of my phone, harsh after the warm darkness of sleep. Without getting out of bed I peel back a curtain, wiping away the condensation I glare out at the low grey cloud. Surprise, surprise, the weather forecast is wrong I muse.

I stubbornly decide to go ahead with my plans, determined not to let Scottish weather get the best of me. The forecast was promising, warm temperatures and lots of sunshine, although there was no sign of that yet. Shedding the warmth of the duvet I shrug on a cold jumper. I pull the van door open and let the cold autumn air blast life into me. One of my favourite parts of wild camping is having breakfast with a view. As I eat my cereal my gaze

takes me far into a Scottish glen. The roaring of a stag ricochets off the walls of the valley and thick clouds cling to the craggy mountains. The river Etive flowing gently loch-ward, carving a path through the wide valley of rusty coloured heather. Such a Scottish scene was before me, it came as no surprise that it was where they filmed the highland scenes in the James Bond film Skyfall.

Breakfast consumed and dishes done, I fire up the van and drive the short distance to the start of the hike. That brings me to my second favourite part of van life, being able to sleep close to the trail head, it makes those early mornings a little less early.

My first steps squelch in the wet gravel. The path ahead winds past another iconic Scottish scene. The Langangarbh climbers hut sitting at the base of the Buachaille Etive Mor, appearing so small and isolated in-front of the towering mountain that guards the entrance to Glencoe. I climb ever higher into the coire, making my way through the clouds. The sun is gaining strength and it looks like the forecast might be right.

Sweat is dripping of my face, I can see the top of the coire now, not much farther to go. With burning lungs, I pull myself up onto the ridge and my breath is taken away.



Above the clouds the full warmth of the sun hits me, it's perfectly still, not a breath of wind. In front of me hazy blue mountains layer the horizon as far as I can see. I turn around and look to the north, Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the UK, sticks his head up through the clouds. I perch on a flat rock, needing time absorb 360° views of such magnitude.

Looking to my right I can see the

ridge and peaks that are today's objectives, Stob Na Doire (1010m), Stob Coire Altruim (941m) and Stob na Broige (956m). It is a perfect day in the Scottish mountains, friendly hikers, no wind, and glorious sun. I make my way west across the ridge, enjoying the views from each summit. At the last summit, Stob na Broige, the mountain ridge ends, from here the mountain drops down to the valley floor roughly 1000m below. From the summit the views down the long glacial valley to Loch Etive are spectacular. On either side of me are some of Glencoe's highest mountains, Bidean Nam Bian (1150m) to the north and Meall a' Bhuiridh and Creise to the south.

With the shadows lengthening I begin the hike out, down the valley named Lairig Gartain. Lairig in Gaelic means pass, and this valley serves as a passage between Glencoe and Glen Etive. Lairig Gartain is full of red deer and birds of prey, at one point I count 8 circling high above me, unfortunately they are all too far to determine the species. As it is autumn the stag rut is well underway and the roaring and fighting of the stags is one of the most amazing displays of nature I have ever seen. I stop multiple times to watch the stags fight,

rear legs driving them forward in the wet ground, antlers clashing viciously with the opposition. Colliding over and over, the deer drive backwards and forwards over the steep ground. Eventually one male backs away, then turns slowly and canters off, and the victor begins roaring again, searching for his next opponent. Distracted by the wildlife it is later than expected when I get back to the van, and I take a quick detour for a £1 shower before returning to a quiet glen to park up for the night. As I cook dinner, utterly exhausted

but very happy, I realise that this was probably the perfect day in the Scottish mountains. It's not often that things align as they have today in Scotland, usually the weather has a mind of its own, but I got lucky. I didn't get lucky the whole trip, I spent a lot of time inside reading, but for my first ever solo van trip it made for a very special memory. With the UK back in lockdown I can look back fondly on this trip, but I can also look forward to the future and I'm already planning my next big adventure in the van.

@joshjmclean



Luis Perez



It all started with an old 1982 vanagon tintop. We knew we wanted to get as much use of the van as possible even during its worst phases. We didn't care we made it work! The first thing we did was gutted the interior. For many years this van was an old shop van filled with oil cans that would spill EVERYWHERE. Reason why we gutted the van down to the metal. Of course nothing goes as planned and the better ideas

come once everything is back into place. I'll come back to that. So I mentioned that we wanted to use the van even in it's bad phases. What I mean by that is we didn't exactly have a bed in it. What we did was used a blow up mattress and that was it. A cooler, a blowup mattress and an old Coleman propane stove top is how we got it all done. It was all we really needed to be honest. Fast forward a couple

years, Newley installed 2.5 Subaru " Franken Motor." and a baby girl on the way! Pictures for proof down below ;) So here we are! Camping/traveling with a newborn.

Was it easy? For me oh yeah but I think that's a question that my beautiful Genarosa can answer for us. She says oh no! But guess what here we are doing it all over again 2 years later. As the van itself has transformed over the years so has our little growing family. We made a couple adjustments to the van to better fit our style of travel. Baby number 2 on the way (a baby boy) and many more adventures to come. If you're wondering if this is the same old beat up tin top vanagon, yes indeed it is. Just like anything in life we believe that with a little bit of passion and a vision, anything is possible. Happy travels!



FINDING MYSELF AT 52

pt 2

So the day came that I finally left Entrebrault and the familiarity and comfort of the Gite that Tony and Justine had afforded me.

I decided on a journey that would take me to Lyon, Saint Simeon De Bressieux, Grenoble, up through the Alps and down to Monaco, then on to Italy and Genoa, Milan,

Verona, and finally Venice before returning to the Italian Alps to find some winter work.

I did my final checks on the van, topped up all the levels, made sure I had water and a few provisions for myself, said my goodbyes and set off. My journey took me initially west. My ethos

for my whole travelling journey has been to stay away from toll roads so the sat nav said it was around five hours to Lyon, and as with all of my other trips I usually drive for no more than 4, camp up then move again the next day.

Lyon came and went with no issues and on day three I was driving into Saint Simeon where I was hoping to meet an old friend who is a French chef; the only problem was, I didn't tell him I was coming so I was taking a risk. It was 5pm so I decided to find a camp site for the night and try him in the morning. I pulled into a tiny camp site that seemed completely full to find the reception had gone home for the evening and had left no contact details, hmmm, do I take the risk and just camp or move on? I did it, I found a spot, pulled out my bed and went to sleep. The next morning I was awake early and headed to the office to find it still closed, I eventually found a chap and I asked him where the owners were and to my surprise, the camp had been taken over by

Gypsies and I had just camped on their site!! I have to say, he was very kind and wished me a safe journey, phew..

Sadly my friend wasn't home so I set off for Grenoble. As you start getting closer the mountains grow out of the ground stretching up in front of you like giants waiting to bat you away, huge rock faces shadowing the whole city, but what an amazing and beautiful city it is. After Grenoble I decided to find a camp site up in the hills above Grenoble, up and up and up my little camper drove, struggling somewhat as the roads were extremely steep, but eventually, some 1500m up I found my campsite, CLOSED! At this point I decide to set my sat nav for Monaco and go for it, I would however say, make sure you call your campsites as many are closed from Oct until April.



So, back down and down I went, almost back to Grenoble as my route to Monaco took me on a different mountain road. I had been driving for around 2 hours and I was at around 2000m when it started to rain so I decided it should find somewhere to camp, and as I thought it, a tiny sign was pointing me off the main road to a campsite. As I arrived the owner was in the process of closing down the site for winter and using my biggest puppy dog impression, he let me stay for the night, a whole mountainside campsite to myself with electricity, showers and loos, heaven.

The next day I said thanks and wished him well and set off on my 3 hours journey, or so I thought, to Monaco. I didn't realise it at the time but the rain that had started the night before was the start of storm Alex and I was heading straight for it at 2000m + on tiny mountains roads.

The rain had become so heavy that I decided to pull over for a few hours to let it ease, and I was still unaware of the emerging situation to befall me. After three hours the rain had eased somewhat so I set off at around 3pm, I was now on 1.5 lane roads, hugging the sides of mountains and driving at around 20mph with my sat nav saying my 60 miles

journey would take me 3 hours which was odd but I attributed it to the small roads. In the next hour, the rain and wind picked up so much that my van was being blown sideways slightly with each gust of wind and the rain was like sheets of water coming down from a waterfall. My speed now was around 10mph as I couldn't see the road clearly and it was dark outside. I turned a corner to come face to face with 3 cars completely up to their bonnets in water, the road had become a raging torrent. I decided to change my destination to Cannes as it was closer and took me on a different route. I ended up following two cars who were about 50m in front of me when out of nowhere, a wave of water came crashing down from above and washed both cars clean off of the road, I stopped dead, luckily for them, the opposite side where they ended up was flat and they were in the middle of a field. I stopped to check on them but the noise of wind, rain, and thunder was so loud they could barely hear my shouts, but both waved at me to show they were ok.

I now made the decision to get down the mountain as the storm was raging, the lightening was so close I felt it would strike my van and the water running off of the

cliff like mountains was now a river rushing down the roads. I limped down slowly following my route to Cannes, as I turned a blind corner a tree fell in the road 25m from me and almost covering the whole road, I squeezed around it and carried on, mountain rescue trucks were driving up past me with blue lights going, 2, 3, 4, 8 of them in total. After an arduous hour of going down I finally arrived at small village and the rain had slowed down and a sign read Cannes 20km. That night I booked into a hotel, a quivering wreck.

A point to all travellers in the mountains, check the weather and don't drive up if there's a chance of rain or snow.

The next day I checked Martha the camper, my hand brake was gone, I had a knocking on my front right half shaft, my exhaust was loose and I had a leak in the back due to the amount of water that had poured down. I spent the next two days fixing Martha before heading to Italy where I am now. And on goes the journey.

@52traveller



VAN, HOUSE, TRAVEL COMPANION



"That! Did you hear it this time?" I said while looking pale and distressed. My girlfriend looked at me with an expression that could only be described as very bored. "Roel, it's just the engine making noise." ... "Yes, but," I raise my finger for dramatic effect, "is it a good noise?" Karlijn could not be bothered with such commonplace worries. "We are still driving, aren't we?". Good point, I thought, very good point. I'm pretty sure everybody with a self-converted van has had some sort of similar experience. When you do everything yourself you start to know your van inside and out and, eventually, it becomes part of the family. You even give it a name, Ruby the Rugged Rhino in our case. Because, being an ex-ambulance Mercedes Sprinter 4x4, she kinda looks like a Rhino. When we went to have a look at the van, it was not in the best of conditions. The interior was not really Instagram worthy, the body work had some rusty spots and the engine was not making a strong and healthy diesel purr. "Not to worry darling! I will fix all of this and more!" My self-confidence was infectious and we concluded that we could fix everything wrong with it and bought it on the spot. This was kind of a big deal, because Ruby would be the van that would take

us to Mongolia and back... I won't go into the whole rebuilding and fixing side of things, that's food for another post, but I wanted to talk about how your van can become a family member, complete with knowing how to handle her in difficult times, knowing her usual sounds and picking up on her not so usual sounds, the fact that she is responsible for your safety and the burden on her shoulders to get you to the most wonderful, and sometimes the not so wonderful, places in the world. When you live in a van, it becomes so much more than just a thing, it becomes another travel partner. Here is one of the many moments when this became very apparent to us.

Back to the start of this story, and to the mysterious sound that I heard when we were driving from Strömsund to Gäddede in Sweden. *start of necessary intermezzo* I know Sweden and Mongolia are 2 different things, but there is a global pandemic going on and Sweden was one of the few countries that would welcome us at the time. *end of necessary intermezzo* We were three weeks into our Scandinavia travels and were driving through some spectacular landscapes. The route we had chosen was the long way round from

Strömsund to Vilhelmina and is called "The Wilderness Road". It was as epic as it sounds and I was in awe about everything around me. We were at an elevation of about 600 meters and the rolling landscape, complete with roaring rivers from the melting snow, was reinventing itself around every bend, becoming more and more awesome the further we drove. The fact that we had to drive carefully so we would not hit the herd of reindeer that would suddenly cross the road only added to my state of complete awe. The only thing that sometimes forced me out of my landscape induced state

of wonderment was a tiny little squeak. It would only be there for a fraction of a second, but I was sure it was not there before. As you know I addressed my concerns to my girlfriend, but she was unmoved by my worrying discovery.

I started to go through the possible culprits in my head, worst things first: failing water pump, that would leave us stranded; worn auxiliary belt, if it snapped, that would leave us stranded; maybe the foton-ioniser warp speed inducer was on its way out, we don't have that. Pity. I opted not to think about it to much and

instead, I enjoyed the amazing scenery. That worked, for a while. The tarmac we were driving on suddenly stopped and we were handed over to the gravel gods, this is quite normal in Sweden and I like the added thrill of driving on gravel. There is an extra feeling of shared accomplishment when you and your van successfully navigate through the maze of potholes and slippery bends. But while musing on this, I made the mistake of not being 100% concentrated and drove straight through one of those potholes after which Ruby unleashed the full power of her squealing capabilities. She sounded like a pig that escaped and you just grabbed it to put it back in the pigsty. No exaggeration was used in the making of this comparison. Karlijn and I both were not ready to be torn away from the idyllic and peaceful scenery but we were nevertheless thrown into the screaming madness that was Ruby. I immediately resorted to the "I told you so!" defence as if that would solve anything. I was now surrounded by two screaming family members. After pulling over, the sound stopped as soon as Ruby was stationary, that meant no engine damage, which was a good thing. I told Karlijn to drive very carefully while I listened from

the outside and quickly came to the conclusion that a piece of gravel must have been wedged between the brake pad and the brake rotor. This was not ideal but we could drive to a campsite where I could take off the wheel and brake calliper to see what was going on. An hour and a lot squealing and strange looks from bystanders later we pulled up at the campsite. When we parked in our assigned spot, I stayed behind the wheel for a while and talked softly to Ruby, explaining what I was going to do and that she would not have to scream and squeal any longer. And, I kid you not, there was a shudder and a grunt of contentment that came from deep within her.



@ruggedrhinotravels



A HARD START TO VANLIFE

Vanlife didn't come naturally to me. The idea came quite easily though. It wasn't a long-drawn-out plan, I just kind of got the idea and thought, "sure". And that was that.

Moving into the van was a whole different story. It didn't feel right. In my mind it was like a holiday and I would go back to "real life" soon. Only I didn't have a "real life". I had just moved back from overseas due to the pandemic, wasn't working and didn't have a place to live. This WAS my real life. I got the van in mid-October and spent 5 days in my little sister's driveway moving my stuff in. I left her house and drove to Banff National Park. My first four days living in the van, it was -20°C and snowy. I was too scared to sleep with the heater on. The van was horrible driving in the snow. And I was in denial that this was my life.



A few days later on the highway, I heard a thump. I pulled off at the next exit to find my solar panel, smashed, and just about to fall off the back of my van. A guy at the gas station helped me get it off my roof and into the van. The roof rack was dented, and the solar panel was useless.

I spent the next two weeks at my parent's house painting, sealing wood and waiting for my builder to organize a new solar panel and roof rack replacement for me. One night as I was driving, the van just stopped in the middle of an intersection. My fuel injector had gone. Off to the dealership we went. A few days later, I was getting a battery charger so if needed, I could jump my own battery. My dad suggested they test my battery for me, "it's free after all" he said. Turns out I needed a new battery. A big, heavy AGM battery that cost almost \$300. "Not feeling very free" was my reply.

With the solar panel now replaced, a new fuel injector and a new battery, I decided to leave the city and head back to my home base on Vancouver Island before anything else needed replacing. I checked into a campsite and officially started my vanlife.

A few days into it, I freaked out. Everything felt hard. Everything felt unnatural. And nothing felt right. I also felt guilty that I wasn't boondocking in the wild like "you're supposed to". My friend told me, "nobody expects you to know how to live in a van right away." It was a statement that smacked me across the face. I expected me to know how to live in a van right away. I thought it would just



be like a small apartment. So, I sucked up my pride and booked the campground for 2 more weeks and ran myself a vanlife bootcamp. I gave myself grace and time and just learned how to do things. How to change my toilet. How much water I needed. How to hang my wet laundry and do my dishes in a small space. How to live in a van.

But there was one thing that I couldn't figure out. The propane tank. Since those first days in my sister's driveway, whenever the propane tank was on, I could smell gas. Finally, I decided that wasn't right, and I started to look for people to help me. It took four mechanic shops, multiple conversations with my builder, and three months before I found someone that believed me, someone that could help me, my propane tank was deemed faulty, and it was finally replaced. Those first four months of vanlife were hard.

And to make matters worse? It was winter. In Canada. My first winter back after living in Australia for almost eight years. I was miserable with the van. I was miserable with the weather. But I was stubborn enough not to let it break me...though it came very close some days.

I almost sold the van during those first few months. It just seemed too big for me to handle on my own. Too many decisions. Too hard. Too EVERYTHING. But something in me stuck with it. Maybe it was stubbornness or maybe a nagging idea that one day it wouldn't be so hard. I'm not sure what, but whatever it was, I'm thankful for it. It's starting to get warmer, and the days are longer. The van (knock on wood) hasn't had too many issues lately and I've even had some upgrades done. It's feeling easier and more natural. It feels like home. And it feels like where I'm supposed to be.

Vanlife didn't come naturally for me. It wasn't an easy start. I'm still learning new things every day. But without the hard start, I don't think I would have appreciated it as much as I do now. I'm thankful for my van. For a safe place to live. A safe car to drive. And a space that I can call my home.



Everyone's vanlife story is unique to them. It may be easy, or it may be hard. It may be boondocking, or it may be parking lots or friends' driveways. Whatever it is, it's yours. And I'm so glad this is how my vanlife story has started.

@emsvanlife

CHEDDAR IN SPRING

It's a scorching 20 degrees in the UK today and with the sun comes my burning desire to get out on the road again. To feel the sand between my toes or the cold wind on a mountain summit. After this year of COVID and lockdowns, my desire for travel can't even be narrowed down to one place, I just want to go. Anywhere. To do anything. The lockdowns have been tough on everybody but with the situation slowly improving and summer on my doorstep, I think it's time to get the van ready to go and give

it a spring clean. With the weather as fine as it is, I am also going to take the van on a spin to some of my favourite local areas.

Before I can take off for the day, I need to give the van a clean and perform a few checks. As its an older van, a 1986 VW T3, it's important to stay on-top of servicing and maintenance. To start is an oil change. With my collection pan and plenty of rags at the ready I unscrew the sump plug and watch the black oil drain, definitely time for a change.

A few litres of fresh oil later and job number one is done. Next, I check my fluids, coolant, brake fluid and water in the washer reservoir, all of these are full which is a great sign after a sedentary winter. I find in the winter months its easy for mould to build up if I don't keep the van well aired out, so I take the opportunity to wipe out all the cupboards, and to give the floor a sweep.

With the small list of jobs ticked off I get the van rolling to my first destination, a historic local spot called Ashton Windmill in Somerset, UK. A mill has stood in this spot since medieval times, but this particular mill has undergone several iterations of restoration and repair, with the current structure having been built around the 1960's. The mill was historically used to grind beans and wheat to make cow feed, which supported the somerset levels thriving dairy industry. This location has impressive 360° views, gazing far to the South I can see the hazy hills of Exmoor, while the wide Atlantic Ocean spreads out to the west. As I turn behind me, I



can see my next destination. The Mendip hills rise sharply from the Somerset levels below and at the foot of these hills sits a small town called Cheddar. Yes, its where Cheddar was first, and still is, made. This isn't the quaint towns only claim to fame though, as it is home to the one of the most stunning natural features in the UK, Cheddar Gorge. The limestone Gorge was carved by glacial meltwater over the last 1.2 million years and its sheer cliffs drop 130m to the road below. The hulking cliffs tower above the meandering road below, blocking the sun and plunging the road into shadowy stillness. On the sunnier northern side spring daffodils take root in shallow soils providing a vibrant splash of colour against the rock and grass.

As I drive up through the gorge, I can only assume this must be one of the most scenic stretches of road in the UK. With lots of pull ins I stop regularly to soak in the magnitude of the gorge. With a keen eye and help from a long camera lens I can spot some of the wild goats that call the gorge home. I must admit, as an animal lover, it makes my palms sweaty watching baby goats navigate the vertical cliff faces, casually nibbling at plants

in areas where a fall would spell certain death. As I drive up, I see some people looking to emulate the goats, rock climbers testing their metal against the cliffs, although at somewhat less staggering heights.

For those, like myself, who don't associate climbing vertical cliffs with fun, Jacobs ladder is a great way to see the Mendips. Although as I drag myself up the 274 steps in 20-degree heat, I begin to question how much fun this is and wonder if the rock climbers might be on to something.

On gaining the lookout tower I quickly forget about the climb, as great views over the town of cheddar, with its reservoir shimmering beyond, open up before me. Deciding that it was definitely worth the climb I spend a bit of time admiring a familiar landscape.

I, like many others I'm sure, am guilty of overlooking the beauty that immediately surrounds me. While COVID has had a profound impact on many aspects of our lives it has made me look more closely at what is around me and, due to travel bans, has given me ample time to get out and explore my local area. Living so close to one of Britain's most majestic natural features, you would think

I come regularly, but I can't remember the last time I drove up the gorge giving myself time to admire the view. With a bit of normality on the horizon for the UK I'm excited to do some domestic travelling, but I think I will definitely be spending a bit more time exploring my local area in the future.

@joshjmclean



VANLIFE EATS

With lockdown number 2 in the UK over we have had plenty of time to perfect our banana bread recipe (like everyone else in lockdown, ha!) Ours comes with a difference though, it was baked in our van. We only have a mini oven in our van, it drains a lot of power so we only use it occasionally and usually when connected to the mains. Even if we wanted to use it more, it is tiny! It would take us all week to bake anything substantial. Due to this we do all our baking in our Omnia Stove top oven.

We feel that travelling in a van should not mean you can't enjoy the comforts of home. Baking and enjoying the end result with a cup of tea is one of those home comforts that I can certainly not live without. We first came across the Omnia oven on Instagram and saw the amazing and delicious looking meals that were being made in them. We knew then we had to try one, it is now without a doubt my favourite vanlife kitchen accessory. We have used it for baking so many things, but

haven't made many meals in it yet. Although I am the baking queen in our van, Mark usually makes the meals and savoury things. His favourite vanlife kitchen accessory is his cast

iron pan so he makes everything in that! We will need to try expanding what we make in the Omnia, we will be sure to add the recipes to our website. Baking in the Omnia can sometimes be tricky initially but it is easy to get the hang off and then it's very similar to baking in a conventional oven. This recipe was our first attempt at banana bread in the Omnia and we have since perfected the recipe to get it a little more coloured on the top. We have found that some things take a little longer to cook in the Omnia than a conventional oven. After using our Omnia for many months here are our top 3 tips for using it in your van.

1. Expect everything to take a little longer than it would in a conventional oven - so add extra time if not using a recipe designed for the Omnia. Beware not to overdo it though, we have found things do not brown as well in the Omnia. You could overcook something trying to get it a nice brown colour.

2. Keep the heat low / medium. If you try and rush the process by turning the heat up you are likely to get a burnt bottom! As tempting as it is, keep the heat low/medium and cook a little longer for best results.

3. Invest in the silicon mould!! For our first attempt of banana bread I tried using baking paper, big mistake!! Trying to get the square paper to fit in a circular tin meant lots of sections of paper. The edges of the paper crept into the cake mixture, making it almost impossible to remove in one piece (hence why there is only a photo of the cake still in the oven!)

Happy baking and be sure to check out more of our recipes, articles & product reviews at vanlifeeats.com



WALNUT & BANANA CAKE (OMNIA STYLE)

INGREDIENTS

100g Butter (Softened)
140 g Caster sugar
1 Egg (beaten)
225g Plain Flour
2 tsp Baking Powder
3 Bananas (Over-ripe)
75g Walnuts (Chopped)
50ml Milk

1. Place the silicone mould into the Omnia, there is no need to grease it.
2. Peel the bananas and mash them, leave to one side.
3. Mix the butter with the sugar & beaten egg.
4. Add the baking powder to the flour, and add slowly to the butter mix.
5. Add the bananas, milk and nuts to the mixture (save some of the nuts for sprinkling on the top)
6. Pour the mixture into the Omnia, sprinkle the remaining nuts on the top
7. Bake over a low flame for 1hr.
8. Allow to cool before trying to remove the cake from the oven or mould.

vanlifeeats.com
@vanlife_eats



GEORGIA BRODERICK

Three Years ago, after completing my Bachelors Degree in Performance Arts, I moved across the globe, from Sydney, Australia to Vancouver, Canada, so I could pursue acting. However after working a couple of acting jobs in Vancouver I realized it was not the course I truly wanted my life to take - maybe it wasn't for me after all.

Back in Australia I had been working in the climbing industry and absolutely loved it! I never expected it to be a career path for me but that's how the saying goes - "never say never." While living in Vancouver and deciding what my

next step would be, I was working full time at a bouldering gym and driving up the Sea to Sky highway to climb in Squamish. Squamish is a mecca for rock climbing, known worldwide, and I was lucky to be living only an hours drive away. After falling in love with the diverse and endless array of climbing, I began spending all of my free time there. When the weather wasn't ideal I would be in the gym training, waiting for the next good weather window, when I could go outside and try my projects. When I wasn't climbing or training, I was working route setting jobs in a couple of different gyms. My life became consumed with this climbing lifestyle, everything else in my life just seemed so much less important. Climbing introduced me to my partner Alejandro and soon enough we decided to move into his van together and start a life in Squamish. As a first time vanlifer, Squamish was a great place to start because of the massive vanlife culture. In the summer time the population almost doubles with people coming from all over, bringing their homes with them on four wheels. Most people are drawn

to Squamish to climb, dirt bike, hike, or mountain bike and due to the cost of these activities and the high rental prices in town, many people want to live rent free. Specifically, Alejandro and I wanted the freedom to travel throughout Canada and the United States hopping from climbing destination to climbing destination. As a climber, living in a van just makes sense, it cuts down the cost of living, it makes climbing destinations more accessible, plus you get to bring your house with you wherever you go, which means you have all of your gear with you ready for an adventure.

When I landed in Squamish, I got a job at Ground Up - the local climbing gym, and kept my performance arts side of me alive by teaching singing and piano at the local academy of music. Alejandro was also working at Ground Up Climbing gym as a coach and route setter. It took me a while to notice that a lot of van lifers on instagram are living nomadic lifestyles where they move around a lot and work remotely, but the reality is that there are a lot of us who live in



one place for most of the year and don't have to work remotely. This, as well as roughing it or the "dirtbag" lifestyle isn't portrayed as much in the media despite it being such a large portion of people living in their vans. Not everyone has the luxury of spending a lot of money on a fancy van that they don't live in for even half of the year. Having a van to travel with and having a van that you spend at least 8 months of the year in are two different things. Over the past couple years, I have put a lot of work into learning how to live efficiency as comfortably as possible in my van, while on a budget. And I have enjoyed sharing that part of this lifestyle - the learning curves and the non-glamorous aspects- on my Instagram and TikTok, not just the luxurious van life that a lot of the media portrays. Alejandro had bought our van a couple of months before we met and started living in it before it was fully converted. He was slowly converting it while also trying to live in it, and from this experience, neither of us would recommend this order of events. By the time I joined him in the van the insulation was already done but not much else. We built cheap prototypes to try and decide on a layout we both liked, which was hard when the space

was already being taken up by our day to day life. Taking our time and really thinking about our layout was great because in the end we worked out exactly what we wanted without committing to the wrong layout and having to re- renovate later. However living full time in a van that is not completed is definitely an experience I would not recommend for anyone. After about 6 months of living in prototype hell, our friends asked us to house sit for them which gave us the perfect time to renovate. Looking back on this experience now, I have no idea how we lived in an incomplete van, but there is no one else I would have rather done it with.

House Sitting for our friends was the perfect opportunity to get to work . We ripped the entire van apart besides the insulation and started from scratch. We had

about a month to complete it which may have been an issue, but covid had just hit and we were in lockdown with not much else to do. Living in our prototype throughout winter we learnt a lot about what we needed to commit to full time vanlife. In Squamish, mould is a big issue because the level of humidity is super high. This meant we needed to find a dry heat solution that could circulate the air through the van to stop the mold from growing. It also meant we didn't need solar panels because thanks to our rainy winters, there isn't enough sunshine to keep them charged . These two problems were solved with a diesel heater, a maxx air fan, and by connecting our batteries to an alternator. After our month renovating we moved back into the van, which was not finished but it was much more liveable than before. We kept up

our renovations while living in the van as we still had to complete our backsplash for the kitchen, the tongue in groove for our walls and ceiling, and the storage under the bed. Since we didn't have a place to build after moving from our friends house these tasks were completed in the middle of nowhere. This turned out to be quite an interesting challenge, especially mixing the grout with a giant stick. But I couldn't be happier with how it all turned out and I definitely learned a lot from the experience.

We still have a few things we need to finish a year after the renovation, because to be honest it's expensive and climbing takes up most of our time and income. Some things we have left to do are buying and installing a fridge and stove, covering the doors and all of the little finicky bits. But even without these things I am in love with our little house on wheels and it just goes to show you don't need everything to be perfect and glamorous in order to live happily and functionally in a van. It is amazing to be able to live in the van full time and have the freedom to sleep near any climbing crag we want. Once travel restrictions start to lift we will definitely be hitting the road to explore all of the amazing climbing North America has to offer.

@georgjabroderick



VANLIFE IN NORWAY

We are Peter and Mary, a couple from Poland. Our story began 5 years ago, when we decided to change something in our lives and to move abroad. We have chosen Norway even though we didn't really know much about this country. We have heard about the fjords, the northern lights and the midnight sun but that was all.

In February 2016 we packed our entire life into boxes and headed out with our cat Stefcia onto the ferry to Sweden, and then further down to Southern Norway. The idea of vanlife has been with us for a long time. Peter, as an enthusiast of caravans and later also campervans, carried this dream with him for a long time. It was to build our own home on wheels.

This dream started to come true two years ago. In the spring of 2019, we became the owners of the Peugeot Boxer. Our tiny home was about to become a reality. Besides working full time we spent our free time converting the van into a living space. We were motivated to finish the van before our vacation. The long evenings and weekends of hard

work have eventually paid off and after 9 and a half weeks we were ready for our first excursion in the campervan.

During our 2 weeks of van life we woke up every day in a different place. Norway is a perfect country to start your adventure with vanlife. There is a law here called „Allemannsretten” which stands for „Right of public access”. It means that you can camp for the night anywhere in the countryside, forests or mountains, as long as you stay at least 150 metres away

from the nearest inhabited house or cabin. There are many such places in Norway. The sky is the limit :)

Imagine waking up at the foot of a massive fjord and by the nightfall falling asleep at sandy beach with azure water. It is no joke that Lofoten is called the Caribbean of Europe. White sand, beautiful sun and crystal clear, turquoise water - all this is widely available in Norway.

Unfortunately, the holiday ended way too soon and we had to

return to our domestic life of work. However, we both knew that this was not the end, but only the beginning.

As the time passed we tried to get the most out of our campervan and to be able to feel more often the freedom we felt during the holidays so we took many weekend trips.

At the beginning of 2020, we made a decision that we want the camper to become our full time home and the vanlife to become our lifestyle. We enjoyed Northern Norway so much during our adventure the previous summer that we wanted to see more, and when I say more, I mean all of it.

So in June last year we went ahead, packing up all of our belongings again, this time into the van and we started the adventure, which, as it turned out, continues to this day. The funny thing is that at the time we weren't very experienced travelers as you can imagine, life was busy, mostly occupied by working but once we made the decision we were forced to jump into the deep water.



At the beginning, it was difficult for us to find our way in the new country. Each trip was also associated with finding care for our cat. That's why we wanted to find a solution to make the journey with a cat as simple and safe as possible. Stefcia has not traveled much in a car before. The first long trip for her was when we were moving to Norway. She didn't take it well. However, with time and our trips, Poland-

Norway, she got used to the road. Now she is a real vanlife cat. She loves traveling, and apart from a camper, she has also traveled by plane and ferries.

We were afraid of how she would cope moving into such a small and confined space, but she adapted to it in the first evening. And the time when we are not in the camper, she usually spends in the same place where we leave her - sleeping on the couch. Life on the road became our reality. We enjoyed and appreciated

each morning because it gave us new experiences to look forward to. We got rid of most of our possessions and lived in 7 m2, and for the first time in our lives we felt that we had more of everything... More time, more joy and only happy thoughts. We began to appreciate small, simple things in life like a warm shower, clean water in the van or seeing the sunrise or the twinkling stars at night. Norway provides an amazing visual experience of ever changing landscapes and at the same time is so vanlife friendly. Clean, drinkable water can be drawn straight from the stream. And you can camp practically anywhere.

Our journey lasted 5 months. We visited the most popular places like Trolltunga, Preikestolen and Trollstigen. We saw moose, reindeer and countless sheep. We swam in the cool waters of the ocean, climbed high mountains. We were pushing our limits by doing things we didn't know before. During the trip, photography and filming became our passion, which we continue to this day. We wanted to capture memories of this journey so it would stay with us forever.

When the weather got rough, we decided to temporarily put the

vanlife on hold to wait out the snow storms, coldness, polar night and constant darkness - these are not the best conditions for living in a van. However, as soon as the beautiful winter has arrived, we returned to our home on wheels. Right now we are exploring Northern Norway, this time in the winter edition. Our base is Senja, the island that is said to be Norway in a nutshell. We couldn't find a better place to continue this exciting adventure.



@travelvan



Editors

Florian Jaunegg

Executive Editor

office@fluadlwirt.com

@fluadlwirt

Philipp Maurer

Design & Layout Editor

office@maurerphilipp.at

@philipp.maurer

Josh McClean

Writer & Text Editor

mccleanjj@gmail.com

@joshjmclean



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