

# Vanlifezone

03.2023

N° 08



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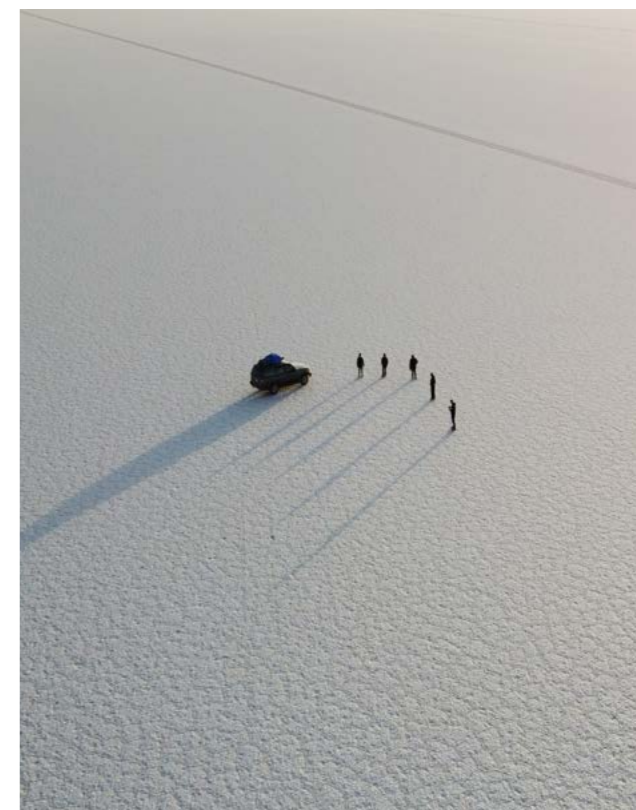
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# New Paths

Dear reader, 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.

## What to expect

This issue takes a closer look at Jordan and the Wadi Rum region. Our community members, [@kkdoo\\_pl](#) and [@countless\\_roads](#), share their experiences of traveling the deserts and cities of Jordan. We provide additional information on the region and on how to deal with the heat. Did you know that camel meat is a central part of the cuisine in some parts of the Jordanian culture? Mark and Sophie from [@vanlife\\_eats](#) take this as an inspiration and share a delicious vegetarian vanlife recipe for rice with crunchy chickpeas with us.

The first article in this issue by [@on.vagabonde](#) tells their story of how they left Switzerland to travel along the Pan-American Highway. A year after starting in Seattle they are now in Panama and have many adventures ahead. Similarly, Joris and Renée from [@travelcrazy.nl](#) left their camper in Spain and headed out for a backpacking trip through South America.

We also feature the adventurous story of [@offgrid\\_odyssey](#), who traveled from Scotland all the way to Turkey with their dog and cat, finding a new companion along the way. Here we also provide additional information on the region around Turda and its amazing Salt Mines in Transylvania, Romania.

From staying in Bedouin camps in the Wadi Rum region to hiking on volcanoes and lush mountains in Central and South America, to exploring the Salt Mines in Turda, our stories will take you on a journey that will leave you yearning for more. If you don't have a van yet but are eager to explore what else is out there, perhaps this issue will inspire you to take the leap and embark on your own adventures. Whether it's a trip to one of the places mentioned in our magazine or a journey to a destination that you've never been to before, we hope that our stories will motivate you to explore the world around you.

As always, 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 after the release of a new issue since this gives us the most time to work with the topics! So go ahead and send us your story at [www.vanlifezone.com/submit-form.php](http://www.vanlifezone.com/submit-form.php).

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



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



# Pan-American Roads



Leaving Switzerland for our one Year Journey  
from Seattle to Panama with our  
Truck Camper Jeff.

# Our First Steps to Vanlife

We met 6 years ago, in Sierre, in the Valaisan Alps in Switzerland, during our studies. Audrey studied computer management and Benji studied tourism. We had one goal in mind, to achieve our dream and travel for a long time. The duration, the destination, the way of transport, ... everything was still fuzzy but our ultimate goal was to save money after our studies. We thought we would work for 3 years and leave but the pandemic delayed our departure. We were lucky to be able to keep our jobs during these atypical years. The time we saved by staying at home allowed us to plan and set up our itinerary for this big trip: driving the Pan-American Highway from Seattle to Panama.

Our itinerary planned roughly; we now had to think about our means of transportation. We wanted to buy a vehicle and ship it from Belgium to Canada. Vanlife was already present in our lives with our Fiat Doblo. We often went to France and Spain on the coast for surf trips.



Our first van was a 1982 Mercedes 207 D James Cook bought on a sudden whim. Barely 1 month later, we sold it because it was really too slow (maximum 80km/h on flat roads..) Our new idea was to buy the next van on the American continent to avoid shipping. The itinerary and the way of traveling decided and the savings made, we were ready! On May 3rd, 2022, we flew to Seattle.



We bought our truck Camper, our off-road companion, Jeff. He allows us to move wherever we want with great comfort. We have a toilet with a shower, a living room, a bedroom, and a kitchen with an oven, a real tiny house on wheels. We spent two and a half months in the USA on the West coast and inland visiting the national parks and the main cities. Then we stayed almost 6 months in Mexico, including 1 month of voluntary work on a ranch in Baja California next to the beach. We visited Belize for a week and Guatemala for a month.

**Currently we are in El Salvador surfing beautiful waves on the Pacific coast.**



## Our Greatest Moments

We are often asked what our greatest moment was. It's a very tough question to answer but we have some moments that are forever remembered. For example, our first National Park in the USA, Yosemite. The sunset with our pesto pasta prepared in our camper in front of El Capitan will be forever in our memory. Punta Abreojos in Baja California was one of our best

surf spots. Our Camper parked in front of the point break with almost nobody in the water. We thought we would stay one night but we stayed 5 because we were out of food and water. Nine Palms in the south of Baja was our nearest spot to the water with incredible waves. These places were like in the magazines, they are very rare but when we find them, we don't want to leave!

And then, what's next? Well, we are not ready to come back home after Panama. So, we are planning to continue our journey to South America but with another Camper. We want to try something less luxurious, smaller and also we don't want to pay shipping costs from Panama to Colombia which are more than four thousand US dollars.

# Wadi Rum with our 4x4



We fell in love with the Middle East long ago. Jordan was the first country in the region we visited and we left convinced that Middle Eastern hospitality cannot be beaten.



Later on, we discovered more countries in the region, always limited by holiday allowances as we worked full time. We met a lot of fascinating people that we can call friends now. Nonetheless, we always had a feeling that we missed the opportunity to discover more. It was never enough for us.

With no vanlife or overland experience, nor 4x4 driving experience, we decided that buying a Nissan Patrol and converting it into our mobile home is the best way to discover the World. And immediately we threw ourselves at the deep end: we started our journey in wintertime from the Balkans, then moved to Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran, the UAE, to end up in Saudi Arabia in one of the hottest months, in June. Next on the list was Jordan. That's when we recalled our desire to drive through Wadi Rum in our own 4x4!

We spent almost two months discovering remote corners of the country, not just the most popular ones. Even though we had visited Jordan before, it kept

surprising us on every step. Our passion for scuba diving kept us for long weeks at the Red Sea coast where we discovered almost all dive sites in the country. With many spectacular areas, it is worth highlighting the Underwater Military Museum – 21 wrecks that were sunk on purpose to make it a fascinating place for divers. Starting from tanks, military cars to helicopters, a good spot to enjoy the feeling of weightlessness underwater.

After the diving adventure, we slowly moved to the north. On the way, of course, we stopped by the Dead Sea. So comfortable to have your own shower to rinse extremely salty water after floating in it. We had to be careful about sinkholes. As the Dead Sea is shrinking by almost 1 meter each year, it gets more and more difficult to find a good spot for swimming. We were lucky to find a wild beach, but it may not be there in a few months. If someone doesn't have time, it's always worth considering moving to a hotel located next to the sea for a few days.





Just next to the Dead Sea there's another destination – Wadi Mujib Canyon. We've been trying to get there many times. First, we were there in the wrong season – it's open only when the water level in the canyon is low enough – mostly in summertime. Then when we got there, there were crowds of people because of the Eid holidays. On our 3rd visit, we finally made it. And it was so worth the effort! It is a true natural water park. After going upstream for about an hour, climbing on ladders, sometimes swimming, you find yourself at the base of a nice waterfall. On the way back you can jump into water from a few meters high rocks or use natural slopes to slide down. We had a lot of fun there!

Also, the north of Jordan has a lot to offer – after hot and humid weeks in the south, we cherished cooling moments in the green hills of Jerash, which reminded us of Tuscany. Olive trees, ancient Roman ruins, and super friendly people are what you can expect there. We stopped on some small curvy roads overlooking the river between Jordan and Palestine, and instead of one night we spent almost a week there. Friendly farmers and shepherds were worried that we didn't have enough food, so they started bringing us fresh

bread, milk and butter! Can you imagine this happening in your homeland?

There's really a lot to see in this part of Jordan – Jerash is a perfectly preserved old Roman city where you can spend a whole day discovering every corner. If you prefer some 'newer' sites, there are some stone castles built to protect locals against crusaders, just like Karak castle. Or you can see a charming town called As-Salt, as the name suggests, known in the past for trading salt. But be careful! Roads are quite narrow there and it might be difficult to move around with your own campervan.

Finally – we go to the famous Wadi Rum Desert. The best part of it was that we could finally roam around in our own 4x4 vehicle. A long-time wish became a reality. We spent long days discovering canyons, rock formations, mountains, talking to friendly local Bedouins, and taking beautiful pictures. The best of it was, of course, sleeping under the stars. Complete darkness, only stars, your car-your home and you. And did we mention that you feel like on another planet here? Many movies were filmed at various sites of the Wadi Rum reserve, The Martian and Star Wars are among the most famous ones.

Traveling by car in Jordan is easy. Roads are relatively good; there are no problems with moving around. Well, we wouldn't go down to the Dead Sea or Wadi Rum desert if we didn't have the 4x4 car, but apart from that, all Jordanian roads are accessible for more standard vans. What is cool there is the possibility to fill your water tanks with purified water – there are special water stations where for a few euros you can buy 100 liters of good quality drinkable water.

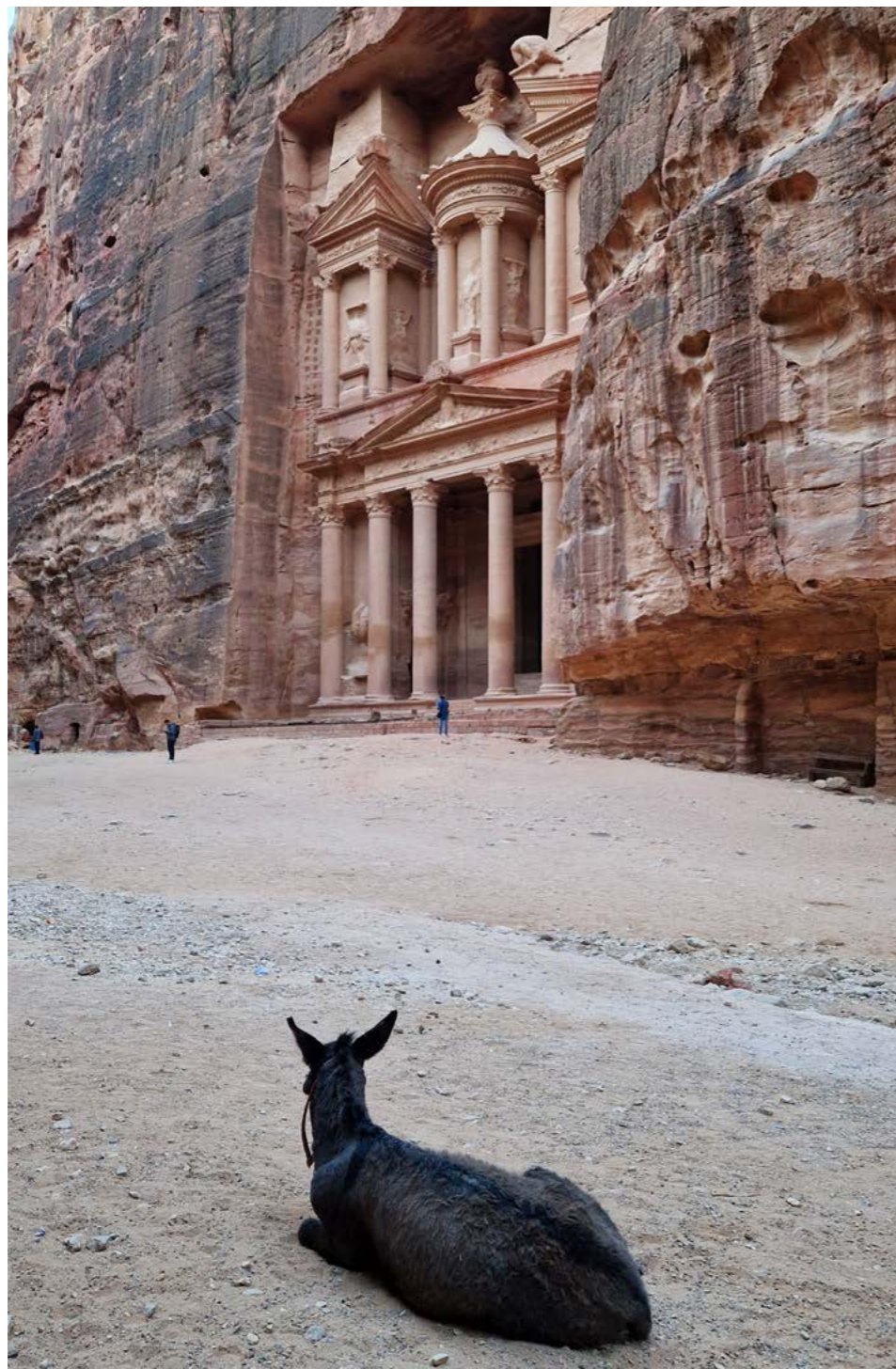
People are very friendly – and of course the standard rule applies – the further from tourist attractions, the better. We encountered only positive reactions from locals. Most of them were quite surprised though – there are not many overlanders in their country. Perhaps it will change?

Jordan was an exciting destination on our way. We enjoyed it a lot, and perhaps it would have been even better if we came in a 'better' season, when temperatures and humidity levels are lower, especially in the southern part of the country.

We continued our journey. We luckily entered the African continent where we're planning to explore the unknown again. Conditions will be tougher, but the joy and satisfaction will be even bigger.



# Welcome to Jordan



The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a state in the Middle East and is one of the most touristic countries in the region. In 2019, around 5.4 million tourists visited Jordan, which itself has a population of just over 10 million. The Corona pandemic caused the numbers to plummet, but they are now recovering and are almost back to pre-crisis levels. Jordan has much to offer. Archeological sites are among the country's biggest attractions, but spectacular natural monuments also make a visit memorable.

Most visitors arrive in the capital Amman by plane, which is located in the northern part of the country. With over 4 million inhabitants, this huge city seems to stretch endlessly in all directions. It is characterized by winding alleys and steep streets that connect the 19 hills on which Amman is perched. Traditional architecture and modern buildings constantly alternate. Among the most famous sights are an ancient Roman amphitheater and the Amman Citadel. The latter is located on a hill in the city center and offers

a spectacular panoramic view of the neighboring districts. The bright blue dome of the King Abdullah Mosque is also visible from the hill. It was built in the 1980s and has since become a city landmark. Under its dome it houses a large prayer room, which is also open to tourists. Strolling through the streets is an ideal way to soak up the special flair of Amman. The city is noisy and hectic and offers exciting new impressions wherever you look. Although Jordan's main tourist attractions are far away from the city, a visit to the buzzing capital is definitely worth the while.

The world-famous ruined city of Petra is located about three hours south of Amman. With its countless burial temples carved into the desert rock, it is considered a unique archeological site. To get to the rock city, you have to walk through a 1.5-kilometer-long canyon, which served as a well-hidden entrance to the city in ancient times. In parts, the over 70-meter-deep "Siq" is so narrow that you can no longer see the sky above. At the end of the

ravine, the most famous building, the Treasury, is a spectacular sight. The huge monument is carved directly into the red sandstone and is a very popular photo motif. Only a little further, the rock walls open up and you find yourself in a vast valley covered with the ruins of the city. The area is so large that a single day is not enough to visit everything. A paved road, once built by the Romans, leads to the center of the city, where the well-preserved main temple is located. Here you can also stop for refreshments at two restaurants before starting the walk to the monastery, which is located just outside of town and high up on a mountain. The climb is strenuous and takes about an hour. Once you reach the top, you will be rewarded with a breathtaking view over the desert and another well-preserved tomb. To visit Petra in detail, it is advisable to stay in a hotel in the nearby village of Wadi Musa. The visitor center and the entrance to the Siq are also located in Wadi Musa.



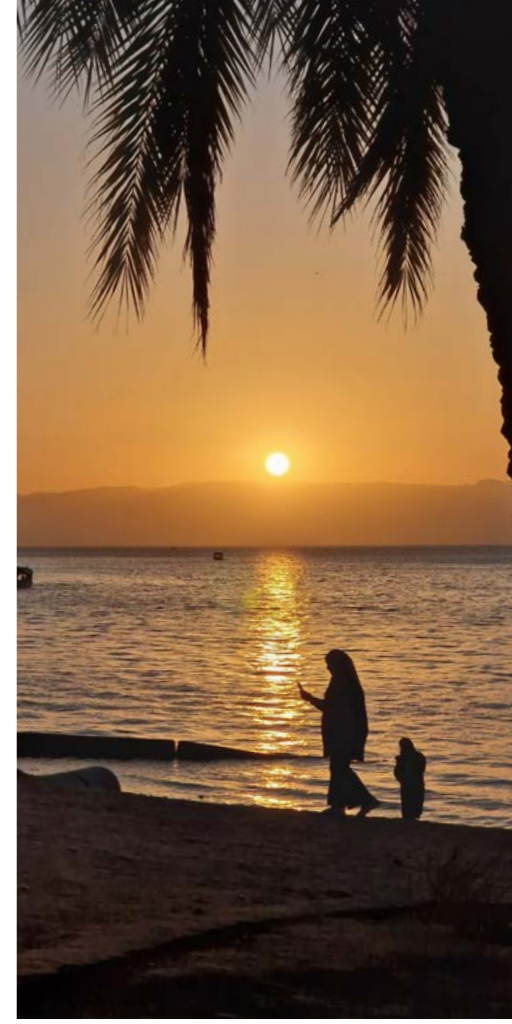
In addition to archeological sites, Jordan also has impressive natural monuments. One of them is Wadi Rum, the largest wadi in the country. A wadi is a dry riverbed or valley that only contains water during times of heavy rain or flash floods. From the village of Wadi Rum, you can take day trips into the desert with local guides. You will visit huge rock formations, beautiful viewpoints, sand dunes and much more by offroad-vehicle. Due to its unique landscape, as mentioned previously Wadi Rum has served as a backdrop for numerous films. The movie „The Martian“ was shot there, because the wadi with its reddish sand and rock landscapes strongly resembles the conditions on planet Mars. The area is also a popular destination in the evenings. Due

to its remoteness and the resulting complete darkness, you can enjoy the sunset undisturbed and watch the stars in the night sky. To visit Wadi Rum, you have the option to either stay on site in a desert camp or travel by car from Aqaba, an hour away.

From Aqaba, a well-maintained road also leads north along the Israeli border, directly to another natural jewel, the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is actually a lake with a length of almost 90 kilometers. At its widest point it is only 17 kilometers wide, which is why the opposite shore is always visible. The high amount of salt in the water makes the Dead Sea so special. With about 33 percent, the Dead Sea contains about ten times more salt than the Atlantic Ocean.

Due to the high salt concentration, the buoyancy is so great that you can simply sit down in the water without sinking. At about 430 meters below sea level, the Dead Sea is the lowest lake on earth. At the same time, the deepest point in the world not covered by water or ice is also located on the shore of the lake. As a result, the Dead Sea has a higher atmospheric pressure, to which health-promoting properties are attributed. At the northern end of the Dead Sea there are numerous hotels and a well-developed tourist infrastructure. The official bathing places for tourists are located here too, but they can become very crowded due to the urban environment. For a more relaxed bathing experience it is advisable to look for a quiet spot along the road coming from Aqaba.

The Kingdom of Jordan has much more to offer and is an ideal destination to combine nature and culture. Getting around the country can be rather difficult, as there is basically no public transportation. Coaches do drive to the main tourist destinations, but limit your ability to explore beyond that. Renting a car or entering the country with your own vehicle is the more enjoyable option. Before traveling, purchase of the “Jordan Pass” is strongly advised. It consists of your tourist visa as well as pre-paid entry to over 40 attractions, including Petra.



# Beat the Heat

## Tips and Tricks for Staying Fit and Healthy in Hot Weather



@paul.jaunegg

When you are traveling to an extremely hot place, it might be difficult to watch your health. Let's be honest: staying active and healthy during hot weather can be a real challenge. The high temperatures, extreme aridity or humidity, and exposure to the sun can make it difficult to maintain a regular exercise routine and follow healthy habits.

However, that's no excuse to neglect your physical health! Even though motivation might be hard to come by in extreme temperatures, it's more important than ever to watch out for your health and follow certain routines that will keep you fit and thriving.

Here are a few things you should keep in mind in order to stay healthy, even in extreme heat:

## Hydration

It's no secret: Hydration is crucial for good health, especially during hot weather. When your body loses too much fluid, it can lead to dehydration, which can cause headaches, dizziness, and other health problems. That's the last thing you want while driving through a foreign country in your van, isn't it?

So, what can you do to keep yourself feeling good? Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!

In hot weather, it's important to drink water before, during, and after exercise, and throughout the day. You can also hydrate with water-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and drinks that contain electrolytes, such as sports drinks.

The recommended amount of water per day varies depending on a number of factors, such as age, weight, and level of physical activity. However, as a general rule, it's recommended to drink at least 8 cups (64 ounces) of water per day. Yeah, being in your van all day is no excuse to skip this step! I recommend you invest in a good, huge water bottle that you only need to refill once or twice a day in order to get an adequate amount of water. That makes it a lot easier to keep your water intake under control and to ensure you are drinking enough.



## Exercise

If you are extremely motivated, you might opt for an outdoor-workout. The most obvious exercise you can do outside without any issues is swimming. It will cool you down and give you a great workout.

But even in nice, cool water you shouldn't forget the power of the sun! Just because you're not actively sweating doesn't mean it's not hot af!

The best time for outdoor exercise in hot weather is early in the morning or later in the evening, when temperatures are cooler. Avoid exercising in the middle of the day when temperatures are at their highest. Also, this is no time to push yourself to your absolute limits. When exercising outdoors in hot weather, it's important to stay hydrated, take breaks when needed, and listen to your body. Start with a light warm-up and pace yourself, and if you start to feel unwell, stop and rest. Trust us, it's better to take it a bit easier and feel good than to completely burn yourself out (literally and figuratively).

Of course, an indoor workout would probably be a good option if you are in a place that is extremely hot. The AC and protection from the sun will give you a lot more energy and your body won't be under so much stress. Usually, a lot of gyms offer day passes so that while on the road, you don't have to commit to anything long term.

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## Food

When it comes to your diet, you can also take steps to improve how your body reacts to the heat. Eating a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats can help you stay cool and hydrated during hot weather. These foods are rich in water and provide the nutrients and energy your body needs to stay healthy.

You can get creative with this, but some foods that are good for hot weather include watermelon, cucumber, strawberries, cantaloupe, and grapefruit. These foods are hydrating, low in calories, and high in nutrients. Depending on where you currently are, cold soups and smoothies can also be a great option to keep you nourished throughout the day!

Your appetite is probably not super high in extreme heat, but it's still important to give your body the nutrients and hydration it needs. Perhaps it is better to eat frequent, smaller meals instead of a couple of huge meals every day.

Of course, you also don't want to contribute even more to your dehydration with the food you consume.

Foods and drinks that can contribute to dehydration include caffeine, alcohol, and foods high in salt. Our tip is to limit your intake of these foods and drinks and to focus on eating a balanced diet that includes plenty of water-rich foods.

## Rest

It's probably not always easy to get a good night's sleep in hot weather, but rest and sleep are very important for your body in extreme temperatures. Getting enough sleep helps to reduce stress, improve mood, and enhance overall health and performance, but it also just helps your body cope when the weather is so hot.

Try to use light, comfortable bedding that is also breathable, and if you can, get your sleeping space ventilated so that you can fall asleep better. During the day, you can take a short nap to increase your productivity. However, I would keep it to under 30 minutes and not too late in the day so that it doesn't interfere with your actual bedtime schedule.

## Stay cool out there

Staying fit and healthy in hot weather requires a combination of good habits and smart planning. From staying hydrated and choosing the right time of day for exercise, to eating a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and taking steps to stay cool and comfortable, there are many things you can do to maintain good health during hot weather.

The good news is, if you follow just a few of these tips, you will feel fine regardless of the high temperatures!

Make sure to always listen to your body and to see when you might actually need to give yourself a break. Good luck with that, and stay cool!

As we write this, we are sitting in front of our bus with two non-alcoholic beers. Our view? A rock formation in the shape of a camel. Or at least, in Amy's opinion. This truly feels like

# 1001 Arabian Nights

To get to our camp for the night, we had to dig ourselves out (twice) as we were once again too lazy to properly deflate our tires. But hey, we're not complaining! Our own house on wheels (nickname: Mitch) is parked in the middle of the Arabian desert. How did we get here? A question we sometimes ask ourselves too. But let's just start at the beginning.

We are Amy and Jeroen: two Dutch 30-year-olds who, after several years of hard work, decided to take a break. To shake things up completely. To make the most of the fact that we still have a

few obligations at home (like a mortgage, children, or other 'grown-up' stuff). We both have done a few longer backpacking trips before, but this would be our first long trip together. Therefore, we opted to go with our own van: the idea of having a fixed base, together with the freedom to go wherever we wanted, was just too tempting. And if we weren't already convinced, the occasional 'vanlife' pictures on social media didn't look bad either.

Under the well known motto, 'I've never done it before, so I think I can do it', we started our search for a van to convert. At first, we

had the idea to buy a Landcruiser (because they are nice and reliable), but soon we found out that this plan didn't fit our budget.

However, after searching the internet like crazy and doing a lot of test drives, we finally came across our dream car: a Mitsubishi L300 4x4. Year of birth: 1996. Big enough to live in. Small enough to drive the smallest streets. Old enough to be repaired anywhere in the world. Strong enough to safely drive the most beautiful off-road routes. And not unimportantly, quite affordable. In other words, the perfect car for us!



After 50 days of hard work and a lot of blood, sweat and tears, the time had finally come – we were ready to hit the road.

After 50 days of hard work (and a lot of blood, sweat and tears), the time had come – we were ready to hit the road. With virtually no (wild) camping experience (we had no time left for a trial holiday), we embarked on our journey. Our plan? Via the Balkan, Turkey, Iran, the Stan countries and Mongolia, towards Japan. However, we underestimated the role of geopolitical factors in our journey. As we realized the Russia-Ukraine conflict was not gone any time soon, we set our eyes on Africa. Simply put: if we can't go North or East after Iran, we go South. But after a few months following our new plan, we got news from Ethiopia: the government had decided to ask for an enormous deposit for foreign cars to be allowed to drive through the country. The route through East-Africa was closed as well. So, somewhat unplanned, we ended up on the Arabian Peninsula for a longer period of time. A part of the world that we mainly knew from (often negative) news reports. And therefore, a part of the world that was never at the top of our bucket list of countries to visit. But we are so glad we did! The past 3.5 months we traveled with Mitch through Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Oman - and each of these countries surprised us positively, in so many ways!



## Let's start with the Arab people

They are so incredibly warm-hearted and hospitable. An Omani once explained to us that according to tradition, you should welcome a guest with coffee or tea and dates & fruit. And boy, they take that seriously. We can't remember a day here, on which we were not welcomed by locals. Sometimes this resulted in a short chat and a photo together. More often the chat turned into a joint picnic or even an invitation to join people in their homes. We spent an evening with Jordanian Bedouins under the starry sky - eating with our hands from a shared plate of rice with camel meat.

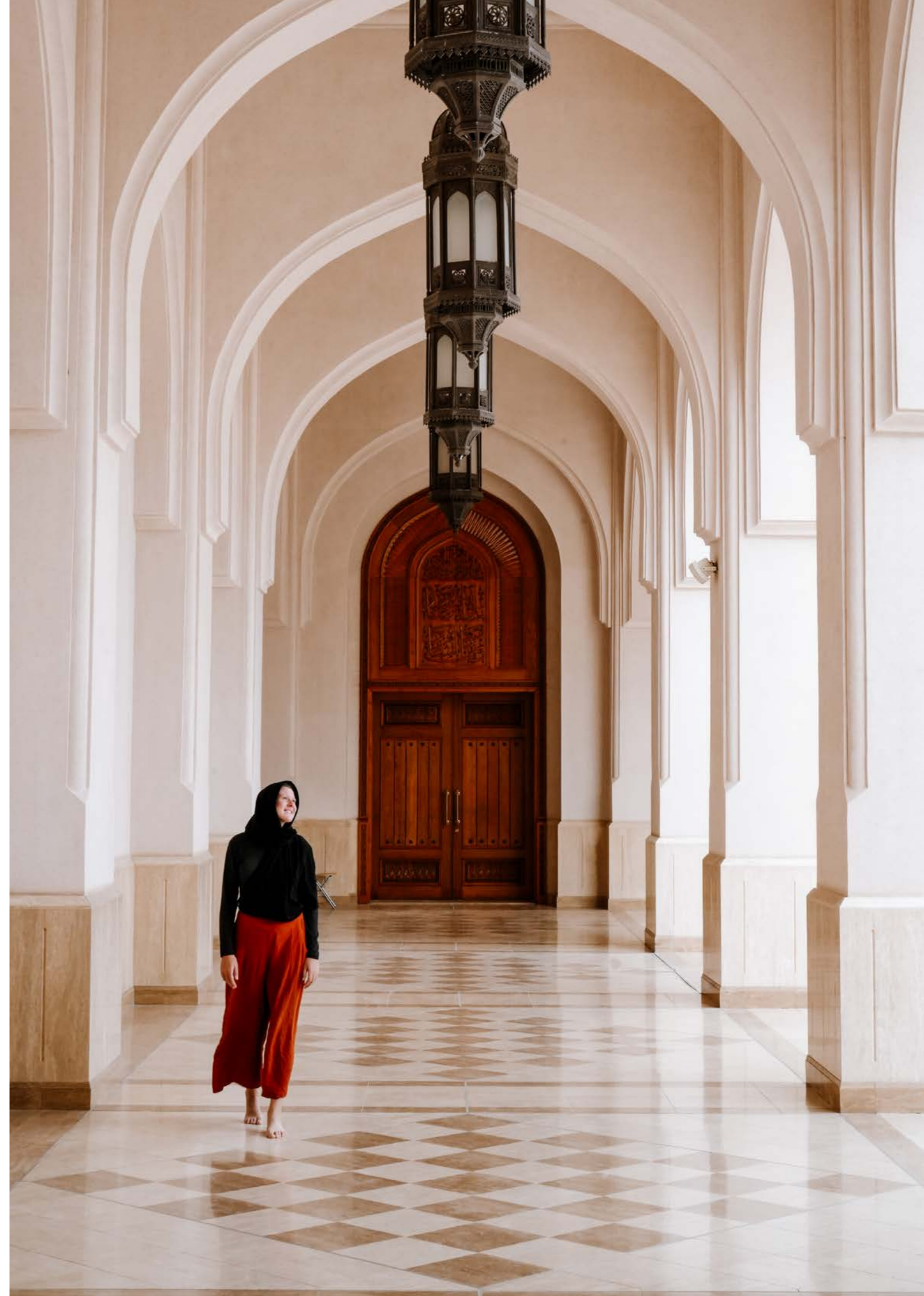
We stayed two days on a luxury farm in Saudi, where we learned how to grow crops in the desert. We drank beers with a fanatic overlander from Oman, who shared our dream of driving to Africa (and had the best-equipped Landcruiser we've ever

seen)! In all fairness, we had some concerns upfront – for example, how would local people approach Amy as a Western woman? But surprisingly, we had many open conversations about this subject. Despite the fact that norms and values are definitely different than in the West, we have experienced acceptance and respect for the choices we make (as long as we do not condemn theirs).

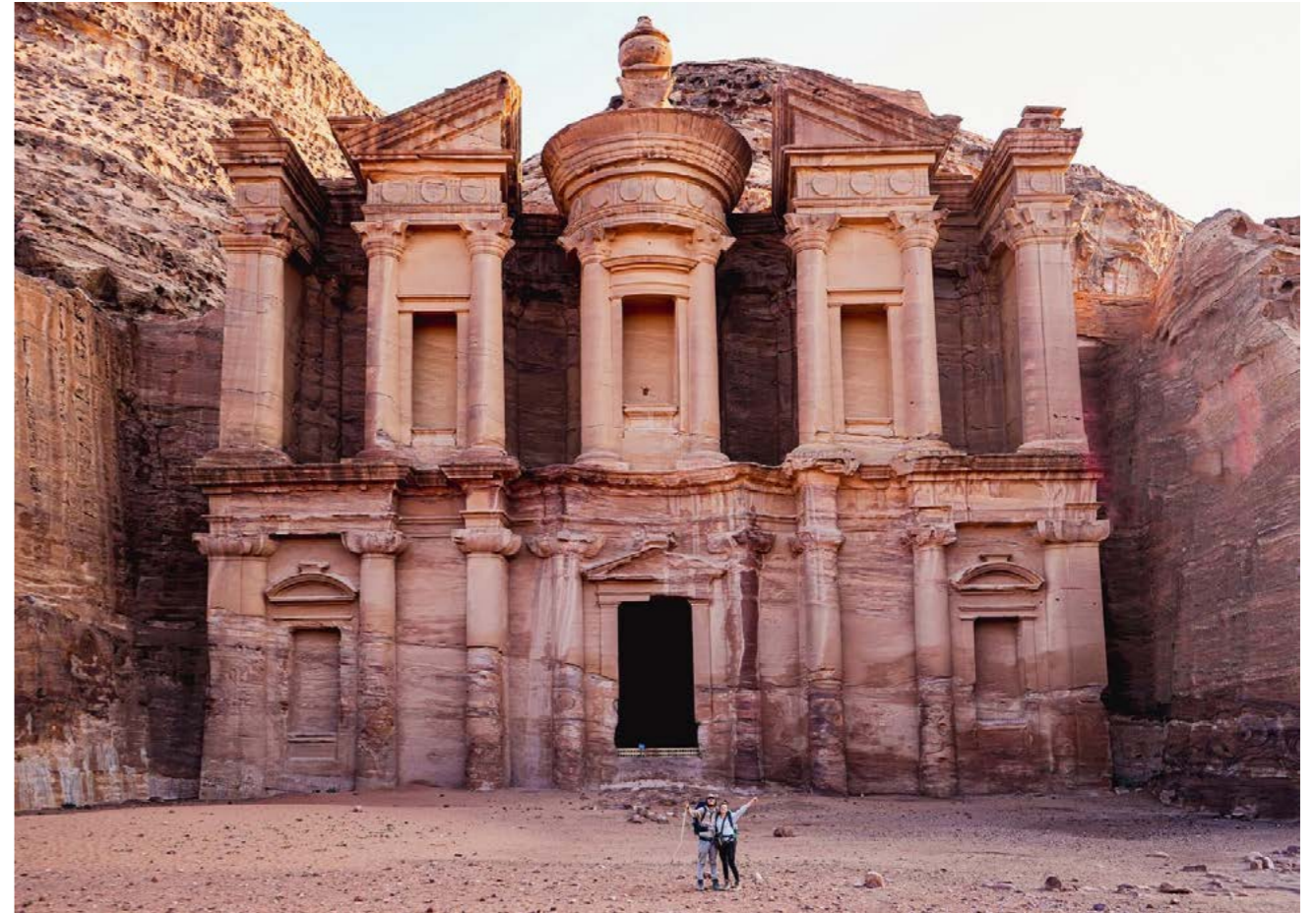
But the friendliness of the people wasn't the only thing that surprised us – so did nature. Although the peninsula largely consists of sand, our idea of the desert upfront (think nothing but infinite grains of sand) seemed incorrect. The desert proved to be a lot more lively and varied. Driving through beautiful rock formations in Wadi Rum is a completely different experience than bashing the soft

sand dunes in the Rub al Khali (the largest continuous sand desert on earth, literally translated 'The Empty Quarter'). And next to sand, we found many species of plants and animals (identifying their traces became one of our favorite morning activities).

The biggest advantage of so much (untouched) land? An endless supply of beautiful wild camp spots – although they require some adjustments on our side. Luckily, local Bedouins (the experts) shared many tips with us to have a comfortable stay. We learned how to find large pieces of fire wood ('dig close to the roots of a plant'), how to level our bus in order to sleep ('reverse without using your 4x4 and let the rear tires dig themselves in'), and how to scare away flies in an animal-friendly way ('make sure you have a fire that smokes').







## Desert Sightseeing

However, every now and then, the amount of sand in the van just drove us crazy. Luckily, there was plenty of (old) culture to discover on days like that. Although Jordan and Saudi Arabia were founded relatively recently (20th century), the remains of previous inhabitants are well-preserved. Think 10,000-year-old hieroglyphics on rock formations in Jubbah, a massive Greek amphitheater in Amman, and Ottoman-style houses in Jeddah. Personally, we were most impressed by the legacy of the Nabataeans: a nomadic people who 2000 years ago made a fortune

trading frankincense and founded a kingdom among steep desert rocks. Their capital? The well-known Petra! Our visit there was extra special, as we decided to leave Mitch behind for four days and hike the last 80km towards the ancient city via the Jordan Trail.

A big tip, as it allowed us to enter through the back entrance (before official opening hours) and view the largest tomb - the monastery - completely alone. Hegra, the second largest city of the Nabataeans and located in present-day Saudi Arabia, we found at least as impressive by the way - especially

because it is not yet so crowded. The above mentioned highlights, are just a snapshot of all the beautiful encounters, impressions and experiences from the last four, incredible months.

So, although we never planned to spend winter on the Arabic Peninsula, we don't regret for a second that our trip turned out this way. With an average temperature of about 25° Celsius, extremely hospitable people, many undiscovered pearls, and an endless supply of wild camp spots, the Arabic Peninsula proved to be the ideal vanlife winter destination for us.



Did you know?

# Camel Meat

Jordan is a country rich in cultural heritage, and its cuisine is a testament to its rich history and traditions. Camel meat has been a part of it for centuries, providing a vital source of nutrition and protein to nomadic and rural communities. Camel herding has been an integral aspect of Jordan's economy and culture, with Bedouin tribes relying on camels for transportation, milk, and meat. While camels are still a common sight in rural Jordan, their meat remains a staple in the country's cuisine.

Camel meat has a unique flavor, often described as slightly gamey with a robust taste reminiscent of beef. It is a popular ingredient in traditional Jordanian dishes such as stews, curries, and kebabs. The meat is usually marinated in spices like cumin, coriander, and turmeric and slow-cooked over an open flame or hot coals to bring out its flavor and tenderness. Some find the flavor to be quite strong and it is probably not to everyone's liking.

One of the most famous dishes featuring camel meat in Jordan is "maqluba," which translates to "upside down." This one-pan dish

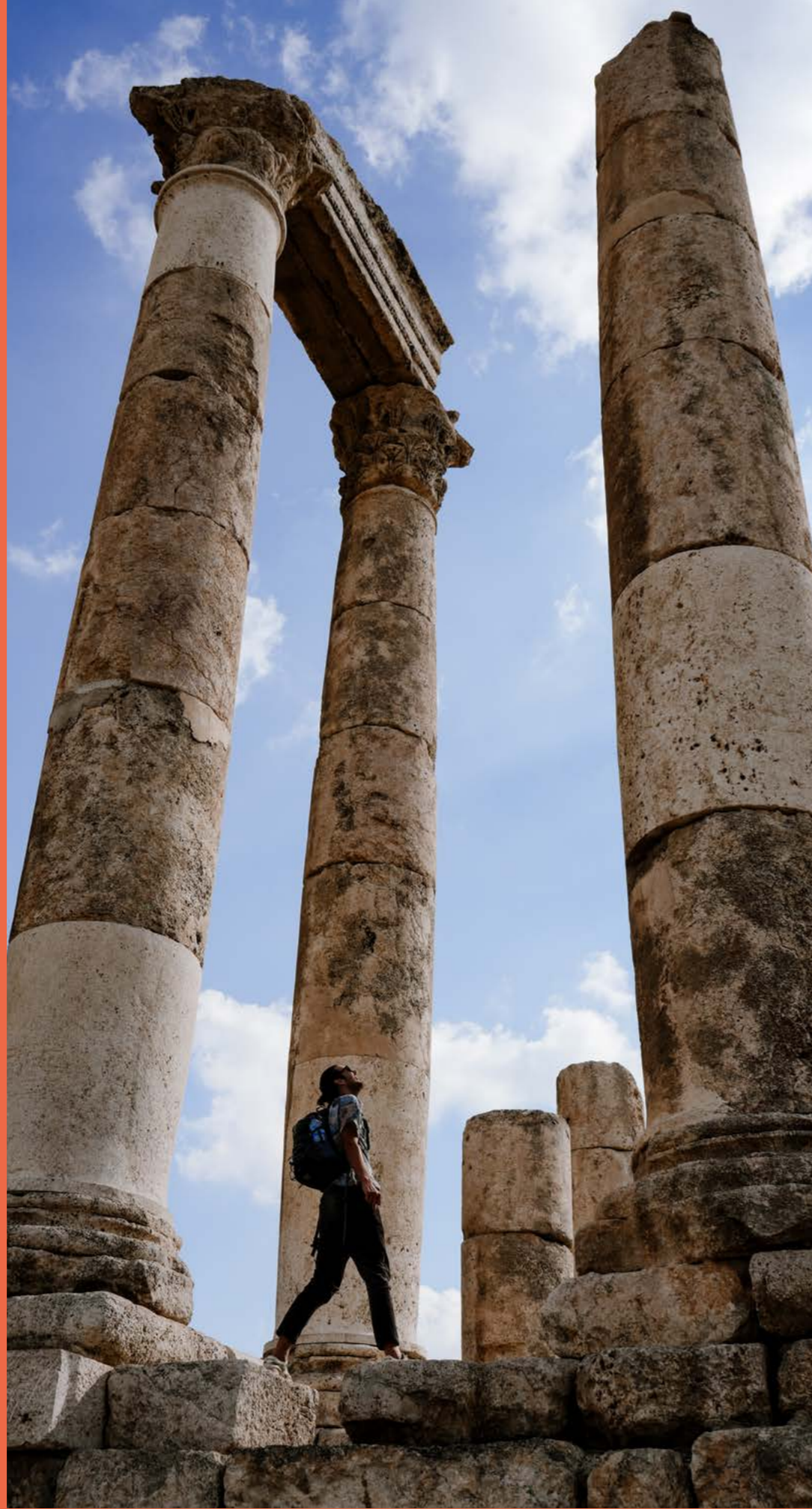
features layers of rice, vegetables, and camel meat, all cooked together and then flipped over to reveal a fragrant and flavorful feast. Maqluba is often served with a tangy tomato and cucumber salad, making it a perfect meal for sharing with family and friends.

Another popular dish is "zarb," a Bedouin-style barbecue. For this traditional cooking method, whole or large cuts of camel meat are placed in a pit with coals, spices, and herbs, and are then covered in sand and slow-cooked for several hours. The result is juicy and flavorful meat that's perfect for a family gathering or a night under the stars with friends.

Camel meat is gaining popularity as a healthy and sustainable alternative to other meats. It's naturally low in fat and calories but high in protein and essential nutrients like iron and B vitamins. Raising camels is also more environmentally friendly as they are well-adapted to arid climates and require less water and resources compared to other livestock. It is worth mentioning that this depends on how the camels are raised and how the camel meat industry

impacts the environment and the local resources. The consumption of camel meat remains a contentious issue in Jordan and the wider region, with some viewing it as a delicacy and a symbol of hospitality and others considering it inedible or forbidden. Despite these differing opinions, its popularity and cultural significance cannot be ignored. Whether enjoyed in a hearty stew, a Bedouin-style barbecue, or as a healthy meal, camel meat is a delicious and nutritious part of Jordan's culinary heritage.

Of course some might not be interested in trying camel meat for personal, cultural, or religious reasons but a trip to Jordan can be rounded off perfectly with the experience of trying its famous dishes. With its unique flavor, versatility, and cultural significance, it's a culinary adventure that's sure to leave a lasting impression. So, grab your appetite and sense of adventure, and get ready to explore the rich and diverse cuisine of Jordan.



# Culinary Inspiration



Jordan is a place either of us are yet to visit, but it is somewhere we would love to explore! So many amazing places to see and visit, and so much amazing food! Food plays an important part in Jordanian culture. As with many cultures it is something to be shared with family & friends and can form a main part of celebrations and festivities.

If you were to head to Jordan you could expect an explosion of delicious Middle Eastern cuisine, with influences from many surrounding and nearby countries. Meat features heavily in Jordanian cuisine, as well as meze dishes such as falafel and hummus.

Not all dishes are van friendly however, with many requiring a number of ingredients or equipment that isn't easy to carry around in the van. Due to this we decided to use the national dish of Mansaf and give it a vegetarian vanlife twist.

Mansaf is the national dish of Jordan and is a dish that the Jordanians take great pride in. It is served at many family occasions, including weddings and funerals. It is a

great dish for sharing and bringing people together. Traditionally it features succulent lamb covered in a sauce made from jameed, which is a hard fermented milk product. This is usually made from sheep or goats' milk. This is then rehydrated to create a yogurt sauce which is used to cover the lamb.

This dish would usually be served with flatbread to help soak the sauce up. Mansaf should be eaten with your hands, and usually just one! It is expected that you would eat mansaf using your right hand with your left hand behind your back. The rice and meat mixture would be rolled into balls and popped into your mouth. Unfortunately we were unable to find jameed amongst the Surrey hills and so instead we used this dish as inspiration to create a vegetarian option that is aromatic and comforting. It is easy to cook in your van with limited equipment and doesn't have a long cook time, saving on the gas you use! To help minimise the amount of pans you need to use, we use our secret ingredient - microwave rice - without the microwave!

# Jordanian Inspired Rice with Crunchy Chickpeas

## Difficulty



## Time

Prep Time: 20min

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

## Ingredients

|                                  |         |
|----------------------------------|---------|
| chickpeas (drained & rinsed)     | 1 can   |
| Olive oil                        |         |
| small white onion (chopped)      | 1       |
| black pepper                     | 1 pinch |
| ground cardamom                  | 1 pinch |
| ground cinnamon                  | 1 pinch |
| salt                             | 1 pinch |
| water                            | 2 cups  |
| microwave rice                   | 1 pack  |
| greek yogurt                     | 1 cup   |
| Tanhini                          | 1 tsp   |
| lemon                            | ¼       |
| almond flakes                    | ½ cup   |
| Flatbreads or tortillas to serve |         |

## Notes\*

We made our own flatbreads for this recipe, but you can also use tortilla for ease. You can substitute the toasted almonds for pine nuts if desired.

## Instructions

Rinse and drain chickpeas, this will help them to crisp up when cooking.

Heat oil in a pan, add chickpeas and cook for 5 mins. Add onion, seasoning and cook until onion is translucent and chickpeas are golden and crispy.

Add 2 cups water, microwave rice on top, cover and cook on low heat for 10 mins. If the water runs low, add some more.

Toast ½ cup almond flakes in a separate pan. These toast extremely fast so keep a close eye on them! When toasted, remove from the heat and set aside.

After 10 minutes, remove 1 cup of the chickpea broth from the pan and place into a bowl. Add in the yogurt and tahini and stir quickly, this will make a creamy sauce.

Tear the flatbreads or tortillas and place some on the plate, drizzle with yogurty sauce. Cover with rice, chickpeas, remainder of sauce, lemon juice.

Finally top with the toasted almonds & use the remaining bread to scoop up the food if you don't want messy hands in the van!



# Leaving

# Otto

# Behind



## Vanlife a different way

You need to know we have traveled long-term before. In June 2016 started our first long-haul. We returned flat broke when we came back in April of 2018. A bug was planted; a new journey would start as soon as we had the money again. So we started to save, intensively. Even though it is common amongst van dwellers to work remotely, we don't. Our reason is that we just want to travel and don't want to be distracted by the daily life, schedules, and deadlines which come with working while traveling. So we needed enough to travel long-term, maybe even for 4 or 5 years. Our hopes were high doing and making this. We went off again in September of 2021.

We started the engine of Otto, our beloved campervan. The belly of this hippie beast was filled with everything including backpacking materials. This time around we are not only going to travel by van but also embark on a long hike, the Camino Santiago de Compostela, and also an old-school backpack trip for 4 to 6 months. For that, South America was on our horizon. It's a part of the world that needed to be explored. Just to keep our minds fit, because sometimes only living the Vanlife can be trying, especially when you travel for a long time.

After a year and three months, we started to prepare for our long journey in South America. By chance we drove with Otto to the Netherlands for two weeks. This made it easier for us to buy supplies and even make some deals with some companies. They gladly provided us with items that we would promote along the way. The well-needed items turned out to be a really fortunate trade between a couple of our newly made partners and us. With new dry bags, shoes, caps, QR tags, and more in our pocket, we drove southbound and out of the Netherlands. The big search for the ideal location to store the campervan, where we would park it while we were away, started. This has been by far the hardest search since decades for us. Almost all the places were full, or didn't accept campers for six months. Our ideal spot would have been in Valencia, having friends in the neighborhood, the usual mild climate, and the enormous amount of possible companies and locations with lots

of space. Two weeks before our flight to South America we found an ideal spot. The spot was near Valencia with decent bus connections in the neighborhood. The spot is a huge lot harboring at least a thousand campers and caravans. It sort of felt safe and we paid 300 Euros for the coming 6 months. The last two weeks before we went off, we started preparing mousetraps, humidity solutions, plastic for the skylights, and all sorts of smaller preparations, like caulking the skylights one time extra, lubricating the window seals with non-acid vaseline or making sure the diesel tank was full so no water could build up with frost. We also recharged the power pack to give the battery an extra boost for when we return. The list including packing the bags was intensively long and felt in such a tiny space like the van even more stressful than our backpacking travels back in the days.

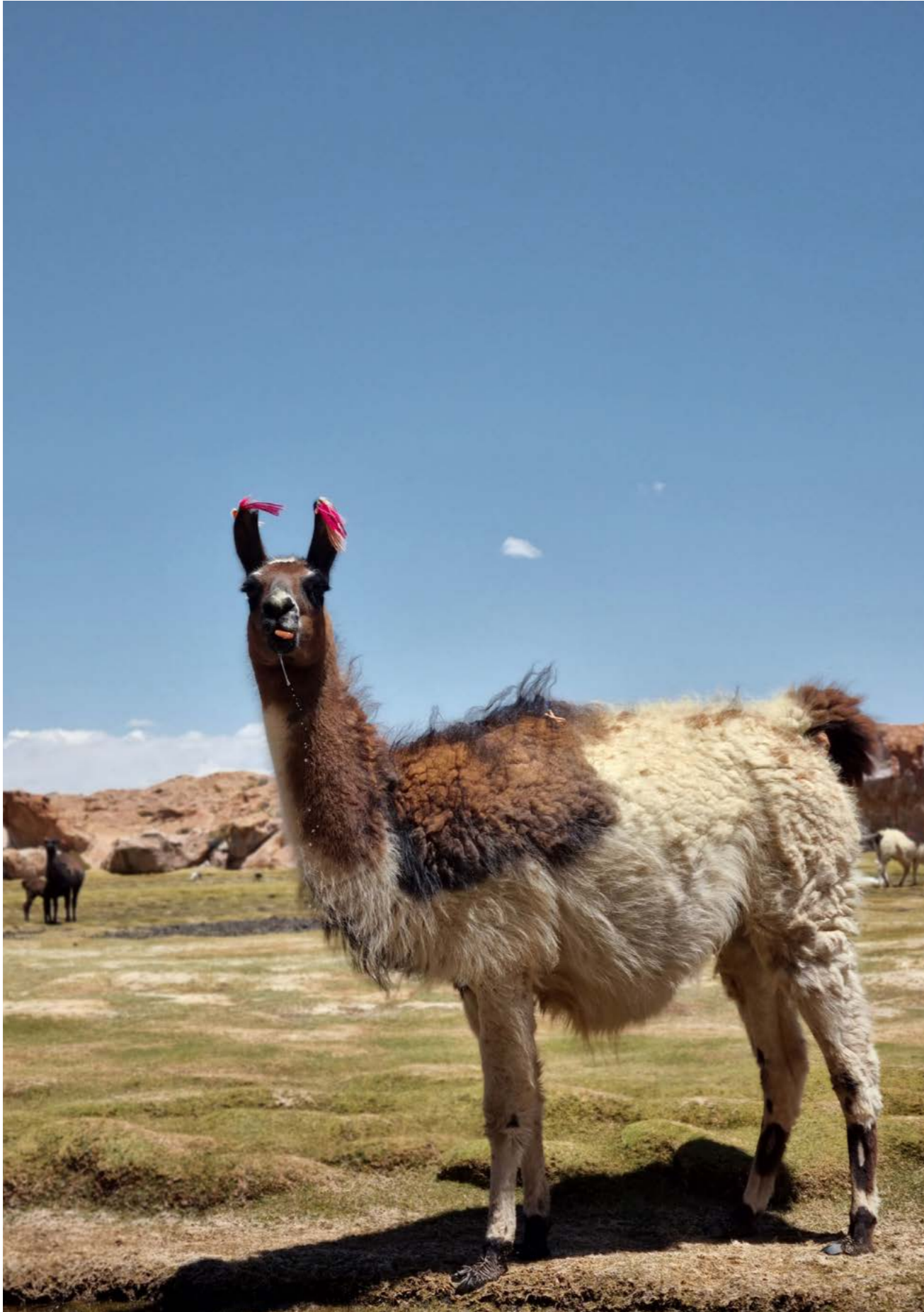


And then the day finally arrived, in the morning of 24 October, we drove to the spot for the first time. We put the camper on blocks, so the rain would glide off. We placed the extra plastic over the skylights and the alcove window. These were our main concerns in this old van. We put the humidity absorbers in overflow tubs and tensioned the mousetraps, locked the camper, took one more photo, and we were off.

The backpack felt heavy. Too heavy. The first small hike brought us to the bus stop, and we just missed our bus by 10 minutes. After an hour of waiting, we hopped on and hopped off at the main station in Valencia. Our next

destination was Madrid. It was our second time to sit in a long haul bus in Spain and it was perfect with an entertainment system and a comfy chair. After 5 hours, we arrived in the Spanish capital. The journey had begun.

Our trip through South America lasted 4 months. We traveled completely through Chile, Bolivia, and Colombia. Everywhere we met travelers and exchanged our adventure stories. Otto was the main character in many. We often heard remarks like: "That would be a dream for me too." While the backpacking trip through these fantastic countries went flawless, we missed, thought, or talked about our life on the road daily.



While writing this we are sitting in Mexico City waiting for our plane to bring us back to Otto. The concerns we had, even now while almost literally embarking on the plane, were: is the van going to still be dry from the massive showers Valencia had the last couple of weeks, did we get mice, will Otto start, or did the massive tree we had to park underneath fall onto the van? And, of course, it's completely out of our hands, and we can't change anything if any of those things did happen. But it kept our minds busy. Our advice now, in hindsight, rent a spot with a roof, open plan, but with a roof.

We could write a book about our experiences in South America. We loved it, but for now it's time to live the sometimes a bit more humble life in a van. Enjoying the sunsets from our home on wheels.

It's good to be Back!



# Rocky Road and Love



We set off from our home in Scotland in February 2022, in “Jungle Jim” our self-built, tropical inspired Mercedes Sprinter together with our two beloved travel companions: Leo our dog, and Hamish our cat.



Travel has always played a major part in our lives, even before we met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia twelve years ago. At the Time we were both traveling for work. Barry was the Asian Ambassador for Glenfiddich Whiskey and Tamara was a TV Travel Show Host. When we met, we realized we were two like-minded souls, and that travel and adventure would continue to play an integral part in our life only now we could experience it together. Since then, we have visited forty plus countries and lived in five across three continents and seven cities.

We first became obsessed with nomadic living and vanlife back in 2015. We packed up our lives (and pets) in Sydney, Australia and moved to Copenhagen, Denmark. The plan being to buy a car and a caravan and travel around Scandinavia. A three-month trip turned into a year as we lived and worked full-time out of a tiny vintage 1988 Adria caravan. At the time people found it either cool or crazy that we chose to take on such an adventure and bring our pets along. For us though there was no question about whether our pets would come with us. They are our world, our family, and we have a duty of care to love, protect and care for them throughout their lives. That was the first time we fully experienced traveling with the pets and living together



in a tiny space. It introduced us to vanlife and the freedom that comes with it. From that point on we were hooked.

After our caravan adventures in Denmark, we moved back to Scotland. Sadly, after living abroad and traveling for so many years, Scotland just didn't feel like home anymore. We always felt something was missing and yearned for the open road. During Covid and the lockdown we became even more restless, so we bought a van, lovingly spent six months building it, and as soon as the borders opened, we took leave of our freedom and 'hit the road' An adventure for all four feet and eight paws.

We drove from Scotland across (and around) Europe and got as far east as Gaziantep. A city in the southeast of Turkey, just 97km north of Aleppo, Syria. Journeying 16,000 miles over two continents and twenty countries. So far, our journey has been full of joy, excitement, adventure, and mishaps. Our biggest 'Joy' arrived while in Romania in the form of a furry little stowaway. Two weeks into the Romania leg while we were wild camping along the Râu Arieș river in Turda, near Cluj-Napoca in North-western Transylvania. A stray kitten appeared out of nowhere; it had followed our cat Hamish to our van.





He was a tiny, scared, hungry, and desperate little creature. When we first saw him, we could tell he was truly struggling to survive; he was malnourished, crying so loud, and wouldn't leave us alone.



We fed him and didn't know what to do with him. Our first thoughts were: he wandered away from his family, and he would soon return to them. We worried that if we brought him into the van with us for the night, he would be lost, so we left Hamish's cat carrier out for him, so he had shelter if he needed it, along with food and water.

We had a sleepless night, tossing and turning in our warm beds worrying about the little kitten outside in the cold, around 3am Barry went out to try and find him but in the darkness of the night, it looked like he had gone off on his way, as he was nowhere to be seen. That morning when we woke up, all we could think about was this little kitten. We were just so upset that he had disappeared all on his own, just a small little man out in the scary world trying to survive. We wondered where he had gone and if he was safe. There was nothing else we could do and that was the end of it, or so we thought.

Whilst sitting and enjoying our morning coffee, looking out over the river, we suddenly heard it: the faint cat cry which brought us sudden relief! How such a small, squirrely noise could evoke such strong emotions. From that moment on we knew that the kitten hadn't left us

at all! Instead, he had crawled up into the mechanisms underneath the van and made himself a comfortable hideout. We were so happy to see this little guy. We instantly took him into our van; fed him, bathed him, and gave him a warm place to rest. The next few days we spent taking care of him and we introduced him to our big dog, Leo. Reacquainted him with our cat Hamish and took him to the vet. All our travel plans were halted as we made it our priority to look after this tiny stowaway. Whilst waiting on animal shelters to get back to us we potty trained him, played with him, and gave him lots of love and attention.

It's fair to say that we fell totally in love with him in the weeks that followed. When the shelters finally got back to us to tell us they couldn't take him; it didn't matter anymore because he was one of us now. Another adventurer joined Jungle Jim's pack. Since Rocky's (that's what we named him because he's a survivor) arrival, he has brought excitement, and adventure to every journey and destination we have been to. He brings a renewed energy and dynamic to our family and fits right into Vanlife. He already loves to walk, hike, and explore the outdoors; that's when he's not napping with his two big brothers, of course.



Every mile we travel now is filled with so much more love and joy. It's a tight squeeze in Jungle Jim but what we lack in space we make up for in love.

# Transylvanian Bliss

Nestled in North-western Transylvania the Râul Arieș river offers a picturesque setting for outdoor activities and exploration. The area boasts rolling hills, lush forests, and quaint villages that create an idyllic escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Adventure enthusiasts will find plenty to keep them occupied at the Râul Arieș, as it provides opportunities for kayaking and fishing. The river's tranquil flow and beautiful surroundings make it accessible for kayakers of all skill levels, with several routes available for full-day trips or shorter excursions. Anglers will also appreciate the diverse fish species found in the river, including brown trout and grayling.

In addition to outdoor pursuits, the region surrounding the Râul Arieș presents chances to delve into local culture and the countryside. The village of Turda is especially noteworthy, as it is home to the Turda Salt Mine, one of the oldest in

the world. Visitors can tour the mine, now a museum showcasing the history of salt mining, and explore the underground tunnels, admire the salt sculptures, and even enjoy some salt therapy.

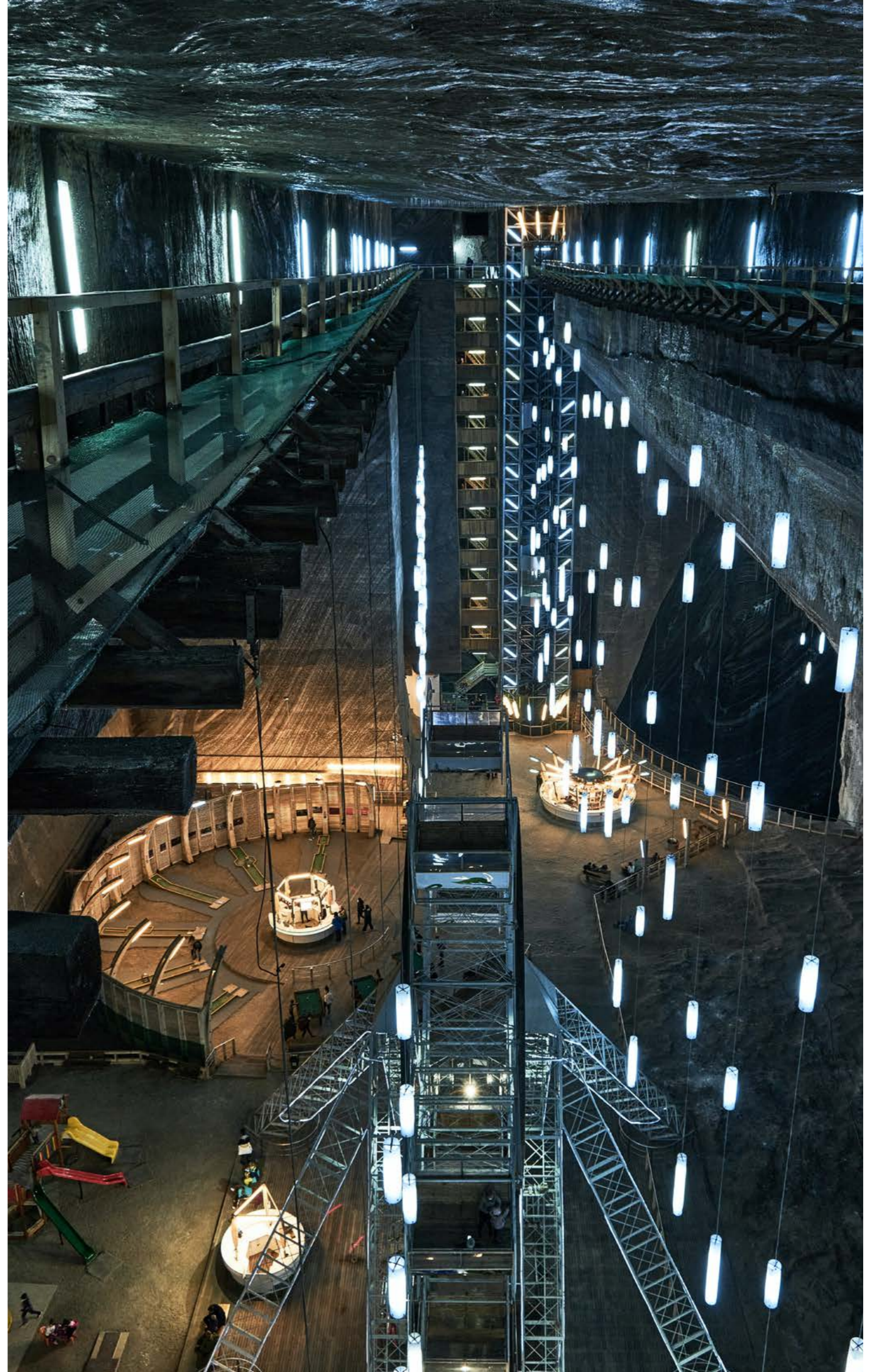


Cluj-Napoca, located just a short drive from Turda, is also worth visiting. This cultural hub in Transylvania boasts a rich history and numerous notable attractions,

such as St. Michael's Church, known for its Gothic-style architecture, and the Ethnographic Museum of Transylvania, which displays the traditional culture of the region.

For those seeking a slower pace, the surrounding countryside provides ample opportunities to relax and enjoy nature. Hike through the forests, have a picnic by the river, or visit one of the nearby villages to immerse yourself in traditional Transylvanian culture.

The Râul Arieș and its surrounding region offer a unique blend of scenic beauty, outdoor activities, and cultural experiences, making it a perfect destination for those in search of a change of pace from city life. Whether you're an adventurer, a nature lover, or simply looking for a peaceful escape, the Region has something to offer. So, pack your bags and head to North-western Transylvania to experience this breathtaking river and the richness of the surrounding area.



# 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.

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.

Here are the four steps and guidelines 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 right. 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!



## 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.

## 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.

## 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.**

If you are a brand and want to partner with us, please contact us on [marketing@vanlifezone.com](mailto:marketing@vanlifezone.com).

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Offenlegung gemäß §25

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Informationen zum Medieninhaber sind ständig und unmittelbar unter folgender Webadresse auffindbar: [vanlifezone.com/impressum.php](http://vanlifezone.com/impressum.php)

Information on the media owner can constantly be found directly at the following web address: [vanlifezone.com/impressum.php](http://vanlifezone.com/impressum.php)

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