

Vanlifezone

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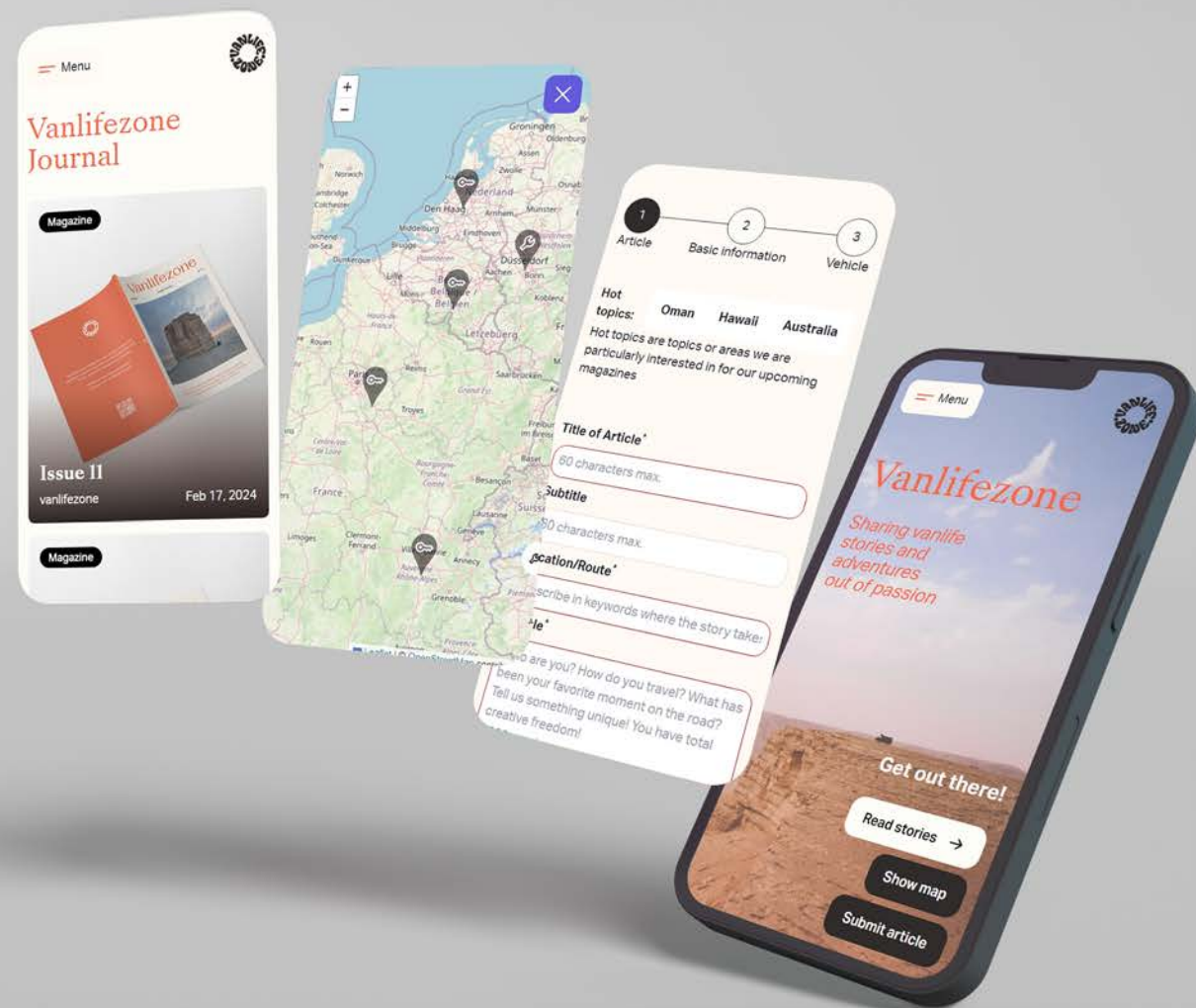
English Version

N° 11



Surviving Cancer, Solo Female Travel in Africa, and Wild
Adventures Across Australia, Europe, the Arabian Peninsula,
and the Pan-American Highway to Ushuaia

Vanlifezone All New.



Dive into adventure stories
& discover invaluable travel
resources! Stay tuned for
future updates!

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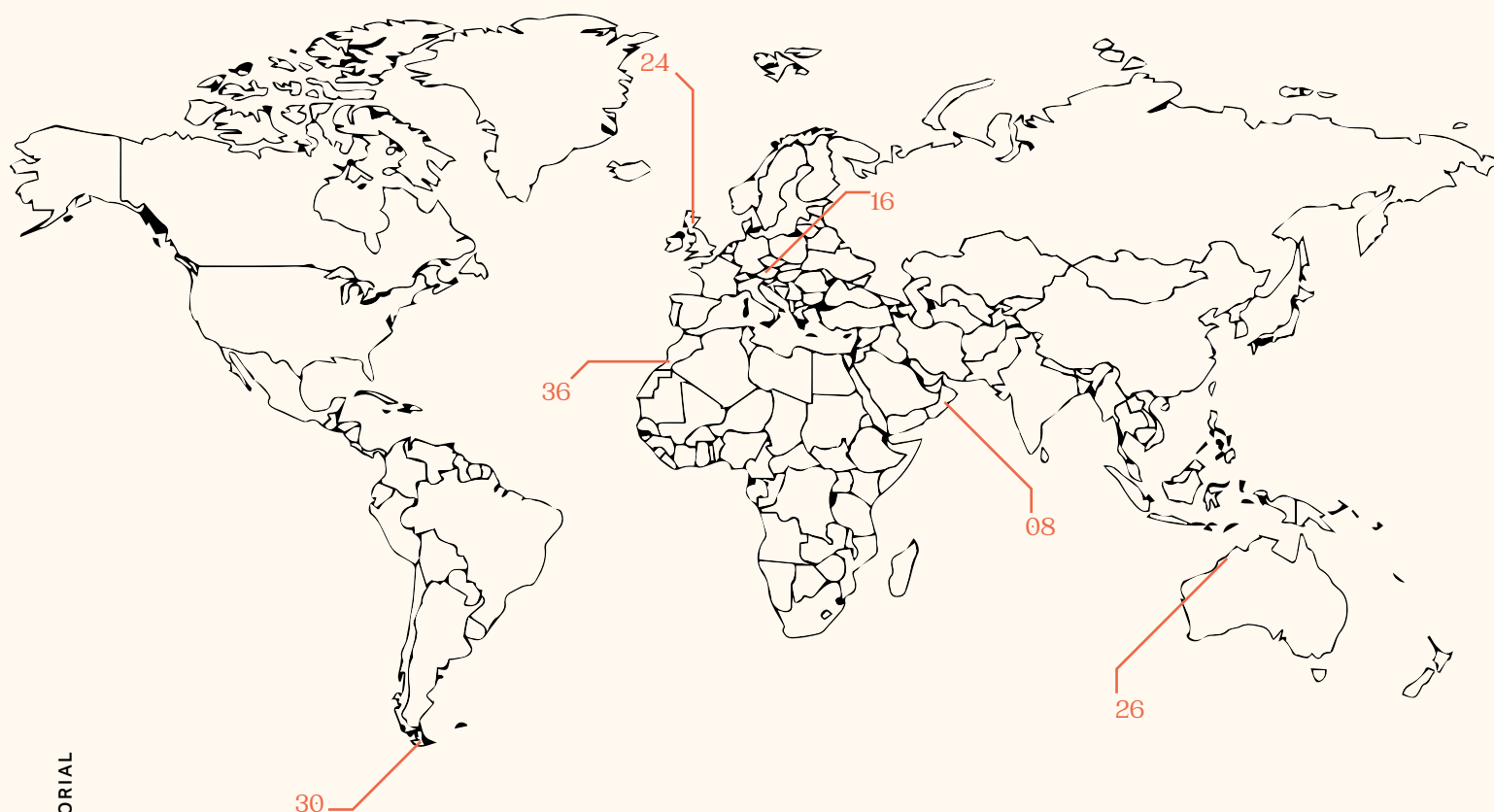
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A New Chapter Packed With Adventures

Dear reader, a lot has happened since our last magazine release. A period filled with many learnings comes to an end and a new chapter begins. In the last issue we promised you a major release of our website - unfortunately things didn't go as planned. Our partners who were developing our new website, failed to deliver and left us stranded with a chaotic half-finished page. Despite this we decided to go ahead with a soft-launch of our website, even though

many of our intended features were unfinished and not implemented. We never announced this launch on social media.

Since then, our team has been working diligently on fixing and implementing more and more features. Together with the release of this magazine issue we also celebrate the launch of our digital journal - a place where we share current news in the world of vanlife and overlanding. We'll also grad-

ually re-upload many of our old articles that are collecting dust in the early digital issues of our magazine.

Our map is also currently experiencing a complete overhaul and will receive several awesome updates soon.

We're thankful for your patience and really appreciate your feedback!

What to Expect

This issue is a special one! We have amazing stories from five continents. They will not only inspire you but will make you laugh out loud, feel pain and give you a vital kick in the ass to GET OUT THERE and chase your dreams.

Join **@travelandrover** as he recounts his transformative journey from cancer survivor to overlanding enthusiast, finding solace and liberation on the open road.

@freebius shares a reflective journey through five years of van life, from the humble beginnings of conversion to the trials and triumphs of life on the road, offering invaluable insights and personal growth along the way.

Dive into the heartfelt narrative of **@starlf0wer_vanlife**, who

found companionship, healing, and unexpected adventures with her beloved animal companions by her side.

@alice.inwondervan offers essential tips and advice for traveling with pets, examining the laws and challenges of different countries.

Embark on an unforgettable expedition with **@on.vagabonde** as they navigate the Pan-American Highway from Seattle to Ushuaia, sharing the triumphs and trials of life on the road.

Follow the daring exploits of **@littlebluevanlife**, who shares scandalous tales from solo van life in the UK, Spain and Northwestern Africa, embracing the thrill of the unknown.

Tantalize your taste buds with an amazing recipe from **@vanlife_eats**, bringing the

flavors of Morocco into your van kitchen with their take on a traditional crispy Moroccan pancake.

And last but not least, discover the rugged beauty of Western Australia with **@patandjele** as they embrace remote touring in their trusty Unimog, showcasing the unparalleled reasons for purchasing their vehicle and its capabilities.

Each story offers a unique glimpse into the diverse experiences that define the van life community. And you know what the best thing is? You can actually hold this issue in your hands as a print! Holding a print copy feels so much better than reading a PDF online. So, go ahead and order yours now!



Share Your Own Story

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

So go ahead and send us your story at vanlifezone.com/submit

We'd also like to invite you to join our facebook community group at facebook.com/groups/vanlife-zone.

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



Florian Jaunegg
Editor in Chief & Project Manager

Vanlife is About Living

Overlanding as a Cancer Survivor

There are some sentences that will change your life. Mine was: „You have a 13cm tumor in your chest. You have cancer.“

I was 24 years old when a physician spoke these words to me and in the same moment it pulled the ground from under my feet. But soon after the physicians left the room, I made a big decision: „Whatever happens, I will try to grow and make the best out of it.“

Months of chemotherapy, antibody therapy and radiotherapy followed and finally saved my life.

Suffering a severe and life threatening illness makes you think about your priorities and dreams. And after overlanding through Australia after high school for one year, mine was to build a campervan and travel with it.



The Conclusion...

Shortly after the diagnosis I bought an old Fiat Ducato with my girlfriend at the time, stripped it down and started to build it up like I wanted.

It allowed me to be myself, realize myself, work on a big dream and have a ray of hope in between all these doctors' appointments, blood samplings, medications and diagnostics.

With the ending of the treatment, I was very happy to be alive but also needed to adapt to the „new life“ with a new health condition. I moved in together with my girlfriend, started working and pushed my dream aside – until life caught up with me again around two years later: My girlfriend broke up with me, my mother unexpectedly died due to cancer and my grandmother passed away after suffering untreatable cancer for months - and all this happened over the course of six month.

I didn't want to keep up with this kind of life anymore; I was suffering

mentally as much as I have never done before. But I decided to change my life once again: by buying a Land Rover Defender and finally living my dream of exploring the world with it.

After a few months into collecting information and test driving, I finally bought the car of my dreams: A Land Rover Defender, built in 2004 with a TD5 engine. I started to optimize the interior to my liking, mounted a pop-up tent and finally left Germany in April 2022 into one direction: East.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, partly closed borders and international conflicts I didn't see a big point in planning too much and I neither had a specific route. I just knew I want to go east towards India, maybe even further to Southeast Asia.

After spending three months in Southeastern Europe, I crossed through Turkey and spent four weeks in Georgia. I got to know @overlanding.bruno, who was also solo-overlanding with a Defender. After a short chat we decided to explore the southern Caucasus together. Especially driving the famous Abano Pass, one of the world's most dangerous roads, has been on our bucket list.



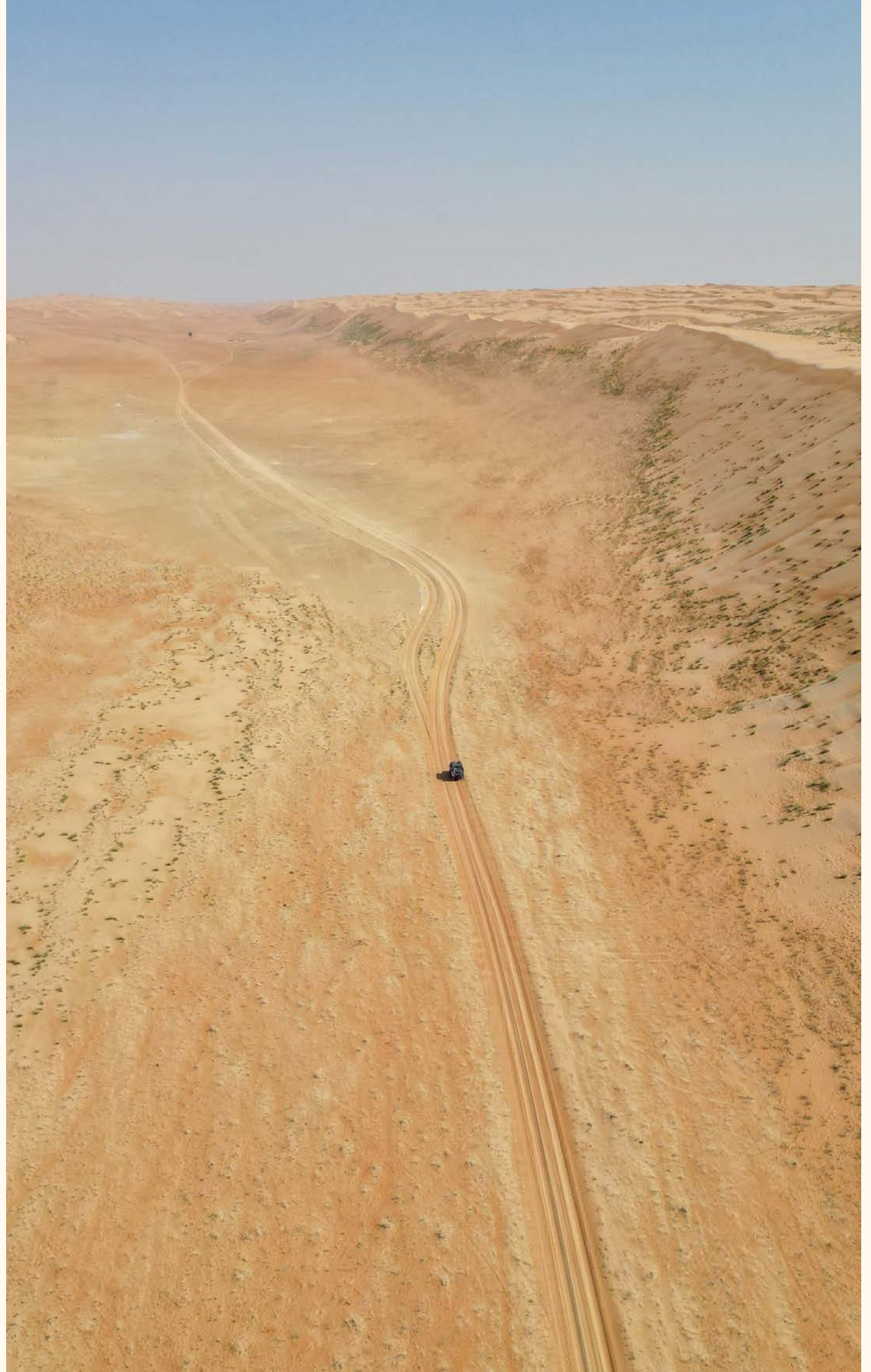
We didn't really know what we had to expect, but definitely felt safer exploring this vast piece of nature together. Even if I learned to risk more for a fulfilled life, I really got to know its worth and the value of health and wellbeing.

Especially if you explore the world on your own with a 4x4 and want to push it to its limits, it can be a fine line between having a great time and risking too much. Therefore I tried my best to be prepared for such a big trip. This included attending an off-road driving training and also a basic maintenance and workshop course, both especially for Land Rover Defenders.

I also already focused on one-person-handling when I build up the car and it was crucial for the decision on the recovery gear. Despite all the preparations, I didn't know that I would face completely different terrain on my trip than expected. After entering Iran the German government asked every

citizen to leave the country in a kind of way they only do in very severe situations. Additionally the Taliban declared war against the Pakistani government and India didn't hand out visas for German tourists at that time. So instead of continuing towards Asia I changed my plans:

After meeting a few Europeans traveling to the Sultanate of Oman, I decided to drive to the Arabian Peninsula – and would face a lot of desert and sand.



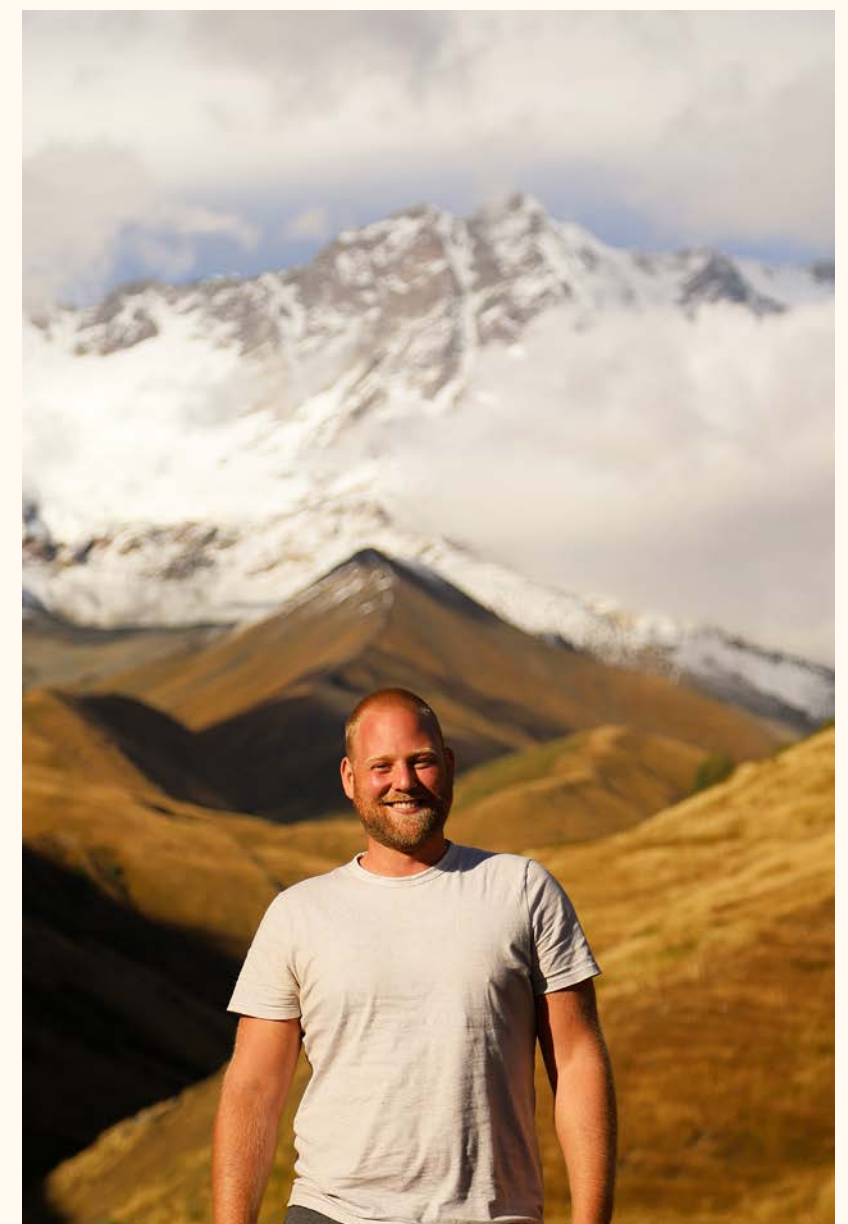


“Life and overlanding have a few things in common!”

I crossed Iraq and had my first desert driving experiences in Kuwait. After four weeks I continued to the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia, to Bahrain and finally put my desert driving skills to perfect level in the United Arab Emirates. I never would have thought to end up spending three month there, but the opportunity to learn kite surfing and to fulfill a long carried wish, in the combination with a very big hospitality of locals and expats finally made me stay. I got amazed by a big variety of desert and especially by the huge sand dunes of the Rub Al-Khali which grow up to a single height of 120m. My newly gained driving skills enabled me to climb these dunes on my own and the solo-crossing of vast deserts in the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

On my trip and with all the experiences made, I felt alive. When I've been alone in the middle of the desert I realized, that life and overlanding have a few things in common! You can't always follow your planned route, conditions can change and so you'll need to too. The terrain will change, so you will need to adjust your speed. You'll always need to make sure you don't lose your grip to the ground by adjusting tire pressure. You'll face breakdowns, mentally and physically, but taking care of yourself and your needs will bring you back to your level. Taking breaks is important to process experiences and prepare for upcoming challenges.

And one of the most important rules: every overlander takes good care of their vehicle. The condition and state of it defines your abilities to travel. But it doesn't only bring you from A to B. When in the right condition, it provides comfort. It will be a place to feel safe and rely on. But all of that doesn't come by itself. You do your maintenance, feed it with good fuel and oil and do a regular check-up.



So don't forget your body is your vehicle. Take care of it and do your regularly check-ups.

Gender and age don't matter. This cannot just save your van, it can also save your life. And that's what it's all about: Vanlife .

So if you want to experience more of my van & life, follow my

trip to the Middle East and the rest of the world at @travelandrover. And the most important thing: Stay safe and healthy!



Here’s how my van life journey started and where it took me in the last five years. I extracted the dates and numbers out of my catalog of photographs and turned them into infographics.

No Road Without a Turn

My Five Years of Vanlife in Review

0 - Starting at Zero

Hey, I'm Fabian - an avid traveler and photographer from a little town in Upper Austria.

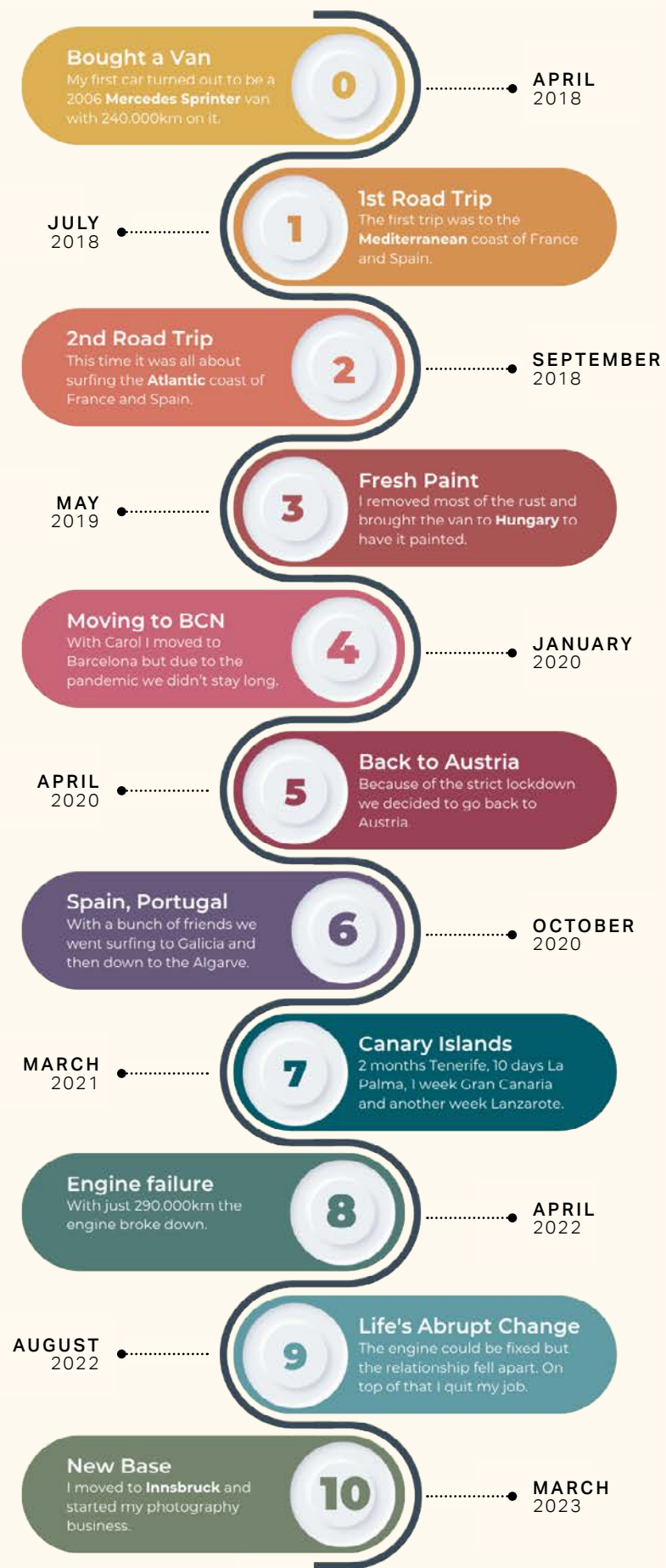
When I came back from a 1-year backpacking trip through South America in 2017 I was somehow missing something. I was looking

for a more convenient way to travel and to integrate it into my day-to-day life. Back then I was working as an app developer in Vienna.

One day it hit me: the missing piece to attain my goal was simply a van. So I bought my first car when I was 25 years old - a relatively old,

white Mercedes Sprinter van from 2006 with 240.000km. The van was empty and rusty.

I really started at zero with no clue what I was actually doing. It can get really overwhelming but somehow with the help of friends and family I slowly started to transform it into what I had envisioned.



1 & 2 - Conversion and First Road Trips

After I had fixed the worst of the rust and installed a window in the back I couldn't wait any longer and had to go on my first road trip. Even though the van appeared rundown, equipped only with a mattress and a few boxes, I drove along the Côte d'Azur and continued to Barcelona, making a couple of stops along the way. After that first road trip I had a better idea of what I wanted and needed in the van. Back at home I built a bed frame and benches where I could store my things inside. After wrapping that up, I headed to the Atlantic coast with a friend for a surfing getaway. We started in Hossegor, France and continued all the way to Santander in Spain. Pretty soon I knew that getting a van was one of the best decisions of my life.

3 - Fresh Paint in Hungary

On the outside the van looked worse than when I got it because of the spots where I had to fix the rust. Through a friend I found a garage in Hungary that painted the van in a grayish green. Now the van really looked like new and the fun part of the build-out could begin - the interior. I insulated the van, laid the floor and installed a roof vent.



4 & 5 - Moving to Barcelona & Promptly Returning

When the colder months were approaching I made an agreement with my employer that I could work remotely from basically anywhere within Europe. I moved out of my flat in Vienna and started to work on the last essential part of the van - the kitchen. Just like the hanging cabinets, I got the base from Ikea (huge time saver) and then modified it heavily. I installed a 50l water tank, a sink and a gas stove. After many consecutive night shifts the van never looked any better.

On one of my earlier road trips in 2018 I met Carol, a girl from Barcelona who later became my girlfriend. In early 2020, we decided to move to Barcelona together. However our plan was disrupted by the pandemic. The restrictions in Spain were super hard and you could barely go out of the house, let alone drive around with a camper van. We ultimately decided to cancel our plan of living in Barcelona and went back to Austria where life seemed easier at the time.

6 - With New Solar Panels to Galicia & the Algarve

During the time in Spain I realized that only charging the battery with the generator wasn't enough so when I was back in Austria, I installed solar panels. As an add-on I also mounted a wooden roof platform and a ladder. With the new upgrade I set off on what turned out to be a 2.5 month surf trip to Spain and Portugal together with friends. While working 32 hours remotely we explored the wild Galicia and also got to see an epic swell hitting Nazaré. I will never forget seeing those crazy people out there surfing those giant waves. Eventually we made it all the way down to the Algarve where we spent some more time, went surfing and explored the area.

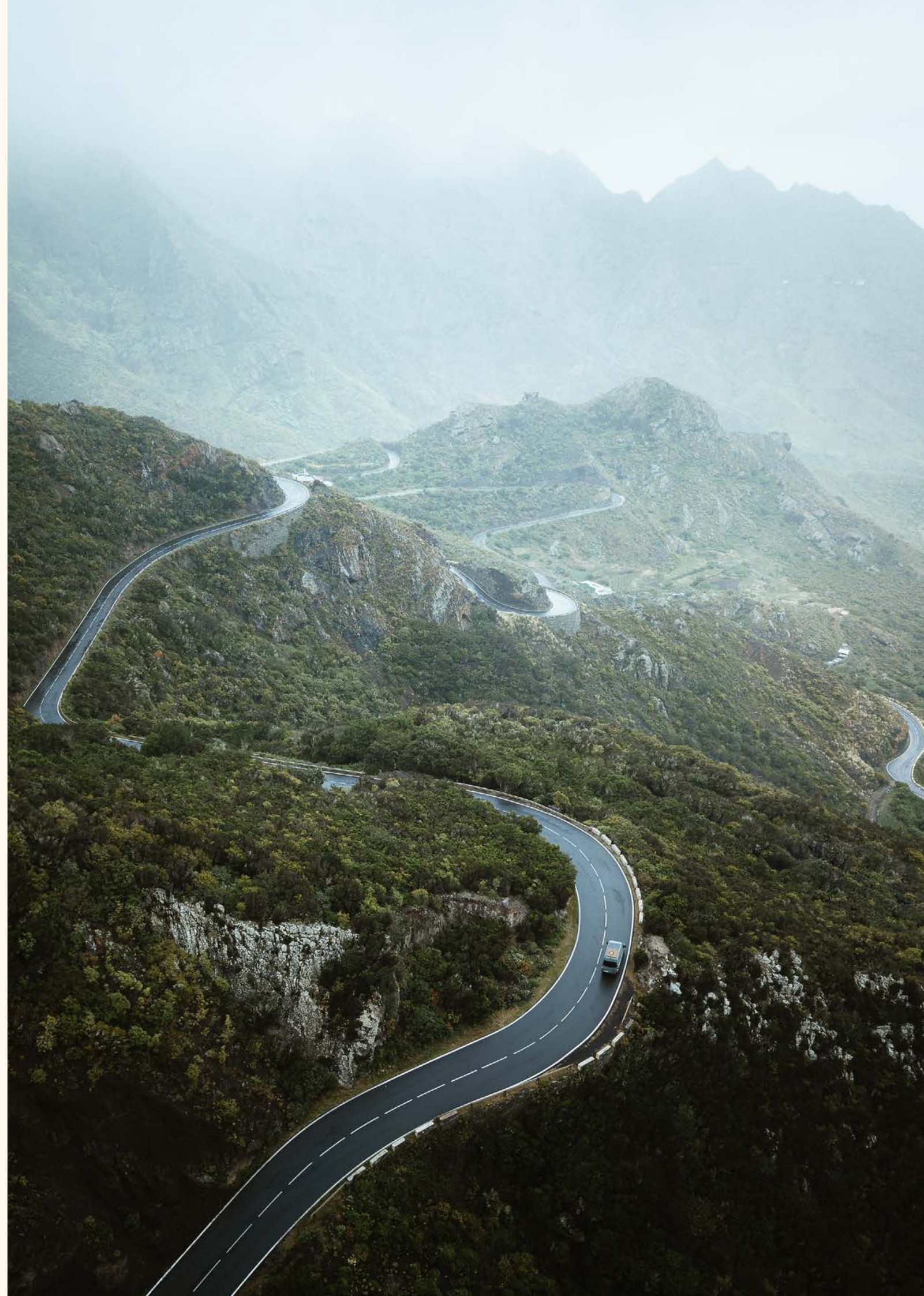
7 - Canary Islands

It was my dream to ship the van to an island one day. In March of 2021, Carol and I went down to Cadíz and took a 35 hour ferry to Tenerife. We stayed there for two entire months because the island has so much to offer. It's paradise for people traveling in a van. The temperature is perfect and nature is so diverse on the island. The North is fresh and green while the South is hot and dry. It couldn't be any better for working remotely - there's good reception pretty much everywhere.

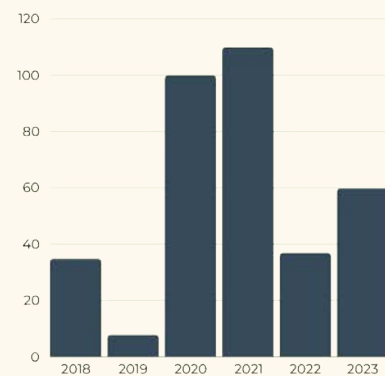
Once you're on the Canary Islands with the van, the ferries from one island to another are pretty cheap. We spent the next two weeks exploring La Palma. My highlight of La Palma definitely was the hike into the Caldera Taburiente. For Gran Canaria we reserved only one

week because we didn't hear too many good things about it. Turns out people were wrong - actually we really liked Gran Canaria and discovered some really amazing spots like Roque Nublo, Barranco de las Vacas or the Azulejos. They're great locations for taking photos. One's a huge monolith, the other one a beautiful canyon and the latter one is an unusually colorful mountain range.

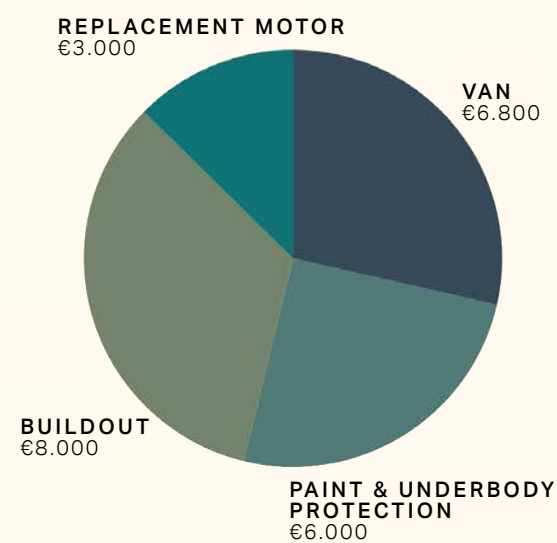
The last island we went to was Lanzarote. There's black volcanic rock everywhere and craters on the horizon wherever you look. It was amazing to drive the van through those endless lava fields. Eventually our time on the Canary Islands came to an end and we went back home. It really was a dream come true to explore those paradise islands for 3 months.



Nights slept in van: 350



Spent in total: €23.800



8 & 9 - Life Turns Upside Down

In April of 2022 the motor suddenly started to make weird knocking-sounds. I had to stop on the side of the road and it turned out that the engine failed and had to be replaced with just 290.000km on it. I guess van life can't always be rainbows and unicorns - sometimes things just go to sh**. That was the beginning of a longer repair process. I found a used motor with 190.000km and a friend who's a mechanic replaced the motor. I couldn't believe it, when the motor was running again. Let's hope that this one lasts longer.

Around that time I also quit my job because I wanted to fully commit to and pursue my dream of a career as a photographer. Maybe it wasn't the best timing to do that though. After the engine failure and quitting my job, things between me and Carol didn't work out anymore and we decided to part ways after being in a relationship for almost 4 years. We moved out of our flat in Vienna and she went back to Barcelona. My life really turned upside down within a month.

10 - Innsbruck

After taking time for myself I started my photography business and moved to Innsbruck. Combining work and travel has been an absolute joy, with recent photography assignments that led me to discover new destinations such as Madeira and Sardinia this year. I really love working remotely from the van but I also really enjoy having my own place. Living in Innsbruck, nestled among mountains and equipped with my van, perfectly suits my focus on capturing outdoor adventures, sports, and the vibrant lifestyle.

There's so many personal take-aways from these 5 years I don't even know where to start. Converting the van taught me invaluable skills like welding, woodwork, and electrical installation. The most consecutive days I was living in the van were 100 days on the Canary Islands and in total I spent pretty much an entire year in the van. Van life teaches you to be more conscious of resources like water and energy. When returning to a more traditional lifestyle you appreciate the comforts that were once taken for granted. I've become so accustomed to the freedom and the possibilities that come with a van that I wouldn't want to live without one anymore. If you have any questions just shoot me a dm to @freebius - I'm always happy to connect with like-minded people.

Finding Vanlife After a Loss

With a Bunny and Two Guinea Pigs



My journey started in 2019 when my partner of 13 years passed away. My only long term boyfriend I have ever had. The person I moved countries for, and learned a different language for.

We moved from England to Sweden in 2013. It was tough for me with the language barrier, but after a few years of perseverance and language classes I was getting on enough and landed a job. From there on it was great. We loved it out there. We bought a house together in 2017.

And in 2019 he passed away. My life went up in smoke and I had no idea what to do, or how to pick up the pieces. I was far away from my family in England, I had friends close by but I missed my family.

That was when I started to see vanlife videos pop up on YouTube. I fell in love with the idea almost immediately. A few months later I bought a van. A 2008 Nissan Primestar. I spent the next 9 months converting her while I worked nights. It was the only thing I could look forward to, or think about. I wasn't coping with the death of my partner very well, I had gone back to work probably too soon as a distraction but I couldn't make it through a shift without crying in the hallways.

The prospect of vanlife gave me the freedom I needed, the light at the end of the tunnel.

I then randomly bought a rabbit. I was buying hay for my guinea pigs and he was in the shop, all alone, and came right up to me with one ear up and one down. I couldn't leave him. I would have to make vanlife work with him. After all, I was already planning on taking my guinea pigs, so why not a rabbit too?

I planned my van around them, the guinea pigs have the space in the overhead compartment. A cosy cubby hole that they absolutely love. When I go back home every now and then and the guinea pigs are back in their big cage, they are so much more frightened.

In the van, nothing phases them! As for Snufkin, he is free roaming in the van like he does when we are in a house. He jumps up into my bed and sleeps under the duvet if he is cold. He will come up in the morning and make me get up and give him breakfast. He sleeps on my driver's seat most of the time, I never get bored of watching passers by seeing him there. I also painted him on the back of my van. My co-pilot. My mascot.



Since I first left Sweden in Starflower van in 2020, we have been to 10 different countries. My first journey was to drive to England for Christmas 2020. I had planned myself a drive of around 5-6 hours a day. I know now that was a ridiculous amount of driving for one person. Nowadays I'll only do 2-3 hours a day! I only drive 1-2 hours in one go, then make sure all the animals are okay and eating and rest myself.

My next plan was to leave England in February 2021 and go to Spain for the rest of the winter. That was when Covid happened. I had booked the Eurotunnel out of England, being a Swedish citizen I could apply to leave the lockdown in need to get back to my own country. The night before I was getting the train my dad told me that his chemotherapy wasn't working and his cancer was back. He didn't tell me before as he didn't want me to stop all my plans because of him. I couldn't believe the bombshell he left me with. That night I couldn't sleep and cried and cried and cried. I got the train at 7am and was in France that morning. I pulled over somewhere to sleep.



“I had no idea what I was doing really, or why. But I was too stubborn to turn around and give up.”

After some much needed hours of sleep I was continuing on my journey. I was heading for Spain, I had to keep an eye on the news of the local areas as some places would place a movement lockdown over the weekends. Slowly but surely I made my way down to Spain. I cried every day. Every

time I would get to a new location I was questioning myself. I had no idea what I was doing really, or why. But I was too stubborn to turn around and give up. I had never even been abroad on my own before, now I was driving through different countries by myself.

It was stressful. Vanlife still is stressful. But now, 4 years on, I can kind of handle the stress a bit more. I try not to panic when my van won't start, or when something doesn't work. More often than not, I can fix it or find a mechanic to help me. As I write this I am in Scotland and my exhaust is falling off. I have tied it up with cable ties so it doesn't fall right off and hopefully a mechanic can help me in a few days.

Most people who do this will tell you that the lifestyle outweighs the stresses and bad side of it all. I do think that is true, but it also isn't for everyone. Counting your liters of water and carefully planning when to be able to wash your hair. I just had a cold shower to wash my hair as I can fill up with water nearby.

The first few nights out in the van I was absolutely scared. Scared of every noise I could hear outside. Expecting it to be someone trying to get in the van and gas me and rob me after reading all sorts of horror stories online. But I've only had a couple of bad experiences while living like this.

And I honestly don't see myself stopping anytime soon. I am now out of the rat race of life, of a normal job. I am never going back. Why would I want to go back to paying all the bills for a house, to work until I am too old to enjoy life. My dad worked his whole life for a good retirement and he didn't get to enjoy any of it.



So for me, I say:
just live now!



So you want to go on a road trip with your furry friends? Well, before you head off on a trip of a lifetime it's always best to research the countries you plan on venturing through. There are so many laws, restrictions, diseases, and cultural differences varying from one country to the next that it's always good to learn about where you're headed. I unfortunately don't have enough type space to lay out every law and restriction across the globe in this one article, but hopefully I can enlighten you a few crucial and lesser known facts in a quick read.

When leaving the country, you most likely know that up-to-date passports, vaccines and microchips are required everywhere. Countries with border crossings will be expected to see all documents so knowing you have the right ones to hand is a must. Since Brexit, a lot of the British public have had to leave the country with an animal health certificate and finding a vet clinic in Europe to have a pet passport made, Belgium and Spain seem to be the best countries for this as some, such as France, require a residential address to sign off on a passport. Following this, they must cross EU borders to restart their 90-day travel rule. If you get to one of these borders without the correct documentation and are denied entry, you will struggle to make it anywhere without paying a fine for exceeding the 90 days, and possible visa complications if these apply to you. At borders outside the continent such as Turkey and Morocco, a titre test will

be required. These tests can take a while to receive the results so it is best to get them booked in with plenty of time to have the results back in hand before you need to leave the continent, they last a lifetime so it's best to get them done sooner rather than later.

Different countries across the continent have different laws regarding banned breeds on their dangerous dog list. If you have a bull or guard breed of any kind, make sure you check each list of each country and follow their rules to avoid any complications with the police and public. For example, bull breeds are banned in Germany, but this doesn't mean they can't enter the country. They should, however, be muzzled and leashed in public at all times, making sure you don't exceed a 6-week stay, which is their travel limit on banned breeds. Italy has no banned breeds for entering the country, yet in Venice, it is prohibited to enter with a Doberman or Rottweiler. Because of these specific rulings, research before entering is highly advised. The last thing you want is for your best pal to be detained in a foreign country just because of their appearance.

If you're heading off across the continent, it's good to do some research regarding dogs, ownership and territorial law of the areas you're planning on visiting. For example, in Greece I've recently come to learn that whilst dogs are allowed on beaches on a leash, they aren't allowed in the sea where there are swimmers, and if caught you will be fined.

Tips for Traveling with Pets: Laws & Struggles

From a UK perspective and drawing on her own experience, Alice provides essential tips for pet owners traveling in Europe & beyond, addressing the (post-Brexit) landscape of regulations and challenges for outsiders. Her guidance can be valuable for anyone looking to explore the world with their pets.

Don't panic too much though, as Greece is edged with miles of coastline offering many secluded park ups and beaches where your doggos can run and swim freely.

The further east you go, the more stray dogs, territorial guard dogs, and diseases you will come across. Be sure that all vaccines are up to date, especially before entering the more vulnerable countries, and please keep your pets close at hand as you never know what is hidden around the corner. Whether that be an escaped guard dog, wild animal, or a parasite, speaking from experience, anything is possible while traveling, so never believe it won't happen to you. It's always best to be safe rather than sorry!

It's not always photo-worthy occurrences while traveling; things go wrong, and vehicles do break down. Unfortunately for some, a

garage visit may be more fatal than others, leaving people stranded in a foreign country without their home or mode of transport back home. This has proven to be much more difficult with a pet on board, from finding temporary accommodation to being unable to book a foot ferry ticket or car shares due to having an animal, has been and will continue to be a head-scratcher and a stressful experience for those who have temporarily lost their transport in the meantime. If you're traveling through Europe, you do have the option of a hire car throughout the journey, which is great for traveling with your pet as well as packing the essentials from your van to take with you as you can drive over the mainland and swap over hire cars as you travel. However, for those of us living overseas, in England, for example, the ferry companies have continuously proven that they are of no help to

those in need, unwillingly offering foot passengers on board with dogs and, in general, causing a real issue for those who need to return home but are essentially stranded abroad with no means of help. There are some ferry companies that will allow you to travel as a foot passenger with a dog along; this will depend on the season, crossing, and company, but make sure you speak to each one yourself to explain the situation and avoid further distress on arrival.

These are just a few variable examples linked to travelling with pets, with the most cautious being the banned breeds and laws in each country. Be sure to really research each country's laws and restrictions before crossing to be on the safe side and you can spend a great road trip without any worries.

From Seattle to Ushuaia

With Two Vans on the Pan-American Highway

Alright, so a quick introduction about our journey. We have been traveling for 20 months through the Panamerican Highway in a van. Not with 1 but with 2 vans, Jeff and Atom. How so ? Well from Panama to Colombia there aren't any roads, so you need to ship your van with a boat. But we will explain that later in the article.

We're Audrey and Benji, On Vagabonde, from the French part of the Swiss Alps. We started our trip to the Americas in May 2022 in Seattle. We bought our first Truck Camper, Jeff and travelled across

North and Central America for a year until we reached Panama. Our aim was to surf the whole way. But after 13 months of coconut palm trees, waves and sun, we were thirsty for a new adventure: the mountains! So we sold our Truck Camper in Panama, flew to Chile and bought our second van Atom. We arrived in June 2023 in South America at the beginning of winter, which made it difficult to travel around Patagonia in a van. So we travelled for 3 months through the Puna of the Andes before driving down to Patagonia and Ushuaia.





Why Two Vans?

As explained earlier, there is no road from Panama to Colombia. You have to ship your vehicle with a boat, either in a container or by RORO (roll-in, roll-out). As our Truck Camper was very big, over 3m3 in height, it did not fit into a container. The price of a container varies between 1500 and 2500 dollars, whereas the RORO with our size was between 4000 and 6000 dollars - too expensive for us. That's why we decided to sell

our Truck Camper in Panama and fly to Chile to buy another van, Atom. For us, it was the best solution from a financial point of view and also from a travel/landscape point of view (we wanted to go into the mountains).

How Can We Afford to Travel?

That's the question we get asked almost every week. First of all, you need to know that when you travel,

the cost of living is very low. For example, our health insurance, which normally costs us 300 euros a month in Switzerland, only costs us 800 euros a year thanks to international insurance. We don't pay rent, we don't go out in the evening, we hardly do any shopping, and so on. And finally, the countries we travel to have a much lower cost of living than Europe. So our expenses are reduced enormously.





Before leaving, we worked and saved for 4 years. This allowed us to build up a nice little amount of savings for our project. During our trip, we did some voluntary work where we could sleep and eat for free in exchange of some work, and collaborated with hotels and product brands.

These small jobs were almost never paid, but they gave us a little comfort and experience that we couldn't have afforded on the road.

We've just returned to Switzerland and have lots of new projects. If you want to find out more, follow us on our Instagram account @on.vagabonde.

Want to read more about the adventures of Audrey & Benji?

Check out the article „Pan-American Roads“ in Issue 8 of the Vanlifezone Magazine by @on.vagabonde

Scandalous Stories From The Road

Overlanding From the UK to the Gambia as a Solo Female Traveler

I'm Emily. I'm a celebrity hairstylist based in London in the summer months, and a campervan crusader in the winter months. I traded the normal brick-and-mortar life for the thrill of the open road in 2022, and have spent my winters driving headfirst into liberation and lunacy across the Sahara Desert and deep into Africa in my Little Blue Van. The nomadic way of life that I chose to live is such a contrast to my glamorous work life which funds my travels for half the year. My job has seen me fly around the world working on everything from runway shows, to television and red-carpet events.

A working day in London might see me have my hands in a super-model's hair; but then the next day I'll be back in the van emptying my Porta-Potty... or it might be the other way round but that sounds a bit gross!

I spent a big part of my existence engulfed in the chaos of Central London, burning through every hard-earned buck on wanderlust. Not to mention the saga of finding a sublet to cover my costly London living situation whenever I wanted

to go away. When I heard about this thing called 'van life', I realized it could be my solution to sustaining a traveling lifestyle and seeking an adventure beyond life's conventional path. Because my work is freelance, it also means that I can use my van to travel around on the job. I now have the benefits of parking up in exclusive shoot locations and trespassing into luxurious wedding venues alike. I can use 'work' as an excuse to mark my territory, and no venue is going to kick a supplier out!

At the moment of writing this I am sitting at a tea-stop in Guelmim in Morocco, contemplating my next move to conquer the challenging Senegalese border. However, the border is supposed to be one of the hardest and most corrupt borders in the world to cross. It involves a lot of bribing, and right-hand drive vehicles are not favored. I might be on the wrong side of my vehicle, but I'm certainly in the driver's seat of my journey and I'm ready to take on the challenge.





Balancing the Pros & Cons, the Ups & Downs

At the very beginning of my recent trip, I was nothing but a driving disaster. After missing 3 ferry crossings, I finally arrived in France and my clutch perished in the middle of the Pyrenees' mountain range.

I detoured away from the tourist areas and found a rural Catalonia garage in the hope that it would be kinder to my bank balance. A new turbo, clutch and £3000 later, my savings sufficed and suddenly felt like Monopoly money. However, I felt like I had landed on Park Lane when I saw my mechanic - a gorgeous, dark señor, hotter than the Saharan sun, who I ended up temporarily moving in with while my van got fixed. Now I can honestly say that this has been the only time I have taken my van to a garage and enjoyed having my pants pulled down!

I always have a tendency to leave garages with more than what I paid for. In Morocco last year I lost my wing mirror whilst driving through a souk, so I went on a quest to find a local garage to fix it. I was greeted with the ultimate first-class Moroccan customer service as 5 keen and curious mechanics(?) gathered round the van.

For the bargain price of 1 Euro, I became the proud owner of a bathroom mirror gaffer-taped to the side of my van.

Sure, it didn't show the whole road, but it screamed authenticity and came with a touch of Moroccan flair.

Traveling the world in my van has brought me so much joy and I'm so pleased that I traded four walls in the concrete jungle for endless horizons. It's like living in a fairy-tale movie when you're nestled in the snow-capped Pyrenees mountains, with the Moroccan candles casting a warm glow against the wood as the hearty aromas of a curry on the kitchen hob fills the van.

Living in a van means waking up to a different outside world every morning. From meteor showers in the desert to impromptu festivals in the woodlands, my van has also hosted more parties than a frat house. Yet after the over populated house parties, you'll find me serenading seagulls with mantras in the van on the beach - it's all about finding your equilibrium, right?

“It’s like a TV screen with the majority of the time streaming live from nature, and nothing beats waking up in the wild landscapes of Africa.”



My favorite feature about my van is the blacked-out windows which give a panoramic view, meaning that I can lay there on my bed staring at the passers-by and none knows I'm in there. It's like a TV screen with the majority of the time streaming live from nature, and nothing beats waking up in the wild landscapes of Africa. However, one New Year's Eve in London it took an unexpected turn, as there was a queue of people waiting to use her tall structure as their sheltered Porta-Potty. My TV screen went from being PG friendly, to watching each man whip their wotsit out in front of me at my bedroom window, and it wasn't quite the firework display that I was expecting to see.

Making compromises is part of van life, and sometimes you have to get creative. With a continuous stint of work in London, my van becomes a semi-permanent fixture, and people can't help but wonder about my bathroom situation.



“I bought a carrycot for my Portaloo and I take it into the McDonald’s toilets pretending it’s a baby.”

I’ve got a toilet onboard, but the whole sewage system luxury has been replaced with a bit of creative labour. I bought a carrycot for my Portaloo and I take it into the McDonald’s toilets pretending it’s a baby. If it leaves a bad aroma in the McDonald’s lavatories, I just exclaim that it was a ‘bad nappy!’ on the way out, and make a swift exit. The carrycot’s seller from Gumtree was so disheartened when on collection I told her that her babies beloved cot was being handed down to my toilet.

I was also fed up of not having a way to receive mail whilst living in my van, so I decided to nail a post box to a tree, complete with the appropriate postcode and road details. I sent a letter to myself to see whether it would work, and the letter arrived!



As for hungover takeaways, I will use random peoples addresses for my deliveries and strategically park outside the unaware victim’s house. Despite putting ‘Blue Van Outside’ in the notes, you have to keep an eye out. This one time in Kensington I had to ring on a lady’s doorbell to collect my food, and awkwardly explain why I had a burger delivered to her house.

Of all the places I’ve over-landed across so far, Morocco stole my heart. The people were always looking out for me, consistently giving for nothing, and I received the warmest of hospitality being welcomed into people’s homes and integrated into their lives. This is a true representation of Morocco. People walk around with their eyes looking up instead of the floor, and with an abundance of curiosity and awareness. Forget the cautionary tales; this country showed me the beauty of simple living and how personal space is overrated. Strangers became family, and I learned that sometimes, the best adventures come when you let go of the steering wheel and embrace the chaos of the road.

When I first set off from the UK, I was nervous about putting the wrong petrol in my van in a foreign country. I even went on Tinder just to get a guy to come and help me put air in my tires. But fast forward 7 months, 10,000 miles, and an abundance of memories, challenges, acceptances, and transformative experiences later: I’m feeling like a strong, independent and resilient version of myself. I’m

still in one piece; the van has a few pieces missing. But when people ask why the van looks rusty, and I look dusty, it’s because we have driven across the Sahara Desert and we have so many stories to tell.

You can do absolutely anything when you go in with an open heart and mind, and you’ll learn lasting

skills whilst navigating some of the life’s rockiest roads - both metaphorical and pothole-ridden. So, my unsolicited advice to everyone would be: take risks, leap into the unknown, book that adventure even if your GPS hesitates, and share your smile wherever you go. Because you have no idea what is waiting for you on your life path.



Msemen / Rghaif

Traditional crispy Moroccan square pancakes

In this issue of the Vanlifezone magazine, we are taking you to Morocco! While we are stuck in the gray, wet, and windy UK, we can only dream of the warmer weather in beautiful Morocco. One of the amazing things about food is that it can transfer you anywhere in the world! We are going to share a little about Moroccan cuisine & a delicious van-friendly recipe to help you get a taste of Morocco in your home on wheels.

Morocco feels like it has it all, mountains, desert, and a beautiful coastline. Making it a great place to visit in your van! One thing is

certain when visiting Morocco, you have to sample the cuisine. Visiting the local Souks, you are sure to be tempted by local specialty dishes, aromatic herbs, and spices. Moroccan “whisky” is something that you will be invited to try. This is a traditional mint tea, and a great way to see how much your host likes you. It is important that the tea is poured from the teapot at a height to be able to produce foam on top of the tea. The higher the teapot is held, the more important you are deemed to be. This tea is VERY sweet, with lots of sugar added, the sweeter the tea, the more your host likes you!

Morocco is probably best known for delicious tagines, couscous dishes & lamb. Tagines are not the easiest thing to store and use in the van. We did, in fact, have one in our van, and it got broken, so now we are tagine-less. We wanted to share with you a recipe that is typical of Moroccan cuisine. It was important that it was a recipe that is easy for everyone to make in their van, no matter their set-up. All this recipe requires is a pan!



These layered, flaky pancakes are absolutely delicious and are sure to become a favorite in your van. They are traditionally eaten for breakfast and dipped into a syrup made from butter and honey.

However, they are very versatile and can be served with savory fillings instead of the honey syrup. Msemen means 'oiled' in Arabic, so 10 guesses what one of the main ingredients is?

Difficulty



Time

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

Try it out yourself, and don't forget to post it and tag **@vanlife_eats** and **@vanlifezone** so we can see your results.

Ingredients

Makes: 15

plain flour	300g
fine semolina	200g
yeast	½ tsp
salt	1 tsp
sugar	2 tsp
warm water	250ml - 300ml
butter (at room temperature)	100g
For rolling & cooking	
vegetable oil	100ml
extra semolina for folding	
baking powder	½ tsp

Instructions

Place the flour, cornmeal, yeast, and salt in a bowl.

Make a well in the center and add a cup of water. Begin mixing together.

Adding the remaining water a little bit at a time, if needed. The dough should not be sticky and should feel quite dry. When it starts to come together you can continue mixing with your hands to gauge the texture of it.

On a lightly floured surface knead the dough for around 5 minutes (workout time while cooking!). You should feel the dough begin to change texture. If too sticky then add slightly more flour

to get the right consistency. Oil a tray, and your hands. Divide the dough into 15 little balls. Place onto the tray with a gap between each to expand, cover with a damp tea towel. Leave to prove for 30 minutes.

Now mix together the cornmeal and baking powder.

Oil your work surface and hands and start flattening the balls individually, using the palm of your hand to make a large circle.

Dot some small pieces of butter along and sprinkle the cornmeal mix. Fold both sides in (so it looks like a flat taco). Then fold the bottom ⅓ up and the bottom ⅓ down to make a square.

Leave to rest on the oiled tray for a further 10 minutes.

Start flattening your msemen out, until around twice the size. Once you have the hang of this you can start cooking them while you continue flattening the remaining ones.

Heat 1 tbsp oil in your pan over medium/high heat. Place a msemen in and cook for around 2-3 minutes each side, flipping regularly. They will puff up while cooking. You may need to push down slightly to ensure all areas of the msemen cook evenly.

When cooked, take each one out and blot the excess oil off with kitchen towel.

Serve with honey, jam, or whatever takes your fancy.



Remote touring in Western Australia

Why we chose to live and travel in a Unimog

A very common question we get besides what our fuel economy is and how much our truck costs, is why we chose a Unimog.

There is a bit of a backstory to that. While Patrick finished his master thesis in Brisbane, we converted a 2wd Mercedes Sprinter van and started travelling up the coast. We didn't make it

far before we realized, having a 4wd is handy in Australia. At Rainbow beach, Patrick joked with Jele that one day we would be back at this spot (we were walking along the beach) with our Unimog. It was always a dream of ours to build a Unimog, but the plan was to do it in Germany where we had the proper facilities to do so.

As we kept travelling in the Sprinter and ended up tackling Cape York, which is the northern-most point of the Australian mainland and a 4wd paradise, and across the Savannah Way and Limmen National Park, we realized that our Sprinter was taking a beating. While we were in Darwin, we began looking for jobs to extend our visa and to get us into Western Australia, which had a closed border at the time due to Covid. In Kakadu National Park we had our “job interview” over the phone and our future boss told us that if we work on the farm, we can use the workshop and all the tools. As we hung up the phone Patrick just looked at Jele and said, “looks like we are getting a Unimog!”.

While we were in quarantine (after crossing the WA border), we did a lot of research into where to get a Unimog from. They are currently selling ex-military stock through Pickles auctions every month, but Jele also joined all the Unimog Facebook groups she could find. The weekend we got out of Quarantine, we headed up to meet some owners and ride in some Mogs to see if it really is the vehicle we want!

Now, before we talk about all the great things, we love about the

“The Unimog is an absolute beast off road! [...] Most people, when they see our Mog say «wow it looks so much bigger in real life».”

Unimog, we need to start out by talking about all the downsides they come with. All the ex-army Unimogs in Australia are around 40 years old and have no air conditioning, are noisy, use lots of fuel, and have a top speed around 85km/h — pedal to the metal! Most people look at these rigs as 4wd weapons, not realizing the endless amounts of money you can sink into them, to give them some of the comforts of a modern 4wd. We did consider all of this but what swayed us in the end was one simple fact.





Off-Road Excellence and Reliability

The Unimog is an absolute beast off road! That first weekend we met all the guys in the Unimogs, we noticed that they were WAAYY bigger than what we had imagined, and most people, when they see our Mog say “wow it looks so much bigger in real life”. Then we took them for a little run in the powerlines track, a bit east of Perth. As we entered the track, and immediately drove off the track through terrain we would have never expected any vehicle to make it through, we were hooked. Even now when we look at the places we have been, and how much weight we are carrying around (our Mog is almost at the GVM of 12tons), we always have to pinch ourselves. No other 4wd

truck can be that laden up with all the comforts of a house and get to the places a Unimog will go.

Another big one is reliability. Now lots of people would look at you and say “reliability on a 40-year-old truck that constantly has something going wrong...”

And yes, little things do usually go wrong, but since the truck is 40 years old, most things are simple fixes and don't require the use of

a computer. We have been lucky, nothing major has gone wrong with our Mog and it has taken us everywhere we wanted to go. But these old vehicles were designed with longevity in mind and even if something a bit bigger fails, it is also a straight forward fix.

We did get lucky, when we bought our Mog as we had absolutely no idea about them, and it was only through the help and patience of the Mog-community around Perth, that we were able to get our heads around this marvelous machine. Three years later, we are now helping other Unimog owners get to know their truck and are always happy to answer their questions.



“Having a very capable vehicle was essential for travelling Western Australia.”

The last major selling point for us was comfort. We knew with the amount of weight we could put on the Mog, we had plenty of room to play with. This allowed us to have more comforts than in our Sprinter including things like a slide-out deck, a washing machine, underfloor heating as well as plenty of water and battery storage. We used the opportunity of building our house from scratch to incorporate all the things we learned and wanted to do differently from our Sprinter. Being able to install residential appliances, even though they are heavy, made the outcome of our build so much better.

Now that we live in our Mog full time, we don't even think about sleeping elsewhere. Even if we visit friends and they offer us a guest room, we always decline, as our house is parked right out front, and we made sure it was more comfortable and had more luxury than anything we had lived in before.

Having a very capable vehicle was essential for travelling Western Australia. Most roads are gravel roads, and some don't even get maintained. Once you get closer to the coast everything starts to get sandy and once again, while you can get to some of the main tourist places in a 2wd, you can't get to any of the even more amazing spots. Most places in Western Australia are remote, with only one big city which is Perth. So, when planning to travel through this massive State, which is half the size of Australia (the size of Australia is pretty similar to the US) you need to be able to carry lots of water, food, have a big battery bank, lots of solar and be fully self-contained. When we had the 2wd van and realized we needed a 4wd, we also didn't want to downsize and lose interior space. We loved that about the van, especially on rainy days. In the end we knew it's going to be a truck and since we are originally from Germany, and every little community has a Unimog, we knew that's the way to go for us!



Share Your Vanlife Story with Us!



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

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

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

1. Complete Form

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

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 wettransfer.com and add **15 - 20 high quality images** that fit your story. If you are unsure how to upload your images, click the „more info“ button next to the image field in the form.

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 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.

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