

#VanLife

By Keith Paradise

Millennials have embraced the RV lifestyle much earlier than previous generations and have popularized the term VanLife on social media. Beautiful Instagram posts provide a glimpse into a lifestyle where travel, adventure and scenic views take precedence over 9-to-5 jobs, material possessions and homes. Meet some people living the #VanLife.

RVers Living Their Best Life

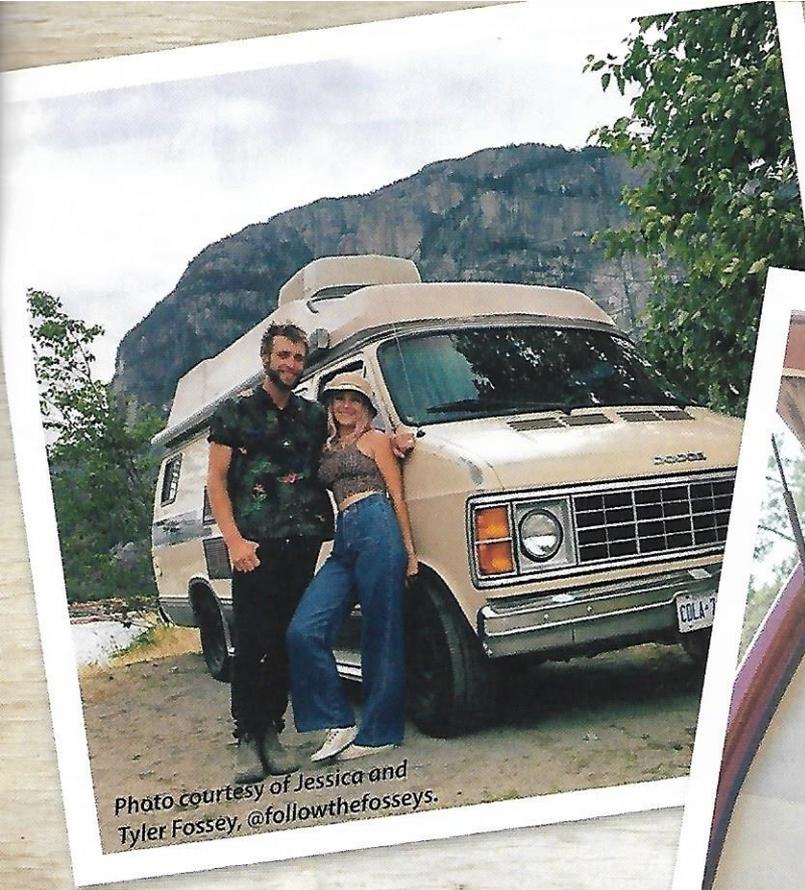
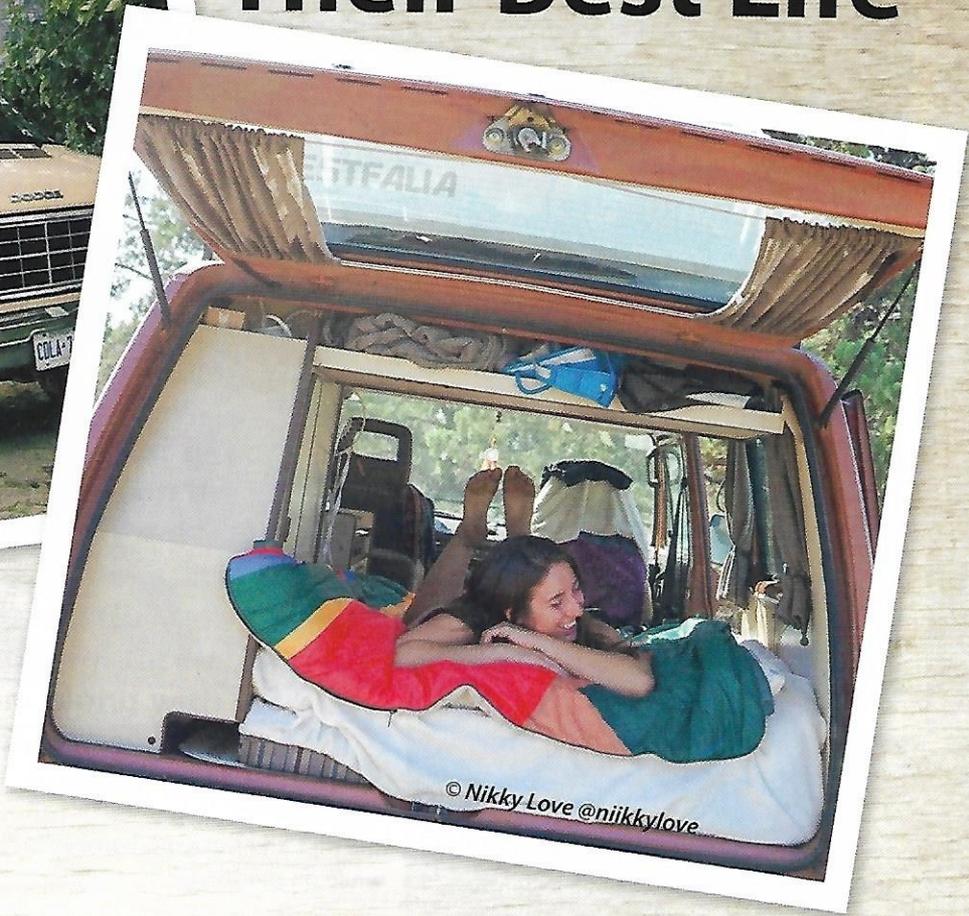


Photo courtesy of Jessica and Tyler Fossey, @followthefosseys.

RVers living and traveling the country in their vans include Lisa Jacobs, left, @vacayvans; top photo, Jessica and Tyler Fossey, @followthefosseys; and Nikki Love, @niikkylove



© Nikki Love @niikkylove

Jake and Gianna Bachowski had been living the typical American life. He worked as a chef while she worked in real estate and the couple had recently become parents to a daughter, Luna. The Bachowskis owned a four-bedroom home in Sarasota, Fla. and, although they had accumulated the usual material possessions, felt like they were lacking in the experiences they both were seeking.

While surfing the internet, Gianna stumbled upon van life, a growing subculture of people who have taken up living in converted camping vehicles while working from the road. The more they researched, the more appealing the lifestyle became.

“We just decided to go for it. It was serendipitous,” said Jake. Within a few months they’d bought a van, put the house up for sale and liquidated most of their possessions. Since July of 2018, the Bachowskis have been calling the cargo van they custom built their home – choosing the view they want to see when they wake up each night.

“Just getting off of the beaten path and seeing real America, it’s really cool to see this part of America that you only may have read about in books,” said Jake.

Once the punchline in a Saturday Night Live skit, van living has been steadily growing in popularity with travelers from all demographics, as the vehicle allows drivers to seek out both big cities and backwoods destinations along their journey. Many of these nomads document their odyssey on social media – including the Bachowskis, whose “Ourvanquest” Instagram page currently has over 20,000 followers.

Lisa Jacobs was also looking for more than just a 9-to-5 existence when she too stumbled onto van living while online.

Jacobs was doing legal work and flipping houses shortly after graduating from law school in Austin, Texas. While exploring ways to travel Europe she discovered Sprinter vans available for rent – then quickly discovered those same vehicles are being utilized by people throughout America. Roughly two days after finding the van lifestyle, she purchased one of her own – an old Nissan food truck that she converted herself.

“In the van I’ve been able to connect with people from all over the world, make friends and follow different opportunities that I wouldn’t have had if I was restricted to opportunities in one place,” she said.



Luna, Gianna and Jak

© Lisa Jacobs @VacayVans

While many were drawn to the lifestyle because of the flexibility and freedom it offers, many first adopted van living out of necessity.

Jessica and Tyler Fossey started camping when they were dating and wanted an affordable vacation. Living in Ontario near Niagara Falls, the couple was finding rent to be exorbitant and investigated different ways to live which would also provide the ability to travel. The couple began searching for camper vans, eventually securing a low mileage 1984 Dodge for \$5,000. Today, the couple live in the vehicle while working during the day in Squamish, British Columbia.

“You wake up in different scenery every day,” said Tyler. “There are times when we will work in town and then drive out and sleep in the forest.”

Nikky Love first got a taste of van traveling during a road trip with a friend down the Pacific coast in an old Volkswagen van four years ago. She was taken by the people

she met and the experiences she shared while on the road.

“They taught me what the word ‘tribe’ means. I remember coming back and thinking, ‘I need a van,’” she said, adding that she bought a similar van shortly thereafter.

Love and her roommate also saw their rent in Victoria, British Columbia raised beyond what two nursing students could feasibly afford two years ago. They searched for a new apartment and found equally expensive dwellings or affordable places that were tucked in basements and mold-infested. The two women started looking for alternatives and settled on a 1975 Dodge Class-C motorhome that they each spent a month’s rent to buy – living in the vehicle for nearly a year while finishing school.

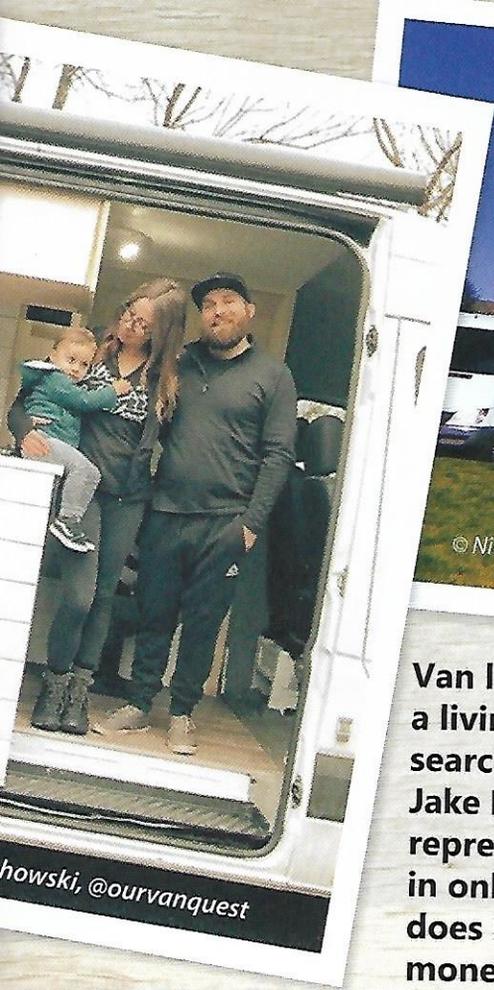
The two students turned the living situation into a positive, taking the small motorhome on small trips over the weekend.

“We took away the pressure and anxiety of just trying to get by and were able to live life more presently and more abundantly,” she said.

Love hopped back into her van and the van lifestyle with both feet after graduation, spending this past summer traveling the western United States.

For people looking to travel off of the beaten path, a class-B camper van offers a lot of advantages that can’t be found in larger vehicles. The van’s wheelbase and chassis allow for easier maneuvering on unpaved roads and mountainous terrain. The vehicle’s smaller size also makes it more manageable in urban settings, with many more parking options available than with Class-A and Class-C motorhomes. Additionally, for campers who plan on boondocking – which is to camp without hookups – the campers can blend in much easier than a larger recreational vehicle.

#VanLife



howski, @ourvanquest

Van lifers also still need to earn a living while they're on the road searching for the next adventure. Jake Bachowski works as a sales representative and Gianna works in online marketing. Jacobs still does legal work along with earning money through social media and investment properties.

© Nikky Love, @niikkylove

"You really can't hide in a 26-foot RV," said Amanda Keshner, a 27-year-old who had been traveling in a class-C motorhome before trading it for a van in September of 2018. "I like the 'stealthiness' because it looked like a work truck."

As the amount of people living in vans and their social media presence increases, so too does the community aspect of the subculture. Travelers camping on Bureau of Land Management public land routinely post their global positioning coordinates on van life applications for other nomads to find, only to have a group of two dozen or more eventually arrive. Love recalls a road trip to Colorado that grew into a circle of over 30 van owners cooking, interacting and bonding for a couple of days. Through their new compatriots, the Fosseys have explored rock climbing, sailing and crab fishing.

"We've met so many people with opportunities that we wouldn't have been able to do otherwise," said Jessica Fossey.

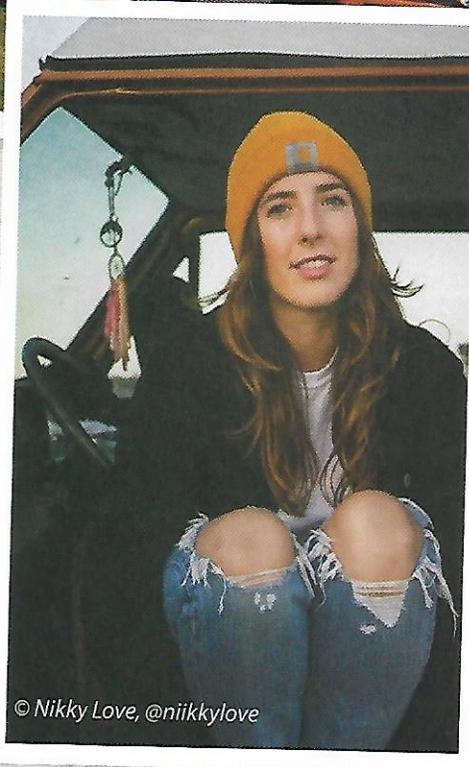
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The van dweller lifestyle is occasionally glamorized on social media, with high resolution photographs of glossy adventures. Jacobs' Instagram page, Vacayvans, currently has 48,000 followers and a page for the Vanlife App which Love works for is followed by 66,000 people.

Although the lifestyle looks carefree and simple, many full-time travelers are quick to point out its not simply a life of leisure.

For people who like having their material possessions as well as a comfortable bathroom space, van living may not be the best option for them. With many vehicles coming with smaller water tanks, many travelers belong to gymnasiums and health clubs strictly for showering facilities. Also, bathroom breaks need to be planned out if a vehicle either isn't equipped with a bathroom or travelers don't want to be frequently looking for places to dump waste water.

"Every step we made had to be



© Nikky Love, @niikkylove

thought out," Love said.

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There's also the reduction of living space, something Jacobs wrapped her head around by taping off the van's 60-square feet dimensions in her living room and simply sitting in it.

"You just have to have a completely new connection to stuff," she said.