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LIFE ON THE ROAD

RV Surf Culture: How To Chase the Waves at Any Age

Surfing Vanlife Proves To Be A Spiritual Experience

ARIEL FRAGER February 2, 2022



Vanlife has experienced a rebirth and resurgence in the past decade, due in part to a generation of RV curious young adults eager for freedom, a connection to nature, and an Instagram-ready lifestyle. The explosion of interest in living a nomadic and picturesque life on the road didn't start just a decade ago. Surfers have been living out of VW Microbuses since the utilitarian vehicle was introduced to the American market in 1950.

The VW Surf Bus

The VW Microbus, also known as the Type 2 (the VW Bug is the Type 1), reached its heyday of popularity with West Coast surfers in the late 1960's-early 1970s. Surfers quickly embraced the bus as a major upgrade to transport all their gear. The van offered ample space for surfboards, wetsuits as well as sleeping and cooking setups. The image of a VW Microbus loaded with surfboards strapped to the roof is iconic for a reason. This was how enthusiastic surfers lived, driving from surf break to surf break in search of the perfect wave.



Vintage VW Microbus with Surfboards. Image by Theodore Trimmer, Shutterstock.

Why Vanlife?

Behind the laid-back looking lifestyle of surfers is a devoted subculture that lives, eats, and breathes the surf. The best way to be ready for the next break is to live out of vans. Vans allow surfers to be the first person in the water for the sunrise dawn patrol or the last one out after the twilight glass off (when the waves are smooth). Vans make it possible to live at the water's edge.



The thing you must understand about surfing is that it is addictive. Once the stoke (feeling of being psyched to surf) touches you, there really is no turning back. Surfing triggers a release of a cocktail of "feel-good chemicals" like adrenaline, serotonin, and dopamine. This last neurotransmitter, dopamine, helps you power through many

situations and is linked to the state of euphoria. No wonder surfers want to sleep as close to their favorite surf breaks, the sport is a powerful drug. Just the smell of my wetsuit kicks off a flood of happiness as I anticipate my next surf session.

Surfing and RVing At Any Age

Even though I was born in the surf mecca of Santa Cruz, California, I didn't start surfing until I was 30 years old when I enrolled in a week-long surf camp for women in Mexico. I was nursing a break-up during the surf camp and the thrill of learning to surf was very empowering emotionally, physically, and spiritually. I felt at one with the ocean in a way I had never experienced before. The immersive surf camp experience was necessary to gain the confidence to go out on my own and the supportive atmosphere of women cheering their new friends on as we rode the bright blue Mexican waves helped too.



Author, Ariel Frager, with dog and surfboard. Image by Seth Needler.

Like so many surfers, I got hooked on the dopamine rush of chasing the waves. Surfing is a difficult sport to begin, and the only one where you have to compete against other surfers for waves just to practice. I found a small tribe of like-minded surf-obsessed friends. My first decade of surfing brought me out to the coast any chance I got. I tent camped in state parks. I slept in my car on the beach where it is legal in some parts of Oregon. And I slept on the beach illegally too (camping in a day-use spot at a popular beach break), only to return from surfing to find the ranger had packed up all my gear and was waiting for me with a big mischievous grin.

I borrowed RVs for extended surf trips up and down the West Coast. I have surfed in Canada, Mexico, Hawaii, and Morocco. Surfing helps me feel connected to the power and

beauty of the ocean and propelled me to get out of my comfort zone.





Ariel Frager with surfboard and dog. Image by Seth Needler.

Now that I'm older, I want more comfort as I chase the waves, like an RV outfitted with all the creature comforts of home parked where I can see the surf when I wake up in the morning.

Where to RV Camp as a Surfer

The best parks or RV campsites either overlook the beach or require a short walk. Websites like Surfline and Magicseaweed list all the surf spots around the globe with forecasting tools and some popular surf spots also have webcams. You can do a simple search for campgrounds close to the most promising breaks. If you want the best campground with hookups close to surf breaks, you should book your reservations well in advance. These campgrounds often fill as soon as the summer reservations open.



Which RVs are the Best for Surfers

While the classic VW bus with surfboards strapped to the top is iconic, today's campervans help fuel the stoke and adventure with dialed in style, comfort, and plenty of space to store all the gear. Some key design elements in RVs are better than others if you want to turn your rig into a surf mobile.

- A place for wetsuits to dry
- A floor that can handle water and wet neoprene
- Floors that are easy to sweep out all the sand

- A roof rack with a ladder to easily access all the boards
- A hose and nozzle to wash off the saltwater
- A portable heater or fire pit to warm up after a cold session



Surfing and RVing both elicit an unbridled sense of freedom as you live close to the natural world. The RV lifestyle fuels and provides shelter and mobility for the surfer. But surfing is more than just a lifestyle, it's a sport and a powerful drug. Marrying surfing and the RV life on the road elevates vanlife to spiritual practice.



Ariel Frager loves to get outside to play, be it surfing, traveling the world, or walking the dog. She is a school counselor and parent during the week and the rest of the time she works her dream job – being a travel writer. Ariel writes about outdoor and family adventures in her beloved Pacific Northwest and beyond. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her family.

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