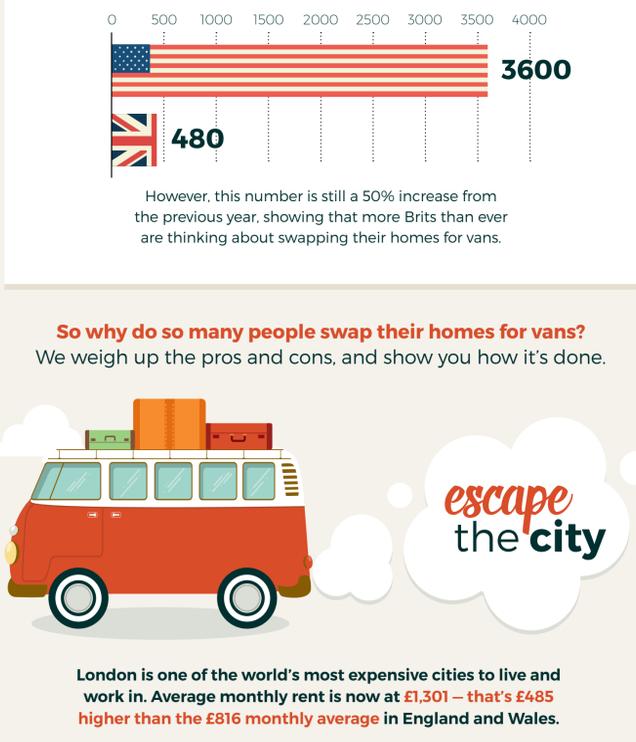




When you think of homes, everything from a city centre apartment to a sprawling country mansion springs to mind.

However, branching out from traditional bricks and mortar, some people choose to live mobile - in motorhomes, house boats and even vans!



So why do so many people swap their homes for vans? We weigh up the pros and cons, and show you how it's done.



escape
the city

London is one of the world's most expensive cities to live and work in. Average monthly rent is now at £1,301 – that's £485 higher than the £816 monthly average in England and Wales.



If you're tired of paying high rental costs, living in a van could be the alternative.

24-year-old Alex Hill, from Gloucestershire, works in London but lives in a customised Transit van. He saves **£1,000 a month** on rent but he can't drink past 7pm for fear he will need the toilet and has to shower at work.

Clearly, van life has its pros and cons...

the pros

- ✓ Free to do by law
- ✓ Can move freely around the country – no need for separate transport
- ✓ No rental payments
- ✓ No bills

the cons

- ✗ No fixed address
- ✗ Limited toilet access
- ✗ Occasional hassle from curious policemen
- ✗ Parking cost
- ✗ Fuel cost
- ✗ No guarantee of safety

Some people choose to live in vans on campsites near major cities.

Olympic hopeful Lucy Boggis spent 2010 in a campervan in Lee Valley.

Fancy living in the capital without the cost? The only thing left to do is get your van...



how to live in a van

First things first, decide whether you're going to live in a campervan or a customised van. For city living, choose a customised white van – you can't park a camper van in a city overnight. The following features will also be handy:

- a high top...** so you won't have to stoop
- a roof vent...** to stop the van from steaming up
- few windows...** for extra privacy.

Setting it up – The costs

The initial cost of a van is often expensive, although the price does vary depending on the model. It's wise to choose a larger van like the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter or the Ford Transit.

Ford Transit



Mercedes-Benz Sprinter



Customisation costs

You'll also have to customise the van. This can involve various amounts of DIY, but there are a few firm staples you'll need.

To get an idea of the cost, you can look at US van dwellers who have done the same thing. Julie Ellison, editor of Climbing magazine, saved up for a van. After buying a **1999 Chevy Express 2500 Cargo Van for \$5,000** in 2013, she got to work...



- RENOVATIONS:** \$675 / £474.99
 - \$110 Tore out flooring and installed new laminate hardwood
 - \$60 New storage containers
 - \$130 Hardware and parts for installations
 - \$375 Roof rack for solar panels
- POWER:** \$2,300 / £1624.55
 - \$900 2 x Goal Zero Boulder 90 Solar Panels
 - \$1,400 Goal Zero Yeti Generator
- ELECTRIC WORK:** \$400 total/£281
- NEW TYRES, STRUTS, SHOCKS AND BRAKES:** \$2,000 total/£1405
- FRIDGE:** \$730 total/£512.89
- SWIVEL SEATS FOR PASSENGERS AND DRIVER:** \$460 total/£323.70
- MISCELLANEOUS:** \$500/£351.30

Includes items like: a spice rack, dish tub, bins, drawers for clothes, electric stove, splashback and small organizational items.

Of course, you could sacrifice some of these luxuries to keep costs down.

However, you'd also need to consider insulation. In the UK, you can use roof insulation boards which are available for around £20 per 2400 x 1200mm board.



As well as renovation costs, you'll need to cover the following too:



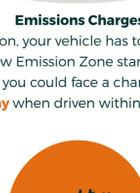
Insurance

The amount you pay for insurance will vary depending on where you're based.



Fuel

While newer diesel vans achieve good MPG, fuel costs will be an ever-present factor.



Emissions Charges

In London, your vehicle has to meet the city's Low Emission Zone standards. If it doesn't, you could face a charge of **£100 per day** when driven within the M25.



MOT

You'll need to keep your vehicle under MOT if it's driven in the UK. This means paying a maximum fee of **£54.85 for goods vehicles** that weigh up to 3,000kg.



Road Tax

For early Euro 4 or 5 compliant models registered after 2001, you'll pay **£140 per year. For everything else, it'll be £225.**



Parking charges

London is the priciest city in the world to park in, costing an average of **£42 per day!**



Considering it? Here are a few tips and tricks from people who've made the nomadic leap...

- While it is technically not illegal to sleep in your van in the UK, police officers or the **local authority can ask you to move on** under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994.
- Try not to show off any **signs of wealth like a satellite dish** on the roof. It can be useful to have a sign on the van saying no tools left overnight to discourage theft.
- Opt for a plain, **inconspicuous looking van** that won't attract unwanted attention.
- Keep your van out of dangerous areas and try to **park in safe places** such as laybys and campsites wherever possible.
- Get your **post delivered to a relative** or other trustworthy source. You'll need a physical address for your insurance documents.
- Washing your clothes can be tough. Use **laundry machines at campsites** – they often cost £3.50 per wash and £1.00 for drying.

the questions we're all asking...

- how do you use the bathroom?**
Pee bottles, public bathrooms and small chemical toilets.
- do you get internet access?**
Users can take out a large data plan on their mobile phone and tether their internet that way. Alternatively, you can use the free Wi-Fi available in coffee shops and libraries.
- how do you shower?**
Some dwellers purchase gym memberships to use their facilities.

courtesy of www.vanmonster.com creative commons

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