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When The Road Is Home: Chantal Wadsworth & RezRoads

Vanlifers Chantal Wadsworth and Vernon Kee didn't realize just how much they craved the stark beauty of their southwestern homeland until they were eight years into the SoCal urban lifestyle. As Native Americans growing up within the Navajo Nation, the New Mexico mountains and desert were their playground, an upbringing that instilled a passion for the outdoors in both of them and lured them back home.

After spending eight years in San Diego, the couple packed up their belongings and tossed everything in a Ford Transit van. With two dogs in tow, their new home on wheels was complete.



“We were done with being contained in four walls,” Chantal says. “Almost a year into the vanlife, I feel like it’s where we should’ve been all along.”

“We didn’t realize how much of the Navajo Nation we hadn’t seen,” she explains. “We’re both Native Americans from the Navajo tribe. We’re back on our homelands exploring the reservation and learning our history and culture.”

Most of the time, they camp fee-free on Bureau of Land Management lands, scouting out cell service in the area to connect to their remote jobs. Vernon joined the Marines out of high school then became a graphic designer, using his artistic talents to document their travels on [Instagram](#). Chantal took her San Diego gig as a safety auditor on the road with her and fills in the history and experiences behind the photos on her Instagram blog.



“When Vernon takes pictures and I explain our experiences, it’s like freezing the moment in time,” she says. “I remember exactly how I felt and what I heard. All my senses come back to me. They’re very beautiful places.”

Chantal and Vernon’s biggest challenge has been the amount of snow they’ve encountered—more than tribal lands have seen in six years. They’ve also had to learn to navigate in areas of the reservation that haven’t been physically mapped. To outfit the van, they added a bed frame, drawers, cabinets, and a roof fan, and they’re keeping things simple for now.

“We’re living in the van for a few months before we permanently build our layout,” Chantal says. “It works very well for us because we’re not in the van most of the time. We like to be in the environment.”



Beyond their desire to be outdoors, Chantal and Vernon want to be close to family and help out when they’re needed. They also intend to give back to the reservation community, starting with the rezdog they adopted during their travels. By sharing video

of the newest member of their family on social media, they're raising awareness for rezdog strays and the importance of spay and neuter programs.

Another project that lines up with their goals of being in the outdoors and giving back is their plan to launch a guide service.

"We want to transition into jobs in the outdoor industry," Chantal expands. "Vernon is getting certified as an outdoor guide with Outward Bound. Tourism is mainly focused around well-known places like Monument Valley and Canyon de Chelly on the reservation, but there are other beautiful places. We hope to open up tourism in the Navajo Nation, incorporating history and our cultural background into the experience."

"We also want to have an impact within our own community," she adds. "We know kids on the reservation who haven't been to these places, so we want to involve our own native people and inspire future generations to enjoy the outdoors."

Image courtesy of Chantal Wadsworth.

If you're considering vanlife, Chantal advises to adjust your expectations at the beginning.

"Don't expect to be comfortable with the vanlife quickly," she says. "We get used to having everything we want quickly. Those needs and wants become instant but when you're living in a van, you have to work with what you have in the van. It can get frustrating because you don't have so many things."

"Vanlife gets you back to the basics," she notes. "In the end, when you're out on the road in your van in the middle of nowhere, your wants and needs tend to shrink into a tiny pile of what you actually need. After about a month on the road, I felt like I could really take about four things that I need right now and I'd be absolutely happy. I feel lightweight, like I could just get up and go and I'll be fine."