

The Nomad's Ultimate Guide to New Zealand

Everything you need to know about the freedom & beauty of life on the road in New Zealand – full-time or part-time.

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FOREWORD

by Lisa Jansen

The 1st of December 2017 was the day I set off on my nomad adventure. That's almost four years ago now, and it's been, without a doubt, the best four years of my life. Despite a few bumps on the road, I've loved the nomad life from day one, and I still do.

There is so much I love about it. I love the freedom, the fact that I can decide every day where I want to be and how long I want to stay. I love being able to see all of this beautiful country I'm lucky to call home. I love the simplicity of life on the road. I love how it has given me new clarity around what I really need and what was just stuff filling up space. I love how it has given me time for those things I truly value, like hiking, kitesurfing, or writing my first book; *One Size Does Not Fit All*. And I especially love the community and how the lifestyle has connected me to like-minded people. I've met many amazing people from all walks of life. I've made new friends, had beautiful conversations and have been inspired by the stories and lives of other nomads I met.

For the last four years, I've been on a journey — a journey around New Zealand, but also a journey to myself. The nomad life and community have helped me reach a new level of life satisfaction, content and happiness. I'm happier, more confident, and more at ease with myself and the path I'm on than ever before.

So when New Holland Publishers approached me to help compile this book, I was thrilled. I was excited about getting the chance to combine two passions of mine: writing and the nomad lifestyle. But even more importantly, it felt like the perfect opportunity to give something back to the lifestyle and

community that has given me so much, while also helping more people discover and try out nomadding. I really believe that this lifestyle – whether you do it part-time or permanently – has so much to offer to such a wide variety of people. I'm hoping that this book will inspire more people to give it a go. And hopefully, you will love it as much as I do.

I also saw this book as an opportunity to help others make the transition into the nomad lifestyle a bit smoother.

Looking back now, I have to admit that I was pretty naïve when I first decided to become a nomad. I am generally a very considerate, thoughtful person who would do a lot of research before making a significant decision, like giving up her well-paying job to live in a campervan. But in this case, I jumped straight in. Luckily, it all worked out for me. However, I also can admit that I made some mistakes that could have easily been avoided and made some things harder on myself than they had to be by not doing more research. In my defence, there wasn't really anywhere obvious to go to learn about the nomad life in New Zealand. Sure, there is lots of information online, and there are also some great magazines and other resources. But there wasn't really that all-in-one resource that could have taught me about important things like preparing myself for the lifestyle change, finding the right RV and navigating life on the road.

My hope is that this book can be that all-in-one resource for others entering the lifestyle, and that it will maybe help you avoid some of the mistakes that I made.

Maybe most of all, I hope that this book will give more people the confidence to give the nomad life a go. My goal was to compile the information you need to feel well-prepared for life on the road, either by providing insights and answers, or by sharing where you can go for help if you have a question not answered in this book. And if you're a seasoned nomad, I hope



this book will give you some new ideas and inspirations and maybe share some facts you didn't already know.

Whether you are a new nomad or a seasoned pro, I hope you enjoy this book and, even more so, I hope you love the nomad life as much as I do.

If you want to follow my nomad adventures, I encourage you to check out my blog (www.lifedonedifferently.com) and follow my Facebook or Instagram pages, where I share photos and stories from my life on the road (you can find the links on my website).

All the best and happy travels.

Lisa

INTRODUCTION

Imagine waking up in the morning in your comfortable motorhome or caravan in a beautiful location, watching the sun rise over the sea or hills from the comfort of your bed while you enjoy your morning tea or coffee and think about how you want to spend your day. Do you want to explore this beautiful area or town of New Zealand? Do you want to travel to another part of the country? Or do you maybe just want to relax and enjoy the day and scenery around you from the comfort of your home on wheels?

For many nomads, this is how a lot of their days start. However, while being a nomad is a life of freedom and beauty, it's also not without its challenges. Not every day is about coffee in bed, stunning scenery and exploring new places. There are chores to be done. There are problems to be solved and decisions to be made, and some of the worries from 'normal' life won't go away just because you decided to live or travel in a motorhome, caravan or bus.

If you are reading this book, chances are that something inside you is drawn to the nomad life and the freedom and adventure it promises. Maybe you've been thinking about it for years. Maybe it's a new idea that only recently came to you. Maybe you have been openly talking about it for a while, or maybe you've been keeping the idea to yourself, worried about how friends and family might respond. Either way, there is a part of you that is pushing you towards the nomad life.

However, chances are, you also at least suspect that it won't always be as romantic, easy and carefree as your dreams and the media make it seem. You probably have questions – lots of them. You might also have some doubts about whether this lifestyle is right for you. Or maybe you are pretty much set on

making it happen, but you don't know where to start and what you need to consider when becoming a nomad.

Or maybe, you're someone who has been nomadding for a while, but you're always looking for new ideas, insights and inspiration to make the lifestyle even more enjoyable.

Whichever you are, this book is for you. Whether you are considering becoming a full-time nomad or plan to travel for a few weeks each year, and whether you are a family, single or a couple, young or old, this book will be your guide and companion as you consider and prepare for becoming a nomad – and it will continue to be a valuable resource as you explore this beautiful country in your mobile home.

In part one, you will learn more about what it means to be a modern-day nomad, the different types of nomads and some of the big plusses. You will also start to get an idea of whether this lifestyle might be right for you, and we share some tips on how you can start becoming part of the nomad community – even if you're not ready to go all in, yet.

Part two is all about preparing you and your life for this lifestyle change. You will learn about how to redesign your life, reinvent yourself and renegotiate your relationships to make the transition into the nomad lifestyle as smooth as possible. We also share tips about making money on the road, and for those nomads with pets, we share some of the rules and guidelines you need to know about travelling with your furry friends.

Part three is all about the rig – your home on wheels. You will learn about the different types available, their pros and cons, which might be the best fit for you, and the many things you should be aware of when choosing your rig. After that, we discuss life on the road in part four. You will hear about the different campground options and how to find them, how to navigate dump stations, where to find water, groceries and

other essentials, how to make new friends on the road and much more.

In the fifth and final part of this book, you will learn about the regions of New Zealand and get tips and inspiration for highlights and off the beaten track destinations you might want to visit. And we also share a calendar of annual events around the country that you might want to check out on your travels.

By the end of this book, you will be well-informed and equipped for a smooth and highly enjoyable nomad life – and you will probably have a long list of places you want to visit.

Our goal is to provide you with an all-in-one guide for the nomad life. However, some of the topics we will cover are complex and technical, and it would be beyond the scope of this book to discuss all of them in full detail – you probably wouldn't be able to lift the book we would end up with. Therefore, we chose to keep this book comprehensive but simple and to cover many aspects of the nomad life instead of going deep on just a few. Throughout this book, you will find recommendations to in-depth sources for those who want to become experts on some of the topics. And throughout, we're pointing out people, organisations and communities where you can ask questions and get help – don't hesitate to take advantage of those.

Alright, are you ready to take the first steps?



PART ONE

FIRST STEPS

A Brief History of Nomadding

In simple terms, nomads are people who do not have one fixed place they call home. Nomads have been around since long before there were motorhomes and caravans. For thousands of years, groups such as hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads with their livestock and trader and tinker nomads have been part of societies worldwide. For these nomads, survival was often the

main driver behind their continuous movements. They moved on when food (for themselves or their animals) and other resources became sparse. Some of these groups move from place to place within a relatively small area, often returning to the same places in regular intervals. Others are completely detached from any land and move around in a much larger area, only infrequently returning to the same places. These nomads still exist today. While their numbers have been steadily declining throughout the twentieth century, there are still several million traditional nomads worldwide.

Over the last few decades, another type of nomad community has emerged in many parts of the world. Modern-day nomads move around more for the joy of it rather than necessity. They are usually driven by a desire to explore, see new places and live a life of freedom and adventure – and less so by the need to find food. However, there are also many modern-day nomads who move around to find work, which is not that different from how historical nomads live.

For many modern-day nomads, an RV is the perfect way to travel in comfort. Whether it's a caravan, motorhome, bus, campervan or fifth-wheeler, an RV means you can move around while still having the comfort of your own home – albeit a small home.

Modern nomadding is a life dominated by driving to far-flung places and parking the recreational vehicle of your choice at either a campsite or in the wild. It's a life of as much self-sufficiency and isolation or as much co-operation and community as you want. And it's a life of experiences and adventures that you couldn't possibly have any other way.



Nomadding in New Zealand

The modern nomad lifestyle is becoming increasingly popular globally. Whether you go to Australia, the United States, Europe or many other parts of the world, you will find people living and travelling in their RVs to experience a life of freedom. And New Zealand is no exception.

While the exact number of nomads in New Zealand is hard to determine, given it is such a broad and diverse community, there is no doubt that the number of Kiwis who own an RV has

been growing significantly in recent years. The New Zealand Motor Caravan Association (NZMCA) now has about 50,000 active members (many are couples meaning the number of individual nomads would be almost twice that much). Almost 60% of those current active members have joined in the past 5 years, given you an idea of how quickly the association is growing. We can assume that the nomad community outside of the NZMCA (not everyone chooses to be a member) has grown at a similar rate.

And it's not just Kiwis who enjoy the nomad lifestyle in New Zealand. Our country is one of the most popular destinations for tourists who want to travel in a motorhome for a few weeks. According to Statistics New Zealand, over 200,000 international visitors travelled in campervans or motorhomes in New Zealand in 2019. While some might have stayed for only a few days, many made longer trips of at least a couple of weeks. Of course, COVID has essentially eradicated that number to close to zero in 2020 and 2021. However, it's highly likely that the tourist will come back as soon as the border is open. In other words, you are very likely to encounter international nomads on your travels around New Zealand.

Modern nomads in New Zealand often travel in pairs, but singles, small groups of friends and families are common, too. And all are bound by a common desire to experience New Zealand the way that they want to, in their own time and on their own terms.

New Zealand is an excellent place for nomads for many reasons:

- It is a developed, first-world economy with substantial infrastructure in place.
- It has a comprehensive health care system that includes emergency services that can reach most parts of the country.



- It includes three climatic zones, ranging from tropical to alpine and thus supports a wide variety of plant and animal life – as well as having some of the world's most spectacular scenery.
- It combines urban areas of dense population with vast, wild, virtually uninhabited areas – and everything in between.
- It is one of the safest countries in the world to travel in, and the wars, riots and other civil disturbances that plague so many other places are almost unknown here.
- It has one of the most comprehensive social security systems in the world, allowing even people of modest means to be able to afford the lifestyle.



Why Become Nomadic?

There are as many reasons to become a nomad as there are nomads, but some of the more common reasons are:

- Liberation: from a mortgage, from the city or, sometimes, from relationships
- Curiosity: about the country, about other people, or about yourself
- Independence – a desire to be entirely self-determined, without anyone telling you what to do, whether it's a boss, a landlord or controlling families
- Self-sufficiency: a need to experience what life is like when you rely mainly on your own resources and inventiveness, rather than the support of civilisation, to get through the day
- Freedom: to have the time and means to experience difference – food, entertainment, scenery and the way that other people live. Experiences that would be difficult to have if you were 'settled' or always bound to a particular time and place.
- Livin' the dream: for many, nomadding is the opportunity to fulfil a decades-long ambition to escape the rat race and have a fun life of adventure. If not now, when?

The Different Styles of Nomads

Nomads are just like everybody else, except that the nomadic lifestyle tends to bring out the more extreme version of who you already are with all the advantages and disadvantages that implies. There are a few broad approaches to life, and they're all represented in the nomad population.

Mr and Ms Spontaneity

No planning, no forethought, no thinking ahead, just impulse. This is the nomad who wants the 'ultimate freedom' without bounds and limitations.

Advantages: serendipity and surprise, because anything can happen anytime, and there's a certain feeling of romantic adventure to everything that happens because, when you live like this, everything is just so fresh, new and surprising.

Disadvantages: unpreparedness, which could result in dangerous situations, injury and worse. Having said that, more often than not, unpreparedness just leads to unnecessary headaches and drama – and sometimes entertaining stories.

Best suited: for those who stay somewhat on the beaten track where people who think things through better can rescue them if they get into too much trouble.

Mr and Ms Prepared-for-Anything

The possessors of lots of 'things'. This nomad is exceptionally well-equipped for a broad range of eventualities and often has the latest state-of-the-art camping gear and creature comforts.

Advantages: if there's a problem, they usually have the right tool, piece of equipment or supply to fill the need or solve the problem.

Disadvantages: since there are so many things that *might* happen or things you *might* need, it usually means lugging around a lot of stuff, and you need to have a vehicle that can handle this and the budget for the increased fuel costs.

Best suited: for those who seek security in things and who don't feel that they have to compromise on comfort or security when they're away from civilisation.

Mr and Ms Organised

While 'the spontaneous' should be prepared to live on beans (because they've run out of anything else) and 'the prepared' won't be able to do without their portable television sets and frozen, gluten-free bread, 'the organised' prefer to have the best of both worlds. However, this means having to think ahead and doing some research. It's likely if you're reading this that you're an 'organised', or you have an organised friend who has given you this book in the hopes that your adventure won't hurt you or kill you. The prepared will have this book, just in case, but have never read it, and the spontaneous might have bought this book on impulse, but they have left it behind somewhere – which could be why you're reading it now.

Advantages: they've done the homework so are less likely to get into trouble and are less likely to have to carry around so much.

Disadvantages: might fall into the trap of being *over-*organised, with a timetable that has no flexibility or give. You might then get upset if you don't get to that music festival right on time. Or you might miss that spectacular sunset because you're too busy looking at the map.

Best suited: for those who have confidence in their ability to do the necessary research and planning, but who also know that they can improvise if something doesn't go exactly to plan.



MEET SOME OF NEW ZEALAND'S NOMADS

On my travels over the last four years, I've been very lucky to meet a number of other Kiwi nomads. Some of them, I got to interview about their lifestyle for stories I write for the magazine Motorhomes, Caravans & Destinations (MCD). If you want to meet some of New Zealand's nomads and hear about why they choose this lifestyle, what their experience has been like and which parts of New Zealand they've enjoyed most, check out these stories on the MCD website. If you don't want to type in the long URLs, you can visit my website and find all the stories and more. www.lifedonedifferently.com/people-places

Meet Lynne and Bill who have been nomadding for over 10 years – first part-time and now full-time enjoying their retirements. www.nzgcd.co.nz/stories/lifestyle/life-on-the-road-with-lynne-and-bill

Meet Laura and Lloyd who enjoy part-time nomadding in their Mercedes Sprinter van. www.nzgcd.co.nz/stories/lifestyle/meet-lloyd-laura-and-the-adventures-of-coddiwomple

Meet this family of five who love being on the road in their caravan called Rosy. www.nzgcd.co.nz/stories/lifestyle/adventures-with-rosy

Meet Carl and Justine who live in an hold Bedford bus that they beautifully renovated themselves. www.nzgcd.co.nz/stories/lifestyle/the-magic-school-bus

Meet Laurel, Pete and cat Blue who love part-time nomad adventures in their Motorhome. www.nzgcd.co.nz/stories/lifestyle/meeting-pete-laurel-and-their-auto-roller-746

The Big Pluses of the Nomad Way of Life

There's no doubt that nomadding is very attractive to a lot of people. Otherwise, there wouldn't even be a word for it. Some of the pluses include:

- The freedom to go where you want, when you want and stay for as long as you want.
- The chance to really see and explore the country. You won't have to make do with a short whirlwind trip around the main tourist attractions. Instead, you can spend time in an area, get to know the locals and explore some of the less well-known sights.
- The opportunity to spend more time with your partner or family (or anyone else you travel with), form closer bonds and make lasting memories together.
- A chance to reduce your expenditures. While the nomad life is not automatically cheaper than 'normal' life, done right, there is a chance to live on less – which means you can either save money or work less.
- The opportunity to make memories and live life to the fullest.
- The opportunity for personal growth is there if you want it. You'll often find yourself doing things you never thought you would do or were even capable of doing. You'll discover potential that you might not have known you had. You'll become a different, and, if you do it right, better version of yourself – more resourceful, more resilient, more capable and more confident.

In addition, the nomad lifestyle lends itself beautifully to getting back in touch with things. Unlike a life of being busy dealing with

one mini-crisis after another and looking after other people's needs, nomadding gives you the space to stop *doing* so much and to just *be*. It's particularly good for letting go of the past, letting the future take care of itself and just allowing yourself to enjoy the present moment. And if you've never meditated before, maybe now's the time to start, especially when you're in beautiful places, surrounded by peace and tranquillity. Here and now is the time to give your soul some much-needed rest and relaxation.

Another big plus of the nomad lifestyle is the community. On the whole, it is a very friendly and welcoming community, and most other nomads like to have a bit of a chat and are always happy to help out or give advice. You are likely to meet amazing people and make new life-long friends – including some people you might have never met in your old life.

As you can see, there are many reasons to embrace the lifestyle. But is it right for you?

Are You One Too? Is This for You?

Nomadding is not for everyone. If it were, everyone who could be doing it, would be doing it. It's important to get real here. Unlike the romantic reputation it often has, in reality, nomad life is not entirely free of obligation, responsibilities or challenges.

You still have to follow traffic rules. You still have to clean up after yourself when you visit a campsite because if you don't and a ranger catches you, here comes a fine. You'll still have to remember your friends, parents and grandchildren's birthdays because if you don't, here comes the guilt.

Exchanging One Set of Obligations, Responsibilities and Challenges for Another

Nomadding comes with certain responsibilities. These aren't just 'social' responsibilities, like remembering to send Christmas cards. There are responsibilities that your life might depend on – things you can't ignore. For example:

- You don't have the luxury of ignoring vehicle maintenance or forgetting to fill the gas tank or, even perhaps more critically, the water tank.
- You don't have the luxury of ignoring your health – like ignoring that persistent toothache or forgetting the use-by dates in the supplies in the first-aid kit, because things long ignored might become critical when you're far from help.
- You don't have the luxury of ignoring unresolved relationship problems because, if you're stuck in your van for a week in the rain, they will come out – and it won't be pretty.

And nomadding presents all sorts of challenges that the more settled hardly ever need to think about, like having to put up with three different sets of neighbours in a week, or weather extremes, breaking down or just plain getting lost.

The reality of nomadding is that, even though you're abandoning the obligations, responsibilities and challenges of 'normal life', you are exchanging those for another set of obligations, responsibilities and challenges.

This is something you want to consider carefully when you think about whether the nomad life is right for you.

It's our hope that in reading this book you'll find out about a lot of things that you didn't know before. With new knowledge come questions – lots of them. But the big questions that



you have to ask yourself are these: Which sets of obligations, responsibilities, and challenges do I prefer? Which are more fun, or, at the very least, more tolerable?

Deciding to become nomadic is a major decision. It requires a considerable lifestyle change. Changes will happen in your mind, heart and body, before, during and after the transition from 'settler' to 'nomad'. Some people think that going nomad is one of the best decisions that they ever made. Others find the lifestyle is not for them.

You can save yourself a lot of time, money, pain, suffering and hardship, and you can enjoy yourself a lot more, too, if you think all this through first. If this book helps you to make informed decisions, it will have done its job. And on the plus side, it's really rare that anyone regrets the decision to go nomadding. The vast majority of the time, whether people have prepared or not, the general nomad advice to those thinking about taking the plunge is to just do it, and not to sweat the small stuff.

Things to Consider

There are many benefits to the nomad life, and because it is such a flexible lifestyle, it suits a wide variety of people. You don't have to be one specific type of person to enjoy the nomad life. Lots of different people do. However, there are also a few clear signs that this lifestyle might not be for you – or that you might have to be smart about how you make it work for you.

If you hate travelling, don't do this. This might seem obvious, but if your idea of 'travelling' has always been about carefully curated tours and staying in five-star resorts, then nomadding probably isn't your thing. Nomadding isn't usually associated with champagne breakfasts and jacuzzis, although there's no reason, in theory, why it can't be. Nomadding isn't even regular camping. It's a long-term commitment or, at the very least, a series of medium-term commitments. Nomadding isn't tourism. It's *real* travel. It's feeling the bumps on the road, every single one of them, both literally and figuratively.

If you're a clean-freak, don't do this. If you're the sort of person who needs three showers a day just to feel vaguely human, things are going to get rough for you unless you're prepared for a large campsite bill to access enough water. Nomadding also often involves shared facilities. Of course, you can spend years on the road without ever using a toilet, shower or kitchen outside of your RV, but most nomads find themselves using campground facilities at some stage. They are generally clean and well looked after, but some might not live up to the clean-freak's standards.

If you are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar, you might struggle at times. The nomad life is all about freedom and flexibility. While that's a good thing for most, those who struggle with uncertainty, are uncomfortable with the unfamiliar and who love their routines might struggle with

the constant change that's part of the life. However, at the same time, nomadding is an excellent way to travel for those who like routines because having your own home with you will make it much easier to stick to certain routines than if you were staying in a different hotel every second night. Nevertheless, if you love living in a neighbourhood you know inside out and every new neighbour moving in gives you anxiety, the nomad life, with its constant change, might not be for you.

If you only like the finer things in life, don't do this. If you're the sort of person who'll use any old type of tissues, you'll be fine, but if you always need to have aloe vera-impregnated pre-softened tissues scented with honeysuckle, you might run into some difficulty. Nevertheless, there are lots of things that you can do to maintain some level of creature comforts.

If you have a low tolerance for people, think very carefully about where you go and when. Nomadding often involves getting in the thick of things. It isn't always romantic skinny-dipping in isolated lakes fed by waterfalls or staring into the beauty of a sunset with your partner on an isolated beach. It can involve being in a crowded trailer park, spending the night listening to the snoring of the fellow camper in the caravan next to you, or the early morning screams of the six kids in the big rig on the other side of you. Sure, you can avoid this, but you have to plan to avoid it. Getting away from cities doesn't necessarily mean getting away from people.

If you have a pet, you're going to be restricted. Your beloved pooch might not be as adored everywhere else as it is at home. Cats are a different story, but they have their pluses and minuses too — more about nomadding with pets in the next chapter.

If you have a chronic health condition, you have to plan carefully. If you're in the middle of nowhere, or even if you're in the middle of somewhere where everything's closed