



## #2 The Plan - Transcript

**Mia Sullivan** How long have you been looking for vans?

**Nick Baci** I've been looking at vans for a long time. Comparing prices and stuff like that on vans probably for the past two months or so, with serious inquiries happening for the past month.

**Mia Sullivan** How many vans do you think you've looked at?

**Nick Baci** {Laughs} Like actually seen in person or looked at online?

**Mia Sullivan** Online.

**Nick Baci** Countless, I couldn't even . . . hundreds. Hundreds easily. In all sorts of places.

**Mia Sullivan** I'm Mia Sullivan, and you're listening to *Places*. A podcast documenting stories from offbeat American locations. From a girl, living in a van.

Recently on *Places*, my fiancé, Nick, and I decided to move into a van and travel around America for a year plus.

Now we're starting to do the work to make the trip a reality. And it starts with . . . researching vans.

**Archived recording (YouTube)** *Hey everyone. In this video we're going to give you a full tour of our self-built camper van. It has a multi-functional bed platform that can turn into a lounge space. A dinette/working area with a swivel table. And it has a ton of accessible storage. It also has a compact kitchen, simple plumbing . . .*

**Archived recording (YouTube)** *Hey, guys, welcome to my brand new home! Come on in and check it out. I'll start with the galley here. It has a nice big sink. So I just turn that on and then I have nice running water.*

**Archived recording (YouTube)** *Hey, it's Vanessa! And Adam! From Create Wonder! Let's check out our Sprinter conversion. So we have kind of the*

*standard bed platform and cabinets on the side. It took us a while. When we talk to people about building vans, we always say the research/planning phase is probably longer or as long as the build itself.*

[Music]

**Mia Sullivan** Nick's been researching van build outs for a few months now. It's January 2020. In case you're not familiar with van life, "building out a van" means turning—essentially—a box into a livable space. It can be as bare bones or as swanky as you'd like, or can afford.

I ask Nick how he's feeling about the whole thing.

**Nick Baci** I guess I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. At the same time, excited.

**Mia Sullivan** Can you walk me through our general options for the van?

**Nick Baci** So there are four options . . .

**Mia Sullivan** Option 1 . . .

**Nick Baci** Buying a van that has been built out professionally by a company.

**Mia Sullivan** Option 2 . . .

**Nick Baci** Buying a van and having somebody else build it out for you . . .

**Mia Sullivan** Like, they'd custom make it for us. Option 3 . . .

**Nick Baci** Buying a van that somebody already built out themselves.

**Mia Sullivan** Likely DIY people who've done a similar trip. And option 4 . . .

**Nick Baci** Building it out ourselves.

The most expensive scenario is having a professional company involved. Those could be anywhere from \$80,000 to \$150,000 potentially.

**Mia Sullivan** So when you say \$80,000 to \$150,000—does that include the van, or is that just . . .

**Nick Baci** That's just the work. Yeah.

**Mia Sullivan** Yikes. That's insane!

**Mia Sullivan** Can you paint a picture of what you are envisioning inside of the van?

**Nick Baci** So I think the way I've thought about it is . . . the core should be a fixed bed. Obviously a sink, refrigerator, having an oven, and then a seating area that we can either eat food at and work or sit down and relax.

**Mia Sullivan** What about the toilet?

**Nick Baci** This is actually normally the first question everybody asks of me. It's going to be a composting-like toilet.

**Mia Sullivan** That means, it's a pot that'll need to be emptied. It won't flush.

I ask Nick which option he's leaning toward. He says he's concerned about having somebody else build it out—because of expense and timing.

**Nick Baci** Then there's the two options of buying one that's already been built out from like a DIY-type person or building it out ourselves. And I'm leaning toward the building it out ourselves, just because, one—it'll be what we want and what we need for our trip. And also, it'll be just a fun experience learning how to build out a van and creating something of our own.

**Mia Sullivan** "Fun" isn't the word I'd use, but I'll hear him out. I'm not mechanically inclined at all. I ask if he thinks I'd be able to build out a van.

**Nick Baci** You yourself or . . .

**Mia Sullivan** {Laughs}

**Nick Baci** . . . like be a part of the process? Well, I think I would need your help as well as some help from some friends that also have some experience in this type of thing.

**Mia Sullivan** Who do you think's gonna help you?

**Nick Baci** Uhh . . . PJ. And Joel.

**Mia Sullivan** PJ's Nick's sister's boyfriend. He's also our roommate. And Joel's our friend who lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He's good at building things. But this means Nick would have to move to Tulsa for a month or two.

So, he wants to go the hardest route. {Laugh} {Sigh} Typical Nick. This isn't something I'm going to be good at. I ask him if he's up for it. It seems REALLY complicated.

**Nick Baci** Well, yeah, it seems exciting to me. I think I can do it. I mean, it's going to be challenging at times for sure. But yeah, I'm up for it.

**Mia Sullivan** OK, so we can't afford to pay someone to do one of those fancy build outs. And Nick seems to be up for building it out from scratch—as long as he can find some competent help. In other words, someone in addition to me.

Building out a van would involve installing insulation, flooring, and electrical wiring, among many other things. It's a huge project.

While Nick's deep in van research, my job is to figure out the places we're actually gonna go.

We're planning to drive across the country, from west to east, relatively geographically. We'll start in Oregon then head to Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. We'll continue on to the midwest, and then head to Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, just in time for the leaves to change. Then we'll continue down the east coast and hit Florida around Christmas time.

The second half of the trip isn't as concrete. We may meander through the south or book it west—to Utah and Colorado for snowboarding season. If we snowboard, we'll likely circle back south for the spring.

We're not seeking out big cities, like LA, Chicago, or Boston. We're curious about small cities, towns, and public land—like National Forests and Parks.

I'm looking for places that tell very American stories that have been overlooked. Stories about opportunity, inequality, and the American Dream.

But it's been weeks since I've appointed myself trip planner-in-chief, and I'm still stuck on the first state—Oregon. More than half of Oregon is public land. How do I figure out where to go?

**Mia Sullivan** OK, I'm Googling "Best National Forests in Oregon". This site basically says "Go to all of them". Not helpful.

Seems like Hood National Forest has rave reviews.

Is Umpqua National Forest worth visiting? How about Willamette?

OK. This article is saying definitely go to the Strawberry Wilderness in the Malheur National Forest. Am I pronouncing that right? It's in Eastern Oregon, and it looks really pretty. We'll consider it.

We're definitely going to the Wallowas. Multiple people recommended them.

And Nick asked me to marry him in the Deschutes National Forest, so we gotta make a pilgrimage back there.

**Mia Sullivan** There are many nights like this—trip planning via generic descriptions and grainy photos on government websites. Pouring through "Best of" listicles that don't feel definitive. Exploring vast areas with Google Street View.

I'm overwhelmed by the options of where to go, what to do, and what to see.

I'm also overwhelmed because I still need to tell my parents about the trip. I do so on a gloomy Saturday. They're out here visiting.

Nick and I decide to tell them over brunch at a cozy neighborhood spot.

We sit toward the back of the restaurant, and I flip through the menu, not processing anything I'm reading. I convince myself it would be best to tell them after we order.

[Music]

We order, but then my mom starts asking Nick a series of questions, and I feel like it would be rude to interrupt.

Food comes, we start digging in, and I begin to carefully tell them—we're interested in traveling around the country. We want to do it before maybe having kids. Gotta throw the kid thing in.

They seem curious, not too freaked out yet. They ask *for how long?* A year. They ask Nick, *are you taking a sabbatical?* He says his company won't go for that. *Where will you stay?* Gulp. A van.

My mom looks slightly nervous but composed. My dad seems intrigued. And not exactly approving, but tolerant. He says he thinks this is something a lot of people want to do but never get around to actually doing.

I'm very relieved.

Sorry I didn't record their reactions. I was nervous and felt like they probably wouldn't appreciate being taped for the big reveal. But I caught up with them afterwards.

**Mia's mom** I wasn't totally surprised. They all love the outdoors, Nick, Luca, and Maria . . .

**Mia Sullivan** Note, my parents call me "Maria", my given name.

**Mia's dad** I was very surprised. Did not expect it at all.

**Mia's mom** Initially I did say that I felt a knot in my stomach, but as I'm getting used to the idea, I think it's going to be very interesting. Very exciting. I think she's going to get to meet a lot of people and talk to people with a lot of different viewpoints, which I think is a good thing. We live in a beautiful country that I'm very proud of and I would love to visit sometime. So I'm very excited for her and Nick and Luca to have this adventure in 2020. And I'll be praying along the way.

**Mia's dad** Well it sounds like a very exciting trip. I do have concerns about it. I think it's going to be rough to live in a van for a year with a big dog. But I guess at the same time, it's an adventure that Maria and Nick would like to take. And I hope they have a very good experience.

[Music]

**Mia Sullivan** Wow. I did it! Let's call that cautious approval? But honestly, I think that's the best it could have gone.

OK, back to the van.

**Nick Baci** Joel seemed pumped about the opportunity to build it out with me. So yeah I think we're going to buy a van and build it out.

**Mia Sullivan** I don't really get the you ask a friend to move into his house and then you request like hours of work from him. Just don't understand why he'd be stoked on that.

**Nick Baci** {Laughs} We're going to build a deck as well in his new home in Tulsa.

**Mia Sullivan** That's good. That makes me feel better about all this.

**Nick Baci** {Laughs}

**Mia Sullivan** So, do you have any leads?

**Nick Baci** There's multiple leads. One thing that I did find though was something close by, down in San Jose, which could be nice just to go down there and at least see and drive a van, just to kind of get a feel for it.

[Van door closing]

**Nick Baci** It looks like it had a rough life.

**Van salesman** You want to go on the freeway?

**Nick Baci** Yeah, that would be great.

**Mia Sullivan** Next up, we chase van leads and get a clearer understanding of our options.

This episode was written, edited, and produced by me, Mia Sullivan. A big thank you to Nick Baci, Christina Sullivan, and Blair Sullivan for their feedback and constant support.

Our theme is by Brent Curriden. And our show art is by Christine Hostetler and Michelle Anderson. Additional music for this episode was provided by Blue Dot Sessions. If you'd like to sponsor *Places*, please reach out to us at [info.placemedia@gmail.com](mailto:info.placemedia@gmail.com). I'm Mia Sullivan. Thanks for listening. Catch you next time.