

# Life on a BUS

Many people aspire to restoring a big old vehicle and going on driving adventures, but only a tiny number actually follow through with it. Among the latter are expats EDITH KRAAIJEVELD, her husband Frank, and their two sons Luc and Yannick. Together, they sourced and converted the holiday vehicle of their dreams – a bus called “LYFE” – and now they’ve taken their first trip.



### What gave you the idea for this ambitious family project?

Looking back, I’d say it’s been a combination of things. We’ve always enjoyed going on road trips – we enjoy the adventure of discovering new places on the road. As far back as 1989, when Frank and I were dating, our first holiday together was a road trip through the UK with a tent; in hindsight, far from romantic, but we thought it was the best! Then, a few years ago, we used my parent’s caravan for a road trip through Germany and Switzerland, and had another wonderful holiday. It was after that, on a trip to Australia, that we came across some vintage buses. Our whole family – at least, the boys in the family – are crazy about classic cars, and these buses hit a nerve. That’s when the dreaming began. We started watching videos on school bus conversions – the documentary film *Expedition Happiness* was particularly inspiring.

Luc ended up being the one convincing his (in his opinion) unadventurous parents to consider the purchase of an American school bus to convert it into a tiny home on wheels. We wanted to make this a family project, with all the planning shared and discussed by all of us.

### How does someone go about buying a bus?

Good question! We got in touch with the owners of the buses we’d seen in Australia to see if they’d be willing to sell one, but it didn’t work out. We continued our search until, one day in September 2017, Luc was surfing eBay for buses (as you do), and found a school bus for sale. The price was reasonable and Frank put a bid in. After a little up and down, that same night, the owner accepted our offer.

We decided to name the bus “LYFE”, after our four initials: Luc, Yannick, Frank and Edith.

### Tell us a bit about the job of restoring and fitting out the bus.

We first needed to get it transported to somewhere where we could actually use it. We chose the Netherlands – I’m Dutch and Frank was born to Dutch parents. The bus arrived there in January 2018, a day before we were to head back to Asia; we were able to park it at a friendly neighbour’s place across from my parents’ house.

By luck or just pure coincidence, there’s a carpenter living two doors down from my parents. Even though we hadn’t approached him yet, we started putting together a plan for the interior, taking measurements and creating a book with our inspiration. Over Easter 2018, the boys went to Holland to paint the interior, we replicated the layout of the bus floor with tape on our driveway. Finally, we met up with the carpenter to share our ideas; he agreed to prepare a solid framework for the interior, so we could then take over and finish the job.

We spent three weeks working on the bus over the summer of 2018. We painted the exterior in a fun, beachy blue colour, and the roof white. Frank continued with the carpentry, putting up walls and insulation, which we eventually painted as well. We had the help of my parents, too, who patiently “touched up” our slightly rushed work and added some finishing touches. They also helped with laying cables for electricity, replacing rubber seals to keep things dry inside, and generally tinkering for a few more months.



Yannick and Luc greet the unrestored bus on its arrival in the Netherlands, January 2018



**When was the bus ready for its first adventure?**

Every time we went to the Netherlands, we would take it for short drives in the small residential compound where my parents live; each time, the engine ticked over beautifully – as long as the emergency exits were closed!

To get LYFE officially on the road, we had to get it approved by the vehicle inspection authority (RWD). Again, luck was on our side; we found a fantastic mechanic who helped us prepare the bus for the inspection. The engine is in very good condition – even after 22 years of driving schoolkids around in South Dakota, the mileage is very low. But it did need tyres and brakes replaced, a hole fixed in the exhaust, and an overall clean-up. In May this year, it passed its roadworthiness test!

**Tell us about your recent holiday in the bus?**

This summer, we took our very first test trip to see how things functioned. As mentioned, the engine is very good – in fact, according to all the “experts” on Facebook and the mechanics in the Netherlands, it’s one of the best of its kind. Sure enough, it didn’t miss a beat!

To stay on the safe side, we decided to explore Holland – so, this was a “back to our Dutch roots” trip. We did a loop through 10 of the country’s 12 provinces, starting in the far southwest, then crossing the border to explore the hills in Belgium.

It was an eye-opener and we loved it all. The Netherlands is beautiful; we enjoyed the gorgeous beaches with their soft white sand, and we loved visiting Schiermonnikoog, an island off the north coast in the UNESCO-heritage Wadden Sea. We couldn’t take the bus to the island, but we parked at a camping ground and caught the 45-minute ferry across.

We also visited the “Dutch Stonehenge” – the Hunebedden in Drenthe. This is the type of history that teenagers are still interested in: how people lived 5,000 years ago. It has a certain cool factor about it!

Holland is the perfect place for camping. As people may know, the Dutch have quite the reputation for their caravans and campervans, and they travel all over Europe. “Campings” range from small family-run camp sites that have a real personal touch and feel, to larger more commercial sites that have their own supermarkets and restaurants. The facilities such as toilets and showers are always extremely clean and very well maintained. This is because the Dutch expectations are very high when it comes to these types of things.



**What are the pros and cons of this kind of travel, and what did you learn about LYFE on the trip?**

The main pro of this kind of travel is that you have full control of your comfort level; so, a quality mattress, nice sheets, your own pillow and a guaranteed good cup of coffee in the morning! It’s a big bus. So, it took a little while to get a feel for its width and length – and Holland has some very small villages with very narrow streets! Frank enjoyed this challenge, though, and he took it all on. The great thing is that everyone we came across loved the sight of the bus and were happy to give way when needed. As I’ve mentioned, the camp sites were brilliant; we were often visited by other campers who wanted to come in and have a look.

It’s honestly difficult to come up with anything negative, other than maybe the mileage; we did have to top up the diesel on a reasonably regular basis. Having said that, one of our goals is to make the engine more sustainable – but that’s a whole different project.

**What are your future plans for the bus?**

At the moment, it’s nice and dry in storage. We plan to get back on the road sometime around April next year. We’re also planning to install solar panels so we can also take the bus off the grid; this would be great for exploring Scandinavia.

Then, our goal is to make LYFE available for others to enjoy so they can have a different type of camping experience – possibly at a fixed camping site, or even moving it around to campsites of choice. The possibilities are endless! *el*

Follow the adventures of LYFE at [lyfethebus.com](http://lyfethebus.com) or on Instagram @lyfethebus.

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