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Coffee TO GO

For Autobahn Coffee, Experience Is Everything

By Isak Kvam

TAKE ONE LOOK at Chad Ellingson's Volkswagen, and you'll determine pretty quickly that he knows a thing or two about coffee.

Half the vehicle is packed with coffee supplies, the tailgate is down to operate as a mobile brewing station, and "COFFEE" is scrawled in large, white block letters on the pop-up.

Autobahn Coffee is a mobile outdoor coffee shop Chad runs out of his '72 Volkswagen Westfalia. Based in the Pacific Northwest, Chad brings his passion for simple, no-nonsense quality coffee to outdoor events across the region — and provides

a meeting space for like-minded, caffeinated community members to gather.

This is the fourth year that Chad has operated Autobahn Coffee in his van,

but his passion for coffee stretches back even further. Chad's love for coffee first began while he moved from Oregon to Sweden to pursue a master's degree

before "life got in the way." He discovered the unique Swedish ritual called "fika," which means that several times a day people pause to take a coffee break with friends and colleagues.

"Coffee becomes an integral aspect of your daily life in Scandinavia, and some of the world's most celebrated coffee roasters are from Nordic countries," says Chad. Because of their "routines with great tasting coffee, Sweden

was an easy place to fall in love with everything coffee."

Brewing coffee quickly became Chad's favorite way to start the morning,

“We keep things minimal, source quality coffee, and try to LET THE COFFEE itself SHINE.”



and since he loves to hike, it also became a non-negotiable item to bring along his hiking trips.

As he came to appreciate the pleasure of brewing and enjoying coffee in the outdoors, he began to scale his coffee-brewing process to provide caffeine in outdoor spaces for others. He even brewed coffee for trekkers at the Fjallraven Classic Sweden, a remote backpacking trip through the wilderness where coffee was air-dropped in 8 kg bags for Chad to brew for participants.

Chad's passion for travel and craft coffee didn't stop in Sweden, however, and he soon decided to combine his passions in a new and unique way. When Chad moved back to the PNW, he decided to create a mobile coffee shop that would allow him to provide craft coffee in unique settings, and he settled on joining the Volkswagen community to make it happen.

VW's have an obvious aesthetic appeal and they're also immensely functional. The tailgate worked perfectly for installing water lines and adding a Mavam espresso machine, commercial coffee brewers, and even a dual-tap dispenser for serving iced coffee and



kombucha, too. The large bay windows were a must, and the rad factor of the iconic VW bus provides the perfect atmosphere to slow down and enjoy a nice cup of coffee.

"What I didn't anticipate is just how many people in the PNW have owned an old VW in their lifetime," says Chad. "Loads of customers tell their stories of breaking down with the entire family pushing the bus to an exit. Funny thing is, they always smile while telling these stories, oddly great memories it seems."

With his VW brewing station dialed, he's now bringing a cafe quality experience to outdoor spaces wherever he roams. Since the bus doubles as his camper, he's traveled to places that would never otherwise have craft coffee

“Sometimes stripping things down to basics can offer a **RICHER** experience.”



and it brings people together to enjoy craft caffeinated beverages.

"My favorite thing about having the coffee bus on the road is providing a spot for fellow travelers to conjugate in the morning, circle around the bus and plan their day over coffee," Chad explains.

While he works at many events and gatherings, he notes that cycling events always amaze him. "They run like clockwork, and the clientele just wants quality espresso and black coffee." But van gatherings are pretty great, too, thanks to their leisurely pace: "Nobody is in a hurry and will stick around to chat at the coffee bus [sharing] lots of stories from a life on the road."

While he's mainly traveled around the PNW as his homebase, he recently spent the winter in Baja, providing espresso in the morning and margaritas in the evening.

For Chad, operating a cafe that's small on space isn't a hindrance – it's an opportunity to focus on the essentials and dial in what's important to a good coffee experience. "We keep things minimal, source quality coffee, and try to let the coffee itself shine." The mobile coffeeshop operates with a limited menu, offering espresso, drip coffee, and lattes, and most customers don't mind fewer choices since they're excited to have

coffee in a unique setting.

"Mindset shifts from expecting loads of options to being pleased with whatever is being offered," says Chad. "If we hold up our end in presenting the coffee correctly, I hope people walk away from Autobahn Coffee recognizing that sometimes stripping things down to basics can offer a richer experience."

Like living on the road, it's the experiences — not the things — that matter most.

As for what's next, Chad has a busy 2021 season planned with Oregon events from April to November before heading south to warmer climates, and where his water pipes don't freeze, for the winter.

"I'm happy with the balance right now," Chad laughs. "Selling summer coffee to fill up the coffers for the winter taco & tequila fund." What could be better than that?

Follow Chad on Instagram [@autobahncoffee](https://www.instagram.com/autobahncoffee). ■

