

# A German's View on Irish Weather

## My Palm Tree which isn't actually a Palm Tree

Surprisingly I haven't dedicated a blog post to the Irish weather yet. It's about time, as Ireland has a distinct climate that comprises some interesting phenomena...

A German friend of mine recently came to visit. She was surprised to find palm trees on our quite cold island. Our house came with a palm tree in the front garden. In Germany they only grow in plant pots, so I was particularly proud to be the owner of a "wild one". Despite my husband's exasperation about having to clean up its leaves, it is under my personal protection.

This type of tree is actually common in Ireland and Great Britain. So much so, that when the sun is shining, the coastline south of Dublin looks like the French Riviera. Whilst doing research on how the palm tree made it to Ireland, I found a few interesting points:

1. This particular tree is called *Cordyline australis* though it is native to New Zealand.
2. It came to Europe in the middle of the 19th century.
3. And it is not in any way related to a palm tree. There are no palm trees natively growing in Ireland.

So my beautiful exotic palm tree is not a palm tree. This leaves me with no arguments in case my husband asks me again to cut it down. So I'd better not tell him...

## Subtropical Gems in Ireland

Let's stay with subtropical plants of which there are a few in Ireland (though not palm trees). Due to the Gulf Stream that

brings a warm current and mild air from the South, the temperature rarely drops below zero in Ireland. Summers are not hot, but an average temperature of 20° seems to be enough for these exotic species.

## Garnish Island

One of these “subtropical gems” is [Garnish Island](#), on Ireland’s West Coast. The little island can be reached by a tiny ferry that leaves from Glengarriff in West Cork from the months of April to the end of October. Besides the Mediterranean plants on the island itself, the seals you meet on the way over are quite a highlight. They are usually sunbathing on a rock near Garnish Island and seem to take advantage of the Gulf Stream climate too.

## The Burren National Park

The word Burren comes from the Irish “Boíreann” which means “rocky place”. And it looks how I would picture the surface of the moon. You would expect nothing to grow there. However this is not the case. In the [Burren National Park](#) in Co. Clare you find a contradictory flora. Both subtropical and Arctic plant types growing here side by side. (Source: [www.ireland.com](http://www.ireland.com)).

The latter are a remainder from the last Ice Age. Simply put, they love the light conditions in the Burren. The way it is reflected by the rocky surface seems to remind them of their Arctic home.

All in all, this unique landscape is home to over 900 different plants. Among them are 23 of the 27 types of Orchids growing in Ireland. What my parents in Germany try to cultivate with huge effort indoors seems to be growing on what looks like *barren* grounds. If I didn’t know it any better I would suggest that *this* is where the National Park gets its name from.

## **Botanical Gardens Kilmacurragh**

My personal favourite though are the Rhododendron bushes that grow as tall as houses in Ireland. They often sprout wildly and unnoticed on the side of some country road until they blossom in the most amazing pink. That is why everybody who comes to visit us when the Rhododendron is flowering (app. May – July) has to go to the Botanical Gardens in [Kilmacurragh](#) with us to see the Rhododendron Avenue. Even when their petals have already fallen down it is worth going to see the “carpet of pink” on the ground. On the weekends during the summer a lot of people would come here for picnics while enjoying the magnificent view onto the Wicklow Mountains. During the week or off-season Kilmacurragh is the quietest and most peaceful place. It is perfect to go for a quick bite or a coffee in the [Café](#) on site. I am loving it, no matter what season of the year.

## **Fifty Shades of Rain**

But back to my original topic – the Irish weather. My plan was to start off this paragraph as follows: “Whereas the Inuit have over a hundred words for snow, the Irish have almost as many for rain.” According to my research though it is a misconception that Eskimo actually do have that many expressions for the tiny white flakes. Surprisingly the Scottish do! Whilst not being confronted with the icy pleasure very often, they hold the record of different words for snow. According to a scientific study that I found in the German magazine Focus, Ireland’s neighbour country has 421 “shades of snow”. So much for that and the reason why this paragraph now starts like this:

## **What the Snow is for the Scots, the Rain is for the Irish**

Whereas the Scots have 421 different expressions for snow, the Irish are pretty creative when it comes to the various intensities of their “liquid sunshine” – which would be number

1. Compared to the amount of snow in Scotland, it is a well-known fact that there is plenty of rain on the Green Isle which eventually gave it its nickname.

## **Rain isn't always Rain**

But if it is worth getting your rain gear out or not, depends on if it is “bucketing down” or only “spittin’”. Drizzle is very annoying for your glasses, but not annoying enough to open an umbrella. The expression “wet rain” seems to be redundant, but for Irish people it means better to stay indoors or get wrapped up properly when leaving the house. However it could be worse, what is then called “lashing”. This is one of my favourites as it almost sounds like rain splashing against the window. I could go on like that for a while. I could even go into more detail by outlining the different shape of raindrops or depth of puddles. I am going to leave it at that. I hope you enjoyed this little insight into the world of (linguistic) precipitation.

## **Live with it**

In Ireland it's going to rain at least once a day – somewhere, sometime. I have seen it raining in our front garden while it stayed dry at the back of our house. No matter how sunny and warm the morning appears, always bring something to throw on for when it is “pelting down” all of a sudden. You will get used to it over time and learn to live with it as if it was the most normal thing in the world. And usually, as quickly as the rain comes, it disappears again, unless “it is down for the day”.

## **Heatwave in Irish**

If there is just one gorgeous afternoon during a throughout miserable summer, it is when you are stuck in work. In Ireland it is not unlikely however that your employer will give you half a day off in that case. At least it happened to me about 2 years ago. My colleagues and I were roasting in our top

floor office in Dublin city centre with no air condition whatsoever. Our Manager let us all finish up earlier with the words: "Take advantage of the weather while it lasts". This is a line you hear quite often in Ireland. Well, as often as the sun is out. Maybe that explains why some red-faced sun worshippers are reluctant to give up their space in the sun even though it would be better for their health.

## **Grand Drying Weather**

I also re-schedule my day when it turns out to be nice despite a contrary weather forecast. (The forecast is inaccurate most of the time. Don't even bother listening to it!) My husband is laughing at me when I drop everything to put on the laundry and make the most of the "grand drying weather". Apparently that is something a good Irish housewife would do – adaptation is everything!

## **The Irish and their Weather**

Talking of adaptation – I would like to suggest a random theory that is not based on any (scientific) evidence. Irish people are generally considered to be easy-going and joyful. They seem to have that "mañana mentality" similar to the Spanish.

Could it be that they have to stay flexible in case their plans for the day (or even the week) get overthrown by unfavourable weather? Or else, that they originally invented pubs to have a dry and cosy place to wait for a shower to pass?

## **Traditional Music to wait out a Shower?**

And to go even one step further, they came up with a great way to entertain themselves and everybody around them – traditional Irish music. I have seen guys pulling a tin whistle out of their shirt pocket and starting a spontaneous jam session. (That is probably the most practical instrument

since it can be carried around easily and doesn't get damaged in the rain.)

Irish people are also great at storytelling. Another activity that is a nice way to wait for the rain to clear. Better than huddling together in a sheltered bus stop like you would see it in Germany.

If the rain really turned Irish people into great musicians and storytellers or if they just can't be bothered by something as trivial as the weather – who knows. Fact is, the rain belongs to the emerald island like rice is white. And figures show it is not putting off holidaymakers either. So pack your rain gear and explore Ireland if you haven't done so already.

## **Best Time to visit Ireland**

The "official season" in Ireland starts around the Easter holidays when most of the touristic sites would open their gates again. I love Ireland in April! It can get quite warm and nature is slowly coming back to life. The gorse in its intense yellow colour will have spread all over the landscape at that stage. It's a lovely contrast to the lush green everywhere. Together they signalise the beginning of spring for me. The season lasts as long as late October which again can turn nature into amazing colours. You can expect less tourists than during the summer months. Queues at the most popular attractions will definitely be shorter, too.

## **Worst Time to travel to Ireland**

The amount of people travelling Ireland in August is one reason why I wouldn't recommend this particular month. Due to national and international holidaymakers, hotel capacities and prices are at their maximum at that time of the year. Secondly, there hasn't been a dry or sunny August for the past 3 years. Even this year with the best and hottest Irish summer in 20 years, August wasn't nice at all.

Another period of the year I can't recommend for visiting Ireland are the months of January and February. Whether they feel dull and grey because they are following the magical Christmas season; or because they are pretty damp and cold. Don't come to Ireland at the beginning of the year unless you want to spend most of the time indoors.!

However, bad weather is in the eye of the beholder and German mothers as well as Irish ones are probably right when they say: "You are not made of sugar."