

Cosy Irish Cottages – Where to stay in Ireland



Glenveagh National Park,
Co. Donegal

Cosy Irish cottages in a romantic rural setting – as clichéd as it may be – are my preferred accommodation when travelling within Ireland. Compared to hotels, they are often the more reasonable alternative and come with lots of amenities too. Above all, they have plenty of charm and character!

That said, when we stayed in a thatched cottage in Co. Clare it was so cold that we could only sit close to the open fire. In spite of that, the heating bill, which we had to pay separately, was enormous.

I used to envy my friend for living in a rustic, cosy Irish cottage, but she had a similar story to tell – of wearing layers in the house and severe power outages. So it can be a challenge to suss out the gems among cosy Irish cottages.

My “Cosy-Irish-Cottage-Dream”



At Russborough House & Park

However for a couple of days a year, I am willing to take a risk and swap the practicalities of [our bungalow](#) for my cosy-Irish-cottage-dream. I consider it my romantic escape. A break from day-to-day life. The time of year when I fool myself into believing there is such a thing as idyllic rural living, well aware that reality would catch up sooner than I could light an open fire.

Yet, it works! Sitting in front of a cottagey fireplace clears my mind off every-day worries. Sometimes a change of scenery is all it takes. Location usually isn't our priority, but a good bedroom set-up and self-catering facilities that work for us as a family of five. This is how we have discovered some of the cosiest cottages in all four provinces of Ireland.

Where to stay in Northern Ireland

Our most recent trip took us to Northern Ireland. It was very spontaneous during the midterm break in February. The weather was miserable and we just wanted to get out of the house. If we were stuck inside, we might as well be stuck in a cosy Irish cottage. I knew that the drive along the Antrim coast would be nice in whatever weather. So two weeks after I had booked we were on our way.



© [Cosy Cottage on Causeway Coast & Glens](#)

We made little to no preparations and I was surprised when I checked en-route how remote the cottage actually was. In Ireland everything appears close on the map, but windy country roads and traffic hubs can stretch a journey significantly. The spirit in the car was good though. Not too many “When are we getting there?” or “I am bored.” from the back seat. Our one-and-a-half year old enjoyed her position in the middle, whilst our five- and seven-year old were keeping each other busy.

The warmest of Welcomes

We got to the cottage at dusk, heavy wind blowing the rain sideways. Exhausted and hungry from the long car ride, the welcome couldn't have been any nicer. The house keys were in a little code safe beside the door, the lights in the porch switched on. In the kitchen, a big box of local and homemade goodies was waiting for us – Irish Soda bread, scones, pastries and short bread. There was coffee, tea as well as milk and butter in the fridge for breakfast.



© Cosy Cottage on Causeway
Coast & Glens

Each of the two bedrooms had their own ensuite. The kids unpacked immediately and were delighted with their “fancy room”, containing two single beds as well as books and toys. Afterwards they went exploring outside, thrilled they could use the swings in the hosts’ garden after being in the car all day. My husband John and I enjoyed the two relax chairs in front of the fire place, before we started making the dinner in the well thought through kitchen space. Despite the grim weather – or because of it – we appreciated the nature view through the former stable door at the back. We were ready to unwind for a couple of days.

Ideal for exploring the Causeway Coast

Wrapped up in rain gear, we set out to explore the Causeway Coast the next morning. I was looking forward to showing our kids the iconic sites that I had travelled long before they were born. The journey was our destination as we wound along the coastal road with stunning views beneath us. Rare moments of taking Ireland’s beauty in through a tourist’s eye, something I hadn’t done much over the past few years. Whilst I was climbing the Basalt columns of the Giant’s Causeway with our eldest, the girls had fun playing in the rock pools with Daddy. A family day out to our liking.



Causeway Coast, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland

We only stayed for two nights, but they had everything my cosy-Irish-cottage dream is made of: Huddling up in front of the fire, watching a cheesy movie with the storm howling outside. Playing board games with the kids after a late breakfast, listening to the rain drumming against the windows. Enjoying hot chocolate, seafood, and long showers after a day trip in Irish weather. We absolutely loved our winter stay and will be back for a summer one!

Enchanting Fairytale Cottage in Leinster



Enchanting Fairytale Cottage Piltown, Co. Kilkenny

The most enchanting of all cosy Irish cottages I have ever seen was in Piltown, Co. Kilkenny. Its name couldn't be more apt. It also turned out to be very conveniently located for our trip to the [Irish National Heritage Park](#) and exploring the

town of Kilkenny the next morning.



Enchanting
Fairytale
Cottage

I was travelling with my sister, her husband and my one-year old at the time. Upon arrival we were greeted with homemade treats and spotless bedrooms. We were delighted with the garden at the back and all the amenities, especially for our little one. That he was spiking a temperature at night time, was not something I was prepared for. In panic I contacted the host who rushed to the late-night pharmacy without hesitation.

It's been seven years since we stayed at the [Enchanting Fairytale Cottage in Piltown](#). To this day I talk about the owner's kindness. Apart from the chocolate box cottage, this is what stuck with me. What might seem like a small gesture is what makes Ireland and its people stand out to me: Showing kindness to a stranger.

Where to stay in Cork

A spontaneous trip in 2024 took us to Cork. This time I strayed from my principle of always booking cosy Irish cottages – for a good reason. It was the October bank holiday weekend and the weather was autumnal at best. When I found an [Airbnb with a private indoor pool](#) online, I didn't hesitate to hit the “book” button. Nevertheless I remained doubtful whether the images were giving an accurate picture. A heated

swimming pool in an Airbnb all to ourselves? It sounded too good to be true!



View from Airbnb, Co. Cork

The check-in once more was super easy. No paper work, keys at the door, the pool ready to jump in. And that was exactly what we did after everybody had settled on their bed of choice. I had the luxury of sharing the double room with our eight-weeks old, while John shared the lower double bunk with our wriggly five-year old. The combined kitchen-living space was practical and smartly furnished. Needless to say that the heated pool was the highlight and turned out to be just like in the pictures.



Cahir Castle, Co. Tipperary

The tour of the [Mitchelstown Caves](#) the next day was a great adventure and kept us out of the rain. The afternoon was dry, so we explored [Cahir Castle](#) which was only a short drive away. For our trip into Cork City the day after, the colourful Irish

autumn showed itself from its most beautiful side. We didn't mind that it was lashing again the next day for all we wanted was to hop into the pool one more time before our departure. Thumbs up for a great Airbnb in the Province of Munster!

Country House Retreat in the Province of Connacht

As cosy Irish cottages go, [Carmen's and Robert's Country House Retreat](#) in Co. Sligo is probably more of a mansion. But one with a very cottagey feel to it. And a garden like out of a country magazine. The pictures online had already blown me away, but seeing it in the flesh exceeded my expectations. It combined all my rural living fantasies in one:



Carmen & Robert's Country House Retreat

Getting woken up by the sounds of nature in a generous, cosy bedroom. Having breakfast in the conservatory that doubled as a greenhouse, plucking tomatoes straight off the plant. Picnicking in the spacious, secluded garden where the kids could run freely without any concerns.

We were also blessed with the most gorgeous summer weather during our stay. We went swimming in the warm, shallow Atlantic at Aughris Head in Sligo Bay. Took a hike up to the Carrowkeel Megalithic Tombs, towering over the breathtaking landscape; and spent a great family afternoon at [eaglesflying.com](#). In the evenings we enjoyed BBQs, enveloped in the mild air and the smell of the freshly harvested

neighbouring fields.

There was nothing that Robert and Carmen could have changed to make our stay more pleasant. Everything was immaculate. I particularly enjoyed Carmen's in-house massage treatment, during which I could leave the busy family life behind for a moment. All around [an unforgettable holiday experience](#), hopefully to be repeated soon!

Precious Little Breaks

Cosy Irish cottages are just the perfect accommodation for our little family get-aways. Their flexible set-ups suit our needs as family with kids at different ages and stages. They provide me with inspiration to write and ideas for our own home. After a couple of nights in rural Ireland I feel fully recharged and even more grateful for the breathtaking country we live in.



Carmen & Robert's Country House Retreat

The Perfect Kid's Birthday

Party – Irish vs. German

Parents are dreading them, kids demand them. And so we submit ourselves to the pressure of organising the perfect kid's birthday party. But is there really no alternative to expensive, standardised birthday parties, that people presume are expected? There is!

Coming up to our son's 8th birthday, many moms asked me what I had planned for his birthday party. "We are doing it German style", was my answer and I had them intrigued.



Standardised and Contained

Kids' birthday parties in Ireland are very different to the ones I used to celebrate as a kid in Germany. With two of our children in primary school, we get party invites almost every week. The majority of parents invites the whole class and the kids celebrate in a soft play centre. What they all have in common is a strict time limit and a contained space. Each time I notice how little the participants interact with each other,

sometimes barely noticing whose par



When the cutting of the cake is announced over the loudspeakers, the kids stream into the sterile party booth, gobbling up fast food and a themed cake, layered thick with fondant. Another round of controlled activity follows, without any room for free play or imagination. At the end there is a hefty bill for the parents and a standardised party bag for the kids, filled with yet more sugary things and plastic toys that most likely break before the kids get home. Why do parents go along with it?

Inclusiveness as a Burden

It is understandable that not every family has the space, or is willing, to organise the perfect kid's birthday party at home. We are lucky to have a [spacious garden](#) and three children with birthdays in summer. But why feel obliged to invite every single person in the class? Are our children not allowed to choose friends and surround themselves by people who are special to them? Does it already make them a bully when they don't invite everybody in the class? I don't think so.

Kid's Birthday Party German Style

The way we do our kids' birthday parties at home somewhat grew organically. We started out with my mammy friends and their children, until our kids were old enough to invite their own guests. Now they get to invite as many friends as the age they are turning which usually covers their desired guest list. I

leave it up to the parents whether they want to drop their kids off or stick around for a cuppa. Some will always stay and I have some extra hands helping out or keeping an eye on the little ones.



When the initial excitement after the arrival of the guests ceases, we have the birthday cake. Rather than waiting until the end of the party, they get to use up their sugar intake during the party games. Colourful sprinkles, fruit and decorations make up for a reduced sugar content in my

cakes.

Competition and Individuality

Kids at that age are so energetic that things can get pretty mad. And with a trampoline in the back garden, there isn't really a need for organised party games. Having all friends over at the same time is an event in itself.

But our son loves his treasure hunt in the garden. And when a good competition awaits, all party guests are on board. Who is getting the clues faster? Which team will find the treasure first? At the end everybody gets to pick small prizes and goodies out of a box. And no, there is not the same thing for every child in a prepped bag, handed out with no effort involved. Viva la Individuality!

A healthy and fun competition, as well as trusting the little ones to choose what they want, is seemingly not encouraged at kids' birthday parties these days. We teach our children about individuality and personal choice, but when it comes to simple examples of who to invite, or what reward to pick, parents make the choice for them or standardise them in a communist

manner – the same for everybody. Is that not more for their own convenience than the children's?



How to keep the Costs low

Whilst there might not be a big final bill for a kid's birthday party at home, costs can easily build up. There are a couple of things that help me keeping the costs low and still have the perfect kid's birthday party.

Plan ahead

Kids' birthdays don't creep up on us. We know exactly when they are happening and can therefore plan well in advance. I had to learn it the hard way when I ordered our son's Christmas present – which he had been asking for forever – the very last minute. Not only did I spend much more in the end, but almost got caught on a dodgy website, desperate to still get it on time. For his birthday I knew better and collected little bits and pieces over weeks. Even for the "party bags" I picked up stuff whenever I saw something in the shops. This way I gathered a variety of things that didn't cost me a fortune.

Recycle

Especially when our kids were small, we bought toys second hand a lot, or got them for free as hand-me-downs. They didn't care where they came from or that they were used. Now that they are older, they have more distinct wishes or like to buy

things themselves. However there are still ways of recycling in order to cut overall costs for the perfect kid's birthday party. Knowing how quickly they rip gifts open, I wrapped them in newspaper this year, instead of buying pricy gift wrap which they don't even notice. For the prize box I bought second hand books in condition as new – again, collecting them throughout multiple runs to the shops. Thus I got more value for money and did something for the environment too. Whatever is left will contribute to the next kid's birthday party taking place at our house.

Multipurpose



Each year I think hard how to decorate the birthday cakes. Of course it has to be a themed cake and even though mine never turn out perfect, I can't get myself to buy one. I keep the flavours simple and when it comes to decorations, I turn to non-edibles. Simply because they function as toys at the same time. Instead of buying action figures or bracelets as gifts, I put them on top of the cake or wrap them around muffins as decorations. This year I lined the icing with croch charms which doubled as party favours.

Interactive Party Games

I love preparing interactive party games for our kids' birthday parties. And it brings me joy seeing the kids getting excited about them. Hours are flying by when the bunch is active in a fun way and it doesn't take much to keep them entertained.

I have a few classics I use as icebreakers and ordinary party games which I adapt or personalise. Whilst they help to navigate through the afternoon, I want the guests to have time for free play, uncoordinated running around, and being

creative on their own terms.



A treasure hunt with clues all over the garden, or finding hidden objects, personality bingo and a movie quiz are only a few game ideas for the perfect kid's birthday party.

If you need a little creative nudge, or would like some ready-made, but individual blue prints of all-time party favourites, leave me a comment or [get in touch](#)! A party prepared with thought, love and a personal touch is what childhood memories are made of.



Mindfulness over Mindfulness

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Mindfulness – The challenge of being in the moment

I just came back from a winter walk in 13 degrees and lovely sunshine. For the first time there was that smell in the air, of dry soil and a hint of fresh flowers. If it was only spring already, I thought to myself, imagining all the lovely things we could do then.



That reminded me of another walk through Greystones town at the beginning of December. The Christmas lights had just come on, but I didn't fully embrace the sparkle they brought to the dark season as I was already anticipating how dull the town would look again in January after they have been taken down.

Playing with my 8-months old son, my mind sometimes wanders off. Once he will be able to walk, we can run around in the garden. Or I think of all the board games I will introduce him to when he is old enough.

Mind-numbing



There is nothing wrong with watching TV shows during my many repetitive tasks I have as a [stay-at-home mom](#). I am too tired to read at night time in bed, so I watch another low-impact TV show to drift off to. What else could I be doing during a 10 minute break, but to scroll through other people's lives on my phone?

For the longest time mind numbing felt good to me. I liked having my mind occupied at all times, not being able to ponder or rest. Only very slowly did I notice a social and even physical impact triggered by my habits. I felt irritable and disconcerted by topics people shared online, or the tone prevalent in threads, as well as poorly researched and fake news. On family walks my mind was occupied, taking pictures for my social media or thinking about what to post next.



Whilst I was aware of my unhealthy behaviour, I found it extremely hard to let go of living in this parallel world. But I soon came to realise that I wanted to be back in the real, present one with all my senses again.

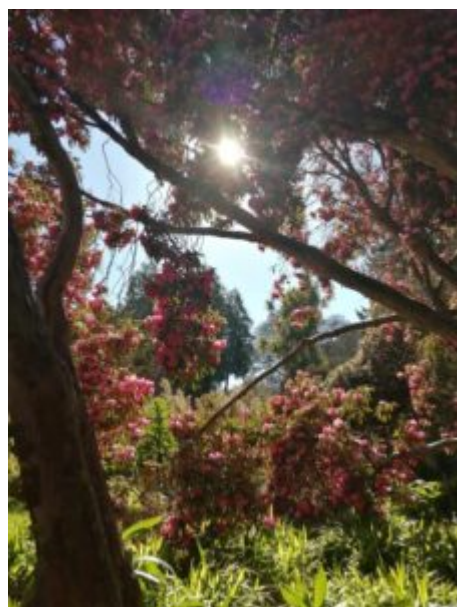
New Mindset

I first posted this article in January 2018. Eventually I got rid of social media and became an active part of family time again. Rather than following like a shadow, capturing images for future use and a pseudo reality, I enjoy the real thing.

I got back to reading at night time but had to work on focussing my attention to words on the page over some trivia web or TV content. During household chores I watch documentaries which I really enjoy and that are inspiring for my writing.

At times I still reach for my phone, longing for a senseless news feed scroll and get a pang of disappointment when I notice the apps aren't there. It is more like a physical automatism instead of something I really *want* to do. So I remind myself why I deleted them and to not fall back into old habits.

The Art of Mindfulness



When I heard of Mindfulness Courses for the first time, I wondered why you needed someone to teach you how to be in the moment. But with all the input and distraction available, and almost unavoidable these days, mindfulness has become an art. The fear of missing out, or not being informed at all times, has become a big part of our daily lives.

From a young age we teach our children that they constantly should be doing something – learning another skill, doing another sport, joining another club. Hardly ever do we let them just be. Since when do we think it is healthy having kids

on a schedule, rushing from one activity to the next? Often we overcompensate for our own busy lives and end up in a vicious cycle of mind-fullness instead of mindfulness.

Having experienced how hard it is to be in the moment when it should be the easiest thing in the world, I want it to be natural for our kids. We intend to keep them away from video games and social media as long as possible since I feel they are big contributors to, if not reasons for, mind-fullness and absent-mindedness. Luckily the town of [Greystones is a pioneer in phone free primary schools](#) to prevent an addiction whose impact we probably haven't fully grasped yet.

20 Things People ask me about Living in Ireland

Interview with Myself

Living in Ireland comes with more than just [practical things to consider](#). People often ask me what brought me here and how I like living in Ireland – what I miss, enjoy or prefer compared to my home country Germany. In this interview with myself I answer the most frequently asked questions.



1. Why Ireland?

When I came to Ireland for a work placement as a student in 2008, it was pretty much a last minute deal. Scotland hadn't worked out and I had to fall back on the connections of my university which led me to Dublin. Despite some initial struggles I fell in love with Ireland. By the time I left, a desire had manifested – to come back one day and stay for good.

2. Did you emigrate for love?

No, I did not come to Ireland because of a man. Just out of love to the country, which had grown stronger over the years after my Erasmus stay. For years I came back to Dublin for the October bank holiday weekend to meet up with friends, and to get my annual Ireland fix. At a time of change in my life, around my 30th birthday, I decided to make my dream of living in Ireland come true.



3. What did you like most about Ireland when you first came in 2008?

I could say something cliched like the landscape and the traditional Irish music which would both be true. But in fact it was the [Brown Soda Bread](#) and Bulmers that I devoured in abundance. Together with the great craic, it was the full Ireland package that got me hooked.

4. Is there anything you wish you would have known before emigrating to Ireland?

Nothing came as a big surprise. But whatever you think a good financial buffer is, add more to it! Living in Ireland is expensive.

4. Did you have a job when you came to Ireland?

Yes I did. Having a signed work contract was the ticket to my new life in Ireland. Without that I probably wouldn't have risked moving here. No matter how much living in Ireland mattered to me, I needed the security of a steady income right from the start.

5. Do you feel homesick at times?

I never feel homesick as such. Sometimes I am upset that family get-togethers are so complicated to organise and therefore don't happen very often. On birthdays or during the summer I miss being able to drop around to my parent's or sister's for a spontaneous barbeque or a chat.

6. Where do you spend Christmas?



The first couple of years after I had moved to Ireland we spent Christmas with my family in Germany. But when we had our first child, we started establishing our own Christmas

traditions. Now, as a family of five, we celebrate an [Irish Christmas](#) on 25th December with German customs and Christmas treats from both countries.

7. How often to you visit Germany?

With each of our three children visits to Germany have become more rare. The kids and I usually go over for two weeks in the summer. It involves a lot of planning and preparation which I find hard to do several times a year. We also have to work around school holidays. So we prefer to go once, but for a longer period of time to make it worthwhile.

8. What do you miss most in Ireland?



Hot summers and snow. I love autumn and spring in Ireland. With their mild temperatures and nature bursting with colours, they are my favourite seasons here. But I do miss consecutive dry days with temperatures over 20 degrees in the summer and cold, snowy winters.

9. Is there anything that you still buy in Germany?

I sometimes ask my parents to send me toiletries and cosmetics, because they are so expensive here. A friend of mine occasionally sends me his homemade Sauerkraut. Other things that you can't get here we make ourselves, like stewed apple, potato dumplings or red cabbage. Last year we brought home some plum butter from vacation. But I am happy enough to have them as treats once in a while.

10. Are your children bilingual?

Yes, our son (7) and daughter (5) are both bilingual. Well, technically. Our eldest was more exposed to German as a baby than our second child and has now a good level of German. He used to be more reluctant to speak German, but that has changed since he was about four years old. Now he switches to German when we are with my parents, but English is still his preferred language. Our five-year old has only recently started mixing some German words into her otherwise English communication. But she understands German 100%. Our 19-months old doesn't talk yet, but understands things in both languages. Our family language is English as my husband doesn't speak any German.

11. Do you speak Irish?

No, I don't. I was under the impression that I would be able to pick it up when the kids learn it in school. I was mistaken! When I hear a word I don't know how to spell it. And when I read it, I have no clue how to pronounce it. Gaeilge is rather complicated and nothing like any other language I have ever encountered. I doubt that I will have the patience and will power to make it to a sufficient level of Irish. I do enjoy listening to the kids talking and singing in Irish though and am proud of how well they are doing with it.

12. Do you dream in English?

Yes, I dream in English and German, depending on where the people in my dream are from.

13. What do you like most about Irish people?

That you can have a conversation about something trivial as the weather for as long as you want, wherever you want. You will never fail to have a chit chat in Ireland as long as you are open to it.

14. What bothers you most about Irish people?

According to my experience Irish people can be a bit flaky when it comes to arrangements – whether private or professional. Often they cancel last minute or don't show up at all. Relationships can be a bit one-sided with me being the one reaching out or keeping in touch. "Let's catch up soon" doesn't really mean anything in Ireland.



16. How do you feel about driving on the left side?

If my old boss from Germany hadn't thrown me into the deep end on a business trip to England many years ago, it probably would have taken me much longer to feel confident driving on the lefthand side of the road (thanks Julia!). Now I don't have any trouble whatsoever driving on either side of the road. It just comes naturally. But it helps having a car with the steering wheel on the respective side for the proper perspective on the road.

17. Is Irish food really that bad?



I have always loved Irish food and the mostly hearty dishes. A full Irish breakfast is an absolute must if you have never tried it before. Be brave and go for the black and white pudding even though they don't seem like typical breakfast items. Tourism traps using low quality products or selling overpriced Guinness Pie and Seafood Chowder can be a letdown. But when done right, Irish classics such as stew, salmon or shepherd's pie are a real delight!

18. How do you cope with the Irish weather?

I often ask myself this question during the wet and dull winter months. But once the smell of spring is in the air, with the first daffodils breaking through the soil, Ireland is turning into one of the most beautiful countries in the world, and I am consoled. Even though I miss more predictable summers and winters, I value the moderate climate without extremes either side of the the zero degree mark. Keeps your wardrobe nice and slim too!

19. What are “Must-Sees” in Ireland?

As interviewee I would have liked to avoid this question. But as an interviewer I think it needs to be answered. The problem is there is not just one answer. There are so many places in Ireland that are worth seeing. When my time as a student in Ireland was limited, I wanted to tick all the travel brochure sites, such as the Cliffs of Moher, Giant's Causeway, Ring of Kerry and so on. They are all stunning indeed, but don't necessarily represent Ireland in its most authentic way. Make them part of your itinerary, but take your time to explore and experience the country at a slow pace! Whilst I got to see more places in a shorter period of time before I lived here, I now return to places to actually enjoy them.



20. Are you planning to stay in Ireland for good?

I came to Ireland with the intention to stay and that hasn't changed since I emigrated in January 2014. Of course I can't predict what the future holds, but I am happy to spend the rest of my life in Ireland. I think I would find it very hard to reintegrate in Germany after having raised our children here. Leaving [our beloved home](#) would break my heart.

Any more questions about living in Ireland? Pop them in the comments below!

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Emigrating to Ireland? What to Consider

On 1st January eleven years ago I emigrated to Ireland. When people ask me if I would do it again, the answer is yes. I have no regrets whatsoever and consider myself lucky calling Ireland my home and that of my family. Whilst my intuition played a big part in my decision making, I considered a lot of practical things too. Here is what I would advise people to take into account when emigrating to Ireland.



No Vacation can prepare you for that!

We have all had that magical summer vacation that makes you want to pack everything up and move to the place of your dreams. Until the rose-coloured glasses come off and you get a more realistic picture. When I came to Ireland first for a 6-months internship in 2008, I knew very little about the country. Finding an affordable place to live and getting screwed over by one of the first Irish people I encountered in the process, was an eye opener. Especially after I had just read on the plane how welcoming and friendly the Irish are.



Five years later I made the decision to emigrate to Ireland for good. Despite my initial struggles and disappointments I had fallen in love with the island after all. But I had already seen it from its ugly side. During the long, damp winter with its short days. Living in a cold and shabby apartment with an obnoxious Irish flat mate. Commuting for hours on the bus into Dublin City Centre. Stretching my

student budget to barely get by.

No vacation could have prepared me for emigrating to Ireland. Making acquaintance with the bureaucracy and the health system, or being stood up by tradesmen repeatedly, put my love for Ireland to the test. There is no harm in reading up on culture, people and economy. But be aware that guide books often play with stereotypes and not all of them are as romantic as portrayed. And whilst you will never be short of a friendly chat in the pub, the “Let’s keep in touch” is not always a genuine one.



Less dreaming, more preparing!

To many Germans Ireland is the symbol of unspoiled nature, traditional music and hospitality. During my career in the Irish travel trade I was often asked to include a “Traditional Irish Night”, a “Sheep Dog Demonstration” or a “Rural Farm Visit” into the travel itinerary. And whilst those are somewhat part of the Irish culture, they are also very romanticised and one-sided. Great for a 2-weeks holiday, not so much part of the day-to-day when emigrating to Ireland.

When I finalised my plans for emigrating to Ireland, I was well aware of my limitations which were mostly of a financial nature. I had secured a job in Dublin, pursuing my career in Irish tourism. I knew about the risk I was taking, too. Turning my back on a good job and my modern apartment in

Hamburg. However, emigrating to Ireland had been on the back of my mind since I had left as a student. I was determined to make it work.

There were a few variables I couldn't plan for. But I was glad I had prepped for those I could. Time, money, language skills. I allowed myself two weeks to find a place to stay before my work contract started. From experience I knew that I would have to be on site to enter the rapid rental game of the tough housing market. Whilst I was under no time pressure and with enough offers available, I had to increase my budget in order to find an acceptable one-bedroom apartment. (By no means German standard!)

Even though my salary was higher than in Hamburg, I dug into my savings on a monthly basis. Thanks to my German (and English) skills, an unexpected step up the career ladder allowed me to continue my dream, rather than boarding a plane back to Germany.

Know yourself – Adaption & Acceptance



A friend of mine who I used to travel with a lot told me once that she was “too German” to emigrate. She had always been the organised one when we were backpacking together – planning our trips and reading the guide books. She was never fussy about foreign food or basic accommodation. We perfectly complemented each other and were on the same page as globetrotters. But when I emigrated to Ireland, she confessed that she preferred

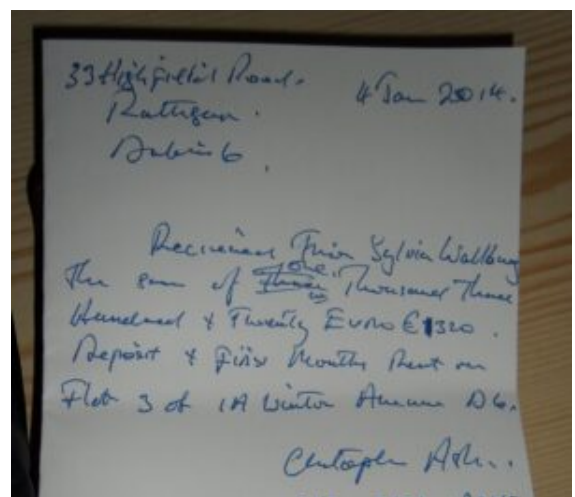
German reliability and standards over living abroad.

I also lived in Spain for some time. And whilst I am a big fan of the country, language and culture, I learned that there were certain traits and customs I wouldn't want to get used to. If I had only been vacationing in Santiago de Compostela or Salamanca, I would have returned in a heartbeat. No matter how much you feel at home travelling, ask yourself how well you are able and willing to adapt to different circumstances for the rest of your life.

When I first came to Ireland I often caught myself saying: "This wouldn't have happened in Germany.", or "Everything is much more expensive here". It took me a while to get used to things being different. Over the years I stopped comparing Ireland and Germany altogether. To me an important step of my integration process. Accepting Ireland for what it is with all its ups and downs, and appreciating both.

Practicalities to Consider

Job & Accommodation



Receipt for Apartment Deposit

Foreign natives usually have an advantage on the job market due to their language skills. Ireland is home to many multinational companies, constantly seeking for employees. An

up-to-date [LinkedIn Profile](#) helps to create a network and for headhunters to send relevant job offers. Otherwise there are [job search engines](#) to filter by qualifications and region.

Whenever I was looking for accommodation in Ireland (2008, 2014 & 2016), it was difficult. The market is fast-paced and overpriced*, especially in the major cities such as Dublin, Cork and Galway. The standards are catastrophic and rental procedures often unprofessional. You have to be quick once an offer goes [online](#) and ideally bring a cash deposit to the viewing for the landlord to consider you. [Buying a property](#) might be worth looking into, but is not any easier or cheaper.

Health Insurance

Ireland has no compulsory health insurance like Germany for example. Private providers like VHI or Laya offer health plans to pay privately every month. Some big companies offer health insurance, but this is not a standard. Costs for health insurance depend on the cover, age entered and pre-conditions. I lived without a private health insurance in Ireland for about 4 years and paid for GP and dental visits myself (usually €60 – 80 per visit, consultants are €120 – €150).

Children up to 8 years of age have free [health care](#), but can also be added to a family plan in order to avoid waiting times for public treatments etc. I availed of the public maternity scheme despite longer waiting hours to see the consultant and sharing a room with up to seven women plus babies. Nevertheless, my experience after three deliveries and aftercare in the Coombe Hospital are throughout positive.

Early Childcare & Irish School System

Another hot topic when it comes to emigrating to Ireland (especially from Germany) is childcare. As opposed to Germany, all pre-school childcare in Ireland is private and hence, expensive. Despite the enormous fees of up to €1500 per month for a full-day crèche, spaces are limited. Parents already

need to apply during pregnancy and are still not guaranteed a space. Alternatives are childminders or nannies which might be slightly easier to find, but at no lower cost.

The Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) is a free (or subsidised) programme that children can avail of from the age of three. We received three hours per day of state-paid childcare for our children from the age of three to five in an outdoor Montessori (usually 9 to 12 in the morning). From there they transitioned into Primary School which is free of charge and goes up to the age of twelve or thirteen respectively. Secondary School finishes with the Leaving Certificate at the age of 18 .

Quite a few people come to Ireland to practise homeschooling. I personally like the [Irish education system](#). Easing children into out-of-home childcare from the age of three suits us. So does the school start with Junior and Senior Infants which focuses on the learning of basic and social skills in a flexible and interactive environment. We chose a school with a Catholic ethos and a uniform over the non-denominational Educate Together.



Kitchen in my
Apt. 2014

Emigrating to Ireland – yes or no?

Would I encourage people to emigrate to Ireland today? Yes and no. No one could have stopped me from following my dream. And

I appreciated every encouragement I could get. If it is meant to happen, there will be a way.

There is also no denying the challenging circumstances, especially when it comes to affordable living. Thoroughly evaluating your possibilities and resources rather than acting on a gut feeling is what I would have said then and is even more valid now.

***At the moment the average rent per month in Dublin is almost 40% higher than in [Munich](#) and 70% higher than in [Berlin](#).**

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Our Christmas in Ireland



It is the 10th year John and I have been decorating together for Christmas in Ireland. Well, he is decorating and I get veto rights. He loves Christmas and is always super excited when it is time to get out the decorations. The more colourful the better. I would prefer a more natural, red and green colour scheme. I like the idea of it being based on red apples

hung on an evergreen tree to teach the story of Adam & Eve before people could read.

However John and the kids overrule me every year. So flashy lights and tinsel it is. In the end all that matters is the sparkle in the children's eyes. I gladly have our house looking like a landing strip in return. At least I managed to

ban John's 1970's Christmas streamers [when we moved into our house](#). Apart from that we compromise – like in every good marriage and in favour of the festive spirit.



Christmas is where Home is

I have always been traditional when it comes to Christmas. As a child I was very particular of how to celebrate Christmas. Just with family, no changes. My sister and I used to decorate the tree in the morning of Christmas Eve with Russian fairy tales playing in the background. Hot chocolate in the afternoon after a walk through the winter wonderland forest. My grandparents brought us to Christmas Mass before dinner where I mostly enjoyed standing up for the singing as it was freezing cold on the pews. We would then come home to a cosy Christmas room, followed by dinner and a performance for Santa Claus before receiving our gifts.

Well before I spent my first Christmas in Ireland, our family traditions changed. Some changes were big and inevitable like celebrating Christmas without my grandparents. Others were small like the Christmas tree being in a different corner of the room, or my favourite ornament getting broken. As much as I tried to hold on to the Christmas of my childhood, there was no point in making cookies without granny or replacing my favourite decoration. The magic had somewhat disappeared.

It didn't go down without a dispute when I announced that I wanted to celebrate Christmas in Ireland from now on. I, who had always insisted on celebrating Christmas the same way each

year, broke the family tradition after all. But when John and I were about to have children of our own, I felt it was time to establish *our* family traditions.



What Christmas is about

Eight years in we have a good few family traditions ourselves. I took up my granny's job of filling our own advent calendars for the kids which wasn't as popular when I came to celebrate Christmas in Ireland at first. I still remember the smell of oranges and German lebkuchen in the little bags that sweetened up the waiting time for me and motivated me to get out of bed on cold winter mornings.

It is important to us that our kids what we are waiting for in Advent and why we celebrate Christmas. For many families in Ireland it is about an abundance of gifts, elves and an expensive visit to the Santa Grotto. We are proud of the fact that our children know the Christmas story and enjoy playing with our nativity scene. Our clay Baby Jesus starts his journey to 'Bethlehem' at the beginning of December, all the



way through the house. He usually takes a few tumbles off ledges and shelves en route, but we successfully mend him each time. The youngest member of the family gets to put him into the crib on Christmas Day. For us a more genuine alternative to the Elf on the Shelf.

On 1st Advent we get our tree and the kids have free reign decorating it. We make sure soft and non-breakable stuff goes at the bottom though, and John's ornaments with the original sweets from the 1980's at the top to avoid a trip to the A&E with food poisoning over the holidays.

Christmas in Ireland: Charades & Panto

Of course Christmas is about presents, waking up to a half empty glass of milk, cookie crumbles and a gnawed carrot, too. Unlike in Germany we do gifts on the morning of 25th. This way the children get to play with their toys during the day rather than sitting up all night on Christmas Eve. (The lack of sleep might be the same due to the early rise on Christmas morning though.)

After mass John is getting straight back into food preparations. Every year he is making a feast of turkey, ham and a gorgeous homemade chocolate mousse. We have Christmas crackers with silly toys and jokes, and charades of course! No Christmas in Ireland without charades! Whether you are at your company's Christmas party or at your in-laws, be ready and read up on movie classics and celebrities beforehand!

The Christmas Magic

Obviously we can't predict which part of Christmas will make it into the treasured childhood memories. It could be the tiny toy cars our son still remembers from his very first advent calendar. Or our spontaneous Family Christmas Play we put on during the Corona lockdown. Maybe our annual trip into Dublin City to see the Christmas lights and the very funny, typically Irish [Panto](#).

We won't know until our children try to bring back the Christmas magic for theirs. Having children, and making their eyes sparkle every year, certainly brought back the Christmas magic for me.



What's it with the Germans? A Holiday Review

No Foamed Lattes and Cash Only!

"We only open at half twelve", the woman emerging from the shut kiosk replies harshly. Even though the connected restaurant has just sent me over to get my coffee-to-go here. Awkwardly I check the time on my phone, balancing the baby in my arms. I wait the three minutes to opening time and eventually order my coffee. "No lids or card payment", she

says, as she hands me a small paper cup with black coffee from a percolator. It smells nice and strong and I have to add four plastic containers of coffee cream to make it drinkable. Welcome to Meck Pomm*, I think to myself as I return to our spot by the lake shore of the [Fleesensee](#), waiting for the rest of my family to arrive.



Swimming in Chilly 24 Degrees

The surface of the water is smooth. Just once in a while tiny waves ripple towards the edge when paddle boats pull into the small marina. Ducks and seagulls bob up and down in the water, seemingly enjoying the free ride. I dip my feet into the shallow water, sand squishing through my toes. Behind me, the beach promenade is slowly coming to life. Restaurants are busy taking in deliveries and some joggers are trying to get ahead of the big heat. Back home in Ireland we are spoilt with gorgeous beaches at our doorstep, but not with 24 degrees at 10 in the morning and a water temperature of 23 degrees. Germans don't even bother showing up for a swim at 'chilly' 24 degrees, I was told.



Tourism Hot Spot...

When I walk with the buggy down to the beach again the next day, I notice the well-tended farm-style houses in the red-brick architecture, characteristic for the region. Surrounded by lush gardens and orchards they stick out like gorgeous little islands among the clean, almost sterile, holiday rentals that definitely outweigh them. That makes me wonder what it is like to be one of the 520 residents of [Göhren-Lebbin](#), dealing with ca. 450.000 overnight stays a year. Considering it is the end of the season, it almost justifies the brusqueness we have been experiencing by some locals. But does it excuse an above-average amount of retirees wearing neon pink hair dye or T-shirts with dubious prints? I am not sure.





The resort we are staying in has the character of a village onto itself. Consisting of colourful timber-framed houses with self-catering units, restaurants, children's facilities and several adventure playgrounds including water play and a petting zoo. Our apartment on the ground floor is spacious and definitely designed with a family in mind. There is plenty to discover and do for all age groups. Our terrace is facing the fields, lined by a forest in the distance and is a lovely space to unwind. There are kids everywhere on the compound, bustling about on Go-karts or pulled along by their parents in handkarts. We are absolutely comfortable having our 7- and 4-year old roaming around on their own.





...and Unspoilt Nature

Another morning I bring the baby for a walk on the sandy path right behind our apartment. It is hot as I push the buggy through the dust, welcoming every gentle breeze rustling through the trees. I appreciate their shady patches, giving the dirt track an alternating pattern. I truly enjoy those morning walks, focusing on the regular breaths of my sleeping baby, accompanied by the humming of bees. My destination is Kirch Poppentin, a red-brick church from 1882 with its attached cemetery. Surprisingly I don't encounter a single soul, despite of three big hotels based in the neighbourhood. Eventually I meet two well-gearred up cyclists with friendly faces who ask me for directions. Three indicators that they are not local.



English – Nein danke!

For Sunday mass we locate a Catholic church in the nearby town of [Waren](#). When we arrive, the car park is bursting out of its seams. People are welcoming and friendly, but keep their distance once they hear we are speaking English. An older gentleman is brave enough to approach us for a chat, encouraged by the Southern German number plate of our rental car. When I tell him – in German – that we live in Ireland, he nods friendly and swiftly makes his goodbyes.

It surprises me that the region of Fleesensee advertises itself as the largest Golf resort in Northern Europe and yet we stick out as English-speakers everywhere. Even our holiday resort seems to survive on a German-only policy, apart from Reception. I feel for the staff in the shop who had to explain to my husband one morning – using gestures and hand signals – that the pre-ordered chocolate croissants hadn't arrived.

What is it with the Germans?

As we potter through Waren, an old lady with a zimmer frame (but no pink hair dye) peeks into the buggy. I prepare for another shower of compliments on our baby when she tells me assertively that I am to put socks on the poor child. Baffled, I follow her slow movement as she shuffles on without another word. What is it with Germans getting involved in how we handle our kids? Only the other day a parent told our 4-year old to not twist her baby sister's arm when she was playing with her on the beach, and I was standing right beside them. Um, excuse me?



Friendliness in Disguise

On our last day, I stroll down the foresty path to Lake Fleesensee one more time. As I drop into the village store, I open with a comment on the weather as you would when entering a shop in Ireland. Not expecting a huge response, I am all the more surprised when the girl behind the counter pours her heart out to me. When I finally leave, I smile to myself, remembering how curt she was the first day I came in.

Down by the lake I decide to give the woman in the coffee trailer a second chance, too. Judging by her still grim facial expression, I fear to get told off for changing my order half way through. Instead I get a “no problem” and a hint of a smile. Delighted I toddle off with my *Bulette im Brötchen**, excited to introduce this typical German snack to my family.

The Charm of Mecklenburg Vorpommern

I am no stranger to the ‘Nordic charm’ as I would call the ‘friendliness in disguise’ in Mecklenburg Vorpommern. In my

twenties I spent four years in Stralsund, studying Leisure and Tourism Management at the local university. And despite some raised-eyebrow-moments during our vacation, I knew that people weren't intending to be rude. However, having lived in Ireland for over ten years has changed my perception of my fellow countrymen, [to being a tourist in my own country](#).

Fleesensee doesn't strike me as a big international player in the resort business. It rather feels like a rural holiday destination with charming flaws, representing the innate culture it is surrounded by: straight forward and down to earth. I value its authenticity over an all pleasing service industry. Although a few more friendly faces around could do no harm. The all prevelant cash payment adds to the holiday feel and so does not having a stable 4G connection at all times.

The natural beauty of the area and its amenities are great for a fun and activity-filled holiday, complemented by pretty towns with its regional architecture. That is what makes Fleesensee attractive to us as a family of five. The [BEECH Resort Fleesensee](#) is the ideal place to combine all our interests and give each of us their own little space to relax. We will be back for sure!



***MeckPomm = Short for Mecklenburg Vorpommern: One of Germany's**

16 federal states. Located in the North East, it was part of the former GDR. Bordering the Baltic Sea it also features extensive lakelands inland.

*Bulette is the name for a meat snack, similar to a burger patty, in Berlin and the North East of Germany (from French "small ball"). It is usually served in a roll. Its name varies depen.

Graveart — Ireland Photography

When I write, I pay a lot of attention to detail. But on a daily basis I wouldn't even be able to tell what paintings we have on the living room wall. I need to make an effort to notice things, despite walking past them several times a day.

Going on my little photo projects trains me to pay attention to detail which helps me during my writing process. I love Irish cemeteries for this purpose. First of all they are beautiful and peaceful places. And when the sunlight hits a headstone in a certain way, or ivy is meandering its way up a celtic high cross, they produce really special photo motives. I call it Graveart.

Many of the pictures I recently took in [Glasnevin Cemetery](#) in Dublin. I particularly liked the contrast between the vividly coloured wild flowers and the darkened grave stones and statues. Also imperfections and broken ornaments caught my attention this time. Others are from St. Patrick's Church Cemetery in Kilquade which I visit on a regular. Especially in autumn, in the misty morning hours, when details like cob webs

and fallen leaves bring a change to the atmosphere. Some details I captured in small, rural graveyards around Co. Wicklow. For more information on my Graveart photographs, leave me a comment or send me an [Email](#).

Check out another one of my favourite photo motives [here](#).

© Sylvia Payne. 2024

"Alive"

"The Shepherd"

"Broken"

"Ornaments"

"Mary"

"Alight from Heaven"

"Reflections"

"Remembered and Forgotten"

"Ivy Art"

Natalia – The Lost Voice of the Parish

<https://www.daslebenistgruen.com/dlig/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/05/Psalm-42-1.mp3>

Sound on: "Psalm 42" adapted and sung by Natalia

"Obituary"

On Sunday 28th April 2024, shortly before 11 am on a lovely spring morning, an era came to an end. After months of joyful weekly gathering in St. Antony's Church in Kilcoole, we said goodbye to the voice of the Family Mass – Natalia. It was a kind, but assertive voice, confident and never too shy to encourage even the most reluctant singers to join in. Also behind the scenes Natalia spared no effort to create this special form of worship every Sunday. Only a few weeks after losing Fr. John Daly to another Parish, we now see a further initiator of the Family Mass depart. Natalia is leaving a void and we yet have to hear about a plan how to fill it.



Wors(e)ship in Greystones before the weekly Family Mass

Having lived in Greystones for almost 8 years, it was a bit of an odyssey for our family to find the right congregation to celebrate mass with. After the convent in Delgany closed down we were looking for a new sacramental home. We soon learned that whilst mass was “celebrated” in many places all over the Greystones Kilquade Parish, there wasn’t much of a *celebration* going on. Especially for a family with a young child at the time, we didn’t feel welcome by fellow church goers. We were casted looks when the buggy was taking up too much room in the aisle. Reluctantly, or not at all, people offered us a space on a half empty pew – despite (or because of) me holding an infant. Whilst we felt proud when people told us how well our by now three children behaved during mass, it was sad to see the disapproving looks towards other children who were less disciplined. The ceremonies themselves were mostly following an agenda. Rushed homilies or none at all, with everybody going their separate ways afterwards. Definitely not an environment to attract families – the future of the faith community.

Natalia’s Story

This is exactly how Natalia felt when she first arrived to the Parish in the summer of 2019. She had just completed the Camino de Santiago from St. Jean Pierre de Port in France to Fisterra in Spain. Whilst her 33-day journey came with the discernment that a vocation as nun – as previously intended – was not for her, it gave Natalia a taste of leading a spiritual life.



Originally from Olsztyn in Poland, Natalia was raised a Catholic and yet couldn't have been further away from the spiritual person that she is now. Born into a time of political transformation during the 1980's, practicing her faith in communist Poland felt more like expressing an ideological identity rather than developing a relationship with God. *"Going through the sacramental process at school wounded my growth with an empty theology and lazy rituals, highlighting my sense of loneliness. At the end of my Christian initiation, I had no one with whom I could share my experience of the divine"*, Natalia remembers.

This sense of being unmet in the spiritual realm escalated through her attempt of studying theology. Eventually, disappointed by the dull celebrations and shaken by public and private church scandals, Natalia turned her back on the

Catholic church for almost two decades.



Coming Home

During that time Natalia followed a rather interesting career path. She seized opportunities of working in many different sectors such as TV, banking, software and gaming, as well as translating books from Polish into German. But no matter how 'fulfilling' her professional roles were, her soul remained unsatisfied. Guided by the online homilies of a Polish Dominican priest and an English Buddhist spiritual director, Natalia eventually re-discovered her faith and re-connected with the Catholic Church.





Returning from her pilgrimage on the Camino however, emphasised her inner loneliness once more. The spiritual depth encountered en route clashed with the emptiness of Catholic gatherings back home in Ireland. Giving up on finding a satisfying celebration, Natalia started attending Greystones and Kilquade masses out of convenience. In Fr. John's homilies and spiritual guidance Natalia found such inspiration that she ultimately took a leap of faith. In 2021 she left her secure, full-time corporate job and accepted a much less paid contract with the Parish.

Godmother and God-Grandmother



When I asked Natalia one Sunday after mass in 2022 if she wanted to be my Godmother, I didn't know that she contributed so much more to mass than just a nice tune. I was merely fascinated by the energy she brought to church and how she portrayed her faith to the crowd. That for me was enough to

make her my spiritual advisor and a year later again the Godmother of our third child. Rather than only facilitating the sacraments as per her job description, Natalia went above and beyond to revive the long lost (or maybe never existing) spirit within the local faith community. *"Whilst it was one of my most spiritually rewarding adventures, the sacramental process was challenging, demanding and exhausting"*, Natalia tells me. I remember her often being at the point of exhaustion after endless overtime and working late. And yet Natalia would face the congregation every Sunday with her guitar and a warm smile on her face.

We are good friends now and I am glad we will continue being part of each other's lives. I am sad for the community though, over losing these vibrant celebrations Natalia brought to the Parish with Family and Ruah Mass*. I will miss the songs she handpicked and adapted to convey the spirit of faith and for everybody to learn under her guidance. I feel upset that the Family Mass the way it was intended, and established during many hours of thinking, planning and re-jigging by a finely-tuned team, has come to an end. I am heartbroken that two people of this team who put something in motion and made a positive change in the Parish – despite fighting against hierarchies and internal politics – were let go without further ado.

Bouncy Castle & Chocolate Fountain – Communion & Confirmation in Ireland

Are we going back to the old ways now? I hope not. But who am I to complain anyway, barely a Catholic for a year and not even Irish. Best to quietly show up for Sunday mass, head bowed. Taking a seat in one of the back pews or even better remain standing by the door so I can slip out after communion. Inaudibly humming the traditional hymnes played on the organ at most, if there is music at all.

Most Irish people have a love-hate relationship with the

institution “Catholic Church”. More hate than love from what I sense in my immediate surroundings outside the congregation. Quite understandable when you consider how religion was interpreted and taught less than half a century ago. Many people still don’t want to have anything to do with it. And it is their free choice to turn their backs on faith altogether. No harm done. Unless they insist on sending their children to a Catholic school and demand as little religious teachings as possible. Unless they want to use the churches once a year to have their child baptised so they won’t feel excluded. Unless they complain about the way the preparations for the sacraments are done, so they can make communion and confirmation solely about expensive white dresses and parties with bouncy castles and chocolate fountains.

Being True to Yourself

I am uncomfortable saying out loud that [I got baptised as an adult](#). I get asked how I could join an organisation full of abuse and mismanagement, rather than [what my thoughts on faith are](#). There are awkward smiles when I say that our children receive the sacraments for we actually believe in them. Or that we give them prayers instead of “worry monsters” to deal with their fears.



What a strange society do we live in where people go along with something they despise, because it has always been done that way? And others feel they can’t say out loud what they truly believe in, out of fear of being ridiculed?

Natalia is a wonderful example for people of faith, never shying away from uncomfortable truths. I admire her bluntness and enthusiasm with which she encourages others to pursue with what they believe in. I am sad she has left the Parish, but I

consider myself lucky to be part of her future projects. One of them will be [Full-of-Grace](#) – Natalia's next initiative to support individuals and communities in search for a faith-driven lifestyle. With all my heart I wish her best of luck, also for her journey towards becoming a Gestalt psychotherapist!

***Ruah Mass: A special way of celebrating mass introduced to the Parish by Natalia and Fr. John Daly. Focused on breathing God's presence through and with the community, translating each breath into praise and worship.**



Pictures: Courtesy of Natalia. Artistic Photography: © [Karolina Hrynek](#)

“Beyond Brexit” – A Book Review

“The Good Friday Agreement” by Siobhán Fenton has recently been published in German under the name “Beyond Brexit”. When the publisher Eire-Verlag asked me to write a review I was

delighted and felt honoured. Northern Ireland with its troubled past has interested me since my first visit to Belfast in 2008. All the more since Brexit, the English exclave in the Republic of Ireland is back in the international news focus.



Excited and Nervous visiting Belfast

I was staying in Dublin for a six months internship in 2008. During that time I got to travel the island a good bit – including Northern Ireland. I didn't know much about its history, or the Troubles. At most I had a vague picture of car bombs and masked men from the news stations back home in Germany.

Only ten years before, in 1998, the Good Friday Agreement had been signed to mark the official ending of the Troubles. No time at all in the eyes of history. And just a two hour plane

ride from my home country Germany. Yet there I was about to visit Belfast, not knowing what to expect. As an intern of an Irish incoming tour operator, I had no doubt that I was going to be safe as a visitor. We were sending tourists to Belfast on a daily basis. I was more nervous I might be asking the wrong questions or to step on somebody's toes with being too curious. The last thing I wanted was to be a nosy, ruthless tourist, exploiting other people's tragedies for entertainment. However I couldn't wait to see Belfast, a place of such recent and troubled history.

From a Whistle Stop to a University Assignment

During a [black cab tour](#) I got my first touristic insight into the Catholic and Protestant quarters of Belfast with their accordant history. Afterwards I was even more keen to learn about the roots of the conflict. I started reading novels and non-fiction books about Northern Ireland, and watching movies and documentaries. I became obsessed with everything labelled "Troubles". Eventually I put all my research to use in a university assignment about the Impact of Terrorism on Tourism using Northern Ireland as an example.

When I recently started reading "Beyond Brexit" I remembered how much that topic had once interested me. I realised that I had somehow stopped taking an interest in history and politics of my country of choice since I moved to Ireland in 2014. All the more I embrace "Beyond Brexit" as an opportunity to dive into that fascinating part of history anew.



Siobhán Fenton & “Beyond Brexit”

Even without previous knowledge of Northern Ireland’s situation, Siobhán Fenton’s book is a great choice for everybody interested in it. It starts with a compact synopsis of historic events which sets the basis for Siobhan’s analysis of the current situation. Even as a professional journalist like Siobhán it is impossible to give a complete and entirely objective narration of events. Considering her background and how closely the Troubles affected her own life, readers will certainly expect some personal input.

Nevertheless, Siobhán states at the beginning of the book that she won’t be taking sides. Born to a Catholic mother and a Protestant father it wouldn’t be easy for her anyway. Her parents saw themselves forced to move to England as their so called mixed marriage wasn’t socially accepted in Northern Ireland. The family returned to Belfast when Siobhán was 3

years old and the Good Friday Agreement had just been signed.

Following the historical outline of the book, Siobhán tackles topics currently prevalent in Northern Irish society. She describes the trans-generation trauma caused by the Troubles, its consequences seen in the still divided social life and the overall inequality in Northern Ireland.

Not on the same Page

Holding a degree in Gender Studies, Siobhán particularly focuses her analysis on what impact the conflict had on women, claiming that this had been neglected in previous studies. When abortion was legalised in Northern in 2019, Siobhán was actively involved in the pro-abortion movement. As a [pro-life supporter](#) and conservative person my opinion certainly differs from Siobhán's in many regards. However "Beyond Brexit" is giving me the opportunity to challenge my perspective against the background of such unique historic circumstances. I trust Siobhán's work as a journalist and as someone looking to process her own past, that by compiling relevant information and doing adequate research she is providing her readers with a qualified insight of the current social situation in Northern Ireland.

Rural rules! Trendy Concepts for Rural Living



Swapping City for Country Life

Like many people on the verge of starting a family, we swapped our cramped apartment in Dublin City for a more spacious and rural alternative in Co. Wicklow. Sometimes we still can't believe how lucky we were [finding our perfect family home](#) after just one viewing. The house itself and also its location in the gorgeous seaside [seaside town of Greystones](#) offers everything we had been looking for.

We didn't exactly acquire a farm, but my husband John likes growing vegetables in the sizable wrap around garden. I love my herbal and lavender bed as well as our little orchard which bears gorgeous fruit every year and gives shade on sunny days. The kids have plenty of space for activities and their own little playground. Since we bought chickens just before Easter this year, I fondly call it our Payne FARMily.



Greystones – Not so rural anymore

Unfortunately the construction of housing estates in Greystones has grown exponentially in recent years. When we

first viewed our house in summer 2016, there were only a few new developments around. All within reason for a popular and attractive area like Greystones. But ever since, developments have exploded, not taking the limited infrastructure into account at all. To my regret it doesn't feel as rural anymore as we had hoped for when we moved here.

However we still value all the amenities close by. Our house and garden is like a little green, self-contained island where we can enjoy privacy and tranquility without feeling claustrophobic. All the more during the times of a full Corona lockdown. We are thankful that we get to combine the best of both worlds – lively Greystones and the beautiful Irish countryside and sea at our doorstep.

And whilst Ireland is the destination embodying tranquility and re-connection with nature for many Germans, I turned to Germany for some pretty interesting trends emerging around rural living.

Longing for Land

According to a study, about 41% of the Germans could imagine switching their urban setting for a more rural one. Especially during the pandemic, as the proximity to the work place has become redundant, more people take advantage of their newly gained flexibility and flee the packed cities in favour of rural living.

Even before the pandemic the image of country life was already changing. It is no longer seen as outdated lifestyle between boring fields and smelly cow stables. Therefore house prices in rural areas in Germany have been increasing by 40 % in the past 4 years. It used to be the expensive and little supply of living space that forced young people out of the cities. Now more people *choose* rural living, hoping for a higher-quality family life. (Source: [German Documentary](#) "Out of the City – The Dream of Rural Living" [Titel translated])

Rural Living on Trial with “Coconat”

Committing to buying your own property far out in the countryside can still be a challenge despite working from home. Limited accessibility, none or little public transport and usually few facilities nearby – to name a few. [Coconat](#), about an hour South-West of Berlin, is a great project to live in the countryside ‘on trial’. “It is perfect to get a feel for country life”, Svenja Nette, a 35-years old blogger says to the ZDF (German TV station). „Am I made for country life and is the country life made for me“, she continues. That is what you can find out as a guest on the expansive former country estate in Klein Glien.



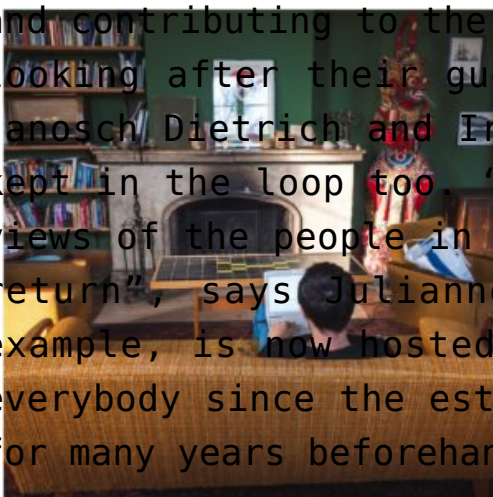


© 1:

[Coconat](#), 2 & 4: [Tilman Vogler](#), 3: [Andreas Plata](#)

Klein Glien is a tiny village with not more than 80 residents in the federal state of Brandenburg (surrounding Berlin). Here Coconat offers co-working and living space for young professionals, mostly coming from the nearby capital of Berlin at the moment. Instead of living or working by themselves in a single household, they can join a group of like-minded people from different backgrounds.

In the community area – a huge converted barn – the guests can socialise, share ideas or enjoy the peaceful surroundings on their own. Some only stay for 1 night to work on an assignment. Others book in for weeks or even months, working and contributing to the community in multiple ways. Apart from looking after their guests, the 3 founders Julianne Becker, Janosch Dietrich and Iris Wolf make sure that the locals are kept in the loop too. “It was important to us to respect the views of the people in Klein Glien and that they accept us in return”, says Julianne. The annual village festival, for example, is now hosted on the estate. A fantastic gain for everybody since the estate had been deserted and hence unused for many years beforehand.



Upcycling Big Style – “Your Year in Loitz”

Annika and Rolando, a creative couple from Berlin, have recently moved into an abandoned house in Loitz in Mecklenburg Vorpommern in the North of Germany. With that they have taken

on a hell of a project. Namely to convert a big, empty shell into a livable space and to add value for the local community. Annika and Venezuelan native Rolando are full of innovative ideas and have a vision to make it work. After all they have been chosen out of 93 applicants when Loitz got the funding for 'The City of Future 2030'. The town residents then elected the couple from the 17 finalists to join their community.

Beating Berlin and Freiburg which had also applied for 'The City of Future 2030', was a great win for the 4300-resident town of Loitz. From the funding Annika and Rolando receive a monthly base income of €1000 for a year and rent-free living in order to brush up the image of the infrastructurally weak region. The idea behind it is to make living in a remote area more attractive again for young people. Hence, rather than young people benefiting from the countryside, it is the other way around in this case.

Annika and Rolando have a year to put their concept which won over the jury into reality. Supported by ambitious neighbours and volunteers and with their creative ideas and skills they are to transform their temporary home into a vital communal space. With that they hopefully will create a win-win situation even beyond the scope of the project. A fantastic initiative that could also help to awaken some rural Irish towns from their slumber.

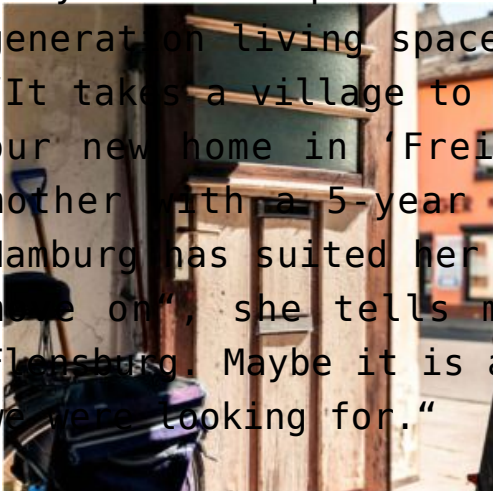


© [Dein](#)

[Jahr in Loitz](#); 1, 2 & 4: Matthias Marx

“It takes a Village to raise a Child”

Not only *where* people live, but also *how* they live seems to be undergoing a shift towards traditional ways of living. When I asked my friend Julia why she was giving up her convenient city centre apartment in Hamburg to move to a multiple generation living space about 160km further North, she says: “It takes a village to raise a child. And that is my hope for our new home in ‘Freiland Flensburg’.” Julia is a single mother with a 5-year old daughter. Living and working in Hamburg has suited her in the past years. “Now it is time to move on”, she tells me. “My grandad was originally from Flensburg. Maybe it is a sign that we found exactly there what we were looking for.”



[‘Freiland Flensburg’](#) is a campus close to the city centre of Flensburg containing different forms of residential spaces. It

includes apartments for single households, different size houses for couples and families, as well accessible units for senior citizens. The main building provides communal space such as guest rooms, a kitchen, a roof terrace and an atrium in the centre. The idea is to offer support for everybody who wants (or needs it) and to profit from the vast skills set of the variety of residents.

“I won’t need to worry anymore when my daughter is playing outside“, Julia says. “There are always going to be other kids around. Or I can drop her off with a neighbour when I have to run a quick errand or work.” Julia on the other hand could offer support in digital matters to elderly people, or teach students how to use a sewing machine. Her baking is fantastic too. I am sure her fellow residents are going to profit from that. A great traditional barter system in a modern environment.

Allotment Garden Irish Style

Rural living without a garden doesn’t really go together for me. What I observe in Greystones however is that most new builds go for an extended indoor space over a green outdoor area. If people have a garden, they often manicure it to perfection or pave it altogether. Not exactly my idea of a natural recreation space.

With joy I read about Tírmór Allotments in Newcastle, Co. Wicklow in the [Greystone Guide](#) recently. “The project is to lay a foundation for an agroforestry project“, says founder Huw. He also runs the Co-working space [Hub13](#) that is currently on hold due to Covid 19. “Tírmór allotments is all about increased biodiversity and soil quality“, Huw continues, “and how farming used to be done before we thought we could cheat nature. Construction impacts can lead to increased flooding and I am planning to counteract negative side effects like that by going back to the roots.”

Aimed to be completed within the next 5 years, Huw is converting parts of the 150 year old family farm just outside Newtownmountkennedy into allotments of various sizes. "In combination with the work hubs, people can spend their lunch break planting their own veg", Huw says with a smile. A fantastic solution for people who prefer a low maintenance garden attached to their house, but would like to give home growing a shot anyway. Cooking and eating it on spot won't be too far fetched either as Huw is planning an outdoor kitchen and campsite along with it. The perfect outdoor adventure for hobby gardeners big and small!

Less is More

Above living concepts show that the wheel doesn't have to be re-invented. We can absolutely learn from what generations before us did well or even take a peek at other countries. By just giving it a modern twist, it can turn into something innovative and sustainable.

When I was a teenager I didn't appreciate rural living nor did I see myself settling in the Irish countryside. The older I get, the more I learn to value traditional concepts of living. I enjoy home growing and cooking food from scratch. I think it is intrinsic wanting to provide for your family. It also is very satisfying creating something with your own hands. I enjoy showing our kids how things grow and what you can make out of them. Moreover I am amazed how little we actually need for a happy life. Here is to rural living!

Sexism works both Ways

On the back of some quite negative publicity I have read about men and childminding during the Corona Crisis, I realised that

sexism works both ways. And I felt the need to show a different side of the story. It is obviously going to be a very personal point of view from within our family. Nevertheless I don't think that my husband John is an edge case. If we still *do* live in a world where men are misogynistic and can't or don't want to look after their children, I am even more lucky to have found the one and only super husband & daddy.

„Feminists shouting sexism all over“

I don't mind "Men-are-from-Mars-and-Women-from-Venus Jokes". Men and women *are* different by nature. They have different strengths and skill sets, often complementing each other. Generalising and joking about their flaws can be humorous. Especially when both sides are aware that it involves stereotyping and exaggerations.

A friend of mine sent me a video the other day about what would happen if women went on strike. It was hilarious! Men were holding crying babies, unable to work out what to do with them. Business men in suits panicking over having to pick up their little ones from kindergarten for the first time. Men at home clueless how to look after domestic stuff. It clearly was exaggerated and sarcastic which I don't have a problem with as such.

But jokes like that don't seem to work the other way around. Feminists would be shouting „sexism“ from all over. Why is it that we find it very funny when men are put down or made fun of when it comes to child rearing? But jokingly criticizing women's driving or mechanical skills – which is obviously as clichéd – is sexism?

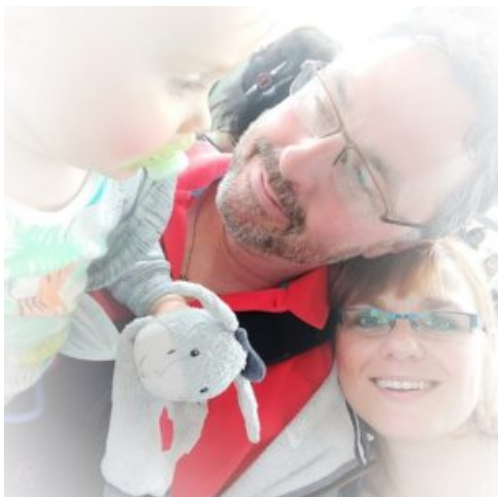
Men against Women

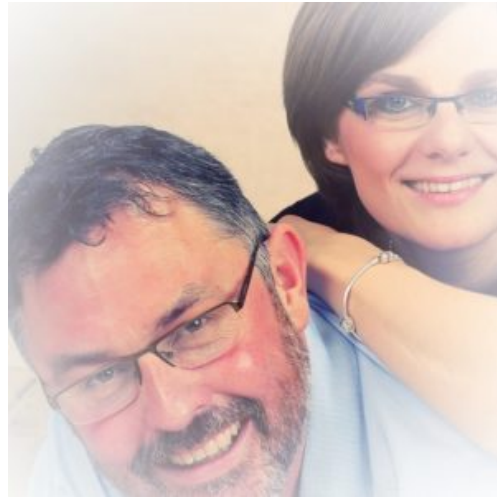
What I have noticed – even more during the Corona Crisis – is that often it is men against women. As if it was a competition that has to be won by either side. What happened to being

partners? Making use of what we both bring to the table and work as a team? Rather than just finger pointing and jumping all over each other's flaws.

I am not saying that we never have these – let's call them gender-based – arguments at home. Who is more tired? How many hours did I look after the kids on the weekend and how many hours did he etc.? Who deserves a break more? We *do* argue about these things, because it can be tough at times. [Looking after two small children 24/7 in your own four walls](#) while working from home is a challenge that grew exorbitantly during the pandemic.

However once our tempers have cooled down after above mentioned confrontations, we remind ourselves that we don't gain anything from *winning* in a marriage. (Well, except for half an hour extra sleep maybe at the cost of not talking to each other for a while.) We made agreements that we tend to stick to. And if we can't for one reason or another we try to compromise and re-adjust. Above all, we know that we are on each other's side and not in some strange pseudo-battle between male and female.





Lazy Housewife vs. Career-oriented Husband

One of our biggest standing agreements is how we split the roles at home. My main task is to look after the children and the domestic chores in the house. John is the sole bread winner. We both have a big responsibility. But for some reason I find neither is perceived as such.

An example for the negative media coverage during the Corona Crisis that I mentioned at the start stated that women are the losers of the pandemic. They have to stay at home and look after the children whilst the men can continue their jobs as before. No one even considers the increased financial pressure now resting on the husband's shoulders whilst the mother gets to spend more time with the children. It might not have been the mother's choice, but not necessarily the father's either.

It doesn't help that the image of a house wife and stay-at-home mom is still not the best in modern society. People argue that women make themselves dependent on their husbands and are denied self-fulfilment. They talk about "giving up" something, but never about gaining at the same time. Everybody knows – at least in theory – that it definitely *is* a full-time job to look after young children. And an important one on top of that. So why is it that women still feel the need to justify themselves for being home carers?

The Grass is always greener on the other Side

It looks like neither men nor women get what they are looking for. Of course I enjoy withdrawing to our home office to work on the computer while John is minding the kids. John on the contrary can't wait to get out at night time and roll around on the floor with the kids.

Does that mean we envy the other person all the time? Is that why there is a constant, merciless battle between men and women? Neither a full-time job in the office nor minding the kids at home is always a pleasure. But John and I chose our roles for a reason. The more we enjoy switching occasionally for a break. However we are far from questioning our whole system.

Jobs with a Meaning

After a hard day – rather than arguing who got the better end of the stick – we try to show each other appreciation for what we have achieved. John in his job and I in mine. I also disagree with the assumption that having a paid job is generally more fulfilling. Whilst our children show me appreciation almost every day, John might be looking for it in vain in the office, despite his hard work.

When it comes to the questions whose job as such is more important, I am also the clear winner. The purpose of my work, i.e. our children, add by far more meaning to my life than John's tasks at the office to his. At the same time we are well aware that we couldn't afford our life style without John's long hours and his good salary.

A Healthy Co-Dependency

There is no doubt about it that it needs us as a team to make it all function. Rather than striving for personal happiness and self-fulfillment, we believe that owning up to our responsibilities and contributing our part is the key to a

content (family) life on the long run. With this comes happiness and fulfillment.

Apart from that, there is no reward system or competition going on for the harder worker. If one slacks off, the other one has to bear the additional load, or things will start slipping. We are not ashamed of admitting that we are depending on each other. Our marriage and family would not work if we were two separate individuals fighting to realise our own personal goals.

Trouble Shooting in the Crisis

The Corona crisis has required a lot of re-adjustment. Even though our traditional roles made it easier for us to adapt quicker to childminding and [working from home](#), we weren't prepared to master it all by ourselves, entirely without the support of family and friends.

Hence we do have our moments when when we are sick and tired of it all and annoyed by each other's company. We had an argument recently which we didn't sort out before we went to bed. However we both agreed the next day that we didn't like that and won't be doing it again going forward. (Well, we will argue for sure, but won't drag it out until the next day.)

There really is no point. We know that we are generally on the same page and agree on the 'big stuff'. Otherwise we wouldn't have got married in the first place. When we argue it is about day-to-day things in combination with being tired or overwhelmed. At the end of the day we know that our marriage is the base camp where we both re-charge our batteries.

Family Vacation in Ireland

Confused by the headline and thinking of calling me out on my apparent typo? Well, it is not a typo and I deliberately wrote 'Carmenites' – double meaning desired. Even though it involves some spirituality, we didn't enter a monastery or found a new order on our family vacation in [Sligo](#). We *did* discover a fascinating lifestyle though. But first things first.



Staycation in Ireland

Like most people in Ireland we didn't have much of a choice but spend our summer vacation on the island due to the [Covid regulations](#). So, we knew quite early on that the 2-week trip to my family in Germany was not going to happen this year. Apart from missing out on a family reunion, spending our family vacation in Ireland was not the worst that could have happened to us. In fact we were pretty excited to bring our kids on our first real family vacation with the four of us.

However it turned out to be a bit of a challenge to find an accommodation last minute that was suitable for ourselves and our friends we were planning to travel with. They also had 2 kids the same age as ours (3 years & 11 months) and therefore we were looking for something spacious with 4 bedrooms. The new trend "Staycation" apparently still involved travelling rather than staying at home like the term might suggest. So we

didn't have any luck at all finding what we were looking for.

I am getting baptised!

Confusing headline again? Stay with me, it still is all about our family vacation in Sligo.

Many times before I had turned to a ['higher power'](#) to ask for things I wanted or didn't want to happen. The turnout had been pretty impressive. I am not only talking about minor things like finding a holiday home, but big life-changing events. When one of the biggest miracles in our life happened last year my doubt in God began to totter.

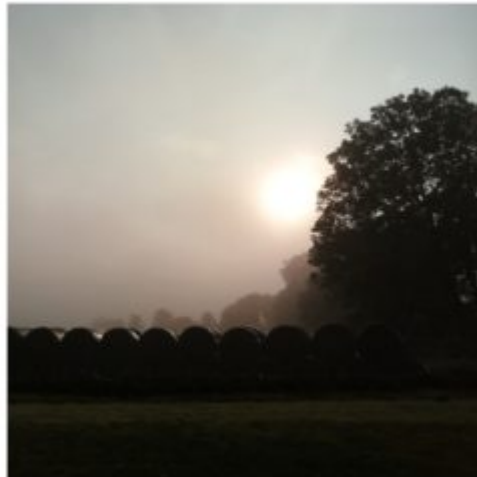
When I told my husband John that it wasn't looking good regarding a place for our spontaneous family vacation he said a silent prayer. He was desperate to get away for a couple of days after a rough time in work and months in his [Home Office](#) during Lockdown. In fact we had both been looking forward to a break and a change of scenery as well as spending some time with friends. We would have been very disappointed if we had to stay in our own four walls for our family vacation.

Family Vacation Miracle

After days of browsing the web for a self-catering cottage without any luck, this dream house popped up in my search. All of a sudden, completely out of the blue. It was too good to be true. The pictures looked absolutely stunning and it seemed to be even better than what we had been hoping for. I couldn't believe when I saw that the 4 nights we had planned to travel were the only dates available in the upcoming weeks. Suspecting a technical glitch, I tried not to get my hopes up just yet.

I knew John's prayers had been answered when I received the booking confirmation shortly afterwards. I was delighted and astonished at the same time. Once more something we had so desperately wanted worked itself out miraculously.

Now it was my turn to keep my side of the bargain. Fair is fair. Finding this absolutely promising holiday home had finally tipped the scales in favour of my baptism. And it wasn't going to be the only miracle that happened throughout our family vacation.



Arrival in Paradise

The headline is not a religious methapor, but literally how I would describe the arrival at our Airbnb in Ballymote. The 3-hour trip through [Ireland's Hidden Heartlands](#) had been very pleasant. Once off the motorway, windy country roads led us through lush meadows alternating between grazing sheep and cows. The mountain range in the distance was quite a contrast to the agricultural land dominating the area. The air after a short but heavy rain shower was fresh with a slight smell of silage lingering in the air. The temperature still hadn't dropped and with about 24 degrees, a mild summer evening was

laying ahead. The perfect start of our family vacation.

Dreaming allowed

It is not that we live in a big buzzing city. We moved to the countryside because we love having nature around us. However our lovely seaside village of Greystones slowly but surely seems to turn into a medium-sized town with a lot of new property development going on. Too fast and too much for my liking.

When we started [house-hunting](#) in summer 2016 I had already dreamed of a country house in the middle of nowhere. But we decided to be sensible and not move somewhere too remote for various reasons.

Anyway, that doesn't keep me from dreaming. And the house we were going to call home for our 4-night family vacation was such a dream.

Dinner in the 'Greenhouse'

The hosts had already warmly welcomed our friends when we got there. We gathered around the long table in the conservatory, the Orangery, for dinner and a chat. What a great idea to have a dining area right beside vegetable beds full of tomato and cucumber plants filling the room with a gorgeous smell. Not to forget the water cress growing in a thick belt around the room.

Our 3-year-olds were excited to see each other. Little did they know they were going to have their first sleepovers in huge comfy beds waking up to the sound of cows mooing in the field across. But who was going to talk about bed time when there was so much to explore first?



Welcome to Mediterranean Ireland

Grapes framed the door leading from the spacious country kitchen into the Orangery. They were ripe and sweet as we soon found out. Our kids much preferred them over the Spaghetti we had quickly prepared for dinner. There were more grapevines around the door leading onto the patio with its almost Mediterranean character. Cosy sunbeds in front of the rustic stone cladding made it the perfect spot for a mild summer night. Two olive trees and a massive fig plant suggested we were not even in Ireland anymore, but somewhere in Southern Europe. No need to dream ourselves away though as we had discovered the perfect spot for our family vacation in rural Ireland and were looking forward to the next couple of days.

The Garden (Eden)

Robert, the man of the house, was doing a wonderful job

keeping the fairy tale garden neat and lush for everybody to enjoy. With lots of space for the toddlers to run around (and literally no way to escape the property), they occupied themselves giving the adults some time to have a chat after breakfast. Or to tidy up the mess that their younger siblings had made eating.

Anyway, there was no rush to leave and go places as everybody was happy out staying in the house and garden. Berries, grapes, tomatoes and herbs freshly picked from the Orangery were the highlights for our busy little gardeners. Around noon we decided to leave the paradise for a trip to the beach.

Aughris Head on the Wild Atlantic Way

We never really got around to read up on things to do in the area before our spontaneous family vacation. Therefore we followed the first advice on the sheet our hosts had given us – which was [Aughris Head on the Wild Atlantic Way](#).

Despite our late start, we were one of the first ones to arrive on the usually busy beach as we were going to find out soon enough. The sun was burning down and it was an absolute perfect day to spend by the sea. With [the Beach Bar](#) right beside it we knew we had picked the right place to be for the day.





My First Time in the Irish Ocean

Convinced that I wasn't going to go for a swim in the sea I hadn't brought my swim gear. John had packed his wetsuit expecting the water to be as cold as back home on the East coast. I couldn't believe how much warmer it was compared to the Irish East coast. The shallow water and low tide had a huge positive impact on the temperature and I decided to go for a swim too despite lacking a swim suit. (No, not German nude style, I kept my clothes on!)

I had been swimming in the sea in Ireland before. On a surfing trip in October about 6 years before. I had been wearing a wetsuit though which would make this year's vacation the first time I was properly bathing in the Irish Atlantic. Another family vacation miracle.

Perfect Ending of a Perfect Day

When we arrived back 'home', Robert and his lovely wife (who was German by the way) had prepared a gorgeous BBQ as complimentary part of our stay. The fire was already blazing in the self-built fire pit. While we were waiting for homemade burgers and German Potato Salad, we sat around the fire chatting away to our hosts and hearing about their amazing story of how they had created this stunning place.

When darkness set in, we continued sitting outdoors in shorts

and T-shirt in this totally silent environment except for our laughter echoing through the night. In Ireland you *never* get to sit outside in a T-shirt at night time without being freezing cold. The starry sky turned it into an almost corny setting. Was it God again or just the Gulf Stream in the West of Ireland causing this delightful summer night?

Must-See for Kids and Adults

For the next day we had planned to bring the kids to a bird sanctuary close by. It was hard getting them into the car as they were busy in the garden making 'salad' out of Robert's raspberry bushes. When we eventually left, our 3-year old fell asleep on the short drive to the [eagles flying](#) bird sanctuary. Even though he slept through all of the very interesting and entertaining bird show, it was an afternoon well spent. We got to pet the "Harry-Potter-Owl" (I am sure it has a scientific name too) and many other animals afterwards. Sorry birds, but the attached petting zoo with the cuddlier animals was our toddlers' favourite experience. But seeing these massive eagles and falcons fly and learning about them made the visit worthwhile for adults too. Definitely a must-see on a family vacation in Sligo! Thanks again to the eagles flying team for doing such a wonderful job!

Sligo from a Bird's Eye View

The trip to the bird sanctuary had set the bar high for any other activities to come. And still, thanks to Robert's advice we saw another unbelievably stunning place the next day. This time we saw Sligo from a bird's eye view.

We visited the [Carrowkeel Passage Tombs](#) which were quite high up in the Bricklieve Mountains. Beware that there is another Carrowkeel right beside the [Megalithic Cemetery of Carrowmore](#), same distance but opposite direction from Ballymote. Our friends learned that the hard way when they ended up in the wrong place with their kids getting whingy in the backseats.

The drive and also the short, buggy-friendly hike up to the passage tombs (a little longer with small kids!) was beautiful. Although we didn't have a very clear view, looking down onto the lakes and the green fields of Sligo gleaming through the mist was beyond words.



‘Newgrange’ for free

When we got to the top of the hill (last bit without buggy!), we found 3 perfectly intact passage tombs. Like little huts made of rocks they were sitting in a line across the mountain. A local passer-by explained to me that there were several monuments built on hilltops in the region overlooking the landscape. She pointed out [Knocknarea](#) to me, a 320 m high mountain across from where we were. On its top I could make out the semi-circular shape of [Queen Maeve](#)'s grave in the distance.

What a spiritual and natural gem Carrowkeel was and what great adventure for the kids peeping through the roof boxes of these impressive passage tombs. Ideal place to include a bit of history into your family vacation.

Why is a site with such historic significance like Carrowkeel almost neglected whilst another one like Newgrange turns into a mass tourism destination? A phenomenon I wrote about in my article [“Abandoned in Ireland”](#).

Self-Catering Spa Treatment

Again, back at our house we had another perfect ending of a perfect day. At least the girls of our little travel group. My

friend and I had booked in for a massage that we conveniently received in the house by the lady of the manor. Whilst my husband dealt with the bedtime routine of our kids, I enjoyed my Indian head massage next door. Where in a self-catering Airbnb do you get an in-house Spa treatment? What a glorious finish of an unforgettable trip!

The Aftermath

When we got home the next day, my husband and I were still glowing. The vacation had fulfilled its purpose. Even our children, who slept through the entire journey, seemed to be giving us a grace period before we were about to enter our daily routine again.

Despite the usual family chaos including particularly early mornings with the kids and late nights by the fire, our short trip left us energised. Even the heavy rain on the drive down – whilst unsubtly marking the end of our vacation – couldn't change that.

When John opened our front door, he noticed how small our house felt compared to [Carmen's & Robert's Country House Retreat](#). Whilst we loved our house, we were going to miss the wide and super-comfy double beds in Ballymote. However, it was more the thoughtful touches and cosy snugs that gave the modernised farm house its special character. 'In love' with Carmen's interior design, we decided to 'carmenise' our home, as we jokingly called it.

How '*c(h)arming*' is that

Indeed there was much to learn from Carmen's knack for decorating. With small children in the house we were obviously restricted when it came to delicate objects. Nevertheless I liked the way Carmen had blended different styles, art works and decorations adding up to this picture book country house. Absolutely charming and with so much attention to detail it was by far more than just a fit for purpose accommodation. It

truly was an oasis to relax and unwind, not lacking a single thing as far as I was concerned.



I'll join the 'Carmenites'!

Also Robert's and Carmen's life style seemed to be in line with what their whole environment conveyed. Something that I had only known from romantic movies before and absolutely adored: A lifestyle back to the roots, but with a very pleasant level of comfort. The weekly shop in the Farmer's Market, homemade bread, freshly cut flowers on the table, mostly homegrown vegetables – to only give a few examples. Combined with Carmen's and Robert's down-to-earth attitude, it really was something worth aiming for. Thanks to our short break in that wonderful little world of its own and the lovely chats with Carmen and Robert, I became cognizant of that once again.

A long-lasting Experience

I gained so much more from that vacation than just a great time with my family and friends. I also own a sourdough culture for the first time in my life now that I use for breadmaking exactly like Carmen. But all joking aside, I haven't had such an uplifting experience in a long time. The laughter with our friends by the fire. The quality adult-time and fun together as families. The warm summer air infused with all the gorgeous scents in the garden (including the one of the BBQ). The activities and getting to know another wonderful region of Ireland. Strangers welcoming us into their house and looking after us so well. We will be back, for sure!

Abandoned in Ireland – Photography & Blog

When I started writing this article a couple of months ago, I didn't know that all the touristic sites of Ireland were going to be literally abandoned due to a pandemic. I picked the title with something completely different in my mind. Places which were abandoned for good. Decaying. Incomplete. Mysterious. A husk of a building. Ruins. Walls.

That hasn't changed and this post is still going to be a journey to a few of my favourite abandoned places in Ireland. Whilst I didn't wish for the tourism industry to come to a complete hold, I have been thinking for a while that it could do with some mitigation of the boom excesses which had been returning. So I will also give a brief explanation in this post of why I prefer some sites to stay abandoned.

Photographs © Sylvia & John Payne, Hartmut Wallburg



WHAT'S THE STORY?

I like old things. My husband is always teasing me that this is why [I married him](#). Whereas this is partly true, I was more referring to old buildings. Both have a story and because of these stories I am drawn to them. (I will leave my husband's story aside here.) I like to feel the energy that comes off an abandoned place. A ruin that has been sitting there for centuries. Decaying and overgrown. I like to imagine what it must have been like during its heyday. Why and under what circumstances has it been abandoned?



LAYING FOUNDATIONS

When I was a child my parents brought my sister and me to a

lot of historic places. Archaeological sites mostly in Greece and Turkey. Some of them were very popular amongst tourists. Others barely had an infrastructure and hence hardly any visitors. These I enjoyed the most. They had been abandoned despite their historical value to mankind. That didn't make them less interesting. My parents and especially my dad showing them to us laid the foundations for my interest in abandoned places.



A CHILD'S IMAGINATION

My mind kept wandering off while I was walking through these

sites, inspired by books and my own very vivid, child's imagination. I pictured the people that had walked the very same grounds thousands of years ago. Sensing the same heat burning on their skin and hearing the overpowering sound of the cicadas the way I was now. Does it play a role if I imagined them in their historically correct clothing? Not to me. What I remember until today is the special atmosphere rather than historical facts that can be looked up any time.



LESS IS MORE

I sometimes like to fill in the blanks myself. Reconstructions

and visitor centres often take away the fun of exploring a site with all its missing pieces. Abandoned buildings speak for themselves although the story perceived is not the same for everyone. There are a good few highly frequented touristic sites in Ireland that have kept the place's spirit and leave room for imagination. Sadly there are many tourist traps too whose interest at heart is not to purely inform, but make people spend money.



SUSTAINABLE

As much as grazing sheep on green hills belong to

Ireland, ruins of mansions or abbeys are a familiar sight in the Irish landscape too. Some people visiting Ireland get downright excited about abandoned castles they spot on the roadside, without a coffee shop or souvenir stall attached to it. One might call it wasted potential, I call it sustainable tourism. Sometimes all you need is some simple facilities and a signpost.



CURSE...

The pictures in this post have all been taken in abandoned

places. Most of them don't have a visitor infrastructure which makes them even more attractive in my eyes. Imagination works better for me without coach loads of tourists around. Not too long ago I myself earned my money in the tourism industry, bringing thousands of tourists to Ireland every year. Long before I stayed at home as [full-time mammy](#), I had a problem with [cut price and mass marketed packages in Irish tourism](#).



...& BLESSING

Appropriately done, tourism is an important income source for

Ireland, especially in less favoured regions. But I feel that the concept of slow, sustainable growth is absent and unsupportable increase reigns instead. I also think that visitor centres should not be turned into the main attraction by covering up the more beautiful, natural site behind it. How can it not backfire in the long run when the attributes people were originally drawn to, disappear? Like tranquility, unspoilt nature and above all authenticity. Keeping (abandoned) sites real will create a valuable resource for Irish people and visitors alike.



DILEMMA

I should be happy that most tourists are sticking to a handful

of iconic sites promoted in travel brochures. Don't get me wrong, I went to see them all myself, the first time I came to Ireland. However after getting to know Ireland better, I feel obliged to show people other places that – for whatever reason – haven't turned into a tourism magnet yet. Places too beautiful to keep them a secret. Yet too precious to turn them into a hot spot during high season. That is my personal dilemma I guess. Luckily I don't have the power to do either.



TALKING WALLS

The ruins that I chose to introduce in this article were all

random finds. I didn't read about them in guide books beforehand nor did anyone recommend them to me as a must-see. Accordingly my expectations were low to non-existent. In each one of them I could totally immerse into my unbiased imagination regarding their history, be it true or not. No reconstructed walls, no fake interior. Just stones the way they were put on top of each other by the people who once built them. And I wonder – what makes them less popular than some of the most visited sites in Ireland in a similar state?



GRAVEYARDS

Old graveyards have always fascinated me the most. In Ireland

they are particularly beautiful because of their Celtic high crosses. I am a big fan of [Glasnevin](#) and [Monasterboice](#) as cemeteries and 'tourism attractions' alike. As well as the [Rock of Cashel](#) and [Clonmacnoise](#) as historic sites featuring an ancient graveyard. In my eyes they are all doing a great job of preserving the place for what it is, despite large visitor numbers. Two 'hidden' graveyards that impressed me as much are the [Hill of Slane](#), Co. Meath and the [Old Burial Ground](#) in Delgany, Co. Wicklow.



HILL OF SLANE

The Hill of Slane struck me as surreal. A quite big complex of

ruins overlooking a green landscape. Cows grazing in the field beside it and a farmer dropping in to check on them just when we were visiting. The only creatures we encountered during our two hour stay. Both were obviously rather unimpressed by the historical value in their vicinity. To me a great example of something historically remarkable blended in with ordinary life. *That* to me makes an iconic site I would call [typically Irish](#).



DELGANY

Stepping into the Old Burial Ground off a busy road, my

husband and I found ourselves in a secret-garden-like environment, only meters from our home. We were the only people there and took our time reading the headstones dating back to the 1700's. Instead of neatly cut edges, the grass was lush and dotted with wild flowers. Tilted, ancient gravestones with engravings barely visible and overgrown. A bench underneath a huge tree providing shade. Could a cemetery be more authentic and a better resting place for the deceased *and* visitors?



BALTINGLASS

Abbeys to me have something majestic. Like graveyards they are

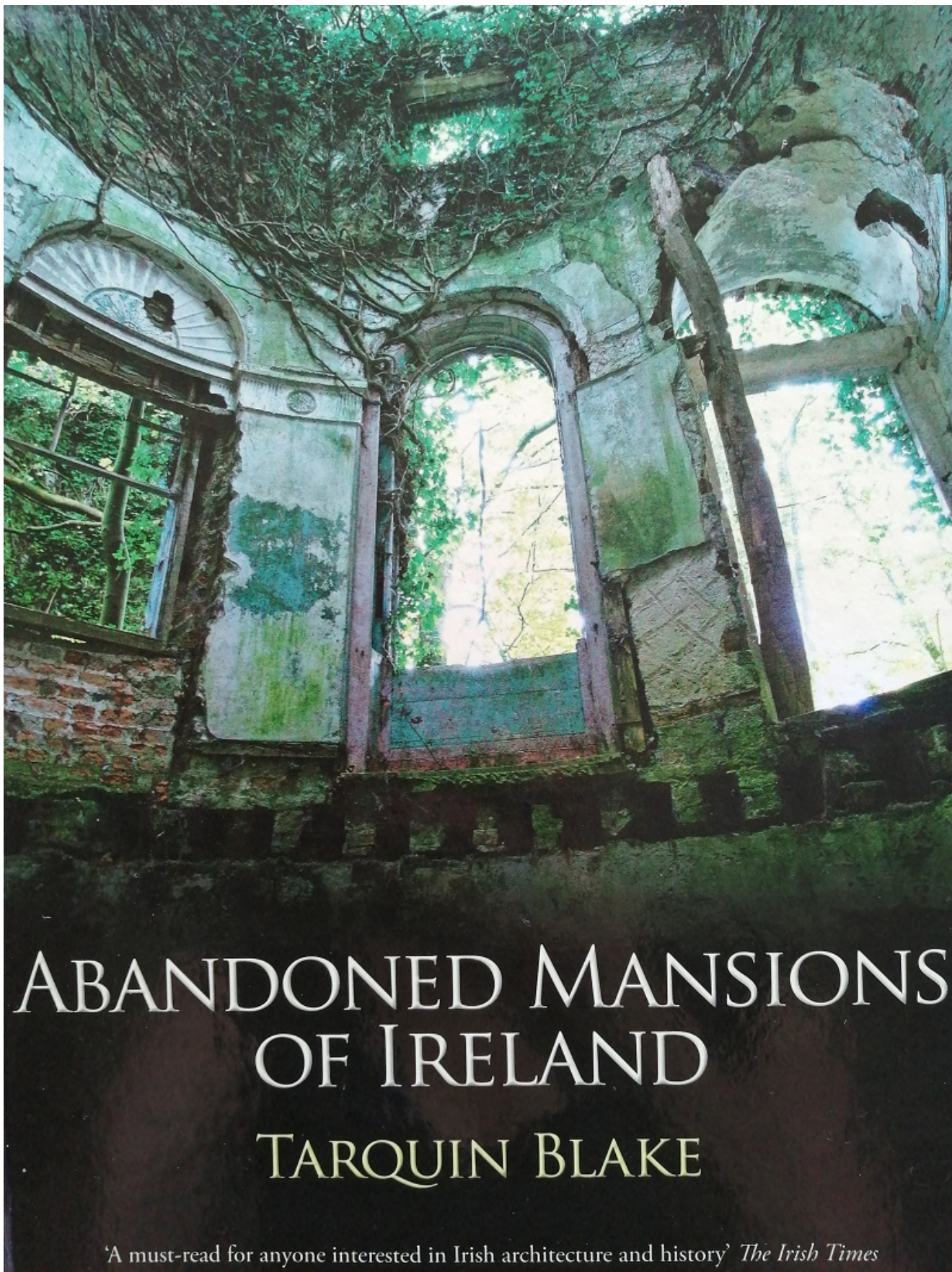
places of devotion and contemplation or at least were in their heyday. Ireland is full of them and even as ruins they don't lose their aura. When we took the scenic drive from our home in North Wicklow to [Baltinglass](#) in West Wicklow, it took us longer than expected. We were hungry and cranky when we got there. Maybe that is why I wasn't straight away baffled by this 12th century Cistercian Abbey. Taking a closer look though, the most stunning details revealed to me. Some of them even just after looking at the photographs. These very elaborate stone carvings belong to the finest examples of Romanesque architecture in Ireland. And still no sinner there to admire them.



FANCY A RUIN?

Whenever I fancy a ruin, I just step outside my door and watch

the sun set at [Kindlestown Castle](#). On the meadow in front of it our toddler is occasionally kicking a ball or people are walking their dogs. That doesn't take away from the fact that we are looking at a historic hall house from the 9th century that is considered a National Monument and part of the [Delgany Heritage Trail](#). Only a few minutes drive from us is [Belmont Demesne](#) as part of a walking trail area. The ruins themselves are from 18th century Belmont House. Pretty unspectacular nestled in between the green parklands which have a rich film pedigree including Vikings and King Arthur. The enclosed Café Bak'd at Arthur's Barn including a local Design Store even got its name from it.



BOOK TIP

Last but not least I would like to recommend a book of someone

that I share my obsession of abandoned mansions with. Tarquin Blake wrote it. My husband gave it to me with the following words written into it: „*To my beautiful wife. On her first birthday as my wife. One day we will build a [home of our own](#). Your husband.*“ These words were not only touching on a personal level, they also made me think that these [Abandoned Mansions of Ireland](#) captured in the book had indeed been a home to someone once. As fascinating as it is to see an abandoned building being re-captured by nature, is the (hi)story behind it. Before I read it I let the pictures speak for themselves first, exactly the way I had done it as a child.

Small pictures, left to right, horizontal: Glen of the Downs (Co. Wicklow); Baltinglass Abbey (Co. Wicklow), Belmont Demesne (Co. Wicklow); Hill of Slane (Co. Meath); Cathedral of St. Peter & St. Paul, Glendalough (Co. Wicklow), Monasterboice (Co. Louth); Selskar Abbey (Co. Wexford); Cathedral of St. Peter & St. Paul, Glendalough (Co. Wicklow), Famine Wall, Ballina (Co. Mayo); Old Burial Ground, Delgany (Co. Wicklow); Hill of Slane (Co. Meath); Old Burial Ground, Delgany (Co. Wicklow); Baltinglass Abbey (Co. Wicklow); Kindlestown Castle (Co. Wicklow)

Photographs © Sylvia & John Payne, Hartmut Wallburg

If Trees could talk –

Photography & Blog

...what would they say?

Would they give away that they are home and hiding place to the "wee folk"? The fairies and creatures that Irish legends and folklore is made of? Would they be able to tell the original tales that have been handed down and adapted by people from generation to generation instead? Who knows. I am going to lend my voice to the trees and give you a little insight into Ireland's mythology in which trees have always played a vital role.

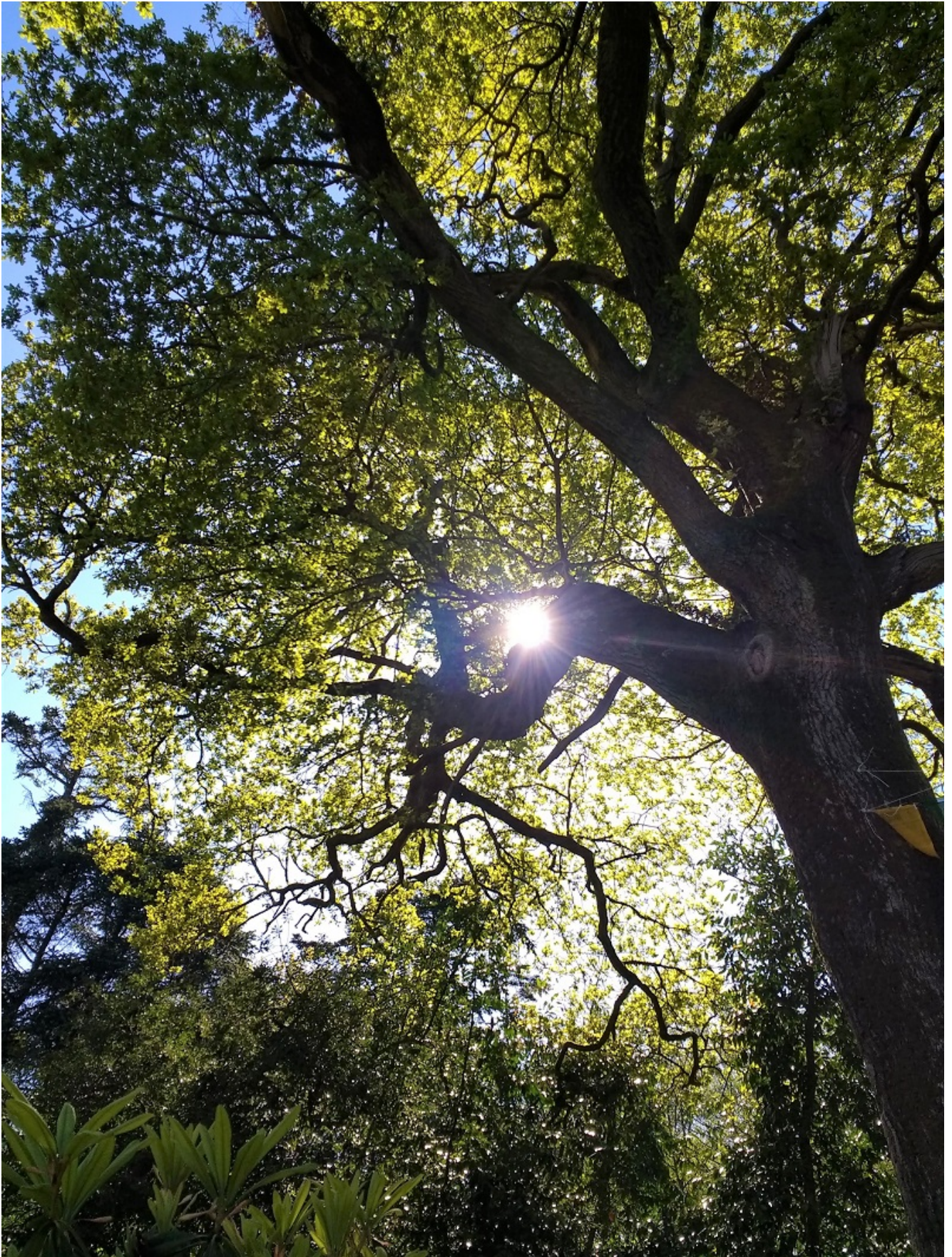
Tree & Forest Photography © Sylvia & John Payne



HEART OVER MIND

Before I do so, a few words why trees are vital to *me* (not

just in a biological sense of course). If you had asked me a couple of years ago where I would like to live, I probably would have said [by the sea](#). And in my head I still think 'by the sea' with lovely sandy beaches as it sounds like something people would say. Especially people like me, who didn't grow up anywhere near the sea. I actually *do* have it at my doorstep now, but that was more or less a [coincidence](#). When I go by my emotions, my heart beats for the forest. For old, gnarly, mossy trees. Sun beams making their way through a canopy of green leaves. The smell of damp soil buffering the sound of your footsteps. I wouldn't call myself an outdoor or nature person, but my parents succeeded in making me a forest-lover.



BORN IN THE WOODS

I feel that when you are young you always want to get away

from what you have. So for a while I was crazy about being by the sea. Whereas when you get older you return to what you know and like. My name Sylvia means "born in the forest" which I was. My first year of life I spent living remotely with my family in a house on the edge of a forest. The next village was ca. 1.5 km away. The address was "By the Woods". Sounds adventurous, but obviously not something I consciously remember being only 1. However my mam keeps telling me that she used to walk me in the pram along the forest paths. Me looking up into the sky seeing the treetops flying past. She said I was taking it all in until I got too tired to keep my eyes open.



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

We moved into a nearby town when I was a year old. Ever since

I can remember we used to go back for family walks in the forest near our old house. Having grown up there, my mam had a very strong bond with the place and had gathered a lot of memories over the years. So did we even after we moved away. Like one winter when we brought the sleigh. My dad had the idea to tie it to the back of the car and we had the time of our lives dashing through the snow at such speed. For Easter my parents would hide little chocolate eggs in the grass along the way. Naive as we were my sister and I always brought them back to my parents to carry them for us. Not knowing that we were hunting the same Easter eggs over and over again.



CONSISTENT

I have always enjoyed our family forest walks. Whilst I still

joined them I would ridicule them as a teenager. Getting up after a late night to go for „fresh air“ wasn't exactly a teenage dream. Anyway this forest in particular has been a constant in my life and maybe subconsciously instilled a positive response to trees in me.



ESSENTIAL

Maybe this is all sentimental drivel and I just like trees.

Either way I ended up living in a country where trees are considered sacred. At least by the mythical creatures who are supposed to live in them. Trees play a vital role in Irish folklore and mythology. Even people back then knew how essential they were for the survival of mankind.



ETHYMOLOGY

You can find proof for that all over Ireland. A lot of Irish

places feature tree names such as “cullen” which means holly or “deagh” for a birchy place. Places with the prefix “kil” or “kyle” refer to the Irish word “coill” for wood. The town Youghal (Co. Cork) for example means *yew wood* and Derry *oak wood* (Source: forestryfocus.ie)



SYMBOLISM

There are three trees prevalent in Irish folklore: oak, birch

and ash trees. The oak stands for kingship because of its strength and fertility. It is therefore often found near ancient royal burial sites. Birches were a Celtic symbol of love and people used to put its branches over cradles to protect their babies. Ash trees with their strong and flexible timber were symbolic of a place's wellbeing and associated with healing, closely linked to water and wells (Source: Niall Mac Coitir "Irish Trees", Gill Books)



SUPERSTITION

I am not sure if it is just a cliché that Irish people are

particularly superstitious. But they take their fairy trees seriously and protect them under any circumstances. A fairy tree is usually an ash tree or hawthorn standing by itself in the middle of a field or on the side of the road. The blossoms of hawthorn trees stand for misfortune. Long after the tree's 'branding', science discovered that it contains the same chemical found in early stages of human tissue decay. Enough reason for misfortune, isn't it? (Source: YourIrish.com)



LEGENDS

In the old times when people couldn't explain certain things

scientifically, they invented stories to make sense of natural phenomena. Did St. Patrick really drive the snakes out of Ireland? Was it a giant who built the Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland? Probably not, but the (fairy) tales survived until today. Despite their supernatural elements, they reflect people's deepest emotions and concerns. That makes them such a valuable cultural asset. (Source: Fiona Biggs „Pocket Irish Legends“, Gill Books)



POSTER FAIRY

Nowadays they rather contribute to the merchandise industry

selling Ireland as the country of storytellers and Leprechauns. Whereas this is true, the leprechaun, on the other hand, has been adapted to fit the country's national colours. Instead of brown trousers and a red hat he is now wearing a bright green costume and a large green hat which sticks out in every souvenir shop. Originally Leprechauns were mischievous spirits and are quite nasty rather than friendly „tourism boosters“. However they know where the pot of gold is and if someone manages to catch a Leprechaun he becomes the righteous owner of the treasure. According to the legend Leprechauns are too smart to be captured. Hence the pot of gold is still hidden at the end of some rainbow.



WHO IS BAN(SHE)E?

...Is probably the question to ask if a female, ghostlike spirit

appeared outside your house screaming. The name Banshee derives from the Irish Bean-Sidhe and means *Faerie Woman*. Before she is seen, she is usually heard. People say her own death was so horrible that she is now watching over families and preparing them for their imminent bereavement of a loved one. She does that by a high-pitched wail. Some say the Banshee even helps the dying person to safely pass over to the other side. It sounds like a comforting way to leave this world (provided she has stopped shrieking by then). Without doubt a fascinating creature, but I would still prefer holding off on meeting her for another while. (Source: YourIrish.com)



FAKE NEWS

Having read and heard a few Irish legends, in my time in

Ireland, I see parallels to the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales or other traditional folk tales. They are often quite harsh and brutal. However they always have a deeper sense or carry an enlightening message. I think that a story, no matter how much truth is in it, needs an element of drama or even a shocking eye-opener in order to educate people or make them listen. Irish legends weren't purely invented to entertain people after all. This is how people learned about heroic deeds, things to avoid and how to respect nature. I guess I wouldn't be too far off comparing them to our modern daily news in regard to their truthfulness. Not everything is 100% true, but they resonate with people. What do you think?

How we found our Dream House in Ireland

Finding our dream house in Ireland was one of many *meant-to-be's* that happened to me since I had emigrated to Ireland in 2014. After [John and I got married](#) in May 2016, we slowly started keeping our eyes out for a new home. We bought a car, so we would be flexible to attend house viewings, and were aware we would need it once we moved out of Dublin City.

It was more or less coincidence that we ended up in Co. Wicklow, right by the sea and surrounded by the gorgeous [Wicklow Mountains](#). We had been looking for our dream house in a child-friendly environment and close enough to Dublin, but didn't have a specific location in mind. In hindsight we couldn't be happier with our choice. So here is our story of how we found our dream house in Ireland.



The Online House Search

For about a year I was looking for houses online. I set up alerts with the main [property search engines](#), specifying our budget and criteria. During that time we didn't attend any viewings as such, but just got a feel for what was out there. It became part of my daily routine to filter through viable offers and send on to John what I considered worth looking at. For me half the fun was daydreaming about remote cottages before discarding them as impractical when John came in with a reality check. Thanks to the extensive online research, we soon had a clear picture of what we wanted and above all, what we could afford. Now we just had to bring the two together.





Speed up the Process

Suddenly there was an urgency to move house when we found out that I was pregnant. Up to then there had been no pressure whatsoever, just the desire to leave busy Dublin and settle in a forever home somewhere quiet. In prospect of being a family of three soon, I was even more determined to speed up the process. Our two-bedroom apartment in Rathgar with the worn carpet and furniture had been acceptable for us as a couple, but was a no-go to live in with a baby.

When I got the alert that a bungalow was for sale in the attractive seaside town of Greystones and well within our budget, I was instantly hooked. Even more so when I saw the photos and its surroundings on Google maps. It almost looked too good to be true. A detached house with a spacious garden in vicinity of the commuter train to Dublin. What was the catch? I couldn't find any. Could that possibly be our dream house? I arranged a viewing for the next available date and for the first time in over a year our house hunt became tangible.

On the Journey to find our Dream House in Ireland

On a dull morning at the beginning of September 2016 we headed to County Wicklow for our first house viewing. Despite all the excitement and anticipation, we approached the appointment with low expectations. The house had already been on the market for quite a while and we were sure that there was a reason for it. We were about to find out. We were only starting out on our journey to find our dream house in Ireland after all and looking forward to some inspiring viewings. We were certainly not going to buy the first house we viewed. Or were we?



Mixed Feelings

The local real estate agent greeted us with a warm smile. He showed sympathy for we got lost on the narrow country roads, but implied that we would have to get used to it if we wanted to live out here. I liked the location and the outside of the house and couldn't wait to get inside. He led us into a spacious hallway that was filled with a strong smell of air freshener. As positive sensations go, we were not off to a good start. It rather gave me the impression that something needed to be covered up.

As the agent walked us from room to room, he was the only one talking. John and I took everything in silently. John had put on his poker face, so even I couldn't tell what he was thinking. The house had three bedrooms, most of them in urgent need of modernisation. The wood panelling in the living room and the turquoise appliances in the bathroom were obviously sins of the 1970's. The two fire places in the front and living room were rustic and cosmetic repairs were long over due all over the place. My hopes sank as we came towards the end of the viewing.

Putting our Heads together

I was dying to hear John's opinion when we finally got back to the car. Almost certain that John would see too many flaws with the house, disappointment was building up inside me. I had somewhat fallen in love with [the big palm tree in the front garden](#). The rooms, even though in neglected condition, were cosy and a decent size. The big windows let in lots of light and opened onto a gorgeous view of the ocean in the distance (even though it wasn't visible on that foggy day). The country kitchen with its dark beams, pots and pans dangling down from them, was exactly my style. I loved the cottagey feel as opposed to a modern open plan layout.

I was delighted and surprised to see a big smile on John's face once the real estate agent was out of sight. The whole time John had been walking through the house, picturing changes and running price negotiations in his head. He was as enamoured with the house as I was. Were we really going to own our dream house in Ireland soon?



Sealing the Deal

Somewhat shocked we realised that we were both in favour of buying the house. It wasn't perfect by far, but it was perfect for us. We never thought that we would find a detached house in a location like Greystones at a price we could afford. And here we were, on the verge of buying a property that provided all our must-haves and with lots of potential to change. The wrap-around garden was sizable and not overlooked by any neighbours. It had gorgeous plants and trees, as well as a little patio. It wasn't hard to picture children running and playing around in it.

And still, as we were sitting in a pub in Greystones town we were trying to talk ourselves out of buying the first house we viewed. What if our dream house was still out there? On the other hand, the bungalow met all our requirements and wishes – a kitchen with good cooking space; a bathroom with a tub; enough space for children and not too much if we only had one. There was no need to argue any longer. Our house search had come to an end before it really began. Before long John was punching numbers into his calculator and preparing the first bid for our dream house in Ireland.



Home sweet Home

When we moved into our new house on 12th December 2016, it didn't take us long to feel at home. It had been love at first sight and our gut feeling hadn't betrayed us. Despite all the work the house needed, we mostly saw the upsides of it. We would have the chance to transform it into our personal dream house, tackling one project after the other. But it already was our safe haven and most likely our forever home.

We still feel the same after having lived in it for eight years. Our three children have all been born into this house and value it as their beloved home as much as we do. We have definitely put our own stamp on it and will continue to do so in the future. Not once have we doubted or regretted our decision to buy this house. We are more than grateful that we were able to do so at the time and couldn't imagine a better home for our family.

House Prices in Ireland over the Years

When we bought our house in 2016, the average asking price for a 3 bed semi-detached house in Co. Wicklow was at €269,000. Compared to Co. Dublin with €314,000. The national average house price was €221,000, whereas Co. Longford came in lowest

with €65,000.

In 2019 the average house price in Co. Wicklow had risen to €322,000. Countrywide the average had climbed to €265,000, headed by Co. Dublin with €368,000. Co. Longford came last again with €96,750 which was still a remarkable increase in only three years (Source: myhome.ie).

In the second quarter of 2024 the average price for residential real estate in County Wicklow was €431,437. That makes it the priciest county in all of Ireland for buying real estate at that moment in time. Even Dublin City Centre came in lower at an average of €385,089. The lowest house prices are now in County Leitrim with an average of €198,869. House prices were about 0.6% higher in 2024 than at the peak of the Celtic Tiger in February 2007. (Source: statista.com).



First published 8th March 2020. Edited 10th December 2024.

How to become the Employee of the Month as a Stay-at-Home-

Mom

Numerous times I have been awarded Employee of the Month. It usually is a small ceremony. Few words, big emotions. Sometimes even tears. The last time I dressed up for the occasion but unfortunately someone spilled on my top. No big deal, it happens.

For the last two and a half years a young man has been managing the procedure. In September a sweet little lady joined the committee. Together they monitor me all day long and you never know what's going on in their heads. Sometimes I expect adoration and get shouted at. Other times for no reason at all I receive supportive smiles. They are harsh critics and they don't make a secret out of it. Their expectations are high and occasionally I struggle to meet them. I often have doubts that I am doing my job properly. The more surprised I am when I receive approval for my efforts.

The Challenge

The job itself is popular. Many people want to do it sooner or later. On the other hand you hear a lot of negative things about it. The job description sounds pretty straight forward at first. You'll find out soon enough though that you have to be flexible, able to improvise and multitask. Funny enough these are all skills that I didn't think I had. What I like about it is that I can work from home most of the time. That also means unfortunately that it is not 9 am to 5 pm.

When I took up the challenge in May 2017, I didn't have a clue what to expect. I thought I was well prepared, but in hindsight there was still a lot to worry about. I left my secure office job to jump into something completely new, which I didn't know if I wanted for the long term. Now I am glad that I had the courage to do it. I couldn't think of anything else that I would rather do. Of course there are days when I am fed

up with it all, but I had these in my old job too. So I definitely made the right decision.

More than a Job

By now I am quite passionate about my work and that really helps. Once you got into it, it is hard to go back to a job behind a desk. A very important part of my day-to-day tasks are the people I am dealing with. Different characters and sometimes even multiple personalities in one. This makes it prone to conflicts and it is on me to keep it all under control. This is something I really had to learn. I have always liked a structured and tidy working environment. And this isn't one. You are basically trying to keep the chaos to a minimum most of the time.

My shiny Award

Looks like I am one of those people myself who has a lot of negative things to say about this mysterious job. So I should mention at that stage that the reward I am getting makes all the stress and overtime worthwhile. And I presume it is also time to tell you what this 'Employee-of-the-Month thing' is all about if you haven't already guessed.

Instead of a gold-plated plaque to hang on the wall I receive colourful scribbles on paper. I get handcrafted cards with Thank-you-stamps and random animal stickers on it. Muddy little fingers bring me in daisys from the garden. I get cuddles and hugs, accompanied by heartwarming smiles and loud laughter. After a long day I am served 'homemade', imaginary meals. When I lie exhausted on the couch someone leans his tiny head against my shoulder without saying a word. With sparkling innocent eyes looking at me I get told "Mammy I love you". Then I know that I have the best job in the world and that for two little people I will always be the Employee of the Months. No shiny award needed.

How child-friendly is Ireland?

(This article is neither referring nor in any way related to the abortion debate. Please check out my blog post [Life is Life](#) on that topic.)

When I moved to Ireland about 4 1/2 years ago this question wasn't relevant to me. Now it is. Though it can no longer affect my decisions, as my little one runs around my feet as I write this. However I am still interested in the topic. In the following article I share my personal experience throughout and after my first pregnancy in Ireland. Starting with the medical care up to child-minding options. Hopefully my evaluation can be of use to those considering having children here. As well as for people with kids thinking about emigrating to Ireland. I am also interested to hear how others feel about parenthood in Ireland.

Medical Care during Pregnancy

The first thing that came to my mind when we were about to have a baby were child-minding costs. When I did a bit of research on that I was shocked. I knew straight away that having a child and pursuing my career at the same time were close to impossible. However I was only at the beginning of my pregnancy at that stage. All that mattered to me then was proper medical care.

I never had any worries about Ireland in regard to medical care. I also didn't know what to expect. I wasn't familiar

with the health care for mothers-to-be in my home country Germany either. Coincidentally a friend of mine in Germany was pregnant at the same time. Not only could we exchange our joys and fears, but also compare the quite different health systems.

Shared Maternity Care

Compared to Germany where your GP (gynaecologist) would look after you throughout the whole pregnancy, the maternity care in Ireland is divided between the GP and a maternity clinic of your choice. This has the upside that come D-day (delivery day), you are already familiar with the place where you are going to have your baby. Instead of just getting a show-around, you are in touch with the medical staff in the hospital and know where everything is. No harm in getting a hang of the “labyrinthal” floor plan well before the big day.

Well prepared, theoretically

At the time of my pregnancy I didn't have private health insurance. I could still avail of several public healthcare courses in preparation of birth and parenthood. Apart from the classic Antenatal Class (including a funny nappy challenge for the daddies-to-be), I took part in a physiotherapy course to hear all about the physical joys of childbirth. I felt like an expert myself afterwards. Well, in theory at least.

I was an absolute newbie when it came to small babies. I had never changed a nappy in my life nor minded kids when I was younger. My husband used to mind his nephews and had a clear advantage over me. Anyway, we both attended as many courses as we could. Why not take the opportunity when given.

I am not going to go into much more detail here. But I would like to point out how pleasantly surprised I was about the variety of classes provided by the hospital. From baby safety to alternative birth methods there was not a thing that wasn't covered in the programmes.

The Midwife is Part of the Deal

The midwife owns a huge part of the prenatal care in Ireland. I didn't have to find one myself (like in Germany) nor did I have to pay extra for her service. During the check-ups in the hospital everything discussed was neatly recorded and there was always enough time for questions to be answered. So even if it wasn't the same midwife every time, I always felt well looked after. I can't really say much about the midwife that was on duty the night I had our son. I am sure she was great, but my mind was kind of focussed on something else I am afraid.

Why reinvent the Wheel...

As soon as I was discharged from hospital, the regional health nurse was informed. She came to the house a couple of days later to check that the baby and I were doing well. She was very supportive. Easing our worries and helping us with questions. In addition to the home visits and being available over the phone, she held a weekly clinic. I proudly told my parents about this great institution they invented in Ireland. My mam smiled and said that they used to have exactly the same service in the GDR and she gladly availed of it as well when I was born. Unfortunately it is not available as standard in Germany anymore. I think this is something which should be reconsidered.

Support when needed

When I heard about a breastfeeding support group for the first time, I thought the name was a bit inappropriate. Support group to me sounded like something you need when you are in trouble. I couldn't possibly think how these two could go together. I know now. Though I was one of the lucky ones who didn't have any difficulties at all with breastfeeding.

I was also lucky that people made it easy for me and even in public I never felt uncomfortable breastfeeding or looked at

in a strange way. One time I had to feed in a mall and one of the shop owners brought me a glass of water. I still tell people about this thoughtful and kind gesture.

First Child, what now

I was convinced I wasn't the type for "mammy friendships". And for sure I wasn't going to have coffees after going for a walk in a convoy of baby buggies. Sure as hell I was never ever going to exchange recipes for sugar free baby muffins. I was wrong. I am now part of a nice and small group of mummies and their cute little babies. And yes, we do talk about healthy cooking and all the other stuff I thought I never would be interested in. As a stay-at-home parent our weekly meetings have become an important part of my life. And the same way it was recommended to me, I am going to pass it on to other mothers-to-be: Get out and build yourself a "mammy-network".

Clap Hands till Grumpy is gone...

I am not a morning person. I like to start my day slowly and above all quietly. Why on earth do all musical playgroups start before 10 in the morning? I should probably mention that our little one is not exactly a morning person either. We don't know if it is genetic or just rubbed off. Anyway, when I open the blinds before 8 a.m. all I get is a dissatisfied grunt. With the cuddly toy on his face to shield it from the incoming light, he rolls over in disbelief wondering what made me come in so early. He should know by now though that Thursday is playgroup time and we all have to make sacrifices to attend. At the latest when my mammy-friend and her always smiling daughter are waiting for us at the gate, we both overcome our morning grumpiness and are ready to clap along.

Let me entertain you

There are a good few playgroups and activities for kids of several age groups in our area. They are all focussed on community, meeting new people (and the kids each other of

course) as well as exchange of information (such as healthy cooking recipes). The organisers – some of them volunteers – are very enthusiastic and welcoming. I cannot speak for all of Ireland, but for what I know there is no shortage of mother and toddler activities. Not all of them are for free. Some of them can be rather expensive. In our neighbourhood it is the Church Parish and the town library that host activities for small or no money. Social media is probably the easiest way to find out what's on in which area. Alternatively, word of mouth (or should I say mothers) has never failed.

Horrendous Childcare Costs

Childcare is probably the most delicate topic when it comes to my initial question "How child-friendly is Ireland?" Only recently I read an article in The Irish Times titled ["High childcare costs keeping women out of workplace."](#) Indeed it is not worthwhile going back to work when the costs for full-time crèche are approximately €1000 per month. When I enquired about childcare when I was still pregnant the lowest offer I got was €950 a month. It came with a significant wait list. The most expensive one was €1650. Another 2 or 3 crèches were somewhere in between.

Career vs. Full-time Parenting

To us it became clear very quickly that I would put my career on hold whilst minding the baby. Apart from personal reasons it was financially and logistically absolutely not viable for me to go back to work. I think I am not an exception among women with a low or medium income. In order to drop off my child at the crèche and pick him up on time I would have needed to work less than full-time. The monthly ticket for the commute would come out of my already reduced salary. To be able to spend the little time left with my son, we might have hired a cleaner for the house – extra costs again. At the end of the month I would have worked for the childcare costs and some pocket money at the cost of being away from my son for

over 40 hours a week. To us this was a quite simple equation.

Demand for Cheaper Alternatives

However, some people might not want to give up their careers or simply need the extra money, no matter how little it may be. And obviously they want to know their child is in safe hands while they are working. I have heard quite a lot of grandparents or other family members taking over the role of a full-time carer for the child. Also au pairs and private childminders are a more reasonable alternative compared to a crèche. Nevertheless, it seems to become more and more obvious that women drop out of the workforce due to the above mentioned reasons.

It's getting (slightly) better

With older children, the financial outlook regarding childcare is slightly more positive. From 3 years of age children are entitled to a state-funded preschool place with the [ECCE programme](#). However it doesn't help the mother to re-integrate into work life since it only covers mornings from 9 am – 12. Whilst primary education starting at 4 or 5 years of age is free, there are costs that parents have to face during that time. The average cost for a primary school kid in 2018 is €830 per year (Source: [Zurich.ie](#)). For a child in secondary school an average annual cost of €1,495 has to be covered by the parents (Source: [Zurich.ie](#)).

Childcare or Caring for your Child?

I think we can all agree that the maternity support in Ireland is pretty decent. So Ireland ticks the box regarding child-friendliness in that regard. It looks slightly different when it comes to costs for childcare. Does that mean affordable childcare would make Ireland more child-friendly? I disagree. Me staying at home with our little one only has upsides for both of us. We get to spend precious time together. I am there for his first big milestones. I can teach him things the way I

want to. I can comfort him when he is upset. I think this is the best for our son. The first 3 years of his life, that are financially not worthwhile for me going back to work, are also the most significant in our child's development. To be there for him 100% during that time is pretty child-friendly, isn't it?

My Big Fat Irish Wedding

The story of our (not so) big fat Irish wedding is so outrageous that we don't want to wait until we can tell it to our grandchildren. We have shared it many times before and people stare at us in disbelief. And to stick with famous movie titles, it might as well have been "Two Weddings and a Funeral."



We're getting married!

But from the start. After we got engaged on our first anniversary it didn't take us long to work out when and how we wanted to get married. As soon as possible and low key. So we never actually planned to have a big fat Irish wedding, but a small intimate celebration with family and a few close friends. At that stage we thought that the biggest challenge was going to be to ship our guests over from Germany and America. Little did we know that this would be the easiest

part.

Finding a Location



Irish Weddings are huge events and people plan it long in advance. So we were aware that most wedding locations would be booked up pretty early. Therefore we had to find a place for our reception, before we could start filing the paper work with the Marriage Registration Office. On one of our weekend trips we discovered the [Conyngham Arms Hotel](#) in Slane by accident. We spontaneously spoke to the wedding coordinator and set the date for a rather modest Irish wedding: 7th May 2016.

Registration of Marriage

The day came – three months before our planned wedding date – when we were finally able to register our wedding. I had made sure I got all the required paperwork from Germany, translated and notarised. John brought a big pile of papers too, including his divorce certificate from America. The appointment with the registrar was swift and the many, rather redundant questions answered quickly. It took a couple of weeks before we received a reply. Our request to receive permission for getting married was denied.

It's still a No

We had already suspected something like that as the registrar mentioned an inconsistency in John's divorce papers. She didn't give us any guidance whatsoever what to do in order to

solve the issue. 'We would have to wait to hear back', was her response. So we did and sent in all the apparently missing details once we got the 'no'. That didn't help to receive the anticipated go-ahead either. On the contrary, more valuable time was wasted and we were left more confused than before.



Loosing precious Time and Money

We didn't have another choice but to consult a lawyer who specialised in foreign divorces. Her field of expertise was so rare and her office in one of the fanciest parts in Dublin, that we paid a fortune to even talk to her. At least she was confident that the issue would be resolved shortly and that we would be able to proceed with our wedding as planned.

Hopeful Anticipation

Meanwhile we had paid a large deposit to the hotel and booked accommodation for our oversea guests. The Conyngham Arms Hotel was just what I wanted, providing the country style and cosy feel, perfect for a traditional Irish wedding. Assured the lawyer would have it all sorted out (while massively eating into our wedding funds at the same time), I allowed myself to relax a little and to look forward to our big day.

Crushed Hopes



A call from our lawyer crushed my positive spirits. She told us that the courts had turned down the recognition of John's American divorce as she had forgotten to previously inform them about her approach. Whilst this was totally on her (and she

wouldn't charge us additionally), John would have to go to court again, in order to file for an *Irish* divorce this time. Not only were we running out of time in order to keep our wedding date, we also needed to involve John's ex wife this time.

Three Divorces and no Wedding

John hadn't spoken to his ex wife in over thirteen years at that stage. And whilst he was supposedly still married to her according to Irish law, she had re-married years ago as per my internet research. We didn't know whether we should laugh or cry about this absurd situation. But either way we were forced to play along and go through another divorce. Well not until we had paid for our and the ex wife's lawyer and she had thankfully signed the Irish divorce papers. The pinnacle of the farce was the court appearance where John had to answer whether there was a chance of reconciliation with his ex wife.

Change of Plans

At that stage it was unlikely that we were able to keep our planned wedding date. Of course we were devastated. To cut our financial losses, we cancelled the hotel as more expenses were about to be due. I felt so embarrassed to tell our family and friends, who had already booked their flights and had obviously been looking forward to our wedding too. Luckily most of our guests were understanding and agreed to come over anyway. Hence we picked ourselves up and organised a coach tour and pub dinner to make up for our busted wedding. We

figured if we showed everybody the lovely [Dublin](#) & [Wicklow Mountains](#) and treated them to a dinner in [Johnnie Fox's](#) they would come back to celebrate a proper Irish wedding on the second attempt.



Again it came differently. About one week before our original wedding date, the Irish divorce was officially through. Too late to obtain the Marriage Registration Form, let alone to re-arrange the hotel reception. But our local priest, who had been sympathetic and supportive all the way through, offered to give us the Sacrament of Marriage regardless. Not knowing when we would have our dearest from far away over again, we decided to go for it. Even though it meant to wave goodbye to our conventional Irish wedding as intended. Thus three days before 7th May and with guests arriving already, we were back in the wedding game.

Spontaneous, Chaotic, Authentic



With three days to re-organise our wedding, options were

limited. And with my emotions all over the place I could hardly focus on flower arrangements, or getting my hair and nails done. Nonetheless I was happy being able to get married to John after all. Our tiny apartments in Rathgar were busy like beehives on the days before our wedding. Everybody helped where they could and shone with their secret talents. My sister looked after the flower arrangements for the church and saved my botched wedding bouquet last minute. A friend did my nails and tried out a few hairstyles. John's best man and his wife helped him to pick out a rental suit and buy snacks for our coach tour after the ceremony. My parents tied up some loose ends and entertained the guests away from the chaos. We couldn't have asked for better wedding gifts.

The Morning Of



Our wedding day didn't start out great. I woke on a wobbly airbed with the rain drumming against the window. There were suitcases, clothes and provisional beds spread out all over our two apartments. My wedding dress was hanging down from the curtain rail. I didn't care that I wasn't in a fancy hotel room. Neither did I mind that I was going to do my own make-up in my scruffy little bathroom. I wasn't even upset about the weather as John had sent me a lovely text earlier on. "Look out, God is washing the earth for us" it read and made me smile. I was definitely marrying the right man. And I was

ready to be a bride. Well, almost. My two unofficial bridesmaids kept me on schedule as I was getting ready, excitedly maneuvering through the cramped space. We had a great laugh and a lot of precious moments despite the chaos. Nothing was staged or forced, everything had a natural, though chaotic, flow to it. By the time I squeezed myself into my sister's tiny rental car* for the short drive to church, I was surprisingly calm. (*The Vintage Car John had originally booked blew its engine a few days earlier. Nothing surprised me at that stage.)

Our not so big fat Irish Wedding



The moment my Dad walked me down the aisle, I didn't think about all the stress and worries of the past few months or the day ahead. I focused on John, standing tall in front of the altar, looking at me with love. Two amazing ladies were singing the songs we had picked during mass a long time ago. It was just perfect! Our priest did a fantastic job with the ceremony and a friend spontaneously helped translating it into German.

As we left the church, our tour coach was waiting to take us to [Glendalough](#) in the Wicklow Mountains. But instead of rain jackets and hiking boots we obviously had dresses, suits and high heels. John had already loaded the snacks and drinks to tide people over until the pub dinner. We held our "wedding

reception" in Sally Gap, one of the most scenic places in the country. Toasting with plastic champagne flutes, and sharing Supermarket sandwiches.



Best Day Ever

The sky was wild and it was breezy. And while messing up my hair, nothing could have ruined that day for me. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves and took our supposedly traditional Irish wedding with humour. My Dad gave a speech, standing on a big rock like a Celtic king, summing up all the mixed emotions which he had been displaying in a heartwarming way all morning.

We went on to the monastery site of Glendalough and had our wedding photographs taken (luckily the photographer had still been available). The cloudy sky was the perfect backdrop and resulted in magnificent pictures. The bus ride to [Johnnie Fox's Pub](#) was cheerful. Everybody enjoyed the stunning views of the Wicklow and Dublin mountains and a few drinks on the way. Upon arrival at the pub I got a fantastic welcome and standing ovations from the crowds. It was apparently a bit of an attraction to celebrate an Irish wedding amidst a regular Saturday pub crowd.

Perfect Little Irish Wedding

The dinner as the main part of our celebrations was very much to our liking. Everybody ordered what they wanted instead of having a set formal menu like in the hotel. We had a lovely snug which gave us full privacy for John to deliver a touching speech, honouring me for bringing out the best in him. We were grateful for the casual setting and the people who were part of it. In hindsight it was much better than if we had tried to pull off a traditional Irish wedding with cake cutting and couple games.

The Promise

Not only did we promise everlasting love to each other on 7th May 2016, we also made a promise to our priest. We gave him our word that we would follow through with the civil marriage as soon as possible. We will forever be thankful to our priest that he was putting all his trust in us, and taking the risk of marrying us without the official go-ahead from the state. When we eventually faced the Marriage Registrar again she was visibly nervous, remembering our case well. Maybe she knew that she could have saved us a lot of trouble if she had told us straight out what was wrong with our papers. Instead she had chosen to leave us in the dark, and was now facing a still very resentful couple.

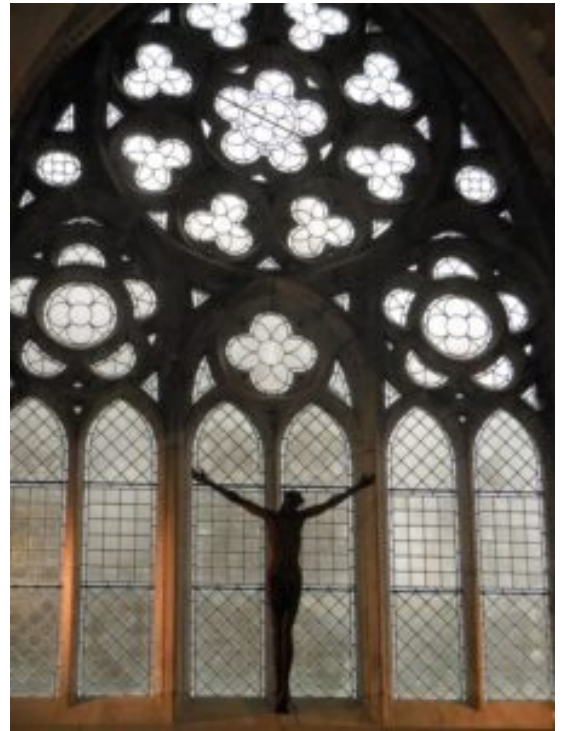
We civilly married almost a year after our church wedding. It was not more than signing a contract in a dull, plain proceeding. No religious music or any references to faith allowed. Unless for official matters, we don't recognise this as our wedding day. It will always be 7th May 2016 when we celebrated our perfect Irish wedding after three divorces and luckily no funeral.



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Considering Faith

I am not a person of faith. Or am I? Is there not a bit of spirituality or the longing for something deeper and more meaningful in all of us? But it is safe to say that I am not a religious person. Born in the communist GDR, my parents raised my sister and me as cultural Christians at most. Whilst they were baptised Lutherans themselves, they didn't raise us as such. We only learned about religion from a historic point of view and during the annual visit to Christmas mass.



It was somewhat acceptable to talk about 'fate', or 'things that were meant to be'. But considering a God, who guides us on our path, remained an alien concept to me. As a teenager I even directed my anger over things that were wrong with the world at the church and God, who I didn't believe in. Why wasn't He able to fix everything if this was all true?

Faith vs. Doubt

But wouldn't it be easier to know that there was a path you are meant to follow, and someone you can give your sorrows to rather than resentfully holding on to them yourself? Is it delusional wanting to rely on a Higher Power instead of doing everything by your own strength? What if there was a God you could turn to for hope and guidance? Or to thank for achievements and positive turns in your life?

I have been pondering that a lot lately, looking back on struggles in my life that had me desperate, but were

ultimately for my own good. On things that fell into place effortlessly, and others that were prevented despite my hard trying. Has there been a plan for me all along and the closer I follow it, the happier I am? And the further I stray the more it hurts me?

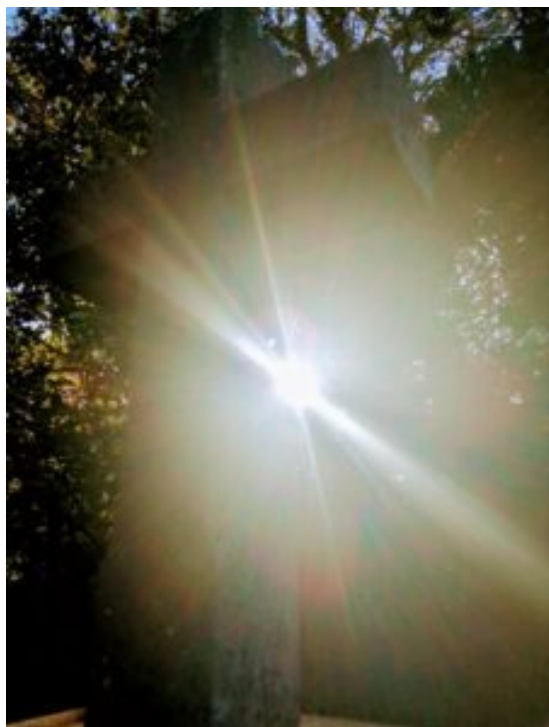


Believe or not?

An atheist friend of mine once implied that relying on God is a weakness. She says it somehow makes you a bystander to your own life, not taking matters into your own hands. But the more I think about it, the more I disagree. The existence of God doesn't take away from the fact that I followed through with [emigrating to Ireland](#). That I happened to decide for the right apartment where I would soon after meet my future husband. It doesn't diminish my success of moving on to a better paid job within a few months of getting to Ireland. Only because God puts the right players on the board at the right time, doesn't make me a puppet to my fate. I am still the one who sits at the steering wheel.

I am beginning to think I must have some divine intervention considering how well things are going for me in Ireland. And whilst I am not there yet to say I believe in God, I am also starting to doubt it is me alone who makes things add up.

Spiritual Beginner meets devout Catholic



Me considering faith didn't just start out of the blue. Religion slipped into my day-to-day life when I miraculously met my now husband shortly after I moved to Dublin. Or was that part of 'the plan' too? Anyway, he is a devout Catholic and openly practices his faith. We started going to weekly mass together which was more like Sunday school to me, learning the basics of religion.

I envy him for how much he is getting out of his faith. For the strength he draws from it and the peace that comes with it. He on the other hand envies me for my natural spirituality, as he calls it, that has led me up to the point in my life where I am now. It helped me overcome the worst crisis in my life, make life-altering decisions, and trust my instinct during times of little support. I would have called it following my gut feeling, female intuition, listening to my conscience – anything, but God.

Faith doesn't come over night

What started out as spending more time with my husband going to church has become a spiritual journey for me. Being open to

his faith for the sake of our relationship made me query my prejudices towards faith in general. The exposure to religion in such an organic way was what I needed to slowly approach it on my own terms. Away from my preconceived ideas and with a physical distance to the non-religious environment of my upbringing. With each mass comes more clarity, but also many more questions that I yet have to find answers to. It leads my husband and me into a religious discourse every time, leaving both of us spiritually richer than before.



Half way there

[Our wedding](#) took place in a Catholic church. The [Three Patrons Church in Rathgar](#) where my spiritual journey started, so to speak. When we decided to get married, there was no doubt that the ceremony was going to be Catholic. Partly because I knew how important it was to my soon-to-be husband. And partly because my 'gut feeling' told me it was the right thing to do. Maybe I am further along on my spiritual path than I am aware of. And maybe it is time to abandon my old ways of thinking and replace them with new ones. They might turn out to be in line with the Catholic faith. God knows...

First published 13th June 2017. Edited 21st March 2025.

Need or Greed? Mass Tourism in Ireland



Two news articles caught my attention and slightly bothered me as a tourism professional living in Ireland:

“According to a survey of the US Magazine Condé Nast Traveler, Dublin was voted 3rd and Galway 6th friendliest city in the world.” (Source: Tourism Ireland, Press Release, August 2016)

“According to the Hotel Reservation Provider HRS, Dublin is the 2nd most expensive place in Europe with regard to accommodation. The average room rate was given with €188 per night which is reflecting the continuously growing demand.” (Source: [Irish Times](#))

Visitor numbers in the first half of 2016 have increased by 14% compared to the same period in 2015. This is an increase of 420.000 within 6 months. (Source: Tourism Ireland, SOAR July 2016.) It is an achievement to be proud of indeed. The economy is back and the recession finally seems to be over.

So why am I concerned?

Every travel workshop I attend, I hear about the latest positive developments in Irish tourism. Industry partners are patting each other on the back, cheering to the upwards trend. Rightly so, as it is their hard work and apparently good marketing that brings more and more visitors to the Green Isle every year. And whilst I am part of this proud crowd, promoting travel to Ireland, I also have my concerns. First and foremost, I am too selfish to share my country of choice with large numbers of tourists, queuing at my favourite places during the summer.

And where are these extra guests are going to stay anyway? Whilst everybody seems to be celebrating increasing visitor numbers, accommodation is limited and already at a record high in cost. We live on an island after all with a limited infrastructure. Of course we can build more hotels, open more visitor centres, invent more exciting attractions to please the rising figures in 2017. But that is exactly what I am concerned about. An unproportionally growing infrastructure solely to accommodate mass tourism in Ireland.



Higher, Faster, Further

I somehow feel like I am in a time loop. Does that not all sound familiar and very much like the construction mania during the Celtic Tiger? Blinded by a potential gain, reasoning seems to go out the window in many places. That makes me think no lesson was learnt during the barely overcome

crash of 2008 and its aftermath. There are still unfinished housing estates lying derelict while plans for new hotel developments are already being made again. Whilst demand is high and supply needed, building inconsiderably left, right, and centre is not my idea of a solution.



Pressure from both sides

Lately I am experiencing a very unpleasant shift in the group travel sector that I have been working in for years. The usually positive and very cooperative industry has become a daily struggle with long established business partners and suppliers over availability and fair prices.

Clients on the other hand are extremely price conscious, looking for an authentic Ireland experience at minimum costs. I am more and more disheartened in my job of promoting Ireland as a travel destination, and compromising on quality or service all the time. I find it extremely tiring being under pressure from both sides. This way I am not able to show people the real beauty of Ireland as I have come to experience it, nor to sustain positive working relationships with fellow tourism providers.

What Ireland is about

Despite poor quality food and mass tourism in group hotels, visitor numbers to Ireland are sky-rocketing. The country is ranking high in friendliness and hospitality. So nothing has

changed, has it? My husband, born and bred in Dublin, believes otherwise. "People hardly engage in chit-chats in shops anymore or have time for a bit of a banter in the streets", he finds.



Everything has become so fast-paced and even I roll my eyes when people are taking too long at the check-out in the shop. The other day a woman almost fainted on the bus and got off at the next stop. No one – including myself – felt obliged to assist her. Especially in Dublin, crowds are rushing past each other, head down, ear phones in. Definitely not the positive vibes and easy-going lifestyle the Irish are known for. And after only a few years of living in Ireland, I might have become part of this homogeneous mass of Dubliners minding their own business myself. Surely this not how the Irish capital defends its title as 3rd friendliest city in the world.

Not what I came for, this is why I leave



I still appreciate the Irish way of life. Otherwise I wouldn't have [moved here three years ago](#). And because Ireland is going to be my forever home, I feel our 'relationship' can handle some criticism. And whilst I do enjoy the cosmopolitan atmosphere in Dublin and all the hustle and bustle, I prefer rural Ireland whenever I want to experience true "Irishness".

Mass tourism is not an appropriate way of exploring Ireland. To travel Ireland you need time. Time to stop in places that originally weren't on your itinerary. Time to make alternative plans in case the rain does not stop for days. You need time to talk to locals, and to listen to their stories.

Mass tourism might show you the iconic sites of Ireland. It will give you a staged synopsis of food, culture and tradition in a dense time frame. It is in line with the restless crowds I described above, that don't have time or don't want to take a closer look. But it is not the way to get to know Ireland for what it really has to offer. I truly hope the country won't destroy its real assets and attractions in order to gain from the short-lived mass tourism trend.

Either way I won't be part of the industry anymore. Partly because of what I wrote about in this article. But mainly because I am expecting our first child and will be focusing on a different chapter in my life.

First published 25th January 2017. Edited 11th March 2025.

Why Ireland? An Emigration Story

When I emigrated to Ireland, I mainly got two types of responses:

1. Why Ireland? Can you not go to Spain where it is warm?
2. Wow Ireland! Green Hills and sheep everywhere.

And indeed, I could have easily ended up in Spain where I lived as a student and loved it! Although neither in Santiago de Compostela, where I spent 3 months working with the Pilgrim's Office, nor in Salamanca where I studied for 6 months, was it all that warm. Both cities had a great vibe. They are full of history, magnificent buildings and were perfect for enjoying the delicious Spanish food and Tapas Bars. And I am the "mañana type of person", preferring late nights over early mornings. So how did end up in Ireland and not Spain?



Why Ireland – Pro and Con List

After a close analysis I actually asked myself why Ireland had won over Spain. According to my very rational pro and con

list, I should be sitting in some Plaza on the Iberian peninsula, sipping affordable wine rather than overpriced Bulmers in a pub. Why Ireland when on paper Spain seemed so much more suitable for me?

My question was partly answered during my approach to Dublin on the plane. I had a clear view of the Peninsula of Howth, with its distinct lighthouse and the small, rocky island "Ireland's Eye". It lay there, as it had each time I came to visit. Watching Ireland draw me in over the years. The minute I spotted it from the air, my heart began beating faster and I felt a warmth inside of me. This time I wasn't here as a visitor. I was starting my biggest adventure. And still, it already felt like coming home. Mentally I tossed my pro and con list which contained nothing but facts and embraced the new start in my country of choice.



First steps in the heart of Dublin

The bus ride from the airport to the city centre was familiar. When I came to Dublin the first time in 2008, I lived in Ballymun in the North of the city and had taken pretty much the same journey every day for six months on my commute into town. I used to love sitting on the bus in the morning, still sleepy, seeing the very different parts of the city pass by.

There was the rough and industrial neighbourhood of Ballymun with derelict estates at the time, followed by the gorgeous red brick buildings of Glasnevin and Drumcondra. Dublin with its many sides, condensed into a one and a half hour bus journey through slow moving traffic.

The journey into the city centre was going to be long too today. But I had taken the 16 for a reason instead of the Airport Express Coach. The rattling of coins when people dropped their bus fare into the slot beside the driver's cabin brought me right back. I was looking forward to hearing the Irish accent around me, which definitely would be on my pro list, if I still had one. Winding through Dublin's suburbs, with a million stops on the way, was exactly what I wanted today.



The bus left me off at O'Connell Street, the main artery of the northern inner city. When I stood there with my two suitcases, I paused for a moment to take in the hustle and bustle. Tourists in rain jackets and hiking boots, with big cameras, rushing past. The faint guitar sound of a street

musician, a language cacophony from the Hop-on Hop-off busses. I felt excited and overwhelmed at the same time. I was finally here, with all my belongings that I needed for my fresh start in Dublin. For so long I had been dreaming of [emigrating to Ireland](#) and on this New Year's Day in 2014, I made it come true.

Fond Memories vs. Reality

There was no guarantee this was going to work out. I had a job secured and some savings, but other than that just my euphoric memories from student days. Fond recollections of nights

danced away in [Whelan's](#), often accompanied by way too many pints of apple cider. Road trips all over the island, taking in Ireland's remotest spots and beautiful scenery. Memories of joyful after work drinks in Ireland's oldest pub, the [Brazen Head Pub](#), right beside the office where I did my placement. All these memories were connected to people I shared those experiences with, above all four German girls who became friends for life.



But now I was here on my own. And whilst my gut told me I had made the right decision, there was also the fear of failure. A bit of me wanted to prove to my family that I could make it, despite the risk I was taking, leaving my established life in Hamburg behind.

My German Dublin Girls had always predicted that I was going to end up back in Ireland, marrying a shepherd, and [living in a cottage by the Sea](#) with lots of red-headed babies. Whilst this was just a joke between us, I would have loved to see it come true. Or at least some version of it.

Not a Tourist anymore



Well, for now I wasn't *all* by myself. Two of my friends from Hamburg had accompanied me for moral support. I envied them when they left our hotel the next morning to go sightseeing, whilst I hunkered down on the bed, nervously calling around in

search of an affordable apartment.

How much would I have preferred roaming touristy Dublin together, which wasn't too busy at that time of year. And probably one of few cities not covered in residues from New Year's Eve, as private fireworks and drinking in the streets were not allowed in Ireland. Something that would go on my pro list, now that I was not here as a tourist or student anymore.



That morning I would have gladly mingled with the tourists in Temple Bar though. I didn't care it was Dublin's tourist trap with rip off prices for a pint. For me it was laced with memories of countless nights out, live music and great craic. Irish musicians with their sense of easiness, playing familiar tunes and spreading good vibes. In a way I wanted to treasure those memories, keep them pristine. On the other hand I couldn't wait to experience it all anew. Sadly for now, it was all about finding a place to live or my adventure would be over before it began.

Just a Feeling

The answer to "why Ireland" remains a complex one. The feeling I get – and always have when I returned to Ireland – can't be reduced to a simple pro and con list. Like with a new love, the initial magic of gorgeous green hills and cute sheep will fade. It is a deep sense of belonging that makes a relationship sustainable. What I found in Ireland completed my life like a missing piece of a jigsaw. I spread my wings and found new roots.



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