

# 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](https://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](https://statista.com)).



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# 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 hind sight 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 decsion.

## **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.

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## 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?

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# **Vacation with a One-Year Old**

## **Bye bye Spontaneity, Hello Planning**

Planning our first summer vacation with a one-year old was a new experience for me. I was never exactly a globetrotter, but

travelling to me had always been adventurous rather than luxurious. I preferred a tent over a Spa hotel and cycle tours over long haul plane trips. Pre-booking was rare as I enjoyed waking up in the morning, curious to where the journey would lead me. Admittedly, I am not a very spontaneous person, but on vacation a loose plan was the way to go.

Not when you are going on vacation with a one-year old. Being organised and well prepared became inevitable. Wanting to combine our family vacation with visiting my family in Germany narrowed down our choices. And whilst the prospect of free childminders was tempting, we wanted to spend some time on our own too.



## New Territory 'Package Holiday'

Before we became parents, we stayed well clear of package holidays and above all places with kids entertainment. That had changed now that we were planning our first vacation with a one-year old. Browsing through offers, I still felt myself drawn to charming, quiet places. But my husband John pointed out that we should opt for something with plenty of family outdoor and indoor activities. Self-catering was a must as we were going to be confined to our room after baby's bedtime.

We settled for a holiday village at the [Lakelands Mecklenburgische Seenplatte](#), about two hours North of Berlin. To my delight it *did* look quite charming for a family resort.

And it came with all the amenities we had been looking for. It was also not too far from the airport and my parents' house, promising manageable travel times. Last but not least it was set in a gorgeous nature reserve with an abundance of sightseeing and day trip opportunities.



## From Backpacking to Bag-packing

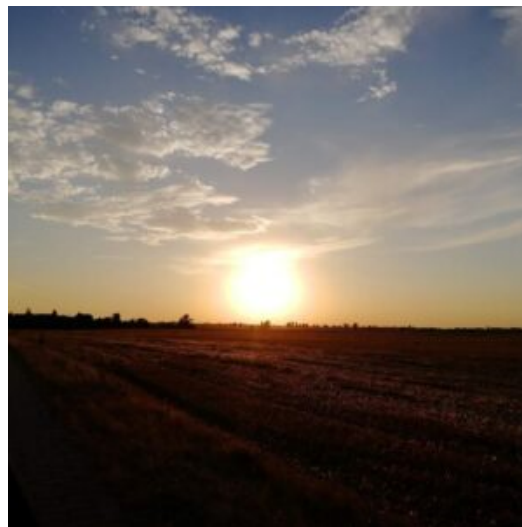
Travelling light had always been my forte. I took pride in requiring very few clothes on vacation and even more in my skill to pack them like a Tetris master. So whilst *I* was absolutely fine with a small suitcase for two weeks, I needed twice the space for our little one. Running through our daily routine in my head helped me to work out what to bring on our first vacation with a one-year old. Knowing I was able to wash stuff in my parents' house put my mind at ease. And the fact that John said "There is nothing we can't buy in Germany". Sometimes that is all it takes to stop a mother's irrational thoughts from racing.

## Time to Relax

When we arrived at the [Dorfhof Fleesensee](#) (now BEECH Resort), our expectations were even exceeded. They truly knew how to cater for families and make a stressed out mom on her first vacation with a one-year old welcome. As we pulled our luggage plus child in a handcart across the compound, we spotted lots of things to entertain kids. After a spin on the



little merry-go-round we checked into our bright and friendly apartment. I was delighted to see that the set up suited us perfectly and I was looking forward to the week ahead. Afterwards we took a stroll to the sun terrace and enjoyed a cocktail as the perfect start to our summer holiday.



## Who let the Cow Out

At the breakfast buffet was the first time we got a feel for what it was like to be on a package holiday with kids entertainment. A massive dancing cow entered the breakfast room, with a bunch of kids in tow. It resonated with our little one though as he started wiggling excitedly in his high chair. Whilst we devoured all the gorgeous breakfast items, mostly aimed at kids, the cow mascot, singing jolly children's songs, came as a minor shock. However we knew what we had

signed up for and seeing our baby happy was a win onto itself. Welcome to family vacation with a one-year old.



## Childminding included

After a couple of days of settling in, we couldn't wait to try the free childminding service. At fourteen months our baby had never stayed with anyone else before. Not used to grandparents around or any type of childminding, we weren't sure how this was going to go. But we were dying for some couple time and planned to go to the attached Pool & Spa one morning. The Kids Club was a lovely space, located in a lighthouse with a huge indoor area and an outdoor playground. It was quiet that day and we got a one-on-one minding service by a lovely young woman. Junior immediately engaged with the colourful environment and we managed to sneak out for as long as three hours! Good we made the most of it as this was all we got. The rest of the vacation he obviously wanted to spend as a family.



## An Unlucky Break

Apart from looking forward to a change of scenery, we had been anticipating high temperatures and loads of sunshine which we normally wouldn't get back home in Ireland. Of course, now that we were away, Ireland was suffering an unprecedented heatwave with hose bans all over the place. That wouldn't have bothered us, if we had gotten some of that lovely heat over in Germany, too. Here on the other hand, everybody was welcoming the intense rain showers which the dry soil so desperately needed. Bad timing for us I guess.

So with the beautiful Lake Fleesensee right at our doorstep, we didn't get a single day to take advantage of the shallow warm water and sandy beaches. Even though there was plenty of stuff to do, I had seen us going down to the lake every day. I would have loved to take a boat trip and John was dying to do some watersport activities. Nevertheless, we had a great time, doing excursions into the surroundings or just chilling out at the Dorfhotel. We were so used to finding our way around bad weather after all.

## The Man Who invented the Potatoes



On our way to my parents' house I wanted to take the opportunity to show John some more of my home country. Passing by Potsdam, I decided that the [Palace of Sanssouci](#) was definitely worth a little detour. My parents had always brought my sister and I when we had visitors from abroad and

now I was going to show it to my Irish family. Proud I had come up with the perfect sightseeing stop, we pulled into the busy car park at Sanssouci. Since we had left the Dorfhotel that morning, the sun was back to splitting the stones. Great, formal terraced gardens with not a single place of shade in thirty degrees.

Anyway, the beauty of Sanssouci captured us instantly. Totally comprehensible why they called it 'sans-souci' which means "without a worry" in French. That was basically all I remembered about its history, obviously very little to impress my inquisitive husband. At least I was able to point him to Frederick the Great's grave that was covered in potatoes. But when he asked me why they were there, all I could come up with was, because he had invented them. It gave us both a great laugh, but was not exactly speaking for my skills as a tour guide. (Read the story about the 'Potato King' [here](#).)



## Shift of Priorities

But who expects you to catch up on local history before a family vacation with a one-year old? Priorities totally shifted for me when travelling as a mother. Whereas my preparations used to focus on what places to visit, it was now all about how most conveniently to get there. Rather than bringing a guide book on the plane, I was making sure I had enough snacks and things to entertain the baby. However our first vacation as a family of three was a success. We even got another chance for a date night at my parents'. And whilst I had the same proud feeling showing my husband around my



hometown [Torgau](#), I skipped the tour guiding part and we settled for a nice dinner and drinks by the river Elbe instead.



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## Dublin's Beautiful Beaches...

### ...and what they mean to me

Well before I was roaming Dublin's beautiful beaches, I ended up living by the water many times. Growing up over four hours away from the nearest sea, it was a privilege attending university with the Baltic Sea at my doorstep. Living in Hamburg afterwards, by the mouth of the river Elbe, and so close to the North Sea was another significant period in my life. A coincidence each time, like my journey that eventually



brought me to Ireland.

## **The Beach that changed my Life**

I remember sitting in a hotel room in Dublin on the October bank holiday weekend. That was usually reserved for meeting up with my Dublin girls who I had met when I came to Ireland for the first time in 2008 for a 6-months internship. The five of us had hit it off straight away and had spent the time of our lives together in Dublin. What would have been the fifth anniversary of our reunion, didn't happen for various reasons.



But I needed my annual Ireland fix and had taken the trip on my own. That morning in the hotel room I hit a low, wallowing in self-pity over our busted get-together. I had wandered the city plenty over the past few days and didn't fancy another stroll through drizzly Dublin.

But I certainly did not want to waste my precious last hours in Ireland in a hotel room. Hence I gave myself a kick in the butt and jumped on the Dart before I could talk myself out of it.

## **No turning back**

It only took minutes on the train before the scenery changed

from busy office fronts to the most amazing beach promenade. Even in the mist and with the rain drumming against the window, it was beautiful. The last time I had been to Killiney Beach, it was warm and sunny, nothing like this day. But still, the prospect of the fresh sea breeze lifted my spirit. I was a bit reluctant to step off the train and into the dampness, but I was here now and nobody else seemed to be. The beach was absolutely deserted and I stood sheltered for a moment, watching the choppy ocean. 'No turning back now', I thought to myself, not knowing how symbolic this would become for the walk.



For by the end of it the seed of moving to Ireland had been planted. It didn't need a pleasant, lighthearted experience surrounded by friends. Just me, out there in inhospitable conditions, on the verge of loneliness, to show me that I can do it. I could emigrate to Ireland and be happy, despite rough waters and in the pourings of rain. All I needed was a kick in the butt.

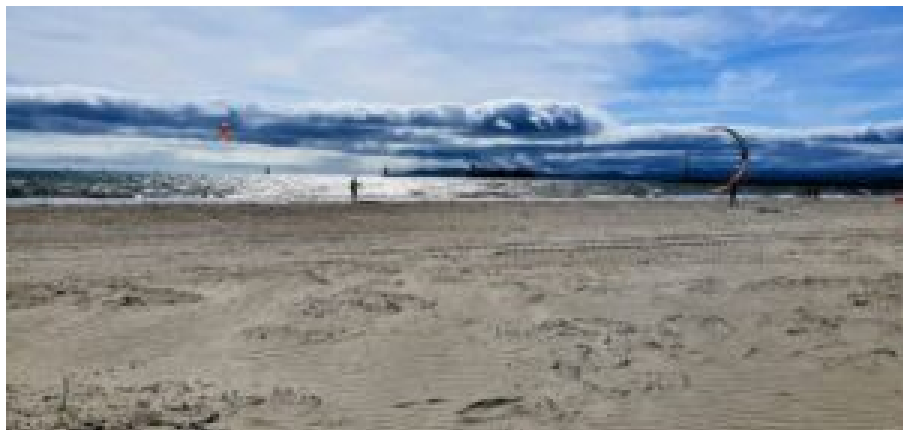
## **Collecting Shells and Memories**

It didn't take me long to put my plan into action. Back home I applied for just one job in Dublin. Two weeks later I flew over for an interview. And by November I had decided that I was going to leave Germany for good and follow my heart to Ireland. As all new beginnings it was challenging. But once I was in Ireland, everything fell into place. And here I was again, exploring Dublin's beautiful beaches once more.



One of the first beach memories I made as an expat in Ireland was my visit to North Bull Island. Together with a friend I met on my first day in work, I walked the small peninsula in the north of Dublin City. Wrapped up against the icy wind, it was one of those autumn walks that I will treasure forever. And North Bull is a true treasure island indeed. Never in my life have I seen more, bigger and prettier shells than there. I just couldn't resist stuffing my pockets until they were hanging down, heavy with shells and dripping wet. Against the

backdrop of the ferry slowly pulling into the harbour, surfers on the water, and kites in the sky, one of my favourites amongst Dublin's beautiful beaches.



## My Slightly Different Hen Party

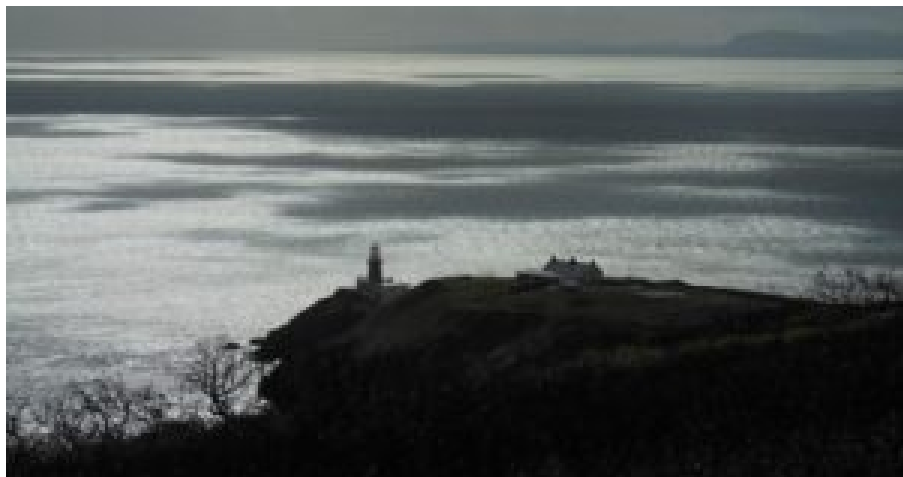
Within the first year in Ireland, I found happiness. An unexpected step up the career ladder secured my future in expensive Dublin. And even before that I met my soon-to-be husband. We got engaged on our first anniversary and started [planning our wedding](#) soon after. With friends and family coming over from Germany and America, we wanted to show them some of our favourite spots, including Dublin's beautiful beaches. [Howth](#) already held a good few memories for me from previous visits. So we picked the peninsula with its gorgeous seafood restaurants for our rehearsal dinner. Up to then nothing had gone according to plan with our wedding. But the lovely meal in Howth, surrounded by our dearest, helped us to centre ourselves for the big day ahead.





After dinner we rushed up to the Summit with its lighthouse at the tip of the headland, before it disappeared in the dusk. Enjoying one of the most scenic views in Ireland with a good friend by my side was a worthy ending to a wonderful evening. I was bursting with emotions. Excited about getting married the very next day. Nervous what else might go wrong. Proud to have family and friends over to show them my home of choice. And joyful over the turn my life had taken within a few months. "Welcome to your belated hen party, my dear", my friend said as she was giving me a tight hug.





## A New Year's Day Tradition

Sandymount is another one of Dublin's beautiful beaches and an iconic one too. At least its two [red and white chimneys](#) are as a substantial part of Dublin's skyline and landmark. Ever since my husband John and I got our feet soaked in ice-cold water on New Year's Day, Sandymount found a place in our memory lane. It was great fun walking through squishy sand, jumping puddles and trickles once the tide was out. But we didn't notice the water slowly creeping up on us. Reluctantly I took off my winter boots and cosy socks as John was already wading through freezing water, laughing.





The photograph of our bare feet on Sandymount Beach on our first New Year's Day together became a well treasured one. So much that we went back on 1st January 2024, re-creating it with the additional feet we had grown in the meantime. Not surrounded by water this time, I was even more hesitant to expose my feet to the wet and cold. But it was worth it for having a keepsake of *that* day on Sandymount Beach too. More aware of the danger of the incoming tide this time, we safely got off the beach. Just in time to watch a coast guard helicopter coming in, and scooping up a family who had not been that lucky.





## **An Abundance of Beaches**

Of course there are many more beautiful beaches in and around Dublin. Portmarnock for example where I have watched spectacular sunsets. Forty Foot in Sandycove is probably the most popular spot for swimming in the Dublin Bay, and the Martello Tower with the James Joyce Museum worth a visit. Skerries in the north of Dublin is great for walks along the promenade, with its little harbour and plenty of cafes and restaurants.

We live in Wicklow now and I can't wait to write about my favourite beaches there. Email me or leave a comment about your favourite beach in Dublin. And subscribe to my Blog for

more personal stories and travel tips!

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# 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: 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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 7<sup>th</sup> 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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