

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



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.

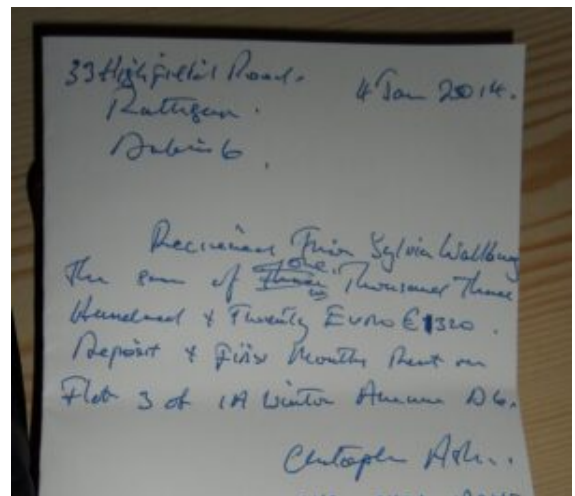
I also lived in Spain for some time. And whilst I am a big fan of the country, language and culture, I learned that there were certain traits and customs I wouldn’t want to get used to. If I had only been vacationing in Santiago de Compostela or Salamanca, I would have returned in a heartbeat. No matter 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.

