

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



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.

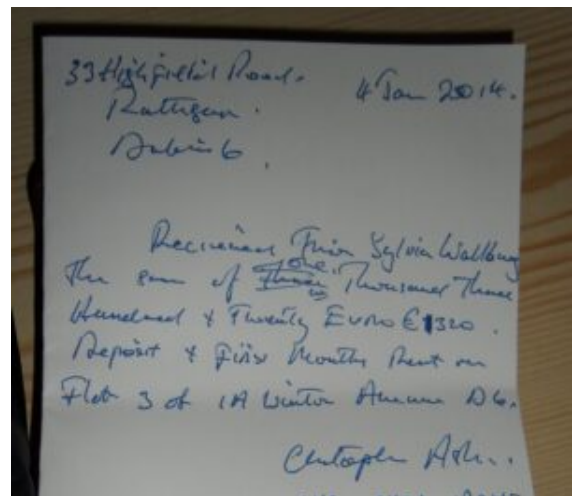
I also lived in Spain for some time. And whilst I am a big fan of the country, language and culture, I learned that there were certain traits and customs I wouldn't want to get used to. If I had only been vacationing in Santiago de Compostela or Salamanca, I would have returned in a heartbeat. No matter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



©1-3 Violine Deane, 4: Anke Marquardt

Of course writing is art. At least when you write like Paul Coelho. Would I consider myself an artist writing an Ireland Blog and running a little journalistic project called the [“Foreigners of Greystones”](#)? Probably not.

I have always had a [passion for playing with words](#). In primary school when I could barely write, I made up stories and didn't

feel ashamed to read them out aloud in front of my classmates. I would say that I still had the advantage of childlike imagination at the time. And the bonus of my young age. Whilst other kids were still struggling with spelling, I was already filling pages. Something that I am proud of looking back.

The Writing Challenge

In the adult world I find it rather challenging to be heard or seen with what I write. Be it due to the amount of competition out there (seems everybody wants to be a writer). Or because my stories aren't scandalous, shocking or lurid enough. But I enjoy writing them. And this is what matters most to me and why I continue.

Writing about the "Foreigners of Greystones" brings me a lot of joy. As stated in my [interview with the Greystones Guide](#) and previous articles, people with a similar emigration story like mine interest me. Also, what brought them to Ireland and to [Greystones](#) in particular.

Greystones' Real Artists

In [my last article](#) I wrote about a *real* artist. Well, real in my eyes. Someone with a special gift who creates the most [amazing paintings](#) and mosaics – Kris. In this article I would like to stick with real artists and introduce Violine who might already be a familiar face to some people in the Greystones community.

Even though Violine is originally from France, her artwork couldn't get more local. With [Violine Sea Craft](#) she has created something original, beautiful and full of innovative ideas. Every picture is unique and 100% Irish. Besides on [her website](#), she is selling her frames in the [Boatyard Gallery Greystones](#), the [Design House in Belmont](#), [Amora Gifts & Jewellery Bray](#) and on the [Kilmacanogue Farmer's Market](#).

Art in her Blood



1: Florence Bertin, Taradeau

©1&3 Courtesy of Violine Deane, 2&4: Anke Marquardt

Violine grew up with art. Her mum Florence is an artist herself who makes sculptures out of different materials. Something that has certainly inspired Violine when she started her own business with Violine Sea Craft last year. It also involves different natural materials that Violine collects on the local beaches. “I have fond memories of collecting treasures from nature as a child which I am now doing as a mum together with my three boys”, says Violine.

Violine Sea Craft

There seem to be real treasures hidden in the rough sand of Greystones beach. At least they become real gems once Violine has used them for her Pebble Art at Violine Sea Craft. It features drift wood, shells, glass and obviously pebbles. These ‘raw materials’ then turn into seagulls or lovebirds, looking onto the sea while sitting on a wooden pole. Or couples standing admiringly around the cradle of their newborn little ‘pebble’. Whole families leaning into each other, watching a flying kite in the sky. The very same seems to be the limit when it comes to Violine’s creativity. Purely by looking at the different shapes and colours of her materials, Violine gets her ideas of how to use them for Violine Sea

Craft.

I have already gifted three of Violine's pictures to family and friends myself. Whilst the repertoire of Violine Sea Craft is huge and contains motifs for each and every family relation or occasion, Violine tailor-made them for me. The extra personal touch was very much appreciated by the people who received them.



Violine Sea Craft ©Courtesy of Violine Deane

Greystones vs. Provence

Moving to Greystones when her eldest was 1 year old in order to be closer to her husband's family, suited Violine. It was well before she started her Pebble Art and Violine Sea Craft. "I fell in love with the place", she says, "It was ideal for my connection and love I have for nature. Besides I love sea swimming. Could there be a more perfect place than Greystones?"

It sounds pretty perfect to me when Violine describes the place of her childhood. "I grew up on a goats cheese farm in [Taradeau](#), which is a small village in the south of France, surrounded by vineyards and 'Herbes de Provence'. The hills around the farm are covered in wild thyme, rosemary and oregano. There are a lot of food producers and farm markets in the area selling wine, olive oil, honey and so on. St. Tropez and the Verdon region with its Lavender fields and stunning lakes are probably more famous. Taradeau is right in between."

A Good Reason to Leave

Whilst it is hard to understand why someone leaves a dreamlike surrounding like the Provence, I find it very uplifting, how fondly my "Foreigners of Greystones" speak of their home countries. It is not that they grew tired of the places where they grew up. For most of them Ireland was only meant to be an

adventure with no intention to stay for good. But – as we Foreigners of Greystones know – Ireland has its very own magic. Even when you were raised on a picture-book farm in the Provence.



©1: @lucortiz_photoesie: 2&3 Courtesy of Violine Deane

Foreigners of Greystones don't quit

Violine came to Ireland in the summer of 2003 to improve her English. “My English was very poor. I worked as a waitress in a café. The pronunciation was so different from the English I had learned in school. I really struggled to communicate and work was very challenging due to my limited English skills“, Violine tells me.

But the “Foreigners of Greystones“ ain't quitters as I can now confidently say after having interviewed six fellow Greystones 'blow-ins'. Despite the language barrier Violine stayed in

Ireland longer than she had planned to, because she loved the country. "A couple of years later I met my now Irish husband and have no plan to go back to France. I lived in Dublin first, then moved to a few places in the south of Dublin before settling in Greystones about 4 years ago."

It has been nearly 18 years since Violine set foot on the Emerald Isle for the first time. You wouldn't believe she struggled with her English at first when you hear her now. She is beyond fluent with a very light, charming accent.

Easy-going and Welcoming

Apart from the language Violine didn't have any difficulties settling in or meeting locals. "I have been lucky to meet many lovely people in Greystones, in my neighbourhood, in playgroups and at sea swimming. Everyone here has made me feel integrated into the community. I have always loved that about Ireland, but even more in Greystones", Violine says.

"The Irish are easy-going and welcoming", Violine continues. And I think we can't deny that there is definitely something about the Irish men too. The same way the Irish weather is the common negative denominator for most of us "Foreigners of Greystones", the Irish males seem to be tipping the scales in favour of Ireland over our home countries.





©1&3: TheConsciousCamera.com; 2&4 Courtesy of Violine Deane

Foreigners of Greystones – Kris’ “Secret Map”

Hands up who needs Therapy?

My [“Foreigners of Greystones” articles](#) usually start with how I met the person I am writing about. In this case I will have to reveal a lot more about myself than I feel comfortable with. But here we go.

Hands up who has never seen a therapist in his life for one reason or another! Nothing to be ashamed about right? On the contrary. You always hear in the media that people should be more open with topics like anxiety and depression in our society. But when it concerns you personally it is a hell of a lot more difficult to talk about it or even admit you are experiencing it yourself.

That is what I am herewith doing. Well, admitting it, not talking about it. The focus of this article lies on Kris as

another “Foreigner of Greystones” and not on me after all.

Hypnotising Kris

So what does Kris have to do with my mental health? I stumbled across [Kris' website](#) when I was searching for hypnotherapists in the area of Greystones. I had always wanted to try hypnosis in addition to a conventional behavioural therapy. And there she was, showing up in my online search, right at my doorstep. An opportunity that I couldn't miss.

Our meetings were just on a professional level. But still, I liked Kris very much as a person and her kind and reassuring way of talking. After my final session I felt comfortable enough to ask her about the art work I had spotted all around the therapy room. Amazingly colourful mosaics done to an absolute level of perfection. I almost didn't believe they were handmade as I couldn't spot a single irregularity in them.



Perfect relaxation

I learned from Kris that this is what she does to unwind. Hard for me to imagine. To create [her mandalas, contemporary abstracts and animal motives](#), Kris uses a special technique called [dotting](#) or pointillism. To me it seems anything but relaxing because it requires absolute precision. Something that I aim for, but that occasionally drives me to distraction. One possible reason for me needing therapy...

Holistic Approach

When I started my “Foreigners of Greystones” series I knew straight away that I wanted to include Kris. Besides her fascinating art, Kris’ educational background and career path intrigued me. Kris studied different health science fields such as pharmacy, toxicology, diet & nutrition as well as psychotherapy. All of which I benefitted from whilst being in therapy with Kris. I valued her holistic approach considering dietary and physical components in addition to mental health.

Change is Good

According to her philosophy of life, Kris’ website where she offers her therapeutic services, is called [changeisgood.ie](#). Similar to [Farzanas](#) life motto, who I wrote about in my previous “Foreigners of Greystones” article, Kris believes that things constantly change and to use that to your advantage.

I personally have problems with change. I don’t think change is bad. But I am very much a creature of habit and have troubles with getting used to new things. However I *did* take some serious leaps of faith in my life one of them being [emigrating to Ireland](#).

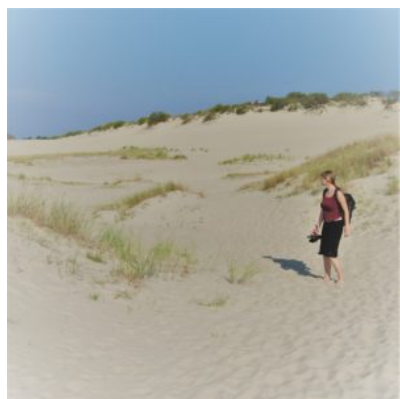
I agree with Kris that the way we see things changes over time as we get older and hopefully wiser. “Our philosophy of life is probably based on our beliefs, moral code, life experience

and expectations. I would say – being authentic and accepting everything else as a part of my own development and growth is the most fundamental part of my philosophy. Being the best example of my own beliefs and teachings is important,” Kris says.

Foreigner Status as Icebreaker

Learning how to be authentic and accepting myself are probably two reasons I started therapy with Kris in the first place. It might sound ridiculous, but with Kris being from a different country and a non-native speaker like myself, I felt more comfortable talking to her.

It also was a great ice breaker talking to Kris about her home country. A country that brings back fond memories of a summer camping holiday many years ago. I got to travel there before it became a trend destination for numerous holidaymakers. It was far from lacking a touristic infrastructure at the time, but I still felt I got to see the real thing. Something you will know is really important to me, when you have read my article [“Abandoned in Ireland”](#) .



Golden Beaches full of Amber

“Lithuania has unique golden sand beaches full of amber, amazing pine forests with silvery moss carpets, sand dunes surrounded by the sea from two sides. There are charming authentic straw roof villages protected by UNESCO, still not touched by a disturbing commercial invasion. Cities are small but charming with loads of stunning historical and architecturally interesting buildings. Not to forget the old narrow streets and inviting small restaurants and coffee shops.” This is how Kris summarises the highlights of her home country.

Once-in-a-Lifetime-Experience

Although I was only in Lithuania once for a short holiday in 2006, it is exactly how I remember it. Especially the ‘golden sand beaches’ and the Curonian Spit in particular are something that I will never forget. My grandmother’s friend had always been talking about the almost 100km long sand dune that separated the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea Coast. She grew up close by in [Nidda](#) and was expelled after WWII together with the rest of the German population. That didn’t stop her from talking of it in glowing terms.

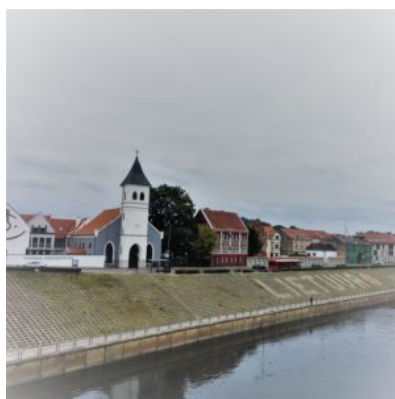
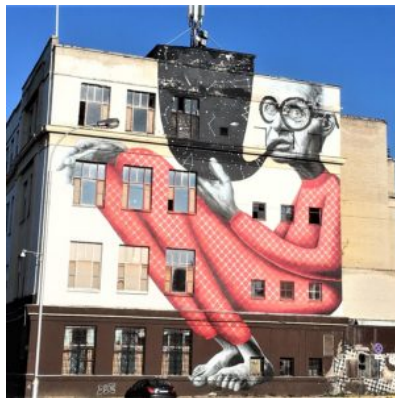
The endangered strip of golden sand is a UNESCO World Heritage site and rightly so. I consider myself lucky having seen it and having been able to walk on this unique natural site that stretches from 400m in width up to almost 4km. (We were told the dunes might be closed off to visitors in future in order to prevent them diminishing.) Whilst it was like a race to get to the only campsite nearby and secure one of the precious spaces for the night, the beach itself was almost empty when we visited it early the next morning. A truly unforgettable experience!

Kaunas – A Place to Study and Live

Besides the unspoilt, beautiful landscape, I was very

impressed with the cities in Lithuania too. When Kris told me she was from Kaunas, I roamed through my old photographs which mirror what Kris says: “My native Kaunas is the second largest city in Lithuania known for its fine architecture (city of design by UNESCO). It is very rich with unique museums, stunning cathedrals and theatres. It’s also an academic city with many great universities including the best medical university in Eastern Europe that I had the privilege to graduate from.”

“94% of its citizens are ethnic Lithuanians which is quite rare for a modern European city“, Kris continues. This indeed is a fact that surprises me. I am sure over the next couple of years and with Covid hopefully out of the way, more young people will discover Kaunas as a place to study and live.



“I looked at Google and chose Wicklow”

Having said that, I asked Kris why she had left Kaunas to come and live in Ireland and how she chose [Greystones](#).

When Kris decided to take a break from her work in a big

Lithuanian medical company, she chose Ireland more or less by chance. The same way I picked it due to the fact that it was a small, English-speaking country in Europe, Kris had chosen it many years before me for these very reasons. In fact 19 years ago. Whilst it took me a while [to find my place in Greystones](#), Kris' "secret map" – as she calls it herself – had laid out Greystones for her right from the start. "I looked at Google and chose the 'County of Gardens' – Wicklow," Kris tells me. With meeting her husband soon after, her final destination had been decided.

The Rootlessness of Immigrants

Being drawn to another country as Kris was to mystic Ireland, is in many ways better than wanting to get away from your country of origin. Nevertheless it doesn't prevent you from feeling rootless as Kris describes it: "It was a scary feeling that every (I believe) immigrant experiences – not having any 'roots' in this strange new soil. No family to call for a dinner on Sunday, no close friend to chat with over a cup of tea, no sentimental place to go when you feel lonely. Knowing that you'll never bump into some old school friend on the busy street or walk by a shop window that still reminds you about that special sentimental moment. Your past becomes nearly irrelevant. You're starting from a blank page."

Fast Food and No Mixer Taps

My favourite "Foreigners of Greystones"-question or answers respectively are the ones about the biggest cultural shock in Ireland. They are usually quite funny and most of the time I can relate to them. Kris remembers it as follows: "Regarding cultural differences, of course, many things were so strange and most of them made me laugh rather than upset! I had some fun learning how to use a sink with two taps – one with ice cold and the other -with boiling water, two story buses manoeuvring in narrow busy streets seemed unreal, amount of junk food places was overwhelming (we had only one McDonald's

at the time I left the second biggest city in Lithuania).“ The absent mixer tap in our kitchen sink still causes disapproval every time my parents come to visit. Interesting to hear it is not only a German obsession after all.

No Summers, No Winters

The Irish summers – or rather the lack of them – seem to be a challenge for most foreigners coming to live in Ireland. For us “Foreigners of Greystones” however not a reason to quit. Rather something we get used to – maybe by taking it with the Irish sense of humour: “When I call to my parents”, Kris says, “we always have fun discussing the weather. If I ask about the weather in Lithuania in winter time, they typically say – very mild, no winter this year. That means the temperature is ‘only’ minus 10 degrees. When I say to them in summer that we are having very hot weather in Ireland with 20 degrees, they look at me with sympathy meaning – no summer again this year in Ireland!”

Learn, Learn, Learn

Whilst this is a quite humorous way of dealing with the sometimes dreadful Irish weather – especially compared to continental Europe – it is all about acceptance. Accepting your country of choice for what it is and fully embrace its otherness. Otherwise you will never settle in at all. A very valuable advice from Kris to emigrants-to-be:

“[...]they should know that once they made a decision to make another country their home, everything in that country should concern them. There is no ‘us’ and ‘them’ anymore. Many immigrants that I know through my work, don’t feel comfortable socialising with locals or actively participating in many areas of life and they use cultural differences as an excuse. My best advice to them – learn learn learn! Language, history, culture and traditions of the country that is your home now! The result is always rewarding as you will find something new and amazing all the time.”

Foreigners of Greystones – Trading Mauritius for Ireland



From Island to Island – Farzana's Story

I love my project [“Foreigners of Greystones”](#). Whilst I knew the people who were going to participate, I now realise that I didn't *really* know them. With each article I learn so much about their home countries and above all their diverse life stories. It is a pleasure to share it on my [blog](#).

Farzana answered my interview questions in such great detail and so eloquently that I wondered if I need to retell her

story in my own words. I am going to try anyway. Hearing about [Mauritius](#), where Farzana is from, was super interesting. I hope it will be for you too. Feel free to leave a comment what you liked best about Farzana's (and my) story.

Our First Encounter

How I met Farzana seems to be a good start. Like [Ana from my previous article](#), I first saw Farzana in one of the Greystones Parent & Toddler Groups. I asked her a question that she had probably heard a million times before. I bit my tongue straight afterwards. Could I not have come up with something a little bit more original, I thought to myself. Anyway, "*How on earth could you leave Mauritius for Ireland?*", I asked her. And this was when she started telling me her story.

I couldn't guess where Farzana was from. In fact, I had never met anyone from Mauritius before. Nor did I know much about the island in the Indian Ocean. Except that it was a popular honeymoon destination with stunning beaches. I held back on saying this out loud though. No need to start on another cliché after my clichéd entry question.

Why Ireland?

I am personally very interested in what brought people from all over the globe to Ireland. And in particular how they ended up in [Greystones](#). It is the central question of "Foreigners of Greystones" and what started me on the project in the first place.

Farzana had been living in different European countries before she came to Ireland. During her studies in France she met her Mauritian husband who was studying in Ireland at the time. While she returned to Mauritius to work there for a couple of years, her soon-to-be-husband stayed in Ireland completing his training. After their wedding, Farzana joined him on the Emerald Isle and they lived happily ever after.

From Mauritius to Greystones

It would be a short story if this 'happily ever after' was actually the end of it. Instead Farzana, her husband and their meanwhile 2 children lived in Dublin for 8 years, before they decided to go back to Mauritius. Understandably, they wanted to be closer to their families, now that they had one on their own.

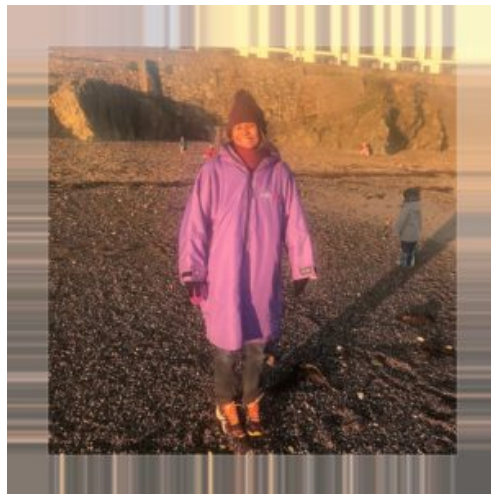
After only 9 months back in Mauritius, the young family realised that this was not what they had pictured for their life. They made the decision to move back to Ireland. This time to the family-friendly Greystones. A friend helped them to settle in and their son got to join his best mate in playschool. Two reasons why they had picked Greystones. Another 'happily ever after', but still not the end of Farzana's interesting story.

Outcast or Insider?

Farzana and her family have been living in Greystones for almost 2 years now. When I asked Farzana if she feels integrated into the local community, her answer surprised me: "That's a tough one. Sometimes I really feel integrated, like I am part of this community. Other times, one look can make me feel out of place. Most of the time, I have felt very welcome here but then there are some hard times when I felt really lonely and not where I should be. It is a choice not to live in my country and therefore something I have to accept and live with."

"There is a small minority of people who understandably feel people from other countries are taking too much space", Farzana says. Obviously that makes her "feel out of place or ill at ease sometimes", she continues. "But having lived in other European countries, I was nicely surprised by the warmth of the Irish! With the name and the skin colour that I have, it has sometimes been challenging to live in other countries but the Irish people were really welcoming in spite of the

differences,” Farzana concludes.



Racism in Greystones?

Mentioning the words ‘Racism’ and ‘Greystones’ in one sentence makes me cringe. Almost like a taboo. Not because I think it doesn’t need to be addressed. But more due to the fact that it makes me realise it even exists in a small community like Greystones.

I guess *especially* in a small neighbourhood where people know each other, it is an issue rather than in a big city. Not long ago you were considered “foreign” when you moved from the neighbour town Bray to Greystones. Whilst it is nice to be part of a community and to be recognised, it is also harder to blend in when you look different.

All in the same Boat?

The Irish are a nation of emigrants and so are the Mauritians as Farzana explains to me: “It is probably in our genes we move around the world so much because our ancestors actually emigrated to Mauritius. I remember someone saying that for a small island there are quite a number of us all around the world.”

Being an immigrant myself I can personally relate to what Farzana is saying. However when I occasionally feel as an outsider, it is more in my own head assuming people are judging me because of my foreign accent. Basically Farzana and I have the same status as immigrants in Ireland. And still Farzana experiences it differently due to her skin colour. That is what racism is about, isn't it?

A little History

“Many different countries have colonised Mauritius. Sailors found the island on their way from Europe to Asia. At that time, it only consisted of mountains, forests and animals. Between 1600 and 1800 its discoverers slowly populated Mauritius. Firstly the Dutch, then mainly the French and British. They used the island as a stopping point on their journey to Asia. Mauritians are therefore descendants of all the people who settled in Mauritius a long time ago.”

Sadly, among the settlers working the fields and rearing the animals, were slaves from Africa and at a later stage workers from India (Farzana's ancestors). “This history, however, was an important aspect of Mauritius because it defines who we are as an island and also where our roots stem from. That leaves us with a rich heritage may it be in terms of architecture, cuisine or language“, Farzana states proudly.

A Matter of Taste

Farzana's answer to the question what her biggest cultural

shock was when she came to Ireland made me laugh: “What I struggle with is probably that they serve cream with every dessert and that food portions here are massive!” Likewise Irish people can’t seem to understand that not all people live up to their weight standards. I remember Farzana telling me that the health nurse tried to match up her daughter to the standard weight percentile during the developmental checks. We were both laughing – one look at Farzana’s stature reveals that there is no Irish measurement for ‘petit but healthy’.

With regard to food portions and creamy desserts the Germans are probably closer to the Irish than to the Mauritians. But when it comes to dress code Farzana and I are totally on the same page. Wearing pyjamas in public and even to social outings, we both haven’t acquired a taste for yet. Clearly another cultural difference Farzana noticed living in Ireland.

Irish Summers equal Mauritius Winters

When Farzana admitted that it was quite a big deal getting used to the [Irish weather](#) too, I don’t feel that bad anymore having asked her why she left Mauritius for Ireland. Considering the tropical climate with temperatures between 14 and 18 degrees during Mauritius winters, it is surprising the cold Irish summers were not a deal breaker for Farzana. Some years temperatures of 18 degrees might be the highest of feelings during the summer months in Ireland.

‘Honeymoon’ Childhood?

Although Farzana grew up less than 10 minutes from the beach, she now spends more time in the cold Irish Sea than she did as a child in Mauritius. “The Mauritian East coast is well known for its beaches. It is on the windy side of the island but has some of the island’s best-known tourist resorts”, Farzana tells me. Whilst I still imagine what it must have been like growing up in one of the most popular honeymoon destinations in the world, Farzana said that for locals these resorts and luxury hotels were as unreachable as for someone living on the

other side of the planet.

“Things have evolved thankfully. Mauritians can nowadays enjoy some of the resorts around the island during low season at more affordable price. Foreigners visiting the island and staying in hotels only get a glimpse of the breathtaking beauty of the island. They don’t see the day-to-day living and reality of people working there”, Farzana adds.

Authentic but Convenient

Having worked for several Irish inbound tour operators, I am amazed about the similarities in the international travel business. Apparently there is a demand for more authentic and sustainable tourism. On the other hand, I feel authenticity has its limits and tourists definitely don’t want to go beyond their boundaries of convenience. They are on vacation after all.

During my work in Irish tourism, I had requests of people wanting to meet up with a *real* Irish community. They thought they could march into somebody’s living room and see how locals spend their day-to-day life. The bestseller still is the Traditional Irish Night with music and Irish Dancing, claiming that this is what Irish people do. It is in a way, but not night in night out in front of a huge, pre-booked audience. Nothing authentic about that. My husband always comments that with “If they want a traditional Irish night, they should come to our house and watch us fall asleep on the couch at 9 pm.”

The Tourism Façade

In all seriousness, of course I get the concept of showing traditions and folklore to tourists. It gives them an impression of local customs and culture. But that’s about it – an impression. Obviously a travel group of 40 people cannot just pop into a spontaneous trad session in the pub around the corner. And that is exactly the point: Large groups and people

on package holidays are very rarely going to experience an authentic Ireland.

Tourism, in whatever way, is an import source of income in most countries. And for a lot of travellers 'ticking boxes' by seeing iconic sites is enough to say they have seen a country. Exactly like Farzana states about people vacationing in Mauritius. I personally find it upsetting when a façade created for tourists is taken for the 'real thing'. In my eyes it is shining a false light on a region or country. The impression given to tourists is hardly ever a mirror of reality. Hence non-authentic by definition.

The Disguise of Doing Good

An even bigger paradox is charity under the name of the most harmful forms of travelling. Massive ocean liners promoting green and sustainable tourism. Hop-on-hop-off busses touring rubbernecks through slums and townships. Agencies who promote "1-day-as-a-farmer-in-a-rice-field" as authentic adventure. It may shine light on a situation that requires attention which is positive. But in my eyes it is far from sustainable or authentic tourism.

I have been thinking for a while now about how international travel could be changed for the better. Revolutionised so to speak. And then Corona hit...Apart from that I have distanced myself a long time ago from mass tourism and package travel. Personally and professionally. I still consider myself as a travel consultant. In what way I will contribute to the tourism sector when it comes to it again, I am just about to work out.

Farzana's Vocation

What would my articles be without my little digressions off topic as per the above. Nevertheless tourism is the biggest and most important source of income in Mauritius, too. Despite that Farzana found her vocation in a different sector which I

personally am very intrigued in. As a trained business psychologist she has worked for various companies in Ireland. Sectors she consulted with include health, aviation, energy development and military forces.

After having had a career break for 3 years for her children, Farzana is currently re-entering the workforce. Her field of expertise covers assessment centres for selection and development, psychometric assessments, competency development, coaching support as well as other human resources related functions. Farzana provides trainings such as change management programmes and performance management training. Their aim is to provide support to organisations or individuals in order to enhance their performance and well-being and reach their goals.

“Shock to the System”

I used to meet Farzana almost every week in our local playgroup that she volunteered to organise by the way. Due to current circumstances I hardly see her anymore. But if, it is mostly on the beach in Greystones where she bravely goes for a swim every day. Rightly so, Farzana considers her daily swim – regardless the weather – one of her biggest achievements over the last year.

“Since September 2019, with a group of mums I have come to know, I got addicted to sea swimming. The cold water wakes me up and forces me to be present and to connect with how my body is feeling. While it is a shock to my system, it is also a breath of fresh air and I have never regretted a swim except when I have tried seas that were too rough for me! The thrill and the feeling after a swim are probably why I always go back. I always feel that I can take and handle everything better after a swim and I am so grateful to be living so close to the sea. Over the last year, I have come to meet so many people who I meet at the beach and with whom I share this passion for the sea swimming.”

To be continued...

There is so much more that I could write about Farzana and her home island Mauritius. And there are also many more questions that I would like to ask her. I'll leave that for a chat face-to-face over a cup of coffee somewhere in Greystones. Hopefully soon! For now I would like to conclude this article with Farzana's – very apt for these days – philosophy of life: *"There is nothing more constant than change. Life just keeps on changing. I am not living with my parents anymore. My kids are not babies anymore. I am not a young graduate anymore and so on. So make the most of the present because this will change and evolve!"*

Foreigners of Greystones – Ana's Story

Why not Spain?

A strange question to start off with, you would think? You'd be right! What does that even mean? Maybe it helps if you knew that my very first blog article was called ["Why Ireland?"](#) Still unclear? Let me explain!

I moved to Ireland in 2014 after I had fallen in love with the island during a 6-months internship as a student. But before that, I had already lost my heart once (actually twice) – to Spain!

During my apprenticeship as a Tourism Assistant 18 years ago (wow, just realising that's a long time ago) I started studying Spanish and absolutely loved the language. Hence I spent my course-mandatory internship in Spain. More precisely

in [Santiago de Compostela](#), the destination of so many pilgrims from all over the world.

Ireland vs. Spain

I could probably write a book about those 3 months alone. They were my first experience abroad. But that was not the end of my relationship with Spain. Years later I studied [Tourism and Leisure Management](#) in University and spent a semester in Spain in 2008. This time 6 months in [Salamanca](#) in [Castile and León](#) in the West of Spain. Apart from exploring the surroundings of Salamanca extensively, I travelled half the country before I returned home.

To answer the question from above – if Ireland hadn't completely blown me away afterwards, I might have ended up emigrating to Spain instead of Ireland.

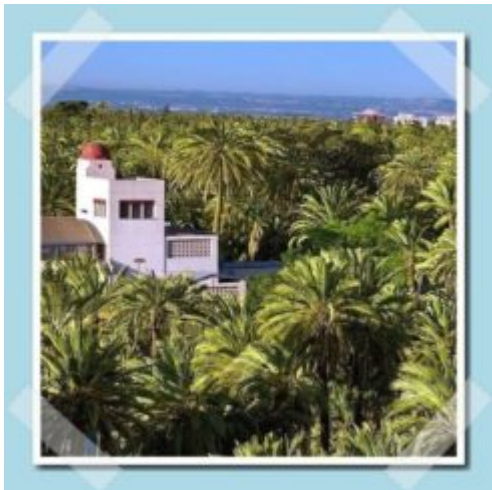
Spanish is not just Spanish

I have to admit that I had my difficulties getting used to the Spanish life style at first. Even though I am a night owl and love my siesta, I am not a night owl in the Spanish sense. According to my experience *“going to bed early on a school night”* in Spain meant staying up until midnight at least.

However, my love for the language and the Spanish culture stayed strong. And here we are, back with [cliches](#), because there is not just *one* Spanish culture. Living in the north of Spain compared to the south can be as different as being in two countries.

And there is not just one Spanish language either. Apart from Spain's official language Castilian, there are Catalan, Basque, Galician and Aranese which are not only dialects, but 4 unofficial languages. Whilst I even learned some Galician words from my colleagues in the Pilgrims Office in Santiago de Compostela, I am now happy when I am able to form a full sentence in any Spanish. I hide when I hear someone talking in

Spanish, afraid I might be tempted to reply in what's left of my Spanish skills.



A great Example

Seeing Ana talk to people with just the few words she had in English when I first met her, communicating by friendly gestures and being super nice all the time, I knew I had to overcome my fear and talk to her in Spanish. Not that Ana needed help – *she* was fine.

I just wanted to show her some appreciation for her constant efforts of approaching people, blending in and even making newcomers like herself welcome. But above all, I wanted to hear her story and get to know her better.

Ana's Story

To me Ana's story is one of bravery and determination. Ana

moved from [Elche](#) at the Spanish [Costa Blanca](#) to Ireland in November 2017. Her granddaughter Nora was almost 4 months old at the time and Ana's daughter was preparing to go back to work. Ana had come to Greystones to mind Nora full time.

November is not exactly the best time of the year to come to Ireland. The weather can be quite dull, the days are short and hence people spend most of the day indoors.

It is a wonder how Ana met people in Greystones, which she was going to call her home now for an undetermined time. I remember Ana telling me in one of our first chats in a mix of English and Spanish that the short days during the Irish winter were particularly hard. Whereas in Elche, in the South East of Spain, people would meet up outdoors and enjoy the mild and bright nights, that was not the case in Ireland.

Cultural Shock? Not at all!

"And everything closes so early in Ireland", says Ana, shrugging her shoulders. "There is no time to meet anybody for a casual coffee after 6 pm." Whereas I would consider that as a huge cultural shock, Ana stays positive. "I didn't notice a big cultural change as most of the Irish I've met were very easy going, loved to chat and broke the ice with ease. Irish hospitality is legendary!", Ana adds.

Needless to say that Ana is a very positive and happy person. Above all, she values moral principals and considers it very important to respect everybody she encounters. This is how she describes herself in just a few words. Characteristics that will definitely help her to settle into her new environment. If only the cafes wouldn't shut that early...

Granddaughter opens up a New World

"One day I was out walking with my granddaughter Nora and met a mother who invited me to attend the local Parent & Toddler Playgroup. This was where I met other mummies, fathers,

grandmothers and au-pairs from different countries. That has been an absolute life changer for me here in Greystones.”

Still with little English, Ana has made an effort from the start to engage with people during the weekly playtime. Rather than sitting in the corner only talking to her fellow countrymen or women, she has been mingling with the crowd. She has such presence, smiles at everybody and helps out wherever she can. I have seen her comforting little ones whose parents were out sight for just a moment. Ana generously shared snacks with the kids (provided parents were ok) and brought goodies for Christmas. When our daughter was born, Ana even gave us a very thoughtful gift. It was not surprising that she soon knew many parents and children by name.

It was almost impossible not to notice Ana in the playgroup. With her friendly and kind manner she integrated herself in no time. I am sure Ana is a familiar face in Greystones too by now.





The Lockdown brought us closer

With the start of the Corona lockdown in March I decided to contact Ana. First of all to see how she and Nora were, as we had parted the last playgroup not knowing what was lying ahead. Secondly I wanted to use that time to brush up my Spanish by writing to Ana. I was hoping to improve before I met Ana face-to-face again.

So Ana and I got into a lovely exchange, texting about all sorts of things. We discovered that we both liked cooking and baking, especially during lockdown with limited possibilities to buy groceries and going out for dinners. Ana told me that she took part in numerous cooking classes back home in Spain and when she sent me pictures I was intrigued.

Food without Borders

Spain is renowned for its culinary specialities and you definitely can't beat the Spanish cuisine when it comes to sweet things. [Churros con chocolate](#) are probably the most famous sweet Spanish export, but Ana's repertoire goes far beyond that. When I told Ana that I had tried to make my own [Torrijas](#) as they still reminded me of my Easter trip to [León](#) in the North West of Spain in 2008, she revealed her special recipe to me. I can't wait for Ana to bring the original ingredients over from Spain so we can have a bit of Spain in Ireland together.

Ana fits right in

Besides being passionate about food and cooking, Ana has many other interests as I learned from our online chats and the interview for my article. When I asked her about what she values most about Ireland and its culture, her answer showed me that Ana has a way deeper affection for Ireland than just liking its people and their hospitality.

“Ireland has made a great contribution to literature with brilliant writers and poets. The traditional music, combined with Irish dancing and all the myths and legends reflect the country’s expansive culture. You can find stunning castles or their ruins almost everywhere which is a proof of Ireland’s rich history. Also its more modern architecture with the coloured doors that you can see all over Dublin, make Ireland an interesting place to travel and explore“, Ana raves.

Torn between two Countries

I sympathise with Ana. I see what she loves about Ireland, but also what she left behind in Spain. Although under completely different circumstances, I made that choice once – in favour of Ireland. I remember that I couldn’t rationally explain to myself why, let alone to other people. When I told family and friends that I was going to emigrate to Ireland, after I had enjoyed the time in Spain so much, nobody really understood. Reading through my interview with Ana, I can see now that they had a point. Apart from the warm weather (except in Galicia where it is more like in Ireland), Spain has a lot to offer that makes you want to live there.

Hence, hearing Ana talk about her hometown Elche and its surroundings makes me a bit sentimental. I get out old photographs from my travels through Spain. I order a book about the Camino de Santiago and flick through an illustrated book about Spain that had gathered dust on the shelf. Reminiscing about old memories gives me great joy and so does the research about the region in the [Province of Alicante](#)

where Ana is from. Probably one reason why it takes me so long to finish a blog post.

Top of the League

Spain is after Italy the country with the second most UNESCO cultural heritage sites in the world. The Historic [Palm Grove of Elche](#) is one of the currently 42 UNESCO attractions in Spain. In addition to that, the [Pusol School Museum](#) and the [Mystery Play of Elche](#) have both been recognised by the UNESCO as outstanding intangible human heritage.

The Mystery of Elche

A couple of days after Ana had answered the interview questions, she sent me an email with additional information and photographs of the “Misteri d’ Elx” how it is called in the own language of the [autonomous community of Valencia](#). I reckon that Ana wanted me to put a focus on this particular event. When I looked at the pictures and read up on it I knew why.

Not just a Theatre Play

The [Mystery of Elche](#) is a musical drama about the Virgin Mary. It has been taking place in the [Basilica of Santa Maria](#) and the streets of the Old Town of Elche for almost 600 years. It is a living testimony of European religious theatre of the Middle Ages and the Mary Cult. Its two acts are entirely sung and are performed annually on 14th and 15th August.

Rather than just actors playing on a stage, hundreds of participants follow the morning and afternoon procession carrying candles. The ‘funeral’ procession of Mary leads through the streets of Elche, finishing with the enactment of the burial. The ‘Assumption’ and Mary’s Coronation follow in the Basilica. Over 300 volunteers feel honoured to take some part in the experience and so are the people of Elche.



You have to be there!

"I have included a video of the performance", Ana writes in her email to me, "but nothing compares to seeing it live and feeling the music and voices reverberating in the basilica whilst golden glitter is raining down from the 'sky'."

Elements of different cultures and epochs feature within this extraordinary event. From Gregorian chants, over songs of the Spanish Renaissance up to Baroque melodies, all performed a capella.

...Dream, Travel, Repeat!

There are all these things in the world that deserve to be explored. Things that you sometimes haven't even heard of before. But once you know they exist, you can't wait to see them with your own eyes.

Or to say it in Ana's words: "Live, enjoy, dream, travel ... and if you have time, repeat."

(All photographs are courtesy of Ana. Thanks also to my lovely husband for helping me with the editing of my text.)

Who are the Foreigners of Greystones?

"Foreigners of Greystones" is my first journalistic project. So far my blogging has revolved around myself and my life as a German expat mammy in Ireland. Recently I have experimented with a new post format featuring my [tree photography](#) and [abandoned places](#). Besides writing, these are two other interests of mine. I would like to focus now on other people and I am really excited to share their stories.

The Blow-Ins

As the title already suggests, it is going to be about the "Foreigners of [Greystones](#)" like myself. Why did they choose Ireland and what brought them to Greystones? A topic that has always interested me. I am delighted that quite a few "Greystonians" from different countries have agreed to take part in my little project.

Whilst we all have a very different cultural background, we met through our kids (well, most of us) which gives us a connection. It is not surprising that we were drawn to the [family-friendly community](#) of Greystones, an attractive seaside town in [County Wicklow](#), about half an hour south of [Dublin](#) .

A Bit about Greystones

Before we moved to Greystones in 2016, I had been here maybe twice before. To me it was always the destination of the [Cliff Walk](#) that you can take from Bray over the summit into the village of Greystones. On the way, with the sea always to your left, you have a great view over the Dublin Bay. Greystones and Bray are both easy to reach on the [DART](#) which I have taken advantage of many times before, while staying in Dublin as a tourist. There are [gorgeous beaches in and around Dublin](#) just a short train ride away from the buzzing city centre.

Main (Street) Attraction

The only place in Greystones that I remembered before we bought our house was the [Gastro Pub Burnaby](#) on the main street. This was where I had enjoyed a cool cider after finishing the Cliff Walk one day. I was one among many weekend visitors at the time who come out from Dublin in hundreds once the weather is nice. Most of them would rather queue at the [Happy Pear](#) for food though, which is healthy, innovative and above all (inter)nationally famous.

Besides great little restaurants for almost every taste, Greystones main attraction is the beach. Whereas the wind-shielded bay 'The Cove' is often quite packed with swimmers and sunbathers, the beach itself has plenty of space to accommodate locals and day visitors alike. The former little fishing Marina is slowly but surely turning into a swanky hot-spot and residential area with modern top-end properties. Nice for taking a stroll, but a bit too much concrete in my eyes (literally!).

Living where Others go on Vacation

...is what my husband says when we take our weekend walk around Greystones. And there is not much more to add. We have the sea on one side, the mountains and the forest on the other side. With the 501 m high mountain [Great Sugar Loaf](#) in walking distance from the town, we have one of Wicklow's nicest hiking

trails right at our doorstep.

The [Wicklow Mountain Nationalpark](#), a pure hiker's paradise, is what the Germans would classify as [typically Irish](#): Green hills, grazing sheep, remote little cottages here and there, waterfalls and mossy trees. The stunning landscape would be reason enough to move to Greystones. On top of that all the facilities and activities for kids makes it a paradise for families too.

Mini-Melting Pot

Who are these people who make up this family-friendly community? You are going to get to know a few of them throughout my blog series "Foreigners of Greystones". They are people who are out and about with their children. Usually they stop for a chat or at least shout a friendly "How are ya?" across the road. I have found the "Foreigners of Greystones" to be outgoing and contributing to social life in whatever way possible. I feel Greystones is a small melting pot of different nationalities. But rather than anonymity it comes with a great sense of togetherness. At least this is how I personally experience it.

Home is where my Heart is

Before we get to my fellow "Foreigners of Greystones", a few words about myself. Most of my story you can find in my [blog articles](#) or in [About me](#). I set foot on Irish ground for the first time in 2008, long before I knew I would end up here for good in 2014. A lot happened in between and I can now say with certainty, that I won't ever leave this island again (except for visits and travelling of course).

[God, destiny, luck or whatever it may be called](#) brought me here and paved the way so I could stay. I emigrated to Ireland purely based on a gut feeling and the rest just magically worked out. I am not saying that it was always easy, but I definitely had a "helping hand". It was just meant to be.

Why Ireland?

This question I have already thoroughly answered in a [guest blog post with the same title](#) (in German only). Whilst this was about my motives to emigrate to Ireland in the first place, I have now even more reasons to stay: A loving husband, two half-Irish kids (according to my husband 100% Irish) and a [our dream house in one of the most beautiful counties in Ireland](#).

Profession vs. Vocation

It was handy that I already worked in Irish tourism when I was still living in Germany. So I had an easy enough start when I moved to Ireland 6 1/2 years ago starting a job with [a big inbound travel company](#).

A few months after I got an even better offer and moved on to [a smaller agency](#). When [our first child was born](#) I knew instantly that I didn't want to return to my old job. In fact, that there wasn't a job that I would rather do than [being a stay-at-home mom](#). For over 3 years now we are a happy [Home-Office-Family](#) with me doing occasional writing jobs for [my former employer in Germany](#).

Euphoric Recall

I consciously made the decision to move to Ireland because I had fallen in love with the island during a 6-months internship as a student. Hence I didn't want to get away from [my home country](#), but just be in Ireland. Also, I didn't do it *for* someone or because of a job. I was as free as a bird at the time like never in my life before. I believe that this has a lot to do with me settling in here so well. Because no matter what happens, *I* wanted to be in Ireland for myself and no other reason.

I can't deny though that I did struggle at the beginning, especially with meeting people and locals in particular.

However I knew from experience that this would have happened to me in any other new place and I therefore had [to overcome the inner temptation to isolate and get out and actively do something](#).

Questions answered

People who are thinking about emigrating often have the same questions in mind. Therefore I hope that my little series about the “Foreigners of Greystones” is going to be valuable to expats for considering all aspects of their decision.

On the other hand I am sure that the locals of Greystones are going to enjoy learning more about some familiar faces they have probably met in town before.

Last but not least I think it is nice that my family and friends in Germany get to know the people who I spend my day-to-day life with and who have become dear to me in my time abroad.

With regard to myself I have already [interviewed myself](#) a while back and contemplated the question [if I would emigrate to Ireland again](#) on my [Ireland Blog](#).

Coming Soon

Hence we can dive straight into the other “Foreigners of Greystones” starting with my fellow German mammy friend Anja. When we met for the first time we discovered a circumstance that made it even easier for us to get to know each other and become close friends. What that was and more about Anja you can read in my coming blog post!

If you are of a foreign nationality, live in Greystones and would like to take part in “Foreigners of Greystones”, just [send me a message](#) or leave a comment below. You can also contact me for questions about emigrating or living in Ireland as an expat or (stay-at-home) mom.

I hope you enjoy reading the upcoming articles. Please feel free to share your opinion or add own experiences in the comments!

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.

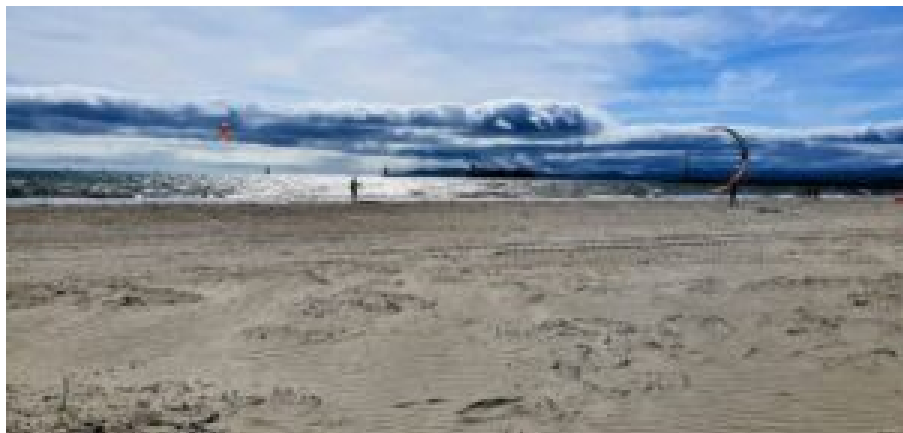
Collecting Shells and Memories

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.



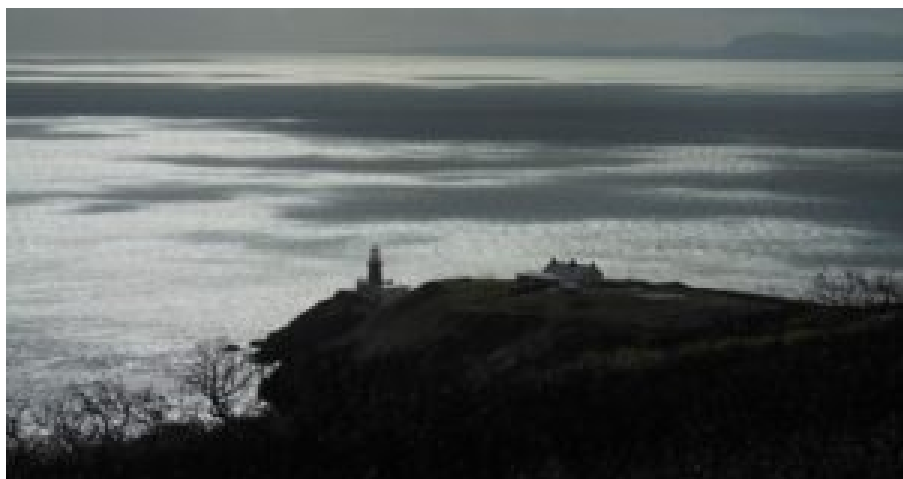
My Slightly Different Hen Party

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 Years'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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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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