

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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Natalia – The Lost Voice of the Parish

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

Sound on: “Psalm 42” adapted and sung by Natalia

“Obituary”

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



Wors(e)ship in Greystones before the weekly Family

Mass

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

Natalia’s Story

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



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

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

Catholic church for almost two decades.



Coming Home

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





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

Godmother and God-Grandmother



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

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

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

Bouncy Castle & Chocolate Fountain – Communion & Confirmation in Ireland

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

Most Irish people have a love-hate relationship with the

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

Being True to Yourself

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



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

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

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

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



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

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.



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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