

Mindfulness over Mindfulness

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Mindfulness – The challenge of being in the moment

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



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

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

Mind-numbing



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

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



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

New Mindset

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

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

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

The Art of Mindfulness



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

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

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

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

Rural rules! Trendy Concepts for Rural Living



Swapping City for Country Life

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



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



Greystones – Not so rural anymore

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

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

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

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

Longing for Land

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

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

Rural Living on Trial with “Coconat”

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



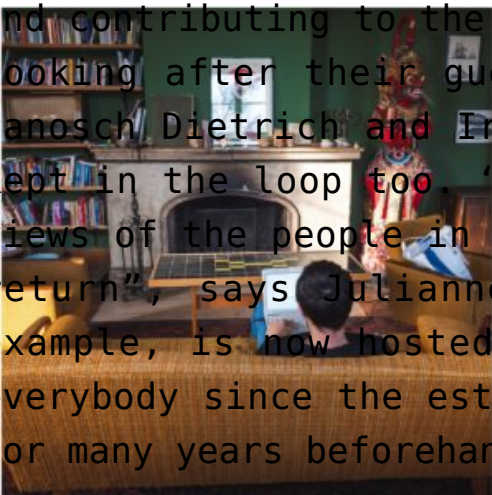


© 1:

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

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

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



Upcycling Big Style – “Your Year in Loitz”

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

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

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

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

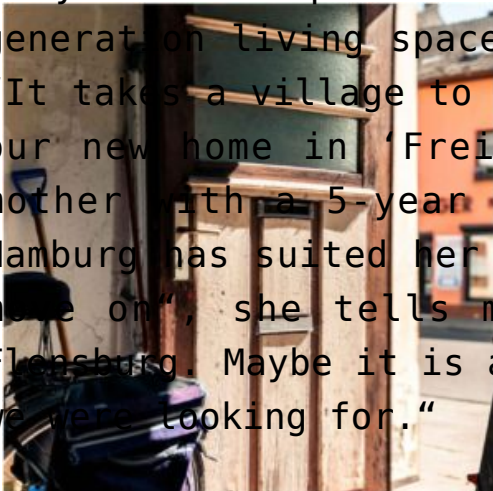


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[Jahr in Loitz](#); 1, 2 & 4: Matthias Marx

“It takes a Village to raise a Child”

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



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

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

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

Allotment Garden Irish Style

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

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

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

Less is More

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

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

Foreigners of Greystones –

“Eat the Cake”



“Life is short. Take the trip. Buy the shoes. Eat the cake.”

Usually I *conclude* my [“Foreigners of Greystones”](#) articles with the philosophy of life of the person I am writing about. They round up the interviewee’s story nicely and so far we had great advice and uplifting mottos in [my previous articles](#). Today however I would like to start off with what, Esther told me, was her attitude to life: “Life is short. Take the trip. Buy the shoes. Eat the cake.” I think it is the perfect introduction for Esther and how I got to know her during our interview and beyond.

Leap of Faith

Esther took a huge leap of faith when herself and her at the time 2-year old daughter followed her husband David from Germany to Ireland at the beginning of last year. David had already been in Ireland for a couple of months after seizing a career opportunity his company offered in October 2019.

When Esther arrived in Ireland at the end of January 2020 it was very hard for her to settle in. Whilst her husband had already established a social network for himself through work, Esther basically started from scratch after leaving friends and family behind in North Rhine-Westphalia ([Viersen](#)) where she is from. Little did she know that it was going to become even harder with the beginning of lockdown shortly afterwards.

Planning, Planning, Planning – German Virtues at their Best

Esther had been well aware that moving abroad was going to be a big challenge. There was a lot to consider even if you were only planning to stay for 2-3 years like in Esther's family's case – depending on her husband's job situation.

Esther had contacted me through [my blog](#) in December 2019. She asked me a lot of questions. Something, Esther and I both agree, people should do before embarking on the big adventure of emigrating. But no matter how many questions I answered, I knew I wouldn't be able to take away her feeling of uneasiness that comes with moving countries. I remember it well from when I made the same decision almost 8 years ago.

It doesn't matter how much you plan or prepare in advance, a level of uncertainty always remains when leaving the familiar for the unknown. Learning to embrace a foreign culture. Overcoming the language barrier. Putting yourself out there and integrating yourself into a new community. These are all things easier said than done. However Esther was not oblivious to the fact that this was all ahead of her and their young

daughter.

The Basics are not Enough

It was definitely an upside that Esther's husband David gave their family a head start by finding a suitable family home before his wife and daughter followed him to Ireland. Their choice had fallen on [Greystones](#) due to its family-friendly environment and location by the sea. Something they had always wanted over a life in a big city like Dublin where David's office is based.

So far so good. But the basics aren't enough. To settle into a new home takes so much more than just finding a nice place to live. Esther didn't leave anything to chance and had already made a few contacts with local mummies on social media prior to their arrival. Now it was time to follow up with the 'field work'. Esther had it all covered.

Thwarted Plans

I had been delighted to finally meet Esther in person in one of the playgroups. She was that nice, friendly, open-minded woman that I had got to know through our chats prior. But I also saw that she was upset about what she had left behind, namely their newly-built house in [Brüggen](#) (Germany), her family and friends in the region she grew up in.

Unlike me, Esther hadn't chosen to come to Ireland because she had fallen in love with the island. It was a family decision to support David's career move which was a great opportunity for him. However living in a foreign country for a couple of years could have been a life-enhancing experience for Esther and her daughter too – under the right circumstances.



From Hundred to Zero

“Shortly after we arrived in Greystones, we introduced ourselves to the neighbours with homemade cookies”, Esther tells me. “My daughter and I went to local activities such as gymnastics for kids, musical classes and playgroups. And I met up with the German mummies I had contacted through social media before. These indoor activities were a great opportunity to meet people as the weather in February and March was cold, wet and stormy.”

Esther was well on her way to establish a social network for herself featuring some German mummies and other people she met through them. With spring on the doorstep and more sunny days ahead, this could have been a fantastic and above all sociable time for Esther and her family to explore their new surroundings.

The socialising came to a sudden halt when the pandemic hit full force pretty much straight away after Esther and her daughter had gained foothold. The beginning of what Esther describes “one of the toughest times in her life”.

Isolated, Lonely and Scared

Despite Esther’s thorough preparations and planning for every eventuality, she found herself in a situation which left her isolated, lonely and scared. “We had found a preschool place for our daughter from the beginning of March 2020”, Esther tells me. “And we had just finished our 3 days of easing-in period when the big shock came – Ireland goes into full lockdown. We had no idea how long this was going to last and decided to not travel to Germany for now. We didn’t want to take the risk of catching the virus on our journey and bringing it home to our families. For 12 weeks we pretty much isolated ourselves”, Esther says.

“My husband was working a lot and my daughter and I were basically on our own in a foreign country. We weren’t allowed any visitors and couldn’t go back to Germany either. It was particularly hard when my uncle died and my dad suffered a stroke”, Esther remembers, “and we were stuck in Ireland. I tried to keep our daughter entertained and to distract her with going to the beach and doing different things. But it was very challenging. The feeling of not being able to get away, the loneliness, the responsibility for our daughter and not knowing how things are going to pan out in the future. That pushed me to my limits.”

No Reason To Crumble

I guess it takes a good bit for a person like Esther to feel that desperate. Just a quick reminder of her philosophy of life at that stage. “Life is short. Take the trip. Buy the shoes. Eat the cake.” Despite only knowing Esther for a short while, I thought this reflected her personality very well. In fact she took that trip (to Ireland) and she certainly eats

the cake.

Well, don't get me wrong. Esther doesn't *look* like as if she was eating a huge amount of cake, but she definitely *bakes* the most amazing ones. Besides her occupation as an online editor in Germany's leading women's online magazine [GoFeminin](#), Esther runs her own [food blog E.A.T.](#)

"I love baking, cooking and trying out new recipes as well as writing and food photography. My job and blogging is ideal to combine what I am passionate about", Esther tells me. It also gives her the much needed flexibility and some sort of stability when they moved to Ireland. Even more now during the Corona Crisis when almost everybody is working from home – including her husband David.

A German 'Frohnatur' (= cheerful person)

Another thing Esther is passionate about is carnival which her home region in Germany is famous for. One can almost say that Germany is divided when it comes to carnival. You either love it or you hate it. Both with a passion. The region in East Germany where I come from does have carnival too, but you can escape the jolly season if you prefer. There are places here and there where you can join the party or just ignore it.

When you come from Viersen like Esther, about half an hour West of Düsseldorf, you hardly have a chance to not partake in carnival or Fasching as it is called in German. It's everywhere. "It's a big celebration that kicks off on 11th November and ends on Ash Wednesday", Esther tells me. "People party, laugh a lot and just enjoy life. In the Niederrhein ([Lower Rhine](#)) region people are very outgoing, chatty and like to celebrate."



Esther fits right in

Hence getting accustomed to the Irish mentality wouldn't have been too difficult for Esther and her family under normal conditions. "Our start in Ireland was actually quite easy. Our neighbours were very welcoming, friendly and helpful. Often people started talking to us on the beach and we really like the openness of the Irish. Everybody we have met so far has been chatty and interested in our story", Esther says.

Nevertheless, Esther admits that she didn't feel integrated for a long time due to the Corona crisis.

"You have to actively do something to meet people in a new place," Esther knows. "It doesn't just happen like that without showing initiative. Not being able to meet people, doesn't help with feeling isolated and lonely."

Never give up

Looks like Esther did everything right. And still, emigrating to Ireland couldn't have been more difficult for her and her family. However, like [Violine](#) and [Kris](#) already stated in my previous "Foreigners of Greystones" articles, never give up!

When I spoke to Esther again a couple of months after our first interview, times don't seem as dark anymore despite the still ongoing lockdown. "There was a turning point when our daughter eventually started in a lovely, recently opened kindergarten in September 2020" Esther says. "The teachers really helped easing her into the new environment. They even learned a few words in German and made lanterns to celebrate the German St. Martin's Day in November which we really appreciated."

Positive Outlook

With spring around the corner just like last year when Esther was about to embrace her Ireland adventure, she can now pick up where she left off. "Through kindergarten I made more contacts who I can at least meet outdoors", Esther says. "Our neighbours are still looking out for us and the German mummies support me when I have questions. We also met parents from other countries like Sweden, Texas and Thailand who were very welcoming and invited us to their weekly gatherings. I took up a Yoga Class with [Minaste Yoga](#) which started out on the beach and is now online every Thursday. I can say that I have established what I would call a positive routine and a good social network for myself."

Let's hope the Corona restrictions will ease soon so that Esther and her family can enjoy their Ireland adventure to the full, how ever long it may last.

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](#).

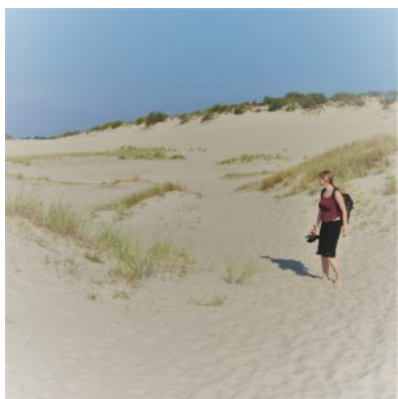
I agree with Kris that the way we see things changes over time as we get older and hopefully wiser. “Our philosophy of life is probably based on our beliefs, moral code, life experience

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.

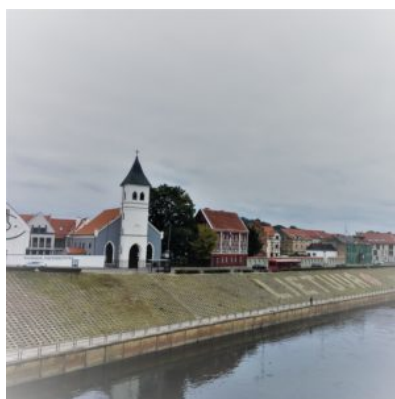
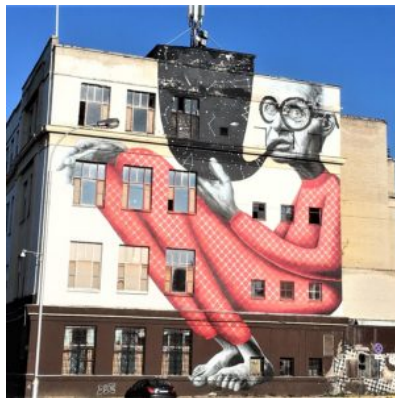
The endangered strip of golden sand is a UNESCO World Heritage site and rightly so. I consider myself lucky having seen it and having been able to walk on this unique natural site that stretches from 400m in width up to almost 4km. (We were told the dunes might be closed off to visitors in future in 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.

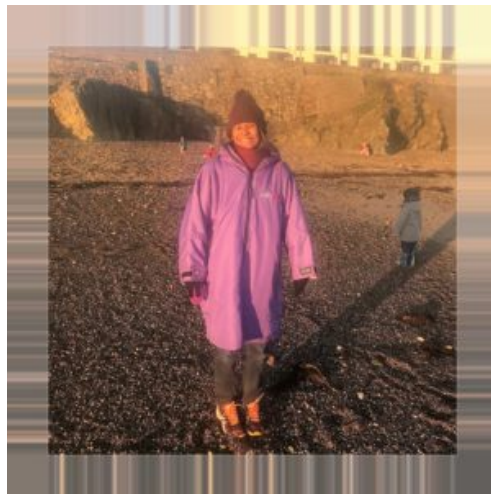
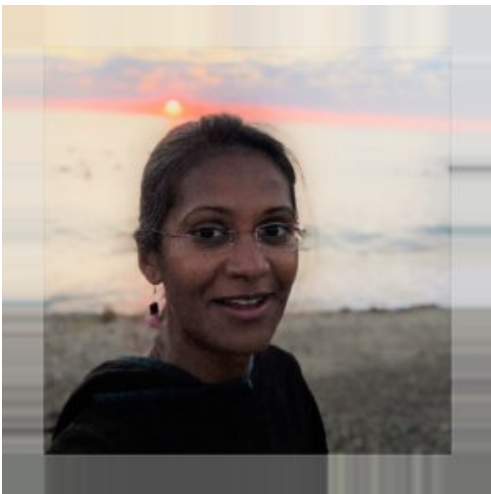
After only 9 months back in Mauritius, the young family realised that this was not what they had pictured for their life. They made the decision to move back to Ireland. This time to the family-friendly Greystones. A friend helped them to settle in and their son got to join his best mate in playschool. 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.

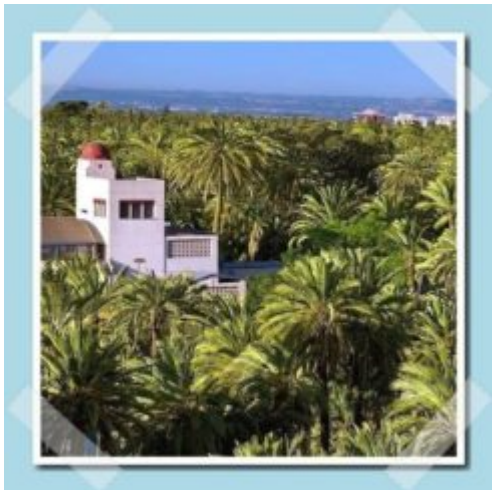
Spanish is not just Spanish

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!