

# 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 It is no longer seen as outdated lifestyle between boring fields and smelly cow stables.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.



© [Dein](#)

[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!

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# **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 11<sup>th</sup> 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.

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# Foreigners of Greystones – Violine Sea Craft



©1-3 Violine Deane, 4: Anke Marquardt

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

I have always had a [passion for playing with words](#). In primary school when I could barely write, I made up stories and didn't feel ashamed to read them out aloud in front of my classmates. I would say that I still had the advantage of childlike imagination at the time. And the bonus of my young age. Whilst other kids were still struggling with spelling, I was already

filling pages. Something that I am proud of looking back.

## **The Writing Challenge**

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

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

## **Greystones' Real Artists**

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

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

## **Art in her Blood**



**1: Florence Bertin, Taradeau**

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

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

## **Violine Sea Craft**

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



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



**Violine Sea Craft ©Courtesy of Violine Deane**

## **Greystones vs. Provence**

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

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

## **A Good Reason to Leave**

Whilst it is hard to understand why someone leaves a dreamlike surrounding like the Provence, I find it very uplifting, how fondly my "Foreigners of Greystones" speak of their home countries. It is not that they grew tired of the places where they grew up. For most of them Ireland was only meant to be an adventure with no intention to stay for good. But – as we

Foreigners of Greystones know – Ireland has its very own magic. Even when you were raised on a picture-book farm in the Provence.



©1: @lucortiz\_photoesie: 2&3 Courtesy of Violine Deane

## **Foreigners of Greystones don't quit**

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

But the "Foreigners of Greystones" ain't quitters as I can now confidently say after having interviewed six fellow Greystones 'blow-ins'. Despite the language barrier Violine stayed in Ireland longer than she had planned to, because she loved the

country. “A couple of years later I met my now Irish husband and have no plan to go back to France. I lived in Dublin first, then moved to a few places in the south of Dublin before settling in Greystones about 4 years ago.”

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

## **Easy-going and Welcoming**

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

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





©1&3: [TheConsciousCamera.com](http://TheConsciousCamera.com); 2&4 Courtesy of Violine Deane

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# 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](#).

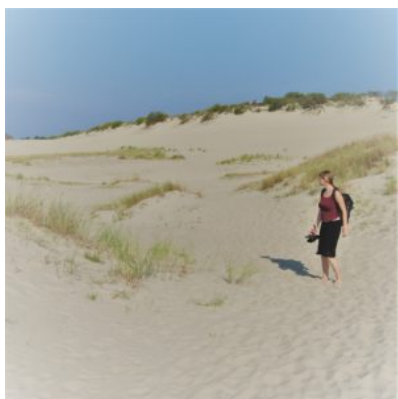
I agree with Kris that the way we see things changes over time as we get older and hopefully wiser. “Our philosophy of life is probably based on our beliefs, moral code, life experience

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!

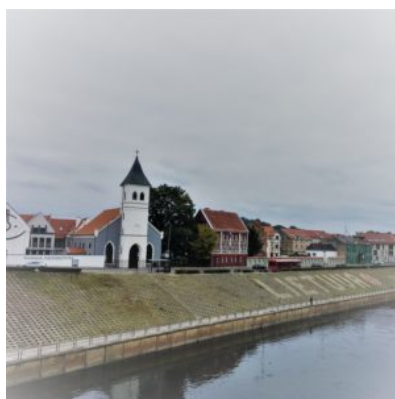
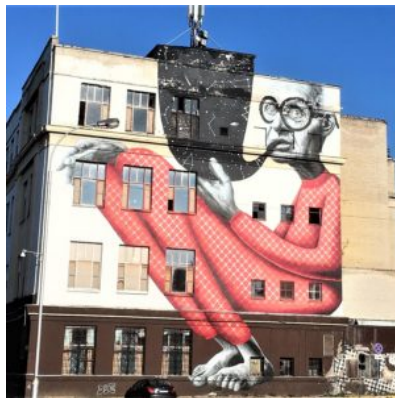
## **Kaunas – A Place to Study and Live**

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.”

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# 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.

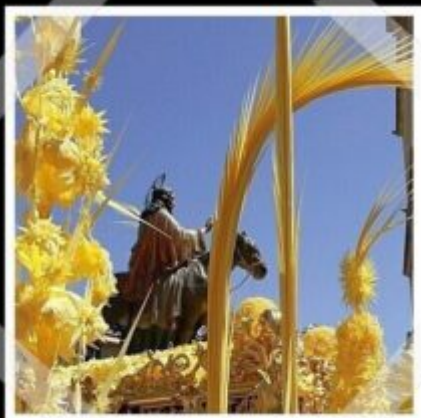
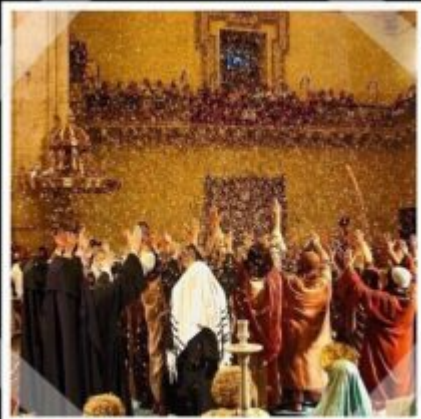
## **The Mystery of Elche**

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 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 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.)*

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# **Foreigners of Greystones – Spot the German**

My husband's theory that you can spot Germans from a million miles away was recently backed-up by a discussion in a forum that I was following. Apparently, they always wear rain or hiking gear of a certain brand, couples even in matching

colours. I guess that speaks to the German virtues of wanting to be prepared at all times and lack of spontaneity.

When I was still working in tourism they used the term of “planned spontaneity” to describe the German target group. I thought that was hilarious, but I could see how it worked as a generalization for their purpose.

Being German myself, I *do* lack spontaneity, but on the other hand I am not very good at planning ahead. This shows that [cliches](#) are not always true, but surely carry some truth.

## Common Ground

When I met Anja for the first time in the [Greystones Breastfeeding Support Group](#), I definitely didn’t “spot the German”. In fact Anja spotted me. The giveaway was me speaking German to our 4-month old at the time rather than me wearing an all-weather jacket. Anja was there with her newborn daughter and this is how it all began.

I think it is natural that people of the same nationality are automatically drawn to each other when living abroad. That doesn’t mean I was particularly looking to build my own little German community. However common ground makes it easier to start off in a new place.

Anja had already been living in Greystones for 3 years when I met her and on and off in Ireland since 2007. But to be honest, I didn’t *need* Anja to find new contacts in Greystones. We just got on from the start. Having newborn babies almost the same age gave us even more common ground than just our nationality.

Last but not least we found out we were living just around the corner from each other. It is surprising our paths hadn’t crossed before. But then we were both working before we had the kids – Anja in her home office and myself in Dublin City. Our children were our connector after all.



## The Delgany Ladies

On our buggy strolls through Greystones, Anja and I met other mummies. Very soon we had a regular lunch group. (Shout-out to the [Beach House](#) for treating us like VIPs every Thursday when we were taking up all the comfy couches with our babas!) From that time on my husband started calling us 'The Delgany Ladies' (we live between Greystones and Delgany). He pictured us like some elegant 1920's women with big hats, parasols, chit-chatting on the beach with our little ones quietly playing beside us. Similarly, Anja's husband David refers to us as 'Ladies who lunch' or 'Yummy yummy Friends'.

These lovely nicknames by our husbands don't exactly mirror reality. Often we barely had a chance to finish our lunch with minding the little explorers. We can't deny though that we always had a great time! When most mummies of our "cohort" went back to work, Anja and I became even closer because we stayed at home and didn't return to our old jobs.





## Opposites attract

Like myself, Anja is a passionate stay-at-home mommy and her now almost 3-year old daughter and our eldest are best friends. I doubt we would have met without the kids since Anja's interests differ from mine. Whereas we both enjoy Irish nature, Anja's is quite an artistic person. An active member of the [Bray Choral Society](#), Anja loves (classical) music. It is her dream to learn how to properly play the piano one day. Besides that and her profession as literary translator, Anja is interested in literature and languages. Well, the latter is another interest we have in common.

We probably wouldn't have met in Germany either as we are from the opposite sides of the country. Thirty years ago not only the distance would have been significant, but also the huge wall that divided "Anja's Germany" in the West and the place where I grew up in the East. We are probably the first generation for whom the German East-West conflict isn't a thing anymore. It surely has been lingering in the air long after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. Anyway, not a topic that I want to focus on in this post.

## Biggest, Highest & Circus Elephant

Anja's description of her hometown or better its surroundings sound very much like [County Wicklow](#) where we both now live.

Green hills, interspersed with forests and lush meadows. Widely spread nature reserves and remote farms. The so called [‘Bergisches Land’](#) (literally translated into ‘Hilly land’) is situated between the former industrial area [‘Ruhrgebiet’](#) and the low mountain range of the [‘Sauerland’](#). Whilst the name ‘Bergisches Land’ is apt, it is misleading at the same time, since it was named after the Counts of Berg, who was ruling the area in the Middle Ages and not its geographical surface.

Many people are familiar or have at least heard of [Cologne](#) with its magnificent [cathedral](#) that is not too far from [Wermelskirchen](#), Anja’s hometown. However, it looks like there is much more to explore than just the usual iconic sites of that region. And it wouldn’t be Germany if there wasn’t one of the oldest, highest, most famous [fill in blank].

So how about visiting the oldest drinking water reservoir in Germany? Or the highest railway bridge [‘Müngstener Brücke’](#) spanning the stunning Wupper Valley in a monumental steel arch reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower? An unrivalled curiosity is the circus baby elephant ‘Tuffi’ who once jumped out of the Wuppertal suspension railway. Whilst visitors can still take a ride in the world’s oldest electric elevated railway with hanging cars, the elephant is long gone, I am afraid.

## **The “heart-shaped” Wupper Valley**

No visit to Germany would be complete without seeing a medieval castle. You are certainly spoilt for choice here, but if you equally value culinary highlights, then pick [Schloss Burg](#) (funnily it literally translates as ‘Castle [named] Fortress’). It is famous for its ‘Bergische Kaffeetafel’ which would be similar to an Irish Afternoon Tea. Just replace ‘tea’ with ‘coffee’ which is here served in a traditional ‘Dröppelminna’ (= antique coffee pot made from tin) and with heart-shaped waffles.

No wonder that Anja and her husband David got married here.

Well, not in the castle itself, but the lovely Wupper Valley. I am sure that something “heart-shaped” was involved anyway.

## **The Irresistible Irish Men**

Like in [my own story with my husband John](#), Anja was put into David's life (or the other way around) by some helping hand. After gaining some experience abroad with her friend to improve her English skills, Anja left Ireland in 2009 after 1.5 years. It wasn't an easy decision, but she had only intended to stay for 1 year and thought it was time to go back to her family in Germany. Moreover, her plan was to start working as a translator which she had trained for.

However, Ireland wasn't ready to let her go and put David on the scene. Both fell in love by writing to each other online. Hence Anja didn't stay in Germany for too long. After she had met David on neutral ground face-to-face for the first time, Anja became a frequent guest in Ireland again. Being flexible as self-employed translator helped with her “jet-setting” life. In 2014 Anja and David moved from his Dublin City apartment to Greystones and the rest is history.

## **Deal Breaker Bus Timetable**

Due to her excellent language skills and easing herself into the Irish way of life, Anja didn't really suffer a cultural shock when moving to Ireland for good. The Irish and German life styles are not too different after all. And you know that you are well suited for another country when you consider the bus timetables the biggest challenge.

I have to agree with Anja that it doesn't make sense to display the times the bus is leaving the terminus at, rather than the departure time from the bus stop like in Germany. On the other hand you can kill some waiting time by working out when the bus is supposedly getting there. Or it gives you the perfect opportunity to pull the “foreigner card” and start a chat with a local.

## **“Make Friends by Doing your Own Thing”**

When I ask Anja what she found most challenging about getting to know Irish people she says: “Actually it was much easier than I expected. Whilst my first friends in Ireland were foreigners themselves, I made Irish friends over time by just following my own interests rather than actively looking for contacts. Hence I met one of my first Irish friends in the choir of Trinity College.”

“The Irish mentality is very welcoming and sociable so that you hardly feel excluded”, Anja continues. “Besides, they are a nation of emigrants themselves and according to my experience the Irish perception of Germans is quite positive. So once you are open to it, friendships will happen automatically“. Even when you don't use the bus timetable debacle as an icebreaker.

## **My “Wing Woman” for Mammy Friendships**

Looking back, I can confirm what Anja says about meeting locals. At the beginning however, I found it hard to become part of existing structures. After work (Irish) people went home to their families or went out with their group of friends. I needed a door-opener who already had Irish friends which was my husband John for me. Once you have kids, there are many locals who start from scratch too after leaving their work environment. That really helps. But even then I prefer to have a “wing woman” for going out. This is how Anja and I made many lovely mammy friends.

## **“Be Happy or Change”**

I am grateful to have Anja as my friend. Apart from the fact that I like spending time with her, she is very positive and optimistic which perfectly counteracts my moody character. Her philosophy of life “Be happy. If you are not happy, change something” perfectly summarises her life-affirming attitude.



It looks like Anja doesn't need to change anything in her life right now. Her answer to what she misses most from our home country Germany (except family and friends) includes just minor things that she can easily live without. Hence Anja doesn't have the desire to return to Germany which suits me just fine.

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## 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!

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# How we found our Dream House in Ireland

Finding our dream house in Ireland was one of many *meant-to-be's* that happened to me since I had emigrated to Ireland in 2014. After [John and I got married](#) in May 2016, we slowly started keeping our eyes out for a new home. We bought a car, so we would be flexible to attend house viewings, and were aware we would need it once we moved out of Dublin City.

It was more or less coincidence that we ended up in Co. Wicklow, right by the sea and surrounded by the gorgeous [Wicklow Mountains](#). We had been looking for our dream house in a child-friendly environment and close enough to Dublin, but didn't have a specific location in mind. In hindsight we couldn't be happier with our choice. So here is our story of how we found our dream house in Ireland.



## The Online House Search

For about a year I was looking for houses online. I set up alerts with the main [property search engines](#), specifying our budget and criteria. During that time we didn't attend any viewings as such, but just got a feel for what was out there. It became part of my daily routine to filter through viable offers and send on to John what I considered worth looking at. For me half the fun was daydreaming about remote cottages before discarding them as impractical when John came in with a reality check. Thanks to the extensive online research, we soon had a clear picture of what we wanted and above all, what we could afford. Now we just had to bring the two together.



## **Speed up the Process**

Suddenly there was an urgency to move house when we found out that I was pregnant. Up to then there had been no pressure whatsoever, just the desire to leave busy Dublin and settle in a forever home somewhere quiet. In prospect of being a family of three soon, I was even more determined to speed up the process. Our two-bedroom apartment in Rathgar with the worn carpet and furniture had been acceptable for us as a couple, but was a no-go to live in with a baby.

When I got the alert that a bungalow was for sale in the attractive seaside town of Greystones and well within our budget, I was instantly hooked. Even more so when I saw the photos and its surroundings on Google maps. It almost looked too good to be true. A detached house with a spacious garden in vicinity of the commuter train to Dublin. What was the catch? I couldn't find any. Could that possibly be our dream house? I arranged a viewing for the next available date and for the first time in over a year our house hunt became tangible.

## **On the Journey to find our Dream House in Ireland**

On a dull morning at the beginning of September 2016 we headed to County Wicklow for our first house viewing. Despite all the excitement and anticipation, we approached the appointment with low expectations. The house had already been on the market for quite a while and we were sure that there was a reason for it. We were about to find out. We were only starting out on our journey to find our dream house in Ireland after all and looking forward to some inspiring viewings. We were certainly not going to buy the first house we viewed. Or were we?



## Mixed Feelings

The local real estate agent greeted us with a warm smile. He showed sympathy for we got lost on the narrow country roads, but implied that we would have to get used to it if we wanted to live out here. I liked the location and the outside of the house and couldn't wait to get inside. He led us into a spacious hallway that was filled with a strong smell of air freshener. As positive sensations go, we were not off to a good start. It rather gave me the impression that something needed to be covered up.

As the agent walked us from room to room, he was the only one talking. John and I took everything in silently. John had put on his poker face, so even I couldn't tell what he was thinking. The house had three bedrooms, most of them in urgent need of modernisation. The wood panelling in the living room and the turquoise appliances in the bathroom were obviously sins of the 1970's. The two fire places in the front and living room were rustic and cosmetic repairs were long over due all over the place. My hopes sank as we came towards the end of the viewing.

## Putting our Heads together

I was dying to hear John's opinion when we finally got back to the car. Almost certain that John would see too many flaws with the house, disappointment was building up inside me. I had somewhat fallen in love with [the big palm tree in the front garden](#). The rooms, even though in neglected condition, were cosy and a decent size. The big windows let in lots of light and opened onto a gorgeous view of the ocean in the distance (even though it wasn't visible on that foggy day). The country kitchen with its dark beams, pots and pans dangling down from them, was exactly my style. I loved the cottagey feel as opposed to a modern open plan layout.

I was delighted and surprised to see a big smile on John's face once the real estate agent was out of sight. The whole time John had been walking through the house, picturing changes and running price negotiations in his head. He was as enamoured with the house as I was. Were we really going to own our dream house in Ireland soon?



## Sealing the Deal

Somewhat shocked we realised that we were both in favour of buying the house. It wasn't perfect by far, but it was perfect for us. We never thought that we would find a detached house in a location like Greystones at a price we could afford. And



here we were, on the verge of buying a property that provided all our must-haves and with lots of potential to change. The wrap-around garden was sizable and not overlooked by any neighbours. It had gorgeous plants and trees, as well as a little patio. It wasn't hard to picture children running and playing around in it.

And still, as we were sitting in a pub in Greystones town we were trying to talk ourselves out of buying the first house we viewed. What if our dream house was still out there? On the other hand, the bungalow met all our requirements and wishes – a kitchen with good cooking space; a bathroom with a tub; enough space for children and not too much if we only had one. There was no need to argue any longer. Our house search had come to an end before it really began. Before long John was punching numbers into his calculator and preparing the first bid for our dream house in Ireland.



## **Home sweet Home**

When we moved into our new house on 12th December 2016, it didn't take us long to feel at home. It had been love at first sight and our gut feeling hadn't betrayed us. Despite all the work the house needed, we mostly saw the upsides of it. We

would have the chance to transform it into our personal dream house, tackling one project after the other. But it already was our safe haven and most likely our forever home.

We still feel the same after having lived in it for eight years. Our three children have all been born into this house and value it as their beloved home as much as we do. We have definitely put our own stamp on it and will continue to do so in the future. Not once have we doubted or regretted our decision to buy this house. We are more than grateful that we were able to do so at the time and couldn't imagine a better home for our family.

## **House Prices in Ireland over the Years**

When we bought our house in 2016, the average asking price for a 3 bed semi-detached house in Co. Wicklow was at €269,000. Compared to Co. Dublin with €314,000. The national average house price was €221,000, whereas Co. Longford came in lowest with €65,000.

In 2019 the average house price in Co. Wicklow had risen to €322,000. Countrywide the average had climbed to €265,000, headed by Co. Dublin with €368,000. Co. Longford came last again with €96,750 which was still a remarkable increase in only three years (Source: [myhome.ie](https://myhome.ie)).

In the second quarter of 2024 the average price for residential real estate in County Wicklow was €431,437. That makes it the priciest county in all of Ireland for buying real estate at that moment in time. Even Dublin City Centre came in lower at an average of €385,089. The lowest house prices are now in County Leitrim with an average of €198,869. House prices were about 0.6% higher in 2024 than at the peak of the Celtic Tiger in February 2007. (Source: [statista.com](https://statista.com)).



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