

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 It is no longer seen as outdated lifestyle between boring fields and smelly cow stables.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

How we found our Dream House

in Ireland

Finding our dream house in Ireland was one of many *meant-to-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).

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).



First published 8th March 2020. Edited 10th December 2024.