

Cosy Irish Cottages – Where to stay in Ireland



Glenveagh National Park,
Co. Donegal

Cosy Irish cottages in a romantic rural setting – as clichéd as it may be – are my preferred accommodation when travelling within Ireland. Compared to hotels, they are often the more reasonable alternative and come with lots of amenities too. Above all, they have plenty of charm and character!

That said, when we stayed in a thatched cottage in Co. Clare it was so cold that we could only sit close to the open fire. In spite of that, the heating bill, which we had to pay separately, was enormous.

I used to envy my friend for living in a rustic, cosy Irish cottage, but she had a similar story to tell – of wearing layers in the house and severe power outages. So it can be a challenge to suss out the gems among cosy Irish cottages.

My “Cosy-Irish-Cottage-Dream”



At Russborough House & Park

However for a couple of days a year, I am willing to take a risk and swap the practicalities of [our bungalow](#) for my cosy-Irish-cottage-dream. I consider it my romantic escape. A break from day-to-day life. The time of year when I fool myself into believing there is such a thing as idyllic rural living, well aware that reality would catch up sooner than I could light an open fire.

Yet, it works! Sitting in front of a cottagey fireplace clears my mind off every-day worries. Sometimes a change of scenery is all it takes. Location usually isn't our priority, but a good bedroom set-up and self-catering facilities that work for us as a family of five. This is how we have discovered some of the cosiest cottages in all four provinces of Ireland.

Where to stay in Northern Ireland

Our most recent trip took us to Northern Ireland. It was very spontaneous during the midterm break in February. The weather was miserable and we just wanted to get out of the house. If we were stuck inside, we might as well be stuck in a cosy Irish cottage. I knew that the drive along the Antrim coast would be nice in whatever weather. So two weeks after I had booked we were on our way.



© [Cosy Cottage on Causeway Coast & Glens](#)

We made little to no preparations and I was surprised when I checked en-route how remote the cottage actually was. In Ireland everything appears close on the map, but windy country roads and traffic hubs can stretch a journey significantly. The spirit in the car was good though. Not too many “When are we getting there?” or “I am bored.” from the back seat. Our one-and-a-half year old enjoyed her position in the middle, whilst our five- and seven-year old were keeping each other busy.

The warmest of Welcomes

We got to the cottage at dusk, heavy wind blowing the rain sideways. Exhausted and hungry from the long car ride, the welcome couldn't have been any nicer. The house keys were in a little code safe beside the door, the lights in the porch switched on. In the kitchen, a big box of local and homemade goodies was waiting for us – Irish Soda bread, scones, pastries and short bread. There was coffee, tea as well as milk and butter in the fridge for breakfast.



© Cosy Cottage on Causeway
Coast & Glens

Each of the two bedrooms had their own ensuite. The kids unpacked immediately and were delighted with their “fancy room”, containing two single beds as well as books and toys. Afterwards they went exploring outside, thrilled they could use the swings in the hosts’ garden after being in the car all day. My husband John and I enjoyed the two relax chairs in front of the fire place, before we started making the dinner in the well thought through kitchen space. Despite the grim weather – or because of it – we appreciated the nature view through the former stable door at the back. We were ready to unwind for a couple of days.

Ideal for exploring the Causeway Coast

Wrapped up in rain gear, we set out to explore the Causeway Coast the next morning. I was looking forward to showing our kids the iconic sites that I had travelled long before they were born. The journey was our destination as we wound along the coastal road with stunning views beneath us. Rare moments of taking Ireland’s beauty in through a tourist’s eye, something I hadn’t done much over the past few years. Whilst I was climbing the Basalt columns of the Giant’s Causeway with our eldest, the girls had fun playing in the rock pools with Daddy. A family day out to our liking.



Causeway Coast, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland

We only stayed for two nights, but they had everything my cosy-Irish-cottage dream is made of: Huddling up in front of the fire, watching a cheesy movie with the storm howling outside. Playing board games with the kids after a late breakfast, listening to the rain drumming against the windows. Enjoying hot chocolate, seafood, and long showers after a day trip in Irish weather. We absolutely loved our winter stay and will be back for a summer one!

Enchanting Fairytale Cottage in Leinster



Enchanting Fairytale Cottage Piltown, Co. Kilkenny

The most enchanting of all cosy Irish cottages I have ever seen was in Piltown, Co. Kilkenny. Its name couldn't be more apt. It also turned out to be very conveniently located for our trip to the [Irish National Heritage Park](#) and exploring the

town of Kilkenny the next morning.



Enchanting
Fairytale
Cottage

I was travelling with my sister, her husband and my one-year old at the time. Upon arrival we were greeted with homemade treats and spotless bedrooms. We were delighted with the garden at the back and all the amenities, especially for our little one. That he was spiking a temperature at night time, was not something I was prepared for. In panic I contacted the host who rushed to the late-night pharmacy without hesitation.

It's been seven years since we stayed at the [Enchanting Fairytale Cottage in Piltown](#). To this day I talk about the owner's kindness. Apart from the chocolate box cottage, this is what stuck with me. What might seem like a small gesture is what makes Ireland and its people stand out to me: Showing kindness to a stranger.

Where to stay in Cork

A spontaneous trip in 2024 took us to Cork. This time I strayed from my principle of always booking cosy Irish cottages – for a good reason. It was the October bank holiday weekend and the weather was autumnal at best. When I found an [Airbnb with a private indoor pool](#) online, I didn't hesitate to hit the “book” button. Nevertheless I remained doubtful whether the images were giving an accurate picture. A heated

swimming pool in an Airbnb all to ourselves? It sounded too good to be true!



View from Airbnb, Co. Cork

The check-in once more was super easy. No paper work, keys at the door, the pool ready to jump in. And that was exactly what we did after everybody had settled on their bed of choice. I had the luxury of sharing the double room with our eight-weeks old, while John shared the lower double bunk with our wriggly five-year old. The combined kitchen-living space was practical and smartly furnished. Needless to say that the heated pool was the highlight and turned out to be just like in the pictures.



Cahir Castle, Co. Tipperary

The tour of the [Mitchelstown Caves](#) the next day was a great adventure and kept us out of the rain. The afternoon was dry, so we explored [Cahir Castle](#) which was only a short drive away. For our trip into Cork City the day after, the colourful Irish

autumn showed itself from its most beautiful side. We didn't mind that it was lashing again the next day for all we wanted was to hop into the pool one more time before our departure. Thumbs up for a great Airbnb in the Province of Munster!

Country House Retreat in the Province of Connacht

As cosy Irish cottages go, [Carmen's and Robert's Country House Retreat](#) in Co. Sligo is probably more of a mansion. But one with a very cottagey feel to it. And a garden like out of a country magazine. The pictures online had already blown me away, but seeing it in the flesh exceeded my expectations. It combined all my rural living fantasies in one:



Carmen & Robert's Country House Retreat

Getting woken up by the sounds of nature in a generous, cosy bedroom. Having breakfast in the conservatory that doubled as a greenhouse, plucking tomatoes straight off the plant. Picnicking in the spacious, secluded garden where the kids could run freely without any concerns.

We were also blessed with the most gorgeous summer weather during our stay. We went swimming in the warm, shallow Atlantic at Aughris Head in Sligo Bay. Took a hike up to the Carrowkeel Megalithic Tombs, towering over the breathtaking landscape; and spent a great family afternoon at [eaglesflying.com](#). In the evenings we enjoyed BBQs, enveloped in the mild air and the smell of the freshly harvested

neighbouring fields.

There was nothing that Robert and Carmen could have changed to make our stay more pleasant. Everything was immaculate. I particularly enjoyed Carmen's in-house massage treatment, during which I could leave the busy family life behind for a moment. All around [an unforgettable holiday experience](#), hopefully to be repeated soon!

Precious Little Breaks

Cosy Irish cottages are just the perfect accommodation for our little family get-aways. Their flexible set-ups suit our needs as family with kids at different ages and stages. They provide me with inspiration to write and ideas for our own home. After a couple of nights in rural Ireland I feel fully recharged and even more grateful for the breathtaking country we live in.



Carmen & Robert's Country House Retreat

Need or Greed? Mass Tourism

in Ireland



Two news articles caught my attention and slightly bothered me as a tourism professional living in Ireland:

“According to a survey of the US Magazine Condé Nast Traveler, Dublin was voted 3rd and Galway 6th friendliest city in the world.” (Source: Tourism Ireland, Press Release, August 2016)

“According to the Hotel Reservation Provider HRS, Dublin is the 2nd most expensive place in Europe with regard to accommodation. The average room rate was given with €188 per night which is reflecting the continuously growing demand.” (Source: [Irish Times](#))

Visitor numbers in the first half of 2016 have increased by 14% compared to the same period in 2015. This is an increase of 420.000 within 6 months. (Source: Tourism Ireland, SOAR July 2016.) It is an achievement to be proud of indeed. The economy is back and the recession finally seems to be over.

So why am I concerned?

Every travel workshop I attend, I hear about the latest positive developments in Irish tourism. Industry partners are patting each other on the back, cheering to the upwards trend.

Rightly so, as it is their hard work and apparently good marketing that brings more and more visitors to the Green Isle every year. And whilst I am part of this proud crowd, promoting travel to Ireland, I also have my concerns. First and foremost, I am too selfish to share my country of choice with large numbers of tourists, queuing at my favourite places during the summer.

And where are these extra guests are going to stay anyway? Whilst everybody seems to be celebrating increasing visitor numbers, accommodation is limited and already at a record high in cost. We live on an island after all with a limited infrastructure. Of course we can build more hotels, open more visitor centres, invent more exciting attractions to please the rising figures in 2017. But that is exactly what I am concerned about. An unproportionally growing infrastructure solely to accommodate mass tourism in Ireland.



Higher, Faster, Further

I somehow feel like I am in a time loop. Does that not all sound familiar and very much like the construction mania during the Celtic Tiger? Blinded by a potential gain, reasoning seems to go out the window in many places. That makes me think no lesson was learnt during the barely overcome crash of 2008 and its aftermath. There are still unfinished housing estates lying derelict while plans for new hotel developments are already being made again. Whilst demand is high and supply needed, building inconsiderably left, right,

and centre is not my idea of a solution.



Pressure from both sides

Lately I am experiencing a very unpleasant shift in the group travel sector that I have been working in for years. The usually positive and very cooperative industry has become a daily struggle with long established business partners and suppliers over availability and fair prices.

Clients on the other hand are extremely price conscious, looking for an authentic Ireland experience at minimum costs. I am more and more disheartened in my job of promoting Ireland as a travel destination, and compromising on quality or service all the time. I find it extremely tiring being under pressure from both sides. This way I am not able to show people the real beauty of Ireland as I have come to experience it, nor to sustain positive working relationships with fellow tourism providers.

What Ireland is about

Despite poor quality food and mass tourism in group hotels, visitor numbers to Ireland are sky-rocketing. The country is ranking high in friendliness and hospitality. So nothing has changed, has it? My husband, born and bred in Dublin, believes otherwise. "People hardly engage in chit-chats in shops anymore or have time for a bit of a banter in the streets", he finds.



Everything has become so fast-paced and even I roll my eyes when people are taking too long at the check-out in the shop. The other day a woman almost fainted on the bus and got off at the next stop. No one – including myself – felt obliged to assist her. Especially in Dublin, crowds are rushing past each other, head down, ear phones in. Definitely not the positive vibes and easy-going lifestyle the Irish are known for. And after only a few years of living in Ireland, I might have become part of this homogeneous mass of Dubliners minding their own business myself. Surely this not how the Irish capital defends its title as 3rd friendliest city in the world.

Not what I came for, this is why I leave



I still appreciate the Irish way of life. Otherwise I wouldn't have [moved here three years ago](#). And because Ireland is going to be my forever home, I feel our 'relationship' can handle some criticism. And whilst I do enjoy the cosmopolitan atmosphere in Dublin and all the hustle and bustle, I prefer rural Ireland whenever I want to experience true "Irishness".

Mass tourism is not an appropriate way of exploring Ireland. To travel Ireland you need time. Time to stop in places that

originally weren't on your itinerary. Time to make alternative plans in case the rain does not stop for days. You need time to talk to locals, and to listen to their stories.

Mass tourism might show you the iconic sites of Ireland. It will give you a staged synopsis of food, culture and tradition in a dense time frame. It is in line with the restless crowds I described above, that don't have time or don't want to take a closer look. But it is not the way to get to know Ireland for what it really has to offer. I truly hope the country won't destroy its real assets and attractions in order to gain from to the short-lived mass tourism trend.

Either way I won't be part of the industry anymore. Partly because of what I wrote about in this article. But mainly because I am expecting our first child and will be focusing on a different chapter in my life.

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