

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://www.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://www.statista.com)).



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My Big Fat Irish Wedding

The story of our (not so) big fat Irish wedding is so outrageous that we don't want to wait until we can tell it to our grandchildren. We have shared it many times before and people stare at us in disbelief. And to stick with famous movie titles, it might as well have been "Two Weddings and a Funeral."



We're getting married!

But from the start. After we got engaged on our first anniversary it didn't take us long to work out when and how we wanted to get married. As soon as possible and low key. So we never actually planned to have a big fat Irish wedding, but a

small intimate celebration with family and a few close friends. At that stage we thought that the biggest challenge was going to be to ship our guests over from Germany and America. Little did we know that this would be the easiest part.

Finding a Location



Irish Weddings are huge events and people plan it long in advance. So we were aware that most wedding locations would be booked up pretty early. Therefore we had to find a place for our reception, before we could start filing the paper work with the Marriage Registration Office. On one of our weekend trips we discovered the [Conyngham Arms Hotel](#) in Slane by accident. We spontaneously spoke to the wedding coordinator and set the date for a rather modest Irish wedding: 7th May 2016.

Registration of Marriage

The day came – three months before our planned wedding date – when we were finally able to register our wedding. I had made sure I got all the required paperwork from Germany, translated and notarised. John brought a big pile of papers too, including his divorce certificate from America. The appointment with the registrar was swift and the many, rather redundant questions answered quickly. It took a couple of weeks before we received a reply. Our request to receive permission for getting married was denied.

It's still a No

We had already suspected something like that as the registrar mentioned an inconsistency in John's divorce papers. She didn't give us any guidance whatsoever what to do in order to solve the issue. 'We would have to wait to hear back', was her response. So we did and sent in all the apparently missing details once we got the 'no'. That didn't help to receive the anticipated go-ahead either. On the contrary, more valuable time was wasted and we were left more confused than before.



Loosing precious Time and Money

We didn't have another choice but to consult a lawyer who specialised in foreign divorces. Her field of expertise was so rare and her office in one of the fanciest parts in Dublin, that we paid a fortune to even talk to her. At least she was confident that the issue would be resolved shortly and that we would be able to proceed with our wedding as planned.

Hopeful Anticipation

Meanwhile we had paid a large deposit to the hotel and booked accommodation for our oversea guests. The Conyngham Arms Hotel was just what I wanted, providing the country style and cosy feel, perfect for a traditional Irish wedding. Assured the lawyer would have it all sorted out (while massively eating into our wedding funds at the same time), I allowed myself to relax a little and to look forward to our big day.

Crushed Hopes



A call from our lawyer crushed my positive spirits. She told us that the courts had turned down the recognition of John's American divorce as she had forgotten to previously inform them about her approach. Whilst this was totally on her (and she wouldn't charge us additionally), John would have to go to court again, in order to file for an *Irish* divorce this time. Not only were we running out of time in order to keep our wedding date, we also needed to involve John's ex wife this time.

Three Divorces and no Wedding

John hadn't spoken to his ex wife in over thirteen years at that stage. And whilst he was supposedly still married to her according to Irish law, she had re-married years ago as per my internet research. We didn't know whether we should laugh or cry about this absurd situation. But either way we were forced to play along and go through another divorce. Well not until we had paid for our and the ex wife's lawyer and she had thankfully signed the Irish divorce papers. The pinnacle of the farce was the court appearance where John had to answer whether there was a chance of reconciliation with his ex wife.

Change of Plans

At that stage it was unlikely that we were able to keep our planned wedding date. Of course we were devastated. To cut our financial losses, we cancelled the hotel as more expenses were about to be due. I felt so embarrassed to tell our family and friends, who had already booked their flights and had obviously been looking forward to our wedding too. Luckily most of our guests were understanding and agreed to come over anyway. Hence we picked ourselves up and organised a coach

tour and pub dinner to make up for our busted wedding. We figured if we showed everybody the lovely [Dublin & Wicklow Mountains](#) and treated them to a dinner in [Johnnie Fox's](#) they would come back to celebrate a proper Irish wedding on the second attempt.



Again it came differently. About one week before our original wedding date, the Irish divorce was officially through. Too late to obtain the Marriage Registration Form, let alone to re-arrange the hotel reception. But our local priest, who had been sympathetic and supportive all the way through, offered to give us the Sacrament of Marriage regardless. Not knowing when we would have our dearest from far away over again, we decided to go for it. Even though it meant to wave goodbye to our conventional Irish wedding as intended. Thus three days before 7th May and with guests arriving already, we were back in the wedding game.

Spontaneous, Chaotic, Authentic



With three days to re-organise our wedding, options were limited. And with my emotions all over the place I could hardly focus on flower arrangements, or getting my hair and nails done. Nonetheless I was happy being able to get married to John after all. Our tiny apartments in Rathgar were busy like beehives on the days before our wedding. Everybody helped where they could and shone with their secret talents. My sister looked after the flower arrangements for the church and saved my botched wedding bouquet last minute. A friend did my nails and tried out a few hairstyles. John's best man and his wife helped him to pick out a rental suit and buy snacks for our coach tour after the ceremony. My parents tied up some loose ends and entertained the guests away from the chaos. We couldn't have asked for better wedding gifts.

The Morning Of



Our wedding day didn't start out great. I woke on a wobbly airbed with the rain drumming against the window. There were suitcases, clothes and provisional beds spread out all over our two apartments. My wedding dress was hanging down from the curtain rail. I didn't care that I wasn't in a fancy hotel room. Neither did I mind that I was going to do my own make-up in my scruffy little bathroom. I wasn't even upset about the weather as John had sent me a lovely text earlier on. "Look out, God is washing the earth for us" it read and made me

smile. I was definitely marrying the right man. And I was ready to be a bride. Well, almost. My two unofficial bridesmaids kept me on schedule as I was getting ready, excitedly maneuvering through the cramped space. We had a great laugh and a lot of precious moments despite the chaos. Nothing was staged or forced, everything had a natural, though chaotic, flow to it. By the time I squeezed myself into my sister's tiny rental car* for the short drive to church, I was surprisingly calm. (*The Vintage Car John had originally booked blew its engine a few days earlier. Nothing surprised me at that stage.)

Our not so big fat Irish Wedding



The moment my Dad walked me down the aisle, I didn't think about all the stress and worries of the past few months or the day ahead. I focused on John, standing tall in front of the altar, looking at me with love. Two amazing ladies were singing the songs we had picked during mass a long time ago. It was just perfect! Our priest did a fantastic job with the ceremony and a friend spontaneously helped translating it into German.

As we left the church, our tour coach was waiting to take us to [Glendalough](#) in the Wicklow Mountains. But instead of rain jackets and hiking boots we obviously had dresses, suits and high heels. John had already loaded the snacks and drinks to

tide people over until the pub dinner. We held our “wedding reception” in Sally Gap, one of the most scenic places in the country. Toasting with plastic champagne flutes, and sharing Supermarket sandwiches.



Best Day Ever

The sky was wild and it was breezy. And while messing up my hair, nothing could have ruined that day for me. Everybody seemed to enjoy themselves and took our supposedly traditional Irish wedding with humour. My Dad gave a speech, standing on a big rock like a Celtic king, summing up all the mixed emotions which he had been displaying in a heartwarming way all morning.

We went on to the monastery site of Glendalough and had our wedding photographs taken (luckily the photographer had still been available). The cloudy sky was the perfect backdrop and resulted in magnificent pictures. The bus ride to [Johnnie Fox's Pub](#) was cheerful. Everybody enjoyed the stunning views of the Wicklow and Dublin mountains and a few drinks on the way. Upon arrival at the pub I got a fantastic welcome and standing ovations from the crowds. It was apparently a bit of an attraction to celebrate an Irish wedding amidst a regular Saturday pub crowd.

Perfect Little Irish Wedding

The dinner as the main part of our celebrations was very much to our liking. Everybody ordered what they wanted instead of having a set formal menu like in the hotel. We had a lovely snug which gave us full privacy for John to deliver a touching speech, honouring me for bringing out the best in him. We were grateful for the casual setting and the people who were part of it. In hindsight it was much better than if we had tried to pull off a traditional Irish wedding with cake cutting and couple games.

The Promise

Not only did we promise everlasting love to each other on 7th May 2016, we also made a promise to our priest. We gave him our word that we would follow through with the civil marriage as soon as possible. We will forever be thankful to our priest that he was putting all his trust in us, and taking the risk of marrying us without the official go-ahead from the state. When we eventually faced the Marriage Registrar again she was visibly nervous, remembering our case well. Maybe she knew that she could have saved us a lot of trouble if she had told us straight out what was wrong with our papers. Instead she had chosen to leave us in the dark, and was now facing a still very resentful couple.

We civilly married almost a year after our church wedding. It was not more than signing a contract in a dull, plain proceeding. No religious music or any references to faith allowed. Unless for official matters, we don't recognise this as our wedding day. It will always be 7th May 2016 when we celebrated our perfect Irish wedding after three divorces and luckily no funeral.



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