

LIVING

# Wi-fi made our rural dreams come true

City living used to be part of the job — until remote working opened up new horizons. Arlene Harris meets the young professionals who have taken the plunge and embraced a new life in the country



“We have been here for less than two months and the move has had a dramatic effect on us already. We are loving the peace and tranquillity”

ALAMY

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The pandemic has been tough for everyone, but those with a garden or who live close to nature have undoubtedly had a better deal than people who had no access to tranquil outdoor space within their 5km zone.

It is for this reason that many city dwellers have swapped their hectic urban lives for a more sedate rural pace.

Jake McCabe and his girlfriend, Niamh O'Donoghue, had peace, affordability and wide-open spaces in mind when, having found the “perfect property” online, they packed their bags and headed west to Mayo.



The pair had been living together in Dublin before O'Donoghue moved to London for work. Then, when she returned last year, they moved in with their respective parents while they looked for somewhere suitable to live together.

“We had been planning to buy a house and had the deposit set aside for that,” says McCabe, who works as an art director for an advertising agency. “However, because Niamh’s employers are in the UK, the banks told us that we were not likely to get the rest of the finance we needed, so we made the decision to rent. But the rental market in Dublin is out of our price range so we started looking at other areas of the country — and just by pure coincidence, the day after we had been talking about the time we climbed Croagh Patrick, Niamh got a notification about an amazing new property in Mayo.”



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As soon as the couple saw photographs of the new-build they contacted the agent, who told them that there were a number of people interested but they were welcome to go on the waiting list.

“We couldn’t believe how good the property looked; we were very keen,” says O'Donoghue, who works as a social media editor. “It seemed almost too good to be true — a self-service apartment spread out over two floors with two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a large kitchen and living area. The fit and finish was incredible, and it was at the foot of Croagh Patrick with a view of Clew Bay — there didn’t seem to be one bad thing about it.



“In fact, it was so good that we didn’t expect we would get it as two other couples had put their names down before us. But a few days later, on a Saturday morning, we got a call to say the other parties were not in a position to proceed. So we asked to do a virtual tour and got the agent to do an internet speed test in each room as good wi-fi is vital for our jobs, and when this came up better than some of the speeds we get in the city, we knew we would go for it.”

First thing that Monday morning, the couple paid a deposit and signed contracts. By Wednesday McCabe had bought a car to transport their belongings during the move, which happened a few days later.

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“I drove the car for the first time on the Saturday when I went to pick up Niamh — which was also the first time we had seen each other for almost four months because of lockdown,” he says. “We packed up our stuff and while my dad followed in a van with the rest of it, we drove four hours across the country and saw our new home for the first time.

“We have now been here for less than two months and the move has had a dramatic effect on us already. The time we have together is incredible and although country life is a lot slower than what we were used to and we have to plan ahead with things like shopping, we are loving the peace and tranquillity of it all. We have also got really into hiking, walking and bodyboarding — things that we just wouldn’t have had the opportunity to do where we lived before.”



McCormack relocated to Knocknacarra in Galway  
JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY

Thomas McCormack had also been used to a busy life in the capital as he shared a house in Drumcondra with four people. But he decided he was more suited to country living after returning to the west.

“I moved home in February 2020 with the intention of putting my business online and doing some travelling,” says the self-employed life coach. “But due to Covid, this wasn’t viable so I decided to move to Co Galway where I would have more space and more sea.

“I moved into a turnkey rental property in Knocknacarra, which is close to Barna, Salthill and the gaeltacht, so it is on the outskirts of the city but very close to the sea and nature. And although it took a little time to adjust and recalibrate, I am very settled now.”

For McCabe and O'Donoghue, another huge bonus of moving out of the city is the cost. "We have been very lucky that we have continued working through the pandemic as we can both do it remotely," McCabe says. "Also, our rent on this place is the same as it would cost one of us to rent a room in either Dublin or London, so not only can we afford it but we are also able to save money. We have noticed that most of the people in our area seem to be young people who have transported themselves here because they wanted to slow down and live a different type of life. And I would say to anyone else who had been thinking of moving out of the city, to just do it."

"We put it off for so long and although we took a calculated risk, we looked at the pros and cons and the benefits far outweighed the negatives," O'Donoghue adds.

McCormack agrees. He says he wasn't aware of how much he needed the peace of the countryside until he moved. "I found a slower pace of life, less traffic, less noise and much more time to spend on the things that really matter," he says.

"There are many benefits to moving to the country. Of course, any change comes with uncertainty, but if it feels right go for it — you won't know for sure until you do it."

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Dublin

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