

In Search of Home

WORDS ALEXANDRA MORROW

ILLUSTRATION TANIA VICEDO



Where is home for you? It's a simple question I get asked a lot, particularly given that I've lived abroad since 1999: Dublin, London, Auckland, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and now Tokyo.

You'd think that the answer is pretty easy—Germany, or, specifically, a tiny village in the former East Germany. That's where I spent the first 22 years of my life, but it only inspires childhood memories and feelings of nostalgia now. I don't know if that's because the country where I grew up, the German Democratic Republic, no longer exists or because I spent my formative adult years abroad.

"I walked past a freshly cut lawn yesterday and closed my eyes," a German friend who has lived in New Zealand for a number of years tells me. "It smelled like home, and the scent was so overwhelming I had tears in my eyes."

While not quite the same or as intense, every time I step out of the plane in Bangkok and breathe in the

familiar air (not quite as appealing as freshly mown Auckland grass, I admit), I feel like I have arrived home.

"Home is a slice of really good German bread," another German friend says.

Lots of expats from German-speaking countries miss their bread. Dublin in the late '90s was a total bread desert. Soft, white loaves, without a proper crust, were standard fare. Fast-forward 20 years and you can find all types of bread and cuisine anywhere.

But I don't crave German food, including bread, anymore. And we don't cook German dishes or seek out German restaurants. Garam masala, kaffir lime leaves, sumac, ghee, tahini and tamarind paste are now staples in my pantry, and we dine at Lebanese, Mexican and Vietnamese restaurants.

I keep asking people where home is for them. An Australian friend, and another longtime nomad, considers my question before answering. "Home is where I want to be buried," she says. I have contemplated that

version of home before, but I didn't come to a verdict.

My mom believes my apparent lack of sense of belonging is in my DNA and blames my grandfather (on my dad's side, obviously). My granddad was a globetrotter and sailed around the world for many years. Maybe his restless genes have been passed on.

I envy people who can say with conviction where home is. Like my husband. He knows for certain where he belongs. Even though he has lived abroad for a long time, he has no doubt that the land of his birth, New Zealand, is where he belongs. Simple.

Perhaps I have more than one home. Is it possible to feel as rooted in New Zealand as I do in the village where I grew up? And where do those other cities that I once referred to as home sit on my spectrum of attachment?

I'm not entirely sure yet. But I'll keep breathing the air and asking the same question to the people I befriend on my travels.

Alexandra Morrow is a Club Member.