

I'm finally starting to feel like a local. But my dream of living in Cornwall may be coming to an end

Despite warnings about Cornish winters, Katie Glass is in love with the county. But the sale on her new home is yet to go through

By Katie Glass 9 January 2021 • 6:00am



'It's fun exploring, but I wish that I had someone to do it with.' PHOTO CREDIT: Jooney Woodward

Everyone told me the real worry was winters in Cornwall. It's easy to love the Duchy in summer – under cloudless blue skies bright as the sea; swimming off sandy beaches, where surfers sit at beach shacks sharing crayfish pizzas and beers.

In high season villages swell with tourists queuing for restaurants, and the sky sings with crowds spilling from pubs. The little fishing port of Mousehole is as packed as Piccadilly Circus, and St Ives is a no-go zone for locals – especially this year, when Covid made it frightening to hear the accents mingling on the beach.

But come winter, everyone vanishes. Roads where camper vans collided with tourist-packed topless double-decker buses sit empty. Villages usurped by second-home owners and holiday cottages fall black at night.

Across the Penwith Peninsula mizzle descends – the Cornish word for the continuously drizzling rain that drenches everything, sometimes coming so thick that from the windows it looks as if a cloud has enveloped the house.

In my Cornish fantasy I pictured myself swanning around beaches barefoot in Laura Ashley, and I packed accordingly in summer, leaving my other clothes in storage. Now it is bitter winter, all I have is thin floral dresses. I stockpile thermals at Sainsbury's and order raincoats to counter the horizontal torrents. I stop caring about how I look and start assessing clothes based only on what will keep the weather out, adopting a cobbled-together uniform of layered thermals, dungarees, jumpers, boots and whichever coat is least wet. It's a relief no one here judges how you look. One freezing night when we were still in Tier 1, I turned up to meet my friend Suzy at the pub and found her wearing her pyjamas and a slanket.

I start waking up earlier, learning that here you have to chase the light (because by 4pm we're plunged into black) – going out to find the car so cold the metal groans and cracks as I set off on the icy road, under an orange sky cut through by golden God rays, passing the old engine houses of tin mines, where smoke rises from the bricks heated by the sun. I go for walks on the north coast, where the sea whips the rocks, crashing down in foamy fountains. Perhaps it is because it is all so new that I love it so much. Will the novelty wear off?

Sometimes I get flashbacks to when I was little, growing up amid the snowy winters in Wales – warming socks on the Aga and boiling the kettle to pour over the snowcovered car before school – and I get pangs of missing my mother.

At first, Cornwall felt quiet after summer, but soon a different buzz took over. Now, I see tractors parked outside the post office, people riding their horses on the beach, and I pass dog walkers who wave, smiling knowingly as we battle the rain together.

I feel the sense of a new life beginning: that, after an agonising year of Covid, which ended my relationship, my job and my life in London, something fragile has started to grow. Then I get a call from my solicitor, and it all comes crashing down again.

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