

UNITED KINGDOM

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

GEOGRAPHY

The United Kingdom (UK) is comprised of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (across the Irish Sea). It is located in the Northern Hemisphere bordered on the west and north sides by the Atlantic Ocean, the east by the North Sea, and the south by the English Channel. Calais in France is just 35km from Dover across the North Sea and is the closest point to the Continent of Europe.

The country is rather flat and undulating along the East coast, whereas in the North (Scotland - Grampian mountains), the centre (England - Pennine Mountain range), and the west (Wales - the Welsh mountains), it is mountainous.

CLIMATE

Britain (England, Scotland & Wales) is an island country and the surrounding sea gives it a varied climate. It is hard to be sure what the weather will be like from one day to the other. It can be sunny one day and rainy the next. In general the summers are warm and the winters cool. Summers are cooler than those on the continent, but the winters are milder. It is much colder in Scotland, with snow in the winter, than in the South of England. The towns along the South Coast are much warmer than on the East Coast, where it is often very windy across the flat countryside.



CAPITAL CITIES

London – England
Edinburgh – Scotland
Cardiff – Wales
Belfast – Northern Ireland

POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT

There are approximately 60,975,000 million people (July 2007) of many nationalities living in the UK, of which 51,456,400 live in England. The majority of the population is English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish. However, it is an extremely diverse nation with a strong culture of racial integration and unity.

The capital city of London has approximately 7.5 million people living there, one seventh of the population of the UK. It is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the European Union.

LANGUAGE

English and Welsh are the official languages of the UK. However, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are many different dialects, which are sometimes not easy to hear clearly and understand for a stranger, and take some time to get used to.

RELIGION

Most people are Christian (71%), although all other religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism are freely practised.

POLITICAL SYSTEM

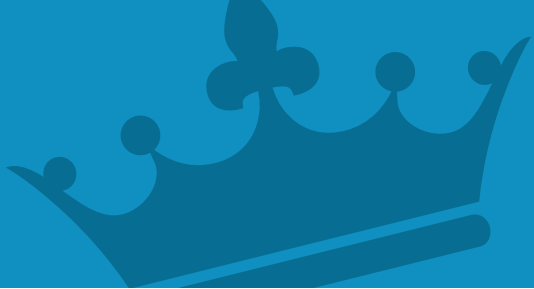
The United Kingdom has a Monarchy, and Queen Elizabeth II is its head, and the Head of State. The Queen opens Parliament, which governs the country, and she officially offers the role of Prime Minister (Head of Government) to the successful candidate when his/her party has been voted in by the electorate. The Crown (and the Queen) have been represented throughout the British legal system at home and abroad, and the Crown is written into most areas of Government, i.e. Crown jurisdiction, Crown property, Offices of the Crown, Officers of the Crown etc.

The country is governed by Parliament (Houses of Parliament in Westminster in London). There is an Upper and a Lower House, the upper being the House of Lords, who oversee and have the final vote on all laws before they are passed. The Lower House is called the House of Commons, where all local representatives of the various towns and areas sit and propose and vote on laws.

The United Kingdom is one of 27 member states of the European Union.

LAW AND JUSTICE

The United Kingdom has three distinct legal systems; English law, which applies in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland law, which applies in Northern Ireland, are based on common-law principles. Scots law, which applies in Scotland, is a pluralistic system based



on civil-law principles, with common law elements dating back to the High Middle Ages. The Treaty of Union 1707 guaranteed the continued existence of a separate law system for Scotland.

The Appellate Committee of the House of Lords (usually just referred to, as “The House of Lords”) is the highest court in the land for all criminal and civil cases in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and for all civil cases in Scots law. Recent constitutional changes will see the powers of the House of Lords transfer to a new Supreme Court of the United Kingdom.

In England and Wales, the court system is headed by the Supreme Court of England and Wales, consisting of the Court of Appeal, the High Court of Justice (for civil cases) and the Crown Court (for criminal cases). In Scotland the chief courts are the Court of Session, for civil cases, and the High Court of Justiciary, for criminal cases, while the sheriff court is the Scottish equivalent of the county court.

The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the highest court of appeal for several independent Commonwealth countries, the British overseas territories, and the British Crown dependencies. There are also immigration courts with UK-wide jurisdiction — the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal and Special Immigration Appeals Commission. The Employment tribunals and the Employment

These publicly-funded services are among the Government’s top priorities, and account for about half of all government spending. They are supported by the work of a great many voluntary social and health care organisations, and by carers who look after members of their own family or friends. More than 90% of all health care in Britain is provided by the state through the NHS.

HEALTH CARE

Britain’s public provider of health care is known as the National Health Services (NHS). Services provided by the NHS include hospitals, family doctors, specialists, dentists, chemists, opticians and the ambulance service. The principal groups that the NHS provides free or subsidised medical treatment to are; those with the right of abode in Britain and who are currently resident in Britain (this excludes British citizens who are resident abroad); anyone who has been resident in the UK for the previous year; EU nationals; students (on courses longer than 6 months); anyone with a British work permit.

Nationals of countries with reciprocal health agreements with Britain are also entitled to treatment from the NHS, although exemption from charges is usually limited to emergency treatment.



Appeal Tribunal have jurisdiction throughout Great Britain, but not Northern Ireland.

WELFARE GUIDE

The health and social welfare system is part of everyone’s life in Britain. It provides help for anyone who is raising a family or who is elderly, sick, disabled, unemployed, widowed or disadvantaged. Everyone at some point in their lives will receive help from its varied services, ranging from health checks for children, home help for disabled or elderly people or cash benefits to cover periods of unemployment. The three pillars of the health and social welfare system are:

The National Health Service - the health of the community is the responsibility of the NHS, free to everyone who normally lives in Britain.

The personal Social Services - provided by local authorities for elderly and disabled people, those with mental disorders and for families and their children.

Social Security - designed to secure a basic standard of living for people who are unemployed, help for families and help towards the cost of disablement.

Countries with reciprocal agreements include: EEA nations, Anguilla, Australia, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Bulgaria, Channel Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, New Zealand, Romania, Russia, St Helena, Switzerland, Turkey, and the Caicos Islands.

If you are not entitled to free or subsidised treatment from the NHS, you are strongly advised to take out some form of medical insurance to cover yourself against emergency medical treatment which can become extremely expensive.

EDUCATION

Education is a devolved matter and each of the four constituent countries of the UK has a separate education system, though England, Wales and Northern Ireland are very similar. Education (although not necessarily in the form of school attendance) is compulsory for all children between the ages of 5-16, though the UK Government announced in January 2007 plans to change this to 5 - 18 in England. Most English, Welsh and Northern Irish state (but not independent) schools usher students through nursery school, one of two primary school tracks, and one of two secondary tracks, of which sixth form is optional. Most children and young people in the UK are educated in state funded schools financed



WHAT DOES IT COST?

To give you an idea of living costs in the United Kingdom we give you below the average retail prices for a small range of household items (GBP£).

Item	Price
Carrots/kg	0.71
Bananas/kg	0.93
Sausages/kg	3.67
Eggs (half dozen)	0.99
Milk/4 pints	1.11
Butter/250g	0.84
Bread - Sliced Loaf/800g	0.96

through the tax system and so parents do not pay directly for the cost of education.

Schools follow the National Curriculum which was introduced by the UK government under the Education Reform Act 1988. The National Curriculum includes the core subjects English, Mathematics, and Science. Welsh is also a core subject in Wales from primary school all the way to year 11: Welsh may be taken as a first language or a second language.

The National Curriculum has five 'key stages':

- **Key stage 1** : age five to seven (Years 1 and 2)
- **Key stage 2** : age seven to eleven (Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)
- **Key stage 3** : age eleven to fourteen (Years 7, 8 and 9)
- **Key stage 4** : age fourteen to sixteen (Years 10 and 11 - preparation for academic GCSE and equivalent vocational qualifications GNVQ, BTEC, DIDA etc.)
- **Key stage 5** (unofficial) : age sixteen to eighteen (Years 12 and 13) - the A-level academic qualifications (AS and A2), also Higher GNVQ and BTEC qualifications, or sixth form college courses.

TRANSPORT, COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA

Most forms of communication are available in the UK, for example television (both commercial & cable), radio, telephone, fax, mobile telephones & texting, internet and emailing, broadband, VoIP etc. Newspapers and magazines are readily available throughout the country, and most of the major newspapers from around the world are on sale in Central London and other large cities.

Telephone accounts can be opened with one of the many companies operating in the UK (the biggest telephone company is British Telecom), or alternatively prepaid mobile telephones can be purchased. Many telephone boxes in the streets only accept a prepaid card, and not cash, and these cards are on sale at newsagents and many other outlets.

Among the many forms of transport in the UK are airlines, railways (internal & to the European Continent via the Channel Tunnel), underground railways in the major cities (usually the quickest way to travel in London), ferries (freight, passenger and car, both intercontinental & local), buses (suburban and intercity) and coaches.

DRIVING

All foreigners with driving licences issued outside the UK are allowed to drive in the UK for 12 months without obtaining a British driving licence. Driving in the UK is on the left hand side of the road. The national speed limit, on motorways and on dual carriageway (divided highway) roads outside towns, is 70 miles per hour (mph). The speed limit for single carriageway roads outside towns is 60 mph. The normal speed limit in built-up areas is 30 mph. Third party insurance is legally required in the UK.

For more information visit www.dvla.gov.uk

ELECTRICITY

The voltage used in Britain is 240 Volts AC at 50HZ. Most power sockets are designed for standard 3-pin square plugs. Electrical appliances generally use the British standard plug with 3 square pins. Plug socket adaptors and power transformers are widely available. Check which of your electrical appliances will not work in the UK. Your television will need to be compatible with the PAL system.

COST OF LIVING

The cost of living varies from one part of the UK to another. Generally it is more expensive to live in London and the South-East of England, and cheaper in the North. In July 2009, Britain's Consumer Price Index (annual inflation rate) was 1.8%.

Britain's currency is based on the pound sterling (GBP) which is divided into one hundred pence (100p). Coins are normally issued up to the value of GBP2.00.

ECONOMY

The United Kingdom (UK) economy is about one-sixth the size of the U.S. economy, about half the size of Germany's, and vies with France for the position of the fourth largest economy in the world. The UK, a leading trading power and financial centre, is one of the





quintet of trillion dollar economies of Western Europe. Over the past two decades, the government has greatly reduced public ownership and contained the growth of social welfare programs. Agriculture is intensive, highly mechanised, and efficient by European standards, producing about 60% of food needs with less than 2% of the labour force. The UK has large coal, natural gas, and oil reserves; primary energy production accounts for 10% of GDP, one of the highest shares of any industrial nation.

Services, particularly banking, insurance, and business services, account by far for the largest proportion of GDP while industry continues to decline in importance. The ongoing strength of the UK's service sector has helped it weather the global downturn better than many other countries. The economy's strength has complicated the Labour government's efforts to make a case for Britain to join the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Critics point out that the economy is doing well outside of EMU, and public opinion polls show a majority of Britons are opposed to the euro.

TAXATION

Tax on your worldwide income after 6 months of residency in the UK is payable in the UK to the Inland Revenue - branch offices are in most cities. Everyone resident in the United Kingdom is entitled to receive a certain amount of income each year before they have to start paying tax. This amount is called the personal allowance. There are also other additional allowances which can reduce the tax you have to pay. The amounts of the allowances are usually announced each year in the budget in March. Income tax code is a code given by HM Revenue and Customs, which shows what allowances an employee is getting under the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system. The code is usually a three figure number followed by a letter.

For more information visit www.hmrc.gov.uk

IMPORTING CATS AND DOGS

The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) is the system that allows pet dogs and cats from certain countries to enter the UK without quarantine as long as they meet the rules. It also means that people in the UK can take their dogs and cats to other European Union (EU)

countries, and return with them to the UK. They can also, having taken their dogs and cats to certain non-EU countries, bring them back to the UK without the need for quarantine. The rules are to keep the UK free from rabies and certain other diseases.

The European regulation which sets the rules for dogs and cats to travel between Euro-pean Community countries and into the Community from other countries also covers the movement of other pet animals such as rabbits and rodents.

The UK does not permit the import of dogs and cats have not been vaccinated against rabies. Before travelling, you must make sure that your pet cats and dogs (including assistance dogs) meets all the rules of the Scheme. Dogs and cats entering the UK under PETS may only do so on certain sea, air and rail routes. Dogs and cats entering the UK from non-qualifying (unlisted) countries must spend 6 months in quarantine on arrival.

For more information visit www.defra.gov.uk

IMPORTING PERSONAL EFFECTS

The cost of moving can be high and household items vary greatly in replacement value from country to country, so it is worth doing some research before deciding what to take and what to leave behind. In the case of many electrical and electronic items, differing standards may make it more worthwhile to purchase new ones.

For more information on customs regulations visit www.hmrc.gov.uk

IMPORTING MOTOR VEHICLES

The total cost of importing a car to the United Kingdom, including compliance and re-registration is so high that unless your vehicle is very special it is seldom worthwhile.

For more information on registration etc visit www.dvla.gov.uk

