

UK

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is situated to the northwest of the European continent, between the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea.

Geography

UK lies on British Isles, that is a geographical term for two large islands, Great Britain and Ireland, and a big number of smaller islands, including the Isle of Man, Orkneys, the Shetlands, the Isle of Wight, and the Channel Islands.

The northern part of Scotland, the Highlands, is mountainous with sea cliffs, glens (deep narrow valleys) and lochs (lakes). Ben Nevis (1,344 m) is the highest mountain of Great Britain. Cambrian Mountains in Wales are popular place for hiking. National Park Snowdonia is located here with the highest Welsh mountain Snowdon.

Pennines is a high mountain range in England. It is sometimes called „Backbone of England“.

British rivers are not very long but some important ports are situated on them. There is London on the river Thames, Liverpool on the Mersey, Glasgow on the Clyde and Belfast on the Lagan. The longest rivers are the Severn and the Thames. There is also a system of canals in Britain.

The climate of GB is temperate and humid due to the Gulf Stream. Winters are mild and summers are not so hot, which is the typical coastal weather.

History

GB was first settled by **the Celts** about 3000 years ago. In the year 43 AD, **the Romans** invaded country and they stayed there for 400 years, till the 5th century. They built villages, roads and forts throughout the country.

Then arrived German tribes, **Angles and Saxons**, from the European continent. They forced Celts to leave England and move westward to the mountains.

The year 1066 was the year of Norman invasion on the British island. William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy defeated the Saxon king Harold, won **the battle of Hastings**, became the king William I, and the country was ruled by Normans. Normans brought feudalism to the country. In 1085, the Domesday Book was founded as the first census of people, cattle and houses on the English land

Very important document in British history is Magna Carta. It was signed in 1215 and it guaranteed rights and the rule of law.

One of the most outstanding kings was **Henry VIII**, who had six wives. During his reign Wales was united with England. Roman Catholic church did not accept Henry's second marriage to Anne Boleyn, so he established his own church – Church of England, independent from Rome.

Anne Boleyn's daughter, Elizabeth I (1558-1603), became Queen of England She was also called the Virgin Queen, because she did not marry. Her reign is described as the **Elizabethan Age**. During her reign great discoveries in New Worlds opened the world to English trade and England became a world power. New world was discovered by Sir Francis Drake, Sir Walter Raleigh and others. Sir Walter Raleigh who explored the eastern coast of North America, founded the first English colony there and called it Virginia in honour of the Queen.

Another monarch who gave her name to an age was Queen Victoria. During her reign the British Empire grew and **the Victorian age** was symbolized by stability and expansion in wealth and power of Britain. Industry was replacing agriculture, people moved to towns. Queen Victoria reigned for 64 years. She was the first monarch who lived in Buckingham Palace.

The British Empire reached its greatest importance in the 1920s. In 1926 the British Commonwealth of Nations – a free association of equal states.

Politics

Britain is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch, the Queen Elizabeth, as a head of state. The Queen appoints the Prime Minister.

Parliament is made up of two Houses: The House of Commons and House of Lords.

There are 3 main political parties: the Labor party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats.

Education in Britain

Education is compulsory between the ages of 5 to 16. Children attend primary school from the ages of five to eleven. The main goal is to teach children reading and mathematics. At the age of 11 children go to secondary school. They usually have to wear a school uniform. This may be a shirt and tie and a special jacket called a blazer. But it is often simply a sweatshirt and trousers in a particular colour.

Except for Scotland, state schools in Britain follow a national curriculum. There are three main subjects – English, mathematics, and science.

There are national tests in these subjects for all 14 year olds. After that, students also study subjects such as information and communication technology, design and technology, and a modern foreign language.

At the age of 16, students take GCSE exams (General Certificate of a Secondary Education)

At the age of 18, they can take A level exams. Then they can go to university. Well known, traditional universities are Oxford and Cambridge.

Interesting places

LONDON

It is the capital city of the UK, the 9th largest city in the world. With its suburbs, London has 10 million inhabitants. London is situated on the river Thames in south-east England. London could be divided into two parts: City of London and City of Westminster:

City of Westminster occupies much of the central area of London. Its southern boundary is formed by the river Thames. Here is located the official London residence of the Queen – Buckingham Palace. Other important building is Palace of Westminster – seat of the Parliament. In the north end of the Palace of Westminster is situated Big Ben, famous clock tower. In fact, Big Ben is the name of a bell inside the clock.

Westminster Abbey is a large church, where King's and Queen's coronations take place.

The London Eye is a modern city attraction. It is also known as the Millennium Wheel with height of 135 metres.

City of London is a small area within Greater London. It is historic core of London. Today the City is a major business and financial centre. Also some of the famous historical sights can be found here – St Paul's Cathedral. It was designed by architect Sir Christopher Wren. Royal marriages are set in it.

Tower Bridge – famous bridge, that can open in the middle, consists of two towers where the mechanism of rising the bridge is placed.

Tower of London – founded in 11th century by William I, the Conqueror, as a fortress, it is a complex of several buildings. It served also as a royal seat and later as a prison.

Edinburgh: Capital city of Scotland is the seat of Scottish parliament. The most famous place there is Edinburgh Castle. It is a place where the coronation jewels are placed.

Belfast: Capital city of Northern Ireland. It is the largest city and a centre of ship-building industry. The Titanic was built here.

Brighton: Situated on the east coast of England, it is known for its beaches. Brighton is one of the largest and famous coastal resorts of Great Britain.

Dover: It is a town and major ferry port in the county of Kent, in South East England. It is nearest city to France.

Canterbury: It is the seat of the Canterbury archbishop. The Canterbury Cathedral is the place where Thomas Becket, former archbishop, was murdered in 1170.

Stonehenge is a prehistoric monument located in the southern England. Huge menhirs, over four meters high, are placed in a circle. The exact purpose of this place is not known.

Offa's Dyke – nowadays it is a long distance footpath along the Welsh-English border. In 8th century, this earthwork

formed a border between England and Wales, probably constructed on the orders of Mercian King Offa.

Hadrian's Wall was built during Roman's rule in England as a border between Scotland and England to protect England from Scottish tribes. It was built from stones and part of it is visible up to the present time.

Life in Britain

Food

British food has traditionally been based on beef, lamb, pork, chicken and fish and generally served with potatoes and one other vegetable. The most common and typical foods eaten in Britain include the sandwich, fish and chips, pies like the cornish pasty, and roasts dinners.

Most people around the world seem to think a typical English breakfast consists of eggs, bacon, sausages, fried bread, mushrooms and baked beans all washed down with a cup of coffee. Nowadays, however, a typical English breakfast is more likely to be a **bowl of cereals**, a **slice of toast**, **orange juice** and a **cup of coffee**.

Five o'clock tea has a long tradition in England. Many people do not eat much at teatime but they usually drink an average of three cups of tea a day.

British people

The British are said to be reserved in manners, dress and speech. They are famous for their politeness, self-discipline and especially for their sense of humour. British people have a strong sense of humour, which sometimes can be hard for foreigners to understand.

Britain is a country of mixed cultures. London has the largest non-white population of any European city and over 250 languages are spoken there. Therefore not all British people are White or Christians.

Living

England has many types of homes. In the large cities, people often live in apartments, which are called flats. In most towns, there are streets of houses joined together in long rows. They are called terraced houses.

The main types of houses in England are:

- Detached (a house not joined to another house)
- Semi-detached (two houses joined together)
- Terrace (several houses joined together)
- Flats (apartments)

Sports play an important part in the life in Britain and is a popular leisure activity.

Many of the world's famous sports began in Britain, including cricket, football, lawn tennis, golf and rugby.

England's national sport is cricket although to many people football (soccer) is seen as English national sport. Football is the most popular sport and some of England's football teams

are world famous, the most famous being Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool.

Football (Soccer): Football is undoubtedly the most popular sport in England, and has been played for hundreds of years. In the English Football League there are 92 professional clubs. These are semi-professional, so most players have other full-time jobs. Hundreds of thousands of people also play football in parks and playgrounds just for fun.

Famous people

Famous writers: William Shakespeare, Brontë sisters (Charlotte, Emily, and Anne), Jane Austen, Agatha Christie, J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Dickens, Famous Poets: Lord Byron, Robert Burns, and Thomas Hardy.

1. **Winston Churchill** was a politician, a soldier, an artist, and the 20th century's most famous and celebrated Prime Minister. 2. **Isambard Kingdom Brunel**
2. **Diana, Princess of Wales** From the time of her marriage to the Prince of Wales in 1981 until her death in a car accident in Paris in 1997, Diana, Princess of Wales was one of the world's most high-profile, most photographed, and most iconic celebrity.
3. **Charles Darwin** was a British naturalist of the nineteenth century. He and others developed the theory of evolution. This theory forms the basis for the modern life sciences. Darwin's most famous books are 'The Origin of Species' and 'The Descent of Man'.
4. **William Shakespeare** was a playwright and poet whose body of works is considered the greatest in English literature. He wrote dozens of plays which continue to dominate world theater 400 years later.
5. **Isaac Newton** was a mathematician and scientist who invented differential calculus and formulated the theory of universal gravitation, a theory about the nature of light, and three laws of motion.
6. **Queen Elizabeth I.** The daughter of King Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, Queen Elizabeth 1 reigned England from 1558–1603. Her reign was marked by several plots to overthrow her, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots (1587), the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588), and domestic prosperity and literary achievement.
7. **John Lennon** was a musician and composer who was a member of the Beatles, the biggest rock band of the 1960s.
8. **Horatio Nelson** is the greatest hero in British naval history, an honour he earned by defeating Napoleon's fleet in the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar.
9. **Oliver Cromwell** was a military, political, and religious figure who led the Parliamentary victory in the English Civil War (1642–1649) and called for the execution of Charles I. He was Lord Protector of England for much of

the 1650s, ruling in place of the country's traditional monarchy.

10. **Captain James Cook** was an explorer of the eighteenth century, known for his voyages to the Pacific Ocean. Cook visited New Zealand, established the first European colony in Australia, and was the first European to visit Hawaii. He also approached Antarctica and explored much of the western coast of North America.
11. **King Alfred the Great**, King of the West Saxons (871–899), scholar, and lawmaker who repelled the Danes and helped consolidate England into a unified kingdom.
12. **Queen Victoria:** Victoria's nearly 64-year reign was the longest in British history.