





















What basic facts do you know about the United Kingdom?

Can you tell me something more about each of the four countries?

Could you describe some of the United Kingdom's geographical features?

What do you know about places to visit in London?

What can you tell me about some famous people from Britain?

What are some foods which you associate with the United Kingdom?

Do you know anything about sports and pastimes in the United Kingdom?

Would you like to go to the United Kingdom? Why?

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Overview

The UK is located in northwest Europe on the island of Great Britain and the northern part of the island of Ireland. It is made up of four countries (see below). Its population is about 67 million. It is a constitutional monarchy, which means that a monarch (currently King Charles III) is head of state but the real power lies with the elected parliament (the House of Commons; members of the House of Lords are not elected and have limited powers). Informally, the national flag of the United Kingdom is called the Union Jack. The UK left the European Union in 2020.

The four countries

England is the largest of the countries both in area and population (56 million). Its capital, London, is also capital of the UK as a whole. The British government is based here, though the other countries also have their own governments. Other major English cities include Birmingham, Liverpool (a port city and the home of the Beatles), Manchester (home to Manchester United football club) and Oxford, where one of the oldest universities in the world was established in 1096. The 5,000-year-old Stonehenge is near Salisbury.

Scotland was an independent state until 1707, when it joined the Kingdom of England (which included Wales) to create the United Kingdom. In 1999, the Scottish parliament was reopened, and Scotland is now partly self-governing. The capital is Edinburgh. Scotland is quite mountainous and the UK's highest peak, Ben Nevis (1,345 metres), is found here.

The capital of **Wales** is Cardiff, which is home to the Senedd, the Welsh parliament. Wales is also mountainous, especially in the north (Snowdonia National Park). It has the most castles by area of any country in the world. It also used to be famous for coal mines.

Northern Ireland remained part of the UK when Ireland gained independence in 1922. The capital is Belfast, home to the shipyards where the Titanic was built. On the northern coast is the basalt formation called the Giant's Causeway, a popular tourist attraction.

Languages of the UK

The UK has several indigenous languages in addition to English, including Scots (a cousin to English), Scottish Gaelic and Welsh (Celtic languages). The largest immigrant languages are Polish, Punjabi and Urdu.

Geography of the UK

The UK has mild temperatures and frequent rain, though extremes of heat and heavy rain are becoming more common. Much of the country is quite hilly. The north is more mountainous, especially in Scotland, where you will find the Highlands. The longest river is the Severn, which rises in Wales. The Thames, which flows through London, is the second longest. Loch Ness in Scotland is the largest lake by volume. The largest lake by area is Lough Neagh in Northern Ireland.

The capital

London has a population of almost 9 million and is very diverse in ethnicities, nationalities and cultures. At its heart is the City of Westminster. Here you can find the Palace of Westminster, which is where the houses of parliament sit. Its clock tower contains Big Ben, a large bell. Westminster Abbey is where monarchs are crowned. Buckingham Palace, the official London residence of the monarch, is not far away. Other famous landmarks include Tower Bridge and St Paul's Cathedral. Hyde Park is the largest of London's Royal Parks. At Madame Tussauds, people can see lifelike wax sculptures. The West End is London's theatre district. The National Gallery houses famous art, while the British Museum has historical exhibits.

Famous people

Famous people from the UK include William Shakespeare, a playwright and poet from the 16th and 17th centuries; Isaac Newton, who developed the theory of gravity; Charles Dickens, a novelist from the 19th century; the Beatles, probably the most popular pop group of all time; and Monty Python, a very influential comedy group. The UK is also famous for many fictional characters, such as the spy James Bond, the detective Sherlock Holmes and the boy wizard Harry Potter.

British cuisine

Fish and chips is a combination of fried fish and fried potatoes. Chicken tikka masala was invented in the UK by South Asian chefs. The Scottish haggis is like a big sausage made from sheep stomach stuffed with offal, oatmeal and spices. The sandwich was popularised in gambling clubs in the 18th century. Pies and pasties are made from pastry filled with meat, onions and vegetables. Yorkshire puddings are small savoury puddings made from flour, milk and eggs and baked in oil. People drink black tea with milk.

Sports and pastimes

Many popular sports come from the UK, including football, cricket, rugby and golf. Other popular activities include rambling (a more relaxed version of hiking), watching horse-racing, seeing pantomimes at Christmas and doing DIY.