

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Great Britain is a big island consisting of 3 countries: England, Scotland and Wales. These three countries together with Northern Ireland form the **United Kingdom**. London is the capital of UK and English is the official language.

The British flag is called the **Union jack**. There are three flags in one. They are the flag of England, the cross of Saint George, red and white, the flag of Scotland, the cross of St Andrew, blue and white, the flag of Northern Ireland, the cross of St Patrick, red and white. They are placed one on top of each other.

The rose is the national symbol of England.

The thistle (cardo) is the national symbol of Scotland. It's a purple flower.

The daffodil (giunchiglia) is the national symbol of Wales. It's a yellow flower.

The shamrock (trifoglio) is the national symbol of Northern Ireland

SEAS

Britain is surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the West, the North Sea to the east and the English Channel to the south. Great Britain and Ireland are separated by the North Channel, the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel.

CLIMATE

The climate is temperate, this means that it is never very hot nor very cold. British temperature rarely falls below less than 10°C or goes above 32°C. The influence of the sea makes summers cool and the weather changeable.

RELIEF AND PLAINS

There are four main groups of mountains: the **Scottish Highlands**, the **Pennines**, the **Cumbrian Mountains** and the **Cambrian Mountains**. The highest mountain peaks in the country are **Ben Nevis** (1393 m) in Scotland and **Mount Snowdon** in Wales. The rest of Britain contains gently rolling hills and plains.

RIVERS AND LAKES

Rivers in England are not very long but most of them are navigable and connect major cities. The **Severn** (354 km) is the longest river in Great Britain. The most famous river is the **Thames** which runs through London and connects London to Oxford and Windsor. Other important rivers are **Humber** that joins the North Sea at Hull (is an important port); the **Mersey** which runs near Liverpool, the **Wye** in Wales and the **Clyde** in Scotland.

In the Cumbrian Hills there is an important area, the Lake District where are 16 little lakes. Today a lot of people go in this area on holiday. However the largest lake is **Lough Neagh** in Northern Ireland. In Scotland there are other lakes as **Loch Ness** and **Loch Lomond**.

ENGLAND

AREA	POPULATION	CAPITAL	PATRON SAINT	FLAG	NATIONAL EMBLEM
130,439 kmq	48,708,000 inhabitants	London	Saint George	St. George's cross of England	rose

England is the largest country in the UK. The majority of Britain's population lives here. The most important cities in England are **London**, the capital, **Birmingham**, **Leeds**, **Liverpool**, **Manchester**, **Newcastle** and **Bristol**. There are also many other important smaller historical towns like Brighton, Canterbury, Cambridge, Oxford, Bath, York...

The economy is mainly based on industry and tourism, but agriculture still plays a significant role.

SCOTLAND

AREA	POPULATION	CAPITAL	PATRON SAINT	FLAG	NATIONAL EMBLEM
78,783 kmq	5,132,000 inhabitants	Edinburgh	Saint Andrew	St. Andrew's cross of Scotland	Thistle

Until the 18th century Scotland was an independent country. In 1707 the parliaments of Scotland and England were united, but Scotland has retained its own system of law, its own church, its own educational system, its language and its own traditions. It has recently obtained its own parliament.

Edinburgh is the capital and **Glasgow** is the main industrial centre

WALES

AREA	POPULATION	CAPITAL	PATRON SAINT	FLAG	NATIONAL EMBLEM
20.768 kmq	2.913.000 inhabitants	Cardiff	Saint David	The red dragon of Wales	Leek and daffodil

In 1535 Wales formally became part of Britain, but it has always kept its separate identity, its own culture, customs and language. About a quarter of the population speaks both English and Welsh. Following a recent referendum it has also obtained its own parliament. The most important centres are **Cardiff**, the capital, **Swansea** and **Newport**.

IRELAND

AREA	POPULATION	CAPITAL	PATRON SAINT	FLAG	NATIONAL EMBLEM
70.000 kmq	4.000.000 inhabitants	Dublin Belfast	Saint Patrick	St Patrick's cross	Shamrock

Ireland is called the “Emerald Isle” because it is very green. English is the main language used in Ireland but Irish Gaelic is also spoken and taught, especially in the west. After a period of fighting, in 1922 Ireland was divided into the Catholic Irish Republic and the Protestant Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom. Dublin is the capital of the Irish Republic, Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland. Ireland’s economy is based on agriculture, industry and tourism.

GOVERNMENT

The Queen is the **Head of State**, but she has no real power. **Parliament** is the real government of Britain and the supreme authority of the country. The British Sovereign reigns but she doesn’t rule, the only body with power to make laws is the Parliament.

The present sovereign is **Queen Elisabeth II**. She was crowned in Westminster Abbey on 2nd June 1953, when she was nearly 26 years old. She is married to Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh and she has four children: Prince Charles, heir to the throne, Princess Anne, Prince Andrew and Prince Edward.

The Parliament consists of three elements: the **Queen**, the **House of Lords** and the **House of Commons**.

The House of Lords is made up of members of the old aristocracy (Archbishops, bishops, lawyers and retired politicians). They are not elected by the people but they are hereditary members or are chosen by the Queen. They can suggest new Laws and change or delay the laws that The House of Commons wants to pass. The House of Lords is presided over by the Lord Chancellor.

The House of Commons is elected by people and consists of 650 members of Parliament. The House of Commons makes laws and decides what taxes people must pay. The Chief officer of the House of Commons is the Speaker.

Nearly all legislation is initiated in the House of Commons and presented to the Lords for approval.

The leader of the Government is the **Prime Minister** who, by convention, is always a member of the House of Commons. He is chosen by the Queen. The Prime Minister’s office is at 10 Downing Street.

The current Prime Minister is Theresa May, leader of the Conservative Party (in Britain there are three main parties: the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats.)