

The United Kingdom



The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is a state in Western Europe and is currently a member of the European Union. The UK is made up of four nations; England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The UK has operated under a single sovereign power since the Acts of Union in 1707 in which the United Kingdom of Great Britain was legally formed. Wales joined England following the Laws in Wales acts of 1535 and 1542 under King Henry VIII, at which time Welsh laws were brought in alignment with English laws and Wales formally became a part of the Kingdom of England. Ireland joined the United Kingdom in 1801 when the British and Irish parliaments gave their consent — at the time the Irish parliament was dominated by Protestants, and the anti-UK Catholics were left out and thus not allowed a vote.

QUICK FACTS

Population: 64.8 million

Area: 248,528 sq. km (Comparable to Oregon)

Capital: London (8.6 million)

Languages: English, Welsh

GDP Per Capita: \$41,700

Head of State: Queen Elizabeth II

EDUCATION

The UK has a devolved education system in which the governments of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland operate their own education systems.

Throughout the UK, education is mandatory through the age of 16 at which time the students take their GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exam and then decide whether or not to pursue further education.



RELIGION

The UK is a majority Christian state, with Queen Elizabeth II serving as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Church of England, an Anglican organization, is led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and has existed since the 6th-century. The Church of England came to play a larger role in the UK under King Henry VIII when he decided to renounce the authority of the pope in order to ensure the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. According to data published by the UN, in 2011 59% of the UK population identified as Christian, followed by 25% claiming no religious affiliation, 4.4% identifying as Muslim, and 1.3% identifying as Hindu — the remaining groups all had less than 1%.

ETHNICITY and DEMOGRAPHICS

London is one of the most diverse cities across Europe, with nearly one third of its residents having been born in a different country. According to the 2011 census, about 46.9 million people across England and Wales spoke English or Welsh as their first language, and 1.7 million speak English well but as a second language. The largest non-native English speakers group in the UK is the Polish community. Northern Ireland and Scotland are more homogenous than their English counterparts with only 1.8% of Northern Ireland's residents being born outside of the UK or Ireland—in Scotland 93% of the population was born in the UK.





CONTEMPORARY BRITAIN

The UK has been known for its innovation for centuries, and has boasted the advent of several important technologies including the telephone, television, steam engine, and the world wide web. The UK is also the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, which saw the transformation of Europe and the United States from agrarian, rural societies, to industrial societies which has in turn brought a higher standard of living for the people living in these societies.

Today Britain is dominated by the service sector which makes up nearly 80% of their overall economy. The service sector includes financial services (there are over 500 banks in London alone), consultancies, restaurants and tourism, and many other sectors.

In June 2016 the UK decided, in a national referendum, to leave the European Union in a 52% to 48% vote. Some of the main arguments surrounding the decision to leave dealt with the so-called democratic deficit that exists within the EU and immigration policies.



Stonehenge, UK



Warwick Castle

UK HERITAGE IN THE USA

The UK and the US have long had, what is colloquially called, a special relationship. Many of the first settlers of North America came from Britain and led the creation of the colonies along the east coast. According to the 2010 Census in the US, approximately 26.9 million Americans claim English ancestry (and 35.5 million claim Irish ancestry).

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Everyday Britons drink roughly 165 million cups of tea (60.2 billion a year)*
- *There are more chickens than humans in the UK*
- *The name Big Ben does not refer to the famous clock or tower, but to the bell inside it*
- *The Channel Tunnel that connects the UK to France is the world's longest underground tunnel*
- *At its largest, the British Empire covered 20% of the world's surface and contained 25% of its population*
- *J.K. Rowling, the British author of the Harry Potter series, is the first author in the world to become a billionaire*

HEALTHCARE

The National Health Service is the publicly funded healthcare provider in Britain. The UK is a unique system in which services at the NHS are free of charge regardless of nationality. The UK spends 8.5% of GDP on healthcare (less than OECD average), which is far less than that of the US (16.4%)



The Union Jack is the official flag of the UK. It is a combination of three older flags uniting England, Ireland, and Scotland.



USEFUL LINKS

https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/unitedkingdom_en

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/uk.html>