

# The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## Geography

The UK **consists of** England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The many islands in this political group **lie off the NW mainland of Europe** and are surrounded by the North Atlantic Ocean to the west and the North Sea to the east. France is only 35 km to the southeast across the English Channel.

The southern **tip** of England is **roughly** at the same **latitude** (52 degrees North) as Prague and the zero degree of **longitude** (Greenwich **Meridian**) passes through London.

The UK covers an area of 244,820 sq km, only three times that of the Czech Republic. The physical geography is **varied** with the highest mountains in Wales and Scotland (Ben Nevis 1,343m). The eastern and southern parts of England are lower and high ground is **referred to as** hills, downs or heights (eg. The Chiltern Hills, The South Downs and the East Anglian Heights). The lowest point in the UK is minus 4 m in the **drained** Fens of East Anglia.

## Climate

The weather is **a main talking point** among the British at first meeting. Its **variability is due to the temperate maritime climate**. Winters are **milder** than they would normally be for the latitude because of the warming effect of the North Atlantic **drift** (The Gulf Stream). Summers are occasionally hot but 50 per cent of the year the skies are cloudy and **overcast**.



The British flag known as the Union Jack represents the three kingdoms of the UK: England and Wales (the red cross of St George), Scotland (the **diagonal** white cross of St. Andrew) and Northern Ireland (the diagonal red cross of St Patrick). The crosses are on a blue background. The flag in its present form first appeared in 1801.

## History

These islands have been **successively** invaded from Scandinavia and the continent. The Romans had a big influence, but the one date that all children surely know is 1066. This is when William the Conqueror, Duke of Normandy (France today), **beat** the English King Harold at Hastings and invaded Britain. French influence is still seen today **particularly** in the English language.

The following centuries were characterised by the growing power of the Crown and **disputes** with France **over** French territories. In 1485, a new dynasty, the Tudors, **gained the throne**. During the **reign** of Henry VIII the Anglican Church was founded and the reign of his daughter Elizabeth I **was marked by overseas expansion** as well as great cultural development. In 1536, Wales was **joined** to England by the Act of Union.

The power of the Parliament gradually grew and during the English Revolution (1649 - 1660) the monarchy was temporarily replaced with a series of republics and protectorates, led by Oliver Cromwell.

The 18th century saw Great Britain as a major colonial and industrial power; especially the long reign of Queen Victoria (ruled 1837 - 1901) is associated with the greatest expansion and economic growth. In 1707, Scotland was joined to England and the new unit was called Great Britain. Northern Ireland was **merged** with Great Britain in 1801.

In the 19th century, Britain **laid political claim to one quarter of the**



The Gothic St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh from the 12th century



Queen Elizabeth II was crowned in 1952 and Tony Blair became Prime Minister in 1997.

**Total area:** 244,820 sq km

**Population:** 60,4 million

**Capital:** London



A prehistoric megalithic complex of standing stones, Stonehenge (near Salisbury in Wiltshire), is believed to have had some religious or astronomical purpose.



The romantic countryside of Wales attracts many tourists every year.

**earth's surface** in the form of the Commonwealth (the countries that used to be or in some cases still are a part of the British Empire). As a result, this small country continues to have political and financial influence abroad. The UK is a **founding member** of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Although since 1973 the UK has been a member of the European Union, the British people **are not keen** to change their **currency** to the Euro.

## Political system

Queen Elizabeth II is head of the constitutional monarchy and the **government is responsible to her for its decisions**. She is also Head of the Protestant Church of England. Tony Blair is **currently** Prime Minister. Many



Mural paintings are common in Belfast.

decisions for the UK are made in London through the Parliament, consisting of the **elected** House of Commons and the unelected House of Lords. Recently there has been a process called devolution. This means that Scotland now has its own parliament in Edinburgh and there is a National **Assembly** for Wales in Cardiff. The establishment of an Assembly for Northern Ireland in Belfast **is still under discussion** because of problems with the peace process.

## People

The population of the UK is more than 60 million, taking into account emigration and immigration. About 7 million live in London.

To live in Britain means that you could enjoy a very good standard of living with **life expectancy** for men being nearly 76 years and 81 years for women. **Unemployment** is low (4.8%). On the negative side, 17% of the population **is living below the poverty line**.

## Holidays

The UK doesn't have special holidays apart from Christmas, New Year and Easter. There are single day **'bank holidays'** in May and August.

Nigel Haward (Great Britain)

## vocabulary

**to consist of** [kən'sɪst] - skládat se z  
**lie off the NW mainland of Europe** - leží severozápadně od kontinentální Evropy  
**tip** [tɪp] - konec  
**roughly** [ˈrʌfli] - přibližně  
**latitude** [ˈlætɪtjuːd] - zeměpisná šířka  
**longitude** [ˈlɒndʒɪtjuːd] - zeměpisná délka  
**meridian** [məˈrɪdiən] - poledník  
**varied** [ˈveəriəd] - rozmanitý  
**is referred to as** [rɪˈfɔːd] - se nazývá  
**drained** [ˈdreɪnd] - vyschlý, vysušený  
**a main talking point** - hlavní téma hovoru  
**variability is due to the temperate maritime climate** [ˌveəriəˈbɪləti djuː ˈtemp(ə)rət ˈmæɪrɪtaɪm ˈklaɪmət] - proměnlivost je způsobena mírným přímořským klimatem  
**mild** [maɪld] - mírný  
**drift** [drɪft] - proud  
**overcast** [ˌoʊvəˈkɑːst] - zatažený  
**successively** [səkˈsesɪvli] - postupně  
**to beat** [bi:t] - porazit  
**particularly** [pəˈtɪkjələli] - zejména  
**disputes... over** [dɪˈspjuːts] - spory... o  
**gained the throne** [geɪnd θrəʊn] - usedla na trůn  
**reign** [reɪn] - vláda, panování  
**was marked by overseas expansion** [ˈəʊvəsiːz ɪkˈspænz(ə)n] - se vyznačovala expanzí do zámoří  
**to join** [dʒɔɪn] - připojit  
**to merge** [mɜːdʒ] - spojit  
**laid political claim to one quarter of the earth's surface** [ˈleɪd ˈpɒlɪtɪkəl ˈkleɪm tu ɒn ɒn ˈkwɔːtə ˈsəʊθɪs] - si nárokovala politický vliv nad čtvrtinou země  
**founding member** [ˈfaʊndɪŋ ˈmembə] - zakládající člen  
**are not keen** [kiːn] - nejsou nakloněni  
**currency** [ˈkʌr(ə)nəsi] - měna  
**government is responsible to her for its decisions** [rɪˈspɒnsɪb(ə)l] - vláda se jí zodpovídá ze svých rozhodnutí  
**currently** [ˈkʌr(ə)ntli] - momentálně  
**elected** [ɪˈlektɪd] - volený  
**assembly** [əˈsembli] - shromáždění  
**is still under discussion** - je stále předmětem diskusí  
**life expectancy** [lɪf ˈspekt(ə)nəsi] - průměrná délka života  
**unemployment** [ˌʌnɪmˈplɔɪmənt] - nezaměstnanost  
**is living below the poverty line** [ˈlɪvɪŋ bəʊ ˈpɒvəti] - žije pod hranicí chudoby  
**bank holidays** - státní svátek, den pracovního volna  
**diagonal** [daɪˈæɡ(ə)n(ə)l] - úhlopříčný  
**mural** [ˈmjʊərəl] - nástěnný