



101 UK CULTURE TIPS

A FIELD GUIDE TO BRITISH CULTURE

BY
ANGLOTOPIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GEOGRAPHY

1. What is the UK?	11
2. The Countries of the UK.....	13
3. Geography of the UK.....	16
4. What is a Brit?.....	20
5. Demographics of the UK.....	22
6. UK Climate 101.....	24
7. Britain's Largest Cities Other than London.....	27
8. The Names of Britain.....	30
9. Pronouncing British Place Names.....	33
10. Famous Streets/Places.....	36
11. Amusing Place Names in Britain.....	39

BRITISH BASICS

12. Dates and Measures.....	43
13. British Etiquette.....	46
14. Bank Holidays.....	48
15. Flags of the UK.....	50
16. Meeting the Queen.....	54
17. The UK Legal System Explained.....	56
18. The Pound and Currency.....	59
19. Exploring Your British Heritage.....	62
20. British Christmas Traditions.....	65
21. English Education System.....	70
22. What is 'The Season'?.....	73
23. Driving on the Left.....	75
24. British Newspapers and Identity.....	77
25. The Royal Line of Succession.....	81
26. A Brief Guide to British Accents.....	83
27. What the British Really Mean.....	86
28. Marriage in Britain.....	89
29. A Few Things to Know About Britain Before Moving There.....	91
30. Random Things Britain Does Better.....	94
31. Boxing Day 101.....	98

ASPECTS OF CULTURE

32. British Honors System.....	102
33. British Peerage System.....	105
34. How to Get a Knighthood (or Damehood).....	108

35. British Patriotic Songs.....	111
36. The Importance of Remembrance Day.....	116
37. Questions Not to Ask a British Person.....	118
38. A Guide to UK Elections.....	122
39. What is Morris Dancing.....	130
40. Patron Saints of the British Isles.....	132
41. British Police Ranks.....	134
42. British Armed Forces Ranks.....	137
43. Unusual British Festivals.....	140
44. Strange British Sports Competitions.....	143
45. The Church(es) in Britain.....	147
46. The Concept of the Crown.....	150
47. The British Class System.....	152
48. Private Members Clubs.....	155
49. British Humor 101.....	158
50. The Union Jack.....	161

HISTORY

51. 10 Events in British History to Know About.....	165
52. Five of Britain's Oldest Businesses.....	169
53. Norman Invasion 101.....	171
54. 10 Worst Britons.....	175
55. Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot.....	179
56. Industrial Revolution 101.....	183
57. 10 Greatest Britons (Men).....	187
58. 10 Greatest Britons (Women).....	190

BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

59. The National Trust.....	194
60. How to Behave in a B&B.....	197
61. How to Behave in Self-catering Accommodation.....	202
62. Places to Visit for Jane Austen Fans.....	206
63. Places to Visit for Sherlock Holmes Fans.....	209
64. British Trees.....	212
65. British Flowers.....	215
66. British Cultural Institutions to Know.....	218

BRITISH FOOD

67. Famous Foods and Dishes.....	224
68. British Condiments.....	230
69. British Christmas Food 101.....	232
70. Top British Sweets.....	234

TEA

- 71. 10 Facts About Tea.....238
- 72. Different Types of Tea Times.....241
- 73. How to Make a Cup of Tea.....243
- 74. Tea Blend Histories.....246
- 75. Foods to Have With Tea.....249
- 76. The All Important Kettle.....251
- 77. Best British Biscuits for Tea.....253

PUBS

- 78. Don't be a Pillock in a Pub – Pub Etiquette.....257
- 79. Different Types of Pubs.....259
- 80. 15 Interesting Pubs to Visit for a Pint.....261

LONDON

- 81. London Black Taxi Etiquette Tips.....267
- 82. Tube History 101.....269
- 83. Strange London Events.....274
- 84. Funny London Place Names.....276
- 85. London's Oldest Businesses.....281
- 86. What is a Londoner?.....285
- 87. Names of London.....287

BRITISH ENTERTAINMENT

- 88. Doctor Who 101.....290
- 89. British Sports.....295
- 90. British TV Channels.....298
- 91. The British Invasion 101.....302
- 92. 10 British Shows for Politics Junkies.....307
- 93. What is the Boat Race.....311
- 94. 10 British Comedies.....314
- 95. BBC 101.....318
- 96. Shakespeare 101.....327
- 97. Going to the Cinema.....329
- 98. Top 100 British Films.....332
- 99. Top 100 British TV Shows.....336
- 100. Top 100 British Songs.....341
- 101. Further Reading.....346



INTRODUCTION

This is a book that changed substantially in the writing. When I came up with the idea a few years ago, I had a clear vision of what it would look like – 101 quick bites about British culture. Then I went to write the thing, and this ended up being a book that was completely different. The end goal was the same; I wanted to create a basic guide to British culture for the curious that covered questions we commonly get running Anglotopia.net.

As I began to plan the content for the book, I found that about half the things that would fit in the book we'd already written about. So I've done the sensible thing and gone through our archive to find these articles and then adapted them for the book. But once I'd done that, I realized there was so much that we hadn't written about yet that needed to be in the book. Half the chapters in this book have not appeared anywhere else and were written for this book.

Inevitably something will have been left out. The format of the book was 101 UK Culture Tips – we could easily write 1001 tips about British Culture! So, we tried to keep it focused on the most important aspects of British culture that outsiders have questions about, wonder about, and like to experience when they travel there. So, there's a big focus on heritage, history, language, places, tourism, etc.

The result has ended up being twice as long as I planned, and we ended up having to change the format of the book to make it larger. So, while the book is not a comprehensive encyclopedia of British culture, hopefully, it feels comprehensive.

It's been rather fun being immersed in British culture for the last few months writing this book; I do find it endlessly fascinating. I do hope you enjoy this eclectic exploration of all things British.

Jonathan & Jackie Thomas
Publishers
Anglotopia

GEOGRAPHY



WHAT IS THE UK?

The United Kingdom is a country in Northern Europe made up of four constituent countries spread out over the two British isles of Great Britain and Ireland. Those countries being:

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Northern Ireland

This does not include the Republic of Ireland, which is its own separate country. This also does not include places like the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands, which are not part of the United Kingdom but are rather Crown Dependencies that the UK has sovereignty over, but the people are not part of the United Kingdom. Places like Gibraltar or the Falkland Islands are British overseas territories.

The Kingdom of Great Britain was officially formed in 1707 when the Kingdoms of England and Scotland, whose crowns had already been joined, politically integrated by creating one Parliament based in London. Wales, by this point, was already considered part of England (this is no longer the case).

The Kingdom of Great Britain transformed into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801 when the Parliaments of Great Britain

and Ireland were officially joined. Ireland was part of the union until the 20th century, when it became independent.

The official name of the country is now the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland being the six counties of Ulster that did not wish to become part of the Republic of Ireland – it's complicated!).

2.

THE COUNTRIES OF THE UK

ENGLAND

Taking up the lower two-thirds of the Island of Great Britain, England has long been the most powerful and most populous part of the island. Its Kings have either ruled most of the island or tried to rule it (and the island next door). When we think of 'British' culture, we usually mean 'English' Culture since England's culture is the dominant force on Great Britain. British Imperialism was essentially English Imperialism (backed up by the Scots and Welsh and occasionally Irish). Separating 'Britishness' from 'Englishness' is very difficult and beyond the scope of this book (and we will irritate pedants by using the terms interchangeably). While England is its own 'country' within the UK – it does not have its own devolved government like the other countries do. Its government is the United Kingdom Government, where it dominates the rest of the UK politically and culturally.

SCOTLAND

Taking up the northern third of the island of Great Britain, Scotland has long been a powerful challenger to the English. It resisted English rule for most of its history, developing its own distinct political traditions and legal system. But it could not resist English dominance forever. First, the

crowns were joined when James VI of Scotland, became James I of England, and united the crowns. The countries joined together into the United Kingdom around a hundred years later and are still together, despite talk of independence. When the UK was formed, Scotland dissolved its parliament, but in 1997, it was given the power to legislate back and now has a strong government already independent of the British parliament. Scottish culture is very distinct from English (and wider 'British' culture). They have their own traditions, many based on the Highland clan system. They have their own patriotic songs, their own accents, and a tradition for doing things that is very different from the English (buying a house and marriage are completely different in Scotland, for example). They even have their own language, which now has legal recognition.

WALES

Wales is a 'rump' of a country on the western coast of the Island of Great Britain. Very mountainous, it played a major role in Britain's industrial development due to the quantities of coal in its hills. It has been a declining region since coal mining went away all over Britain. It's struggled in recent years. Culturally, it is very distinct from Scotland and England. Like Scotland, they have their own traditions; many rooted in the hills and valleys that make up Wales. They have their own Celtic language (separate from Scottish Gaelic), and it's an official language (with its own radio and TV stations). The Welsh consider themselves to be the original 'Britons' as they're the closest in relation to the original inhabitants of the British Isles before the Romans arrived. Wales now also has its own devolved government, but independence isn't really at the forefront of political thought like in Scotland. Until very recently, Wales wasn't even considered a 'separate' country; legally, it was just part of England. That has changed, and Wales is developing and proudly showing off its separate identity to the rest of the world.

NORTHERN IRELAND

This one is complicated. The Republic of Ireland used to be part of the United Kingdom but has had independence for over 100 years. But the six counties in the North never joined the Republic and wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom. This has led to a century of conflict known as 'The Troubles' that is too complicated for this short entry. But basically, there's a constituency that wants to remain part of the UK, but there's also a constituency just as big that would like to join the Republic in a new United Ireland, which seems feasible in the new post-Brexit order. The Northern Irish are a distinct culture from Ireland and from the rest of the UK. There are those that see themselves as just Irish,

those that see themselves as British, and those that see themselves as both. They have their own devolved government, but it's very unstable, and the British government occasionally has to intervene through 'Direct Rule.' Even as I type, this Northern Irish politics are in turmoil and will remain so for the foreseeable future. As I said, it's complicated. For a good explainer on it – I recommend the TV comedy Derry Girls.

3.

GEOGRAPHY OF THE UK

For what might seem like a tiny island to those in the great big United States, the United Kingdom is a very diverse country when it comes to Geography. In fact, much of its diverse natural features are known throughout the world, from the White Cliffs of Dover to the Lake District to the Scottish Highlands. The natural beauty found in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland has been praised in poetry, literature, art, and music. The regions in the United Kingdom are almost defined by their geography as much as their cultures, so we will look at each one to give you a basic overview of what Britain has to offer.

LONDON AND SOUTHEAST ENGLAND

London is the most central place in the United Kingdom in terms of its importance more than its physical location, but it is the River Thames that both defines Greater London and has made it important since the Romans first established a settlement there. Once you get out of the city and the home counties, the rest of Southeast England is filled with luscious green hills. It's also in the Southeast that you'll find the famous White Cliffs of Dover, which reach 350 feet high and owe their color to being made of chalk and flint.

EAST ENGLAND

East England, sometimes referred to as East Anglia, is defined by both agricultural land as well as its waterways. This includes the Norfolk broads, a network of navigable rivers and marshlands that offers some of the most ecologically diverse animal and plant life. These marshes also encompass the Fens or Fenlands, a number of which were drained over time to produce arable land. The Fens also help to buffer storms that come in from the east.

SOUTHWEST ENGLAND

Much like the East and South East, Southwest England is full of rolling green hills, farmland, and quaint villages. These hills are made primarily of limestone and chalk, though some are artificially made barrows that provide the final resting places of importance of the pre-Roman chiefs of yore. Its shores see perhaps the greatest number of ports in the United Kingdom. The Southwest peninsula has the longest coastline of anywhere in the UK at 700 miles, and the amount of igneous and metamorphic rock that makes up parts of East Devon and Dorset has labeled it “Jurassic Coast.”

EAST AND WEST MIDLANDS

The most geographically central part of England, the Midlands, is an idyllically green place from whence rose the Industrial Revolution. It's also here that you can find the Peak District, which is home to both grassland moors and upland elevations that mark the very southern end of the Pennines mountain range. It should be no surprise that this region contains a number of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, such as the Shropshire Hills and the Cotswolds.

YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

The Pennines practically divide our next two entries. Yorkshire and the Humber sit between the East Midlands and Northeast England, and its beauty has caused the locals to dub it “God's Own Country.” It's here that you'll find some of the largest moors in the North York Moors. It's also home to Yorkshire Dales National Park as well as the most northern part of the Peak District. The Yorkshire Peaks are three relatively close mountains that comprise Ingleborough, Wharfedale, and Pen-y-Ghent.

NORTHEAST AND NORTHWEST ENGLAND

Also collectively known as “The North,” Northwest and Northeast England can also lay claim to the Pennines mountains and is full of numerous other hills and mountains. It’s a hard land that, over the centuries, has produced an arguably hardy people. It is also home to the Lake District, a series of waters and meres that proved popular with artists and writers of the Romantic Period.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland comprises just 17% of the island of Ireland and is mostly uplands and low mountains. It does, however, also possess the United Kingdom’s largest freshwater lake in Lough Neagh. Another striking feature are the basalt columns that make up the Giant’s Causeway. It also has its share of mountains, including the Mourne Mountains, Slieve Croob, Slieve Donard, and the Antrim Mountains that rise up to the Antrim Plateau.

WALES

Occupying much of western Great Britain, Wales can be divided into a mountainous region to the north and lowlands to the south. Most of the northern mountains can be found in Snowdonia, including, of course, Mount Snowdon as the country’s highest peak. There are also the Cambrian Mountains, the Black Mountains, and the Brecon Beacons. The lower regions are covered by a coastal plain filled with valleys. Approximately a quarter of Wales is covered in national parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and at least 80% of the land is dedicated to agriculture, whether crops or livestock.

SCOTTISH LOWLANDS

While Scotland is a pretty diverse country in its own right, it’s primarily divided into the Lowlands and the Highlands. The Lowlands comprise the Central Lowlands and the Southern Uplands, which border England. The Lowlands are full of sedimentary rocks and valleys that have produced most of Scotland’s agriculture over the centuries. Most of Scotland’s largest cities are found in the Lowlands, and the thinnest point of the lowlands is only 30 miles across. The hills down near the border in the Southern Uplands are rounded, and their peaks are covered in peat, a composition of plant matter that looks like soil and was once burned as fuel.

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

The Scottish Highlands are considered one of the most romantic and beautiful parts of the country. Thousands of years ago, glaciers carved out the mountains that created high mountain ranges and deep valleys. It should be no surprise that the Highlands are the highest elevations in the United Kingdom and also feature the nation's highest peak, Ben Nevis, which rises to a height of 4,413 feet. The Caledonian Canal is a major waterway that bisects the Highlands and runs from Inverness to Fort William. It's the untamed beauty of this land that has inspired TV programs such as *Outlander*.

4.

WHAT IS A BRIT?

This is a complicated question to answer. You'll see why shortly. On the surface, a Brit is someone from the Island of Great Britain. But quite a few Scottish and Welsh people might not appreciate being called 'British.'

That's the paradox of being a citizen of a country made of our four different countries. Each has its own identity.

On the most basic level, it is fine to say someone from the United Kingdom is British. When they're outside the UK, calling them British, or a Brit for short, is perfectly fine, and that's how the UK government would refer to them or itself – the UK government is the 'British' government. The Queen is the British Queen. The Royal Family is the British Royal Family. The BBC is the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Someone from Scotland is Scottish, and they call themselves Scots. While they're technically British, a separate Scottish identity is very strong these days, so you will find they will identify more with being Scottish than British. Some nationalist Scots will be insulted if you call them British. Some Scots view themselves as Scottish first, British second if at all.

Someone from England is English, and they call themselves English. While they're technically British, Englishness and Britishness are practically the same things. They will use 'English' and 'British' interchangeably. Some English people hate the term 'Brit,' but most don't really care. It's all very confusing!

Someone from Wales is Welsh, and they call themselves Welsh. While they're technically British (and until only recently were part legally of England anyway), they identify with being Welsh first and British second. Welshman or Welshwoman are common terms. But they might keep it simple by saying they're British. Welsh Nationalism is not nearly as strong as Scottish Nationalism, but they're still proud of their separate Welsh heritage.

Northern Ireland is a whole other matter entirely.

So, Northern Ireland is made up of the six counties on the island of Ireland that did not join the Republic of Ireland when it gained independence. Mostly because there's a huge population of Anglo-Irish and Scots who moved there over the centuries, most of these people are Protestants (so joining majority Catholic Ireland was not appealing). Many of these people call themselves Unionists and consider themselves to be British and would probably call themselves Brits.

However, there's a large population of Irish Catholics who consider themselves to be solely 'Irish' even though they live in Northern Ireland. Then there's a group of people who just consider themselves to be Northern Irish. According to the Good Friday Accords, which brought peace to Ireland in the late 90s, people in Northern Ireland can choose to be either 'Irish' or 'British,' and it comes down to personal choice (they can apply for both Irish and British passports). As I said, it's complicated!

So, if you're interacting with someone who appears to be English ... Scottish ... Welsh ... or British – it's best to let them lead in the conversation. Which accent they speak and how they speak about themselves will indicate how they like to call themselves. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with just asking how they prefer to be referred to. That way, no Scottish people or Welsh people are harmed in the course of your conversations!

5. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE UK

We've covered what the British call themselves and the constituent countries. But that doesn't cover exactly WHO the British people are. This data is based on the 2011 census (data from the 2021 census was not available at the time of writing).

Historically the people of Great Britain were white Northern Europeans. But with a history of empire and immigration, that picture is much different today.

The United Kingdom has 66 million people.

The countries break down as follows:

- England – 56.2 million
- Scotland – 5.5 million
- Wales – 3.2 million
- Northern Ireland – 1.9 million

The following numbers are broken down for the entire country of The United Kingdom. Race breaks down into the following groups:

- White: 92.12%
- Asian: 4.39%

- Black: 1.95%
- Mixed: 1.15%
- Other: .39%

The White population of Britain is a mixture of native Brits and also other Europeans who have immigrated over the centuries. This also includes a large number of Irish people and people of Irish descent.

The Asian population of Britain is rather diverse as it's a broad term. The biggest proportion is people from the Indian subcontinent who came from former British colonies. Chinese and other Asians are lumped into this, but percentage-wise, they're rather small.

The Black population of Britain mostly comes from its former colonies in the Caribbean. Most came in the 1950s and 1960s to fill labor shortages in Britain after World War II and stayed – starting families and becoming part of the British fabric.

6.

UK CLIMATE 101

What most people outside of the United Kingdom think of when it comes to British weather is rain. Rain, rain, rain, rain, and more rain. Maybe some gray clouds or fog as well, but it's mostly rain. This is most definitely an exaggeration, even if it isn't too far off the mark. Britain's climate from Cornwall to the Shetland Islands of Scotland is actually rather nice most of the time. Perhaps surprisingly to non-Brits, you might even find it sunny more often than not.

The United Kingdom is actually in a temperate zone. This is the climate zone that actually exists between the tropical zone to the south and the arctic zone to the north. A good chunk of the world exists in temperate zones in the northern and southern hemispheres, including the United States. Compared to the tropical zone that runs around the middle of the planet, a temperate zone has less biodiversity when it comes to plants but a greater number of environments. This is mostly due to the fact that temperate zones enjoy colder winters, which limits the growing time for plant life.

Britain falls neatly into a temperate climate with cool winters and warm summers, though it can be a bit wet in any season. Being a moderately large island, Great Britain doesn't get as much biodiversity in its environments as larger countries like the United States, Canada, and Russia do. Additionally, being surrounded by larger bodies of water means that cold or warm fronts can move in and affect most of the

country easily, and weather can change daily (and sometimes hourly) from rain to shine and back again. Indeed, British weather is almost entirely at the mercy of whatever is happening in the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea.

However, that doesn't mean there is no diversity from one end of the United Kingdom to the other. Dover in southeast England can quite often be warm and dry, while Cumbria in the northwest can be cooler and tends to experience more rain. Southern England stays warm even though the southwest, in Cornwall, for example, can be wetter than Dover. In fact, while rain is a constant throughout the UK, it tends to get steadier the further north you go. The rainfall in Western Scotland can reach 60 inches per year and experience approximately 200 days of rain. On the opposite side of Great Britain, in London, there was only about 23.5 inches spread out over 109 days. Manchester, which sits roughly in the middle of the island, gets about 31.5 inches over 149 days.

Part of the reason that the more mountainous regions further north are more snowy is that the warm air brought in by the Atlantic tends to rise, and by the time it reaches the higher elevations, it cools and turns into precipitation. Needless to say, if you're heading to Scotland, it's best to make sure you have a rainproof windbreaker or umbrella handy. However, despite all the rain that most of the country gets throughout the year, snow is exceedingly rare as the temperatures rarely get cold enough for the precipitation to freeze. The last time there was widespread snowfall in the United Kingdom was actually 2010, and before that, it was 1991, so it appears the country can expect winter weather about every twenty years. On average per year, the percentage of weather stations reporting snow hardly even gets into double digits.

Much like here in the States, July and August can be the country's warmest months, but whereas the highs in the US can reach the 90s or even 100s, in Britain, the highest you might see is a balmy 75-degree Fahrenheit. Additionally, the further north you go, the cooler it gets. And interestingly, while in the States, we're used to winter temperatures that can get down to the 30s or even the 20s on the most extreme wintery days, the average winter low in the United Kingdom hovers in the low-40s. As such, temperatures tend to be fairly mild by comparison to those of us across the pond.

Summer is perhaps the best time for visiting the United Kingdom, and you'll find it to be a lot cooler than the average American summer. You may find yourself needing a sweater or jacket and some Chapstick in parts of Scotland. Also, be aware that July and August can be some of Scotland's wettest months, so that raincoat or umbrella will definitely be useful. January and February tend to be the coldest months, but with lows in the 40s, it can be quite pleasantly cold depending on what part of the United States you call home. And do keep in mind that the weather can change pretty quickly, so always be sure to dress in layers for cool-to-

warm temperatures so you can shed what you don't need. If you plan to visit Scotland in the colder months, a jacket is a must, along with a warm hat, some gloves, and maybe even a scarf.

To conclude, the United Kingdom isn't all about rain, even if there is quite a lot of it depending on when and where you go. Holiday destinations along the south will be a fair bit dryer in contrast to the stereotypical image of a drizzly and gray London. In truth, all parts of the country are generally pleasant for most of the year, and you can find yourself starting out with a coat in the morning only to ditch it by midday, then whip out the umbrella in the evening when the rain starts (if it starts). The best time to visit will be in the summer months, but due to Britain's moderate temperatures, you really could visit any time of year and be quite comfortable. So long as you're well-prepared for all the potential weather and temperatures you might encounter, you can expect to have a lovely visit to any corner of Great Britain.

7.

BRITAIN'S LARGEST CITIES OTHER THAN LONDON

When most foreigners think of Britain, they think of London. But contrary to what most Londoners think – there are several very large cities throughout Britain, all with their own unique cultures and history (and who have quite a chip on their shoulder about the focus on London). Here's a list of the ten most populous and what they're known for. All are easily reachable by train or motorway – so there's no reason not to explore them!

Birmingham – Also known as Britain's 'second city,' Birmingham is located in the heart of the Midlands. Birmingham was an economic powerhouse during the Industrial Revolution as its location helped fuel its growth. This declined after World War II, and much of the city center was destroyed, giving Birmingham a checkered reputation, but it's had a bit of a renaissance in recent years. Those from Birmingham are known as Brummies, and they have a distinctive accent.

Leeds – This is the largest city in the county of West Yorkshire. It grew to prominence during the Industrial Revolution and a center for processing Wool – it was a major mill town. The beautiful city has impressive civic buildings and a strong Yorkshire culture. Now it's an important center of culture and tourism for the greater Yorkshire area.

Glasgow – Despite the reputation of Edinburgh, Glasgow is actually the biggest city in Scotland, and it was an industrial engine of the British Empire at its height. It was called the ‘Second City’ of the British Empire at its industrial height. The city is now a strong center of Scottish culture and tourism, and also it’s become famous as a film shooting location – its long, straight streets in some places give it an American-like grid feeling – it even stood in for New York City in the Captain America film. Locals in Glasgow are known as Glaswegians and have their own unique lilting Scottish accent.

Sheffield – This large city in South Yorkshire is known for one thing: steel. Its foundries made steel that built the world. Stainless steel and crucible steel were developed locally and led to a tenfold increase in the local population. It’s still known as the Steel City, even as steel production has declined (as it had in most post-industrial nations in the West).

Bradford – Known in history as the ‘Wool City,’ it was a center of the textiles boom during the Industrial Revolution; its proximity to supplies of coal meant that industrial capacity grew quickly. Though the city declined in the 20th century, its proud history and heritage has meant that, like the other post-industrial towns in Northeast England, it’s had a ‘second life as a center of culture and tourism.

Manchester – Pretty much everyone knows the name of Manchester these days, thanks to the fame of one of its football teams – Manchester United. Manchester really developed during the Industrial Revolution, and when the canal was built linking it to the Irish Sea, it became a textile powerhouse – some say the engine of the British Empire as goods from all over the Empire were brought here and finished into products that were then exported. It declined in the 20th century as textile production moved to the former Empire. But the devastation of the IRA bombings in 1996 led to massive investment and redevelopment in the city, turning it into a Northern economic engine again. Locals in Manchester are known as Mancunians.

Edinburgh – The stately capital of Scotland, and it has been so for over a thousand years. It was a center of knowledge and culture for hundreds of years. It’s where the Scottish Parliament is based, and the Queen has her own residence there. Many Scots feel about Edinburgh how most Englishmen feel about London – it’s a distant, rich place that may not understand all that is happening outside its boundaries.

Liverpool – This city is most famous for one of the most popular bands in history – The Beatles, who came from this former industrial powerhouse. Its location on the coast made it an important port in

Britain – one of the most important in the entire Empire. Liverpool had a dark role in the operation of the Atlantic slave trade. Important cargoes also went through here – as products made all over Britain were funneled into the port and exported around the world. Many Irish and English immigrants to the new world departed from here – leading to major shipping conglomerates like Cunard and the White Star Line (who later merged). It's now one of the most popular tourist destinations in Britain (thanks to the Beatles connections) and was at one time designated a European Capital of Culture. Locals are known as Liverpudlians and have a lilting accent distinctive from Manchester, which is only 37 miles away.

Bristol – Another important port city for Britain, which like Liverpool, grew thanks to the Atlantic Slave Trade. When it was abolished, it continued to be an important port city for Britain. It was heavily damaged in World War II bombing. Despite this, it was a great center of aerospace engineering – all of the Concorde were constructed in nearby Filton.

Cardiff – The capital of Wales and its largest city, Cardiff grew as an important port in Wales due to the ease of getting coal from the Welsh valleys to the water. Welsh coal helped fuel the British Empire. As coal declined in the 20th century, Cardiff declined as well. But thanks to massive investment and planning, it's had a bit of a renaissance. It also became an important center for television production as the BBC built studios on the former docks – hit British shows like Doctor Who are filmed there.

8.

THE NAMES OF BRITAIN

There are so many names for the United Kingdom that it can be hard to keep them straight. Some were used interchangeably as if they mean the same thing. Some are used incorrectly. Oftentimes people are mistaken when they refer to something in Scotland as being in England or that the word 'English' means the same thing as 'British.' Here is a list of words and explanations for some of the places and peoples in the United Kingdom.

UK – The official name is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which consists of England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

(Great) Britain – The island of Great Britain itself but often used when talking about the United Kingdom. Does not include Northern Ireland.

British – A term usually used to mean anyone from the United Kingdom though this may annoy some of the Northern Irish. It is also not advisable to call a Scotsman British. While they are technically British, they are Scottish first. Someone like Andy Murray is Scottish until he's winning at Wimbledon, at which point he becomes British (this is a well-worn joke).

Britannia – An outdated Latin term for the island of Great Britain that was coined by the Romans. They also founded Londinium, the city that became London. Britannia is also the female symbol of the UK – the shield maiden used on older currency. Britannia was also a symbol of British Imperialism.

Briton – Essentially citizens of the United Kingdom, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, or of one of the British Overseas Territories. The shortened version is ‘Brit,’ which is commonly used by Americans to refer to the British. There are some who don’t like the usage of that term.

The British Isles – The Geographic name for the islands that make up Great Britain and Ireland, though it’s falling out of use because the Irish don’t like being called British for good reason.

Hibernia – Classical Latin name for Ireland.

Éire – Irish Gaelic for Ireland

Albion – Another outdated term for the island of Great Britain. This is the oldest known name of the island and comes from Ancient Greek.

Caledonia – The Latin name given to the northern part of Britannia, which is now called Scotland.

Cymru – The Welsh language name for Wales.

Ulster – The northern UK part of the island of Ireland (the independent Republic of Ireland is the bottom part). Though not all of the original ‘Ulster’ was incorporated into Northern Ireland.

England – The largest country in the United Kingdom, where most people live in the UK. South of Scotland and East of Wales.

English – 1. The language spoken by the British (but as in Scotland and Wales, not the only language). 2. The people who live in England. Someone from Scotland is not English. Someone from Wales is not English. Only someone from England is English.

Blighty – An older term for ‘Britain’ that evokes misty-eyed golden images of Britain. ‘Dear Old Blighty.’ Originated in India.

Rosbif – A derogatory French term used by the French to describe the British. Because the British love Roast Beef (or at least that’s what the French think).

Sassenach – Term used by the Scottish and other Celts to describe the English.

Team GB – The official Olympics team for Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Some people believe the name discriminates against the Northern Irish.

Grande Bretagne – French for Great Britain.

Angleterre – French for England.

Grossbritannien – German for Great Britain.

Gran Bretagna – Italian for Great Britain.

Limey – Limey is a derogatory predominantly American slang nickname for a British person.

Pom or Pommy – An Australian term for British people that is derogatory in nature. Brits will often be called ‘whingeing poms’ if they come to Australia and complain about anything.

Toff – In British English slang, a toff is a derogatory stereotype for someone with an aristocratic background or belonging to the landed gentry, particularly someone who exudes an air of superiority.

Jock – A derogatory nickname for Scottish people used by the English.

Tan – A derogatory nickname for the British used by the Irish, a reference to the ‘Black & Tans’ sent to Ireland in an attempt to quell the Irish Uprising (who were quite harsh and unforgiving to the Irish rebels).

9.

PRONOUNCING BRITISH PLACE NAMES

One of the most perplexing things travelers in Britain can come across is how to properly pronounce the place names in Britain. Places that have the same name in somewhere like the USA or Australia, will be pronounced completely different in the UK.

This is by no means an exhaustive list – there are plenty of those out there. We’ve kept the list focused on popular places that Americans would be likely to visit and also places that are particularly indecipherable to an American tongue. There are also local pronunciations that will differ – we’ve tried to focus on how anyone in Britain would say it based on convention.

- Alciston, East Sussex – Aston
- Alfriston, East Sussex – All-Friston
- Allerton, Bradford, West Yorkshire – Ollerton
- Aldwych, London – Old witch
- Alnmouth – Allenmouth
- Alnwick (Northumberland) – Anic
- Althorp (where Princess Diana is buried) The village is pronounced Olthorpe, but the House is pronounced Orltrop (notice the reversal of the O and the R!)
- Ansty, West Sussex An-Sty
- Ardingly (Sussex) – Ardingl-eye

- Bamburgh (Northumberland) – Bambruff or Bambro?
- Beaconsfield – Bekonsfield
- Beaulieu – Bewley
- Bedworth – Bedduth
- Belvoir – Beever
- Berwick on Tweed – Berik on Tweed
- Bicester – Bister
- Boughton, Lincolnshire – Bootun
- Borough, London – Burra
- Brough, East Yorkshire – Bruff
- Burpham, Surrey or West Sussex – Ber-Fam
- Cadogan Square, London – Ca-duggan
- Castle Combe, Cotswolds – Castle Coombe
- Chippenham – Chipnam (locally)
- Chiswick, London – Chizzik
- Cholmondeston, Cheshire – Chumston
- Cholmondley – Chumly
- Clapham, London – Clap-em
- Deptford, London – Det-ford
- Dulwich, London – Dull-tich
- Edinburgh – Edinboro or Edinburah (just NOT Edinburg)
- Eltham, SE London – El-tum
- Etchilhampton (near Devizes Wilts) – Eyeshalton
- Fowey (Cornwall) – Foy
- Frome – Froom
- Gillingham, Kent – Jillingham
- Gillingham, Norfolk & Dorset – Gillingham (hard sounding “g” as in girl)
- Gotham, Nottinghamshire – Goat’am
- Glasgow – Glazga
- Gloucester – Gloster
- Greenwich – Grenich
- Grosmont, North Yorkshire – Grow-mont
- Grosvenor – Grovenor
- Harrogate – Harrowget
- Hainault, London – Ay-nolt
- Hastings, Sussex – Haystings
- Holborn, Central London – Ho-burn or O-bun
- Homerton, London – Ommer-tun
- Hunstanton (Norfolk) – Hunston
- Isleworth, London – Eye-zul-worth
- Keswick, Cumbria, England – Kezik
- Kettering (Northamptonshire) – Ke’-rin (apostrophe indicated glottal stop)
- Launceston (UK) – Lawnston

- Leadenham, Lincolnshire – Led’nam
- Leicester – Lester
- Leominster – Lemster
- Lewes, East Sussex – Loowis
- Marylebone, London – Marly-bone
- The Mall, London – The Mal not Maul
- Mildenhall (Wilthshire) – Minal (to rhyme with spinal)
- Milton Keynes – Milton Keens
- Mousehole, Cornwall – Mowzel
- Norwich – NORRich
- Pall Mall, London – Pal Mal not Paul Maul
- Penge, London – Rhymes with Henge as in Stonehenge
- Penistone – Penny –stun
- Plaistow, London – Plaaah-stow not Play-stow
- Plymouth – Plimuth
- Rotherhithe, London – Rother-hive
- Ruislip, London – Ryeslip
- Salisbury, England – Sawlsbry
- Scone, Perth, Scotland – Skoon
- Shrewsbury – Shrowsberry
- Slough – Slow (to rhyme with how/now)
- Southwark – Suth-uk
- Streatham, London – Stret-em
- Theydon Bois, London – Theydon Boyce
- Tottenham, London – Tott-num
- Truro, Cornwall – Tru-row
- Warwick – Warrick
- Wapping, London – Kind of rhymes with shopping
- Welwyn – Wellin
- Weymouth, Dorset – Waymuth
- Woolwich, London – Wool-idge
- Worcester – Wooster (as in Bertie Wooster)

10. FAMOUS STREETS/PLACES

There are many streets in places in Britain that have become metonyms for something else. You'll hear them often in the British news or in British TV or film. Here is a list of the most common ones to help you translate.

Savile Row – The street with a high concentration of tailors. Getting a proper Savile Row suit is considered a very nice thing to have, indeed.

Harley Street – While Britain has a nationalized health service that everyone has free access to, there is still a parallel private health system (and private health insurance). Many of the 'top' private doctors will practice on Harley Street. It's popular for wealthy foreigners to come to get their procedures done here.

Shaftesbury Ave – The central avenue in London where there's a heavy concentration of theaters (for plays and musicals). It's now a metonym for referring to the musical and theatre world in general.

Bond Street – A shopping street in London with a high concentration of high dollar designer stores. It also extends to 'New' Bond Street as well.

The Mall – The red road leading from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace and usually the center point of many national ceremonies and celebrations.

Charing Cross Road – This used to be a Mecca for bookstores, but there are not as many today – though there are still a few. Cecil Court, just off Charing Cross Road, has more bookstores these days and retains some of that charm.

Downing Street – The location of the Prime Minister’s home and office. It’s one of those things that wasn’t planned and just kind of happened and stayed that way. The Chancellor of the Exchequer (the money man) lives next door. Downing Street has come to symbolize the seat of the British government, even though actual governing takes place down the street in the Palace of Westminster.

Whitehall – The Main Street through London’s ‘government quarter’ and has come to be the stand-in phrase for the actual functions of government in Britain.

Scotland Yard – The original public entrance (via “Great Scotland Yard”) to the headquarters of the London Metropolitan Police Service. It is no longer located there, but the name persists when referring to the Metropolitan police in London.

The Old Bailey – This street in central London is synonymous with the most important building on the street – the Central Criminal Court – which is now usually called The Old Bailey.

Fleet Street – Many of Britain’s newspapers were based on this street in the late-Victorian and early-Twentieth century. It became a metonym for referring to the press ‘what Fleet Street thinks.’ It’s a name that’s stuck when talking about the British press, even though there are no longer any newspapers actually based on Fleet Street.

Gold Hill – Probably the most famous street scene in Britain due to its appearance in an iconic Hovis Bread Commercial, this picturesque row of cottages in northern Dorset is one of the most perfect English scenes. It has ancient cottages rolling down a cobbled hill with beautiful green hills and valleys in the distance. It is sublimely perfect (in this author’s opinion).

Castle Combe – This small English village in the Cotswolds has come to epitomize the perfect English idyl. Nestled in an enclosed valley, this small village built of local Cotswold Stone is one of the most beautiful places in Britain (and absolutely swamped with tourists in the peak season).

Arlington Row – Bibury – Another famous location in the Cotswolds – Arlington Row is a street of weaver's cottages along a small stream that has become famous as one of the perfect English places. Again, popular with tourists, you will struggle to see it as a calm and beautiful place in peak tourist season.

Steep Hill – Dorset doesn't have a monopoly on steep street scenes; this street in Lincoln is very famous, lined with Georgian villages and providing views of the surrounding city and countryside; it's a very beautiful place.

Stormont – An estate in Northern Ireland where the Northern Irish assembly meets, and the NI government operates from. So, when the media refers to issues in Northern Ireland, you'll often hear the name when referring to the government there.

Holyrood – A street in Edinburgh where Holyrood Palace is located, as well as the new Scottish Parliament. It's now a metonym for the Scottish government, and you'll often hear 'Holyrood' invoked when speaking of the Scottish government or First Minister.