



evropský
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EVROPSKÁ UNIE



MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ,
MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY



OP Vzdělávání
pro konkurenceschopnost



INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland** is a country and sovereign state that lies to the northwest of Continental Europe with Ireland to the west. It occupies the majority of the British Isles and its territory and population are primarily situated on the island of Great Britain and in Northern Ireland



on the island of Ireland. The United Kingdom is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, and its ancillary bodies of water, including the North Sea, the English Channel, the Celtic Sea, and the Irish Sea. The mainland is linked to France by the Channel Tunnel, with Northern Ireland sharing a land border with the Republic of Ireland. The United Kingdom is a political union made up of four constituent countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The British crown has three dependencies: the Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey.

The United Kingdom also has many overseas territories, including Anguilla, Bermuda, Gibraltar, Pitcairn Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Saint Helena (with Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha), South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, as well as Akrotiri and Dhekelia and British Antarctica among others. A constitutional monarchy, The Queen Elizabeth II is also the Queen and the Head of the State of 15 other Commonwealth Realms such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

People

Nationality: British.

Population (2008): 61.7 million.

Annual population growth rate (2008 est.): 0.7%.

Major ethnic groups: British, Irish, West Indian, South Asian.

Major religions: Church of England (Anglican), Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland (Presbyterian), Muslim.

Major languages: English, Welsh, Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic.

Education: *Years compulsory*--12. Health: *Infant mortality rate* (2008 est.)--5/1,000. *Life expectancy* (2008 est.)--males 77.2 yrs.; females 81.5 yrs.; total 79.4 years.

Work force (2008, 31.36 million): *Services*--81.5%; *Industry* — 16.9%; *agriculture*--1.6%.

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The United Kingdom's population in 2008 surpassed 61.7 million -- the third-largest in the European Union. Its overall population density is one of the highest in the world. Almost one-third of the population lives in England's prosperous and fertile southeast and is predominantly urban and suburban--with about 7.5 million in the capital of London, which remains the largest city in Europe. The United Kingdom's high literacy rate (99%) is attributable to universal public education introduced for the primary level in 1870 and secondary level in 1900. Education is mandatory from ages 5 through 16. The Church of England and the Church of Scotland are the official churches in their respective parts of the country.

A group of islands close to continental Europe, the British Isles have been subject to many invasions and migrations, especially from Scandinavia and the continent, including Roman occupation for several centuries. Contemporary Britons are descended mainly from the varied ethnic stocks that settled there before the 11th century. The pre-Celtic, Celtic, Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse influences were blended in Britain under the Normans, Scandinavian Vikings who had lived in Northern France. Although Celtic languages persist in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, the predominant language is English, which is primarily a blend of Anglo-Saxon and Norman French.

The United Kingdom is a union made up of the following regions, home nations and territories:



The UK



The Island of Great Britain



England



Wales



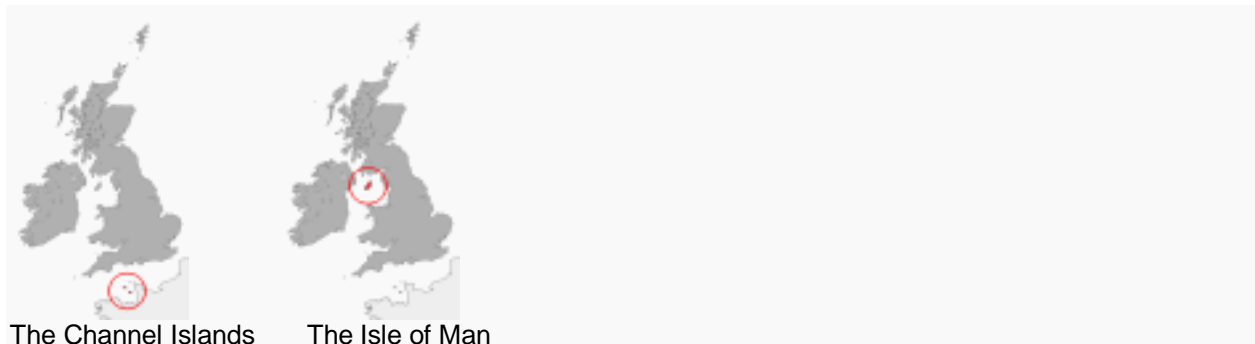
Scotland



The Northern Ireland

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Crown Dependencies



Geography

The total area of the United Kingdom is approximately comprising of the island of Great Britain, the northeastern one-sixth of the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland) and smaller islands. It lies between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, coming within of the northwest coast of France, from which it is separated by the English Channel

Great Britain lies between latitudes 49° and 59° N (the Shetland Islands reach to nearly 61° N), and longitudes 8° W to 2° E. The Royal Greenwich Observatory in London, is the defining point of the Prime Meridian

When measured directly north-south, Great Britain is a little over in length and is a fraction under at its widest, but the greatest distance between two points is between Land's End in Cornwall (near Penzance) and John o' Groats in Caithness(near Thurso). Northern Ireland shares a land boundary with the Republic of Ireland.

The United Kingdom has a temperate climate with plentiful rainfalls all year round. The temperature varies with the seasons but seldom drops below or rises above.

The prevailing wind is from the southwest, bearing frequent spells of mild and wet weather from the Atlantic Ocean. Eastern parts are most sheltered from this wind and are therefore the driest. Atlantic currents, warmed by the Gulf Stream, bring mild winters, especially in the west, where winters are wet, especially over high ground. Summers are warmer in the south east of England, being close to the European mainland, and cooler in the north. Snowfall can occur in winter and early spring.

England

accounts for just over the half of the total area of the UK. Most of the country consists of lowland terrain, with mountainous terrain north-west - Cumbrian Mountains, the Lake District, the Pennines and limestone hills of the Peak District.

The main rivers and estuaries are the Thames, Severn, Humber

England's highest mountain is Scafell Pike (978 metres).



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England has a number of large towns and cities, including six of the top 50 Larger Urban Zones in the European Union. (London, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester...)

Scotland

accounts for just under a third of the total area of the UK, covering , including nearly eight hundred islands, mainly west and north of the mainland, notably the Hebrides, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands.

The faultline separates two distinctively different regions; namely the Highlands (to the north and west) and the lowlands (to the south and east).

The more rugged Highland region contains the majority of Scotland's mountainous terrain, including Ben Nevis, which is the highest point in the British Isles (1343m).



Lowland areas, especially the narrow waist of land between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth, known as the Central Belt, are flatter and home to most of the population including Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, and Edinburgh the capital and political centre of the country.

Wales

accounts for less than a tenth of the total area of the UK, covering . Wales is mostly mountainous, though south Wales is less mountainous than north and mid Wales.

The main population and industrial areas are in south Wales, consisting of the coastal cities of Cardiff (the capital, political and economic centre), Swansea and Newport and the South Wales Valleys to their north. The highest mountains in Wales are in Snowdonia, and include Snowdon - the highest peak in Wales.



Northern Ireland

is mostly hilly. It includes Lough Neagh, the largest body of water in the UK and Ireland.

The highest peak in Northern Ireland is Slieve Donard in the Mourne Mountains.



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Government



Type: Constitutional monarchy.

Constitution: Unwritten; partly statutes, partly common law and practice.

The United Kingdom does not have a written constitution. The equivalent body of law is based on statute, common law, and "traditional rights." Changes may come about formally through new acts of Parliament, informally through the acceptance of new practices and usage, or by judicial precedents. Although Parliament has the theoretical power to make or repeal any law, in actual practice the weight of 700 years of tradition restrains arbitrary actions.

Executive power rests nominally with the monarch but actually is exercised by a committee of ministers (cabinet) traditionally selected from among the members of the House of Commons and, to a lesser extent, the House of Lords. The prime minister is normally the leader of the largest party in the Commons, and the government is dependent on its support.



Parliament represents the entire country and can legislate for the whole or for any constituent part or combination of parts. The maximum parliamentary term is 5 years, but the prime minister may ask the monarch to dissolve Parliament and call a general election at any time. The focus of legislative power is the 646-member House of

Commons, which has sole jurisdiction over finance. The House of Lords, although shorn of most of its powers, can still review, amend, or delay temporarily any bills except those relating to the budget. The House of Lords has more time than the House of Commons to pursue one of its more important functions--debating public issues. In 1999, the government removed the automatic right of hereditary peers to hold seats in the House of Lords. The current house consists of appointed life peers who hold their seats for life and 92 hereditary peers who will hold their seats only until final reforms have been agreed upon and implemented. The judiciary is independent of the legislative and executive branches but cannot review the constitutionality of legislation.

The Flag of The United Kingdom

The **Flag of England** is the St George's Cross.



The red cross appeared as an emblem of England during the Middle Ages and the Crusades and is one of the earliest known emblems representing England. It achieved status as the national flag of England during the sixteenth century.

Saint George became the patron saint of England in the thirteenth century, and the legend of

Saint George slaying a dragon dates from the twelfth century.

The flag appeared during the Middle Ages.

The Flag of Scotland



is a white saltire, a *crux decussata* (X-shaped cross) representing the cross of the Christian martyr Saint Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland on a blue field.

It is named **the Saltire** or the **St Andrew's Cross**.

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The **Flag of Wales**



is *Y Ddraig Goch*, consisting of a red dragon passant on a green and white field.

It was officially recognised as the Welsh national flag in 1959.

Northern Ireland



has not had its own unique, government sanctioned flag since its government was prorogued in 1972, and abolished in 1973 under the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973. The "Ulster Banner" is one name that was given to the flag, the "Red Hand Flag" or as the "Ulster Flag".

The Ulster Banner was the official flag that was used to represent the Government of Northern Ireland from 1953 to 1973. In common with other British flags, any civic status of the flag was not defined in a de jure manner. During official events, the British government uses the Union Flag, which is the official flag of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and is the only flag used by the government in Northern Ireland

Union Jack



The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland uses as its national flag the royal banner known as the **Union Flag** or, popularly, **Union Jack**. The current design of the Union Flag dates from the Union of Ireland and Great Britain in 1801.

It consists of the red cross of Saint George, edged in white, superimposed on the Cross of St Patrick which are superimposed on

the Saltire of Saint Andrew.

Its correct proportions are 1:2. However, the version officially used by the British Army modifies the proportions to 3:5, and additionally two of the red diagonals are cropped.

History

The Roman invasion of Britain in 55 BC and most of Britain's subsequent incorporation into the Roman Empire stimulated development and brought more active contacts with the rest of Europe. As Rome's strength declined, the country again was exposed to invasion—including the pivotal incursions of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes in the fifth and sixth centuries AD—up to the Norman conquest in 1066. Norman rule effectively ensured Britain's safety from further intrusions; certain institutions, which remain characteristic of Britain, could develop. Among these are a political, administrative, cultural, and economic center in London; a separate but established church; a system of common law; distinctive and distinguished university education; and representative government.

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Union

Both Wales and Scotland were independent kingdoms that resisted English rule. The English conquest of Wales succeeded in 1282 under Edward I, and the Statute of Rhuddlan established English rule 2 years later. To appease the Welsh, Edward's son (later Edward II), who had been born in Wales, was made Prince of Wales in 1301.

The tradition of bestowing this title on the eldest son of the British Monarch continues today. An act of 1536 completed the political and administrative union of England and Wales.

While maintaining separate parliaments, England and Scotland were ruled under one crown beginning in 1603, when James VI of Scotland succeeded his cousin Elizabeth I as James I of England. In the ensuing 100 years, strong religious and political differences divided the kingdoms. Finally, in 1707, England and Scotland were unified as Great Britain, sharing a single Parliament at Westminster.

Ireland's invasion by the Anglo-Normans in 1170 led to centuries of strife. Successive English kings sought to conquer Ireland. In the early 17th century, large-scale settlement of the north from Scotland and England began. After its defeat, Ireland was subjected, with varying degrees of success, to control and regulation by Britain.

The legislative union of Great Britain and Ireland was completed on January 1, 1801, under the name of the United Kingdom. However, armed struggle for independence continued sporadically into the 20th century. The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 established the Irish Free State, which subsequently left the Commonwealth and became a republic after World War II. Six northern, predominantly Protestant, Irish counties have remained part of the United Kingdom.

British Expansion and Empire

Begun initially to support William the Conqueror's (c. 1029-1087) holdings in France, Britain's policy of active involvement in continental European affairs endured for several hundred years. By the end of the 14th century, foreign trade, originally based on wool exports to Europe, had emerged as a cornerstone of national policy.

The foundations of sea power were gradually laid to protect English trade and open up new routes. Defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 firmly established England as a major sea power. Thereafter, its interests outside Europe grew steadily. Attracted by the spice trade, English mercantile interests spread first to the Far East. In search of an alternate route to the Spice Islands, John Cabot reached the North American continent in 1498. Sir Walter Raleigh organized the first, short-lived colony in Virginia in 1584, and permanent English settlement began in 1607 at Jamestown, Virginia. During the next two centuries, Britain extended its influence abroad and consolidated its political development at home.

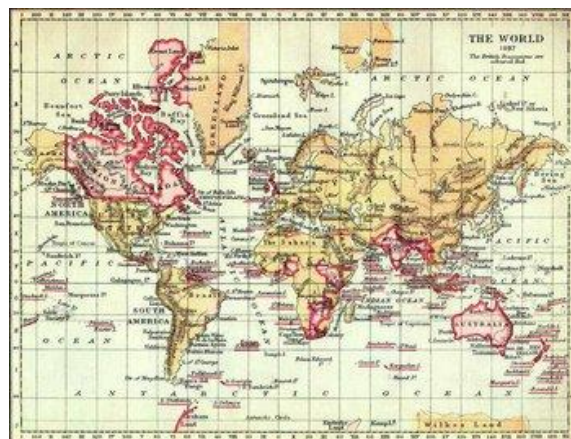


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Great Britain's industrial revolution greatly strengthened its ability to oppose Napoleonic France. By the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, the United Kingdom was the foremost European power, and its navy ruled the seas. Peace in Europe allowed the British to focus their interests on more remote parts of the world, and, during this period, the British Empire reached its zenith. British colonial expansion reached its height largely during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Queen Victoria's reign witnessed the spread of British technology, commerce, language, and government throughout the British Empire, which, at its greatest extent, encompassed roughly one-fifth to one-quarter of the world's area and population. British colonies contributed to the United Kingdom's extraordinary economic growth and strengthened its voice in world affairs. Even as the United Kingdom extended its imperial reach overseas, it continued to develop and broaden its democratic institutions at home.

20th Century

By the time of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, other nations, including the United States and Germany, had developed their own industries; the United Kingdom's comparative economic advantage had lessened, and the ambitions of its rivals had grown. The losses and destruction of World War I, the depression of the 1930s, and decades of relatively slow growth eroded the United Kingdom's preeminent international position of the previous century.



Britain's control over its empire loosened during the interwar period. Ireland, with the exception of six northern counties, gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1921. Nationalism became stronger in other parts of the empire, particularly in India and Egypt.

In 1926, the United Kingdom, completing a process begun a century earlier, granted Australia, Canada, and New Zealand complete autonomy within the empire. They became charter members of the British Commonwealth of Nations (now known as the Commonwealth), an informal but closely-knit association that succeeded the empire. Beginning with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, the remainder of the British Empire was almost completely dismantled. Today, most of Britain's former colonies belong to the Commonwealth, almost all of them as independent members. There are, however, 13 former British colonies--including Bermuda, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, and others--which have elected to continue their political links with London and are known as United Kingdom Overseas Territories.

Although often marked by economic and political nationalism, the Commonwealth offers the United Kingdom a voice in matters concerning many developing countries. In addition, the Commonwealth helps preserve many institutions deriving from British experience and models, such as parliamentary democracy, in those countries.



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