

# Britain

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## Best Museums

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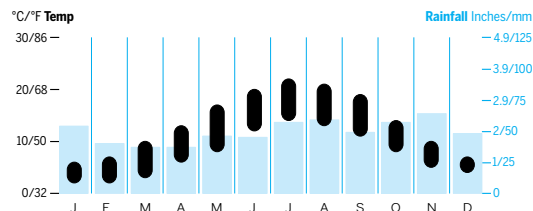
## Why Go?

Few places cram so much history, heritage and scenery into such a compact space as Britain. Twelve hours is all you'll need to travel from one end to the other, but you could spend a lifetime exploring – from the ancient relics of Stonehenge and Avebury, to the great medieval cathedrals of Westminster and Canterbury, and the magnificent mountain landscapes of Snowdonia and Skye.

In fact, Britain isn't really one country at all, but three. While they haven't always been easy bedfellows, the contrasts between England, Wales and Scotland make this a rewarding place to visit. With a wealth of rolling countryside, stately cities, world-class museums and national parks to explore, Britain really is one of Europe's most unmissable destinations. And despite what you may have heard, it doesn't rain *all* the time – but even so, a brolly and a raincoat will certainly come in handy.

## When to Go

### London



**Easter–May**  
Fewer crowds, especially in popular spots like Bath, York and Edinburgh.

**Jun–Aug** The weather is at its best but the coast and national parks are busy.

**Mid-Sep–Oct**  
Prices drop and the weather is often surprisingly good.

## ENGLAND

By far the biggest of the three nations that comprise Great Britain, England offers a tempting spread of classic travel experiences, from London's vibrant theatre scene and the historic colleges of Oxford, to the grand cathedrals of Canterbury and York and the mountain landscapes of the Lake District.

### London

POP 8.7 MILLION

Everyone comes to London with preconceptions shaped by a multitude of books, movies, TV shows and pop songs. Whatever yours are, prepare to have them exploded by this endlessly intriguing city. Its streets are steeped in fascinating history, magnificent art, imposing architecture and popular culture. When you add a bottomless reserve of cool to this mix, it's hard not to conclude that London is one of the world's great cities, if not the greatest.

The only downside is increasing cost: London is now Europe's most expensive city for visitors, whatever their budget. But with some careful planning and a bit of common sense, you can find excellent bargains and freebies among the popular attractions. And many of London's finest assets – its wonderful parks, bridges, squares and boulevards, not to mention many of its landmark museums – come completely free.

### History

London first came into being as a Celtic village near a ford across the River Thames, but the city really only took off after the Roman invasion in AD 43. The Romans enclosed Londinium in walls that still find an echo in the shape of the City of London (the

city's central financial district) today. Next came the Saxons, and the town they called Lundenwic prospered.

London grew in global importance throughout the medieval period, surviving devastating challenges such as the 1665 plague and the 1666 Great Fire. Many of its important landmarks such as St Paul's Cathedral were built at this time by visionary architect Christopher Wren.

By the early 1700s, Georgian London had become one of Europe's largest and richest cities. It was during the Victorian era that London really hit its stride, fuelled by vast mercantile wealth and a huge global empire.

The ravages of WWI were followed by the economic troubles of the 1920s and 1930s, but it was WWII that wrought the greatest damage: huge swathes of the city were reduced to rubble during a series of devastating bombings known as the Blitz.

During the 1960s, Swinging London became the world's undisputed cultural capital, with an explosion of provocative art, music, writing, theatre and fashion. The 1970s proved more turbulent than innovative, with widespread unrest and economic discontent, while the 1980s were marked by an economic boom in London's financial district (known as the City), which brought a forest of skyscrapers to the city's skyline.

In 2000 London got its first elected Mayor, left-wing Ken Livingstone, who served for two terms before being ousted in 2008 by his Eton-educated Conservative rival, Boris Johnson, who oversaw the city's hugely successful stint as Olympics host. The pendulum swung back leftwards in 2016 when former Labour MP Sadiq Khan took office, the first Muslim to be mayor of a major Western capital city.

## ITINERARIES

### One Week

With just seven days, you're pretty much limited to sights in England. Spend three days seeing the sights in **London**, then head to **Oxford** for a day, followed by a day each at **Stonehenge** and historic **Bath**, before returning for a final day in London.

### Two Weeks

Follow the one-week itinerary, but instead of returning to London on day seven, head north to **Stratford-upon-Avon** for everything Shakespeare. Continue north with a day in the **Lake District**, followed by two days in Scotland's capital, **Edinburgh**. After a day trip to **Loch Ness**, recross the border for two days to see **York** and **Castle Howard**. Next, stop off in **Cambridge** on the way back to London.