

Destination Great Britain

What is it that makes this damp little island moored off the northwest coast of Europe such a fascinating place to explore? For starters, Britain is a land for all seasons. Summer or winter, spring or autumn, there's always something to engage your imagination, be it the summer solstice at Stonehenge or the New Year street parties in Edinburgh.

There are over 5000 years of history to engage with, from the Stone Age village of Skara Brae to the space-age domes of the Eden Project, and from the stark simplicity of a Welsh chapel to the pomp and circumstance of Buckingham Palace. There are castles and cathedrals by the score, medieval monasteries and aristocratic mansions, and a roll-call of picturesque places with endearingly odd names, such as Lydiard Tregoze and Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlantantysiliogogoch.

Britain has given the world Shakespeare and soccer, the Beatles, James Bond, Monty Python and the programmable computer, not forgetting traffic lights, milky tea and the world's least scary police. These cultural contributions are celebrated in a collection of fascinating museums and art galleries that range from world-class institutions like the Tate Britain and the Victoria & Albert Museum, to delightfully dotty local curiosities – where else but Britain would you find the Pencil Museum and a dog-collar museum?

Then there's a geography textbook's worth of scenic landscapes, such as the rolling hop fields of Kent with their conical oast houses; the honeyed stone cottages and hedgerow-lined country lanes of the Cotswold hills; the soaring, silver-grey sea cliffs of Pembrokeshire, scabbed with yellow lichen; and the jagged, rock-girt peaks of the Isle of Skye.

Whatever the weather, there's a diverse menu of adventure activities to choose from, including some of Europe's best surfing, scuba-diving, sailing and hiking; plus less-strenuous pastimes such as trainspotting at York's National Railway Museum and whale-watching off Scotland's west coast.

As you travel around the region, what are the issues of the day that you'll hear Britons chatting about in the pub, at the bus stop and on the train? The national obsession with the weather has always seemed baffling to outsiders, who have often found it difficult to discern any difference between the mild winters and soggy summers. But in recent years the normally benign British weather has turned savage. Is it climate change in action? People are talking about an increase in summer storms and torrential downpours, and how 2007 saw the wettest summer, and 2008 the dullest August, since records began. There have been tornadoes in London and Birmingham, and many parts of the country, notably Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire and south Wales, have suffered devastating flooding. Instead of looking forward to the summer sun, many now fear the summer floods.

Napoleon famously described Britain as a nation of shopkeepers, but today it has become a nation of homeowners. In the 1950s less than 40% of Britons owned their own homes; today the figure is more than 70%, and it's the ambition of many to get a foot on the property ladder as soon as they can afford it. Wherever two or more Brits are gathered together, the conversation will soon turn to the subject of house prices. Encouraged by the belief that prices can only go up, by banks offering loans for 125%

FAST FACTS

Population: 59 million

Area: 88,500 sq miles
(230,000 sq km)

Inflation: 5.2% (October
2008)

Unemployment: 5.7%
(August 2008)

Head of State: Queen
Elizabeth II

Per capita GNP:
approximately £23,500
(US\$41,000)

Average annual rainfall
in southeast England:
550mm

Average annual rainfall
in northwest Highlands:
3000mm

Male life expectancy (posh
part of Glasgow): 82

Male life expectancy (poor
part of Glasgow): 54

of a house's value, and by TV channels clogged with 'property porn', thousands of Britons have sunk their savings into bricks and mortar.

But at the time of going to press, Britain was under a cloud in more ways than one, with recession looming on the horizon. The global credit crunch that began in late 2007 has seen interest rates rise, mortgages dry up and house prices tumble – possibly by as much as 30% by 2010. Those who bought into the get-rich-quick, property-owning dream in the last few years are feeling the clammy grip of negative equity, and tens of thousands of homes are being repossessed.

The economic crisis has seen a backlash against the investment bankers, chief executives and hedge fund managers whose actions are seen by many as the cause of the credit crunch – ordinary people suffer while the 'fat cats' walk away with millions in their pockets. Financially speaking, Britain today is one of the most unequal societies in the developed world. Back in 1970 the average chief executive of a FTSE 100 company was paid around 10 times the earnings of the average employee; today that multiple is well over 100 times, and the wealthiest 10% of the population get 40% of the income. The popular mood is now in favour of increased regulation of the financial sector.

Britain's unexpected success in the 2008 Olympics – taking fourth place in the medal table with 19 gold (the Paralympic team came in second place overall, with 42 gold) – prompted a surge of interest in cycling, rowing and sailing, and increased expectations for the London Olympics in 2012. The London Games will ensure the arrival of large numbers of overseas visitors (and their money), a raised profile for British tourism, new housing and sports facilities for the capital, plus increased fitness and improved health for the entire nation. Or so say supporters. Detractors claim that the billions of pounds being spent are unlikely to be recouped, and local groups protest that a nature reserve, garden allotments and even popular sports venues are being bulldozed to make way for the Olympic Park.

But before the Olympics take place, one of the government's most controversial policies will grind into action. In 2009 the government will begin issuing biometric ID cards to British citizens. Supporters claim the cards will help combat crime and illegal immigration, and will make it easier to prove your identity to banks, the police and government agencies. Anti-ID card campaigners say the policy is an infringement of personal privacy and civil liberties, and that the unified database underlying the scheme is an IT disaster waiting to happen. Whatever the outcome, Britain is already one of the most spied-upon societies in the world, with 4.2 million CCTV surveillance cameras – about one for every 15 people. Something to think about as you travel around the country – Big Brother is watching you!

Getting Started

Here's a handy slogan to remember while you're planning your trip: travel in Britain is a breeze. Granted, it may not be totally effortless, but it's easy compared with many parts of the world. In this compact landscape you're never far from the next town, the next pub, the next national park or the next impressive castle on your hit list of highlights.

WHEN TO GO

Any visitor to Britain will soon understand the locals' obsession with the weather. Extremes of hot or cold are rare, but variability is a given. The key word is *changeable*: the weather can be bad one minute, great the next. It wouldn't be unusual in April, for example, for the morning to be warm enough for T-shirts, lunchtime to be cloudy, the afternoon see a downpour and drop in temperature, and the day polished off by an overnight dump of snow.

Despite apparent randomness, there is a seasonal pattern. Temperatures are higher in summer (June to August), and there's normally more sunshine, though July and August, along with the winter months, are often the rainiest months of the year. Conversely, winter (November to February) may enjoy fantastic clear spells between bouts of rain or snow, while spring (March to May) or autumn (September to October) can often produce the finest weather of the year. There are also north-south variations: southern England might be chilly, while northern Scotland enjoys a heatwave. Or vice versa. Be prepared for anything and you won't get a surprise.

With all that in mind, May to September is undoubtedly the best period to travel in Britain. July and August are busiest (it's school holiday time), especially in coastal towns, national parks, and historic cities like Oxford, Edinburgh and York. In April and October you take a chance on the weather but avoid the crowds, although some hotels and attractions close from mid-October to Easter, and tourist offices have limited hours.

Overall, the least hospitable months for visitors are November to February. It's cold in the south, very cold in the north, and daylight is short. In Scotland, north Wales and the hills of northern England, roads can sometimes be closed by snow. Reaching the islands off the Scottish mainland (and occasionally other parts of Britain) can also be a problem as high winds disrupt ferry services.

For winter visits, London and the big cities are an exception – they're busy all the time, with such a lot to see that the weather is immaterial. Besides, you're almost as likely to have a damp day in June as you are in January...

COSTS & MONEY

If you're a global traveller, whatever your budget you'll know that Britain is expensive compared with many other countries. But don't let that put you off. If funds are tight you'll still have a great trip with some forward planning, a bit of shopping around and a modicum of common sense. A lot of stuff is cheap or good value, and some is completely free. The following gives some guidelines; for more details see the Directory (p982) and Transport (p996) chapters.

For midrange travellers, basic hotels cost around £50 to £120 for a double room, except in London, where doubles in midrange hotels start at around £80, and around £150 in London gets you something pretty decent for the night, although you could easily spend more. When it comes to eating, a

For more weather facts and figures, see Climate Charts, p987.

decent three-course meal with wine in a smart restaurant will set you back about £25 to £35 per person. In London this jumps to about £60, although if you choose carefully you can still get a great meal (with a glass or two of wine) for around £30. Of course, you can go wild at somewhere outrageously posh or trendy, and not get much change from £150.

Backpackers on a tight budget need £36 a day for bare survival in London, with dorm beds from £18, basic sustenance £12, and transport around £6 unless you prefer to hoof it.

Whatever your bracket, extras in London might include clubbing (£6 to £12, up to £25 at weekends), a pint in a pub (£2.80 to £3.50) or admission to museums and galleries (£10 to £20 a day, though many places don't charge).

Out of London, costs drop; shoestringers need around £30 per day for hostels and food. Midrangers will be fine on £60 to £85 per day, allowing £25 to £35 per person for B&B accommodation, £12 to £18 for lunch, snacks and drinks, £15 to £25 for an evening meal. Admission fees are the same for everyone – work on around £10 per day for general admission costs.

Travel costs depend on transport choice. Trains can cost anything from £10 to £50 per 100 miles, depending when you buy your ticket. Long-distance buses (called coaches in Britain) cost about half the train fare for an equivalent journey. Car drivers should allow £12 per 100 miles for fuel, plus around £5 per day for parking. Rental costs £25 to £60 per day, depending on model and duration.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Britons share their compact and increasingly crowded island with around 33 million cars, vans, buses and lorries – that's more than one vehicle for every two people. Traffic congestion and carbon emissions are serious problems that are only now beginning to be tackled head-on.

In the past, the government's response to overcrowded roads has been to build more of them; today, politicians have been forced to look at other approaches. While London has its congestion charge, Sustrans (www.sustrans.org.uk) – a group focused on sustainable transport – is busy creating a national network of cycle routes; and Worcester (p494), Peterborough (p413) and Darlington (p653) have been chosen as showcase sustainable transport towns, with government-funded projects to promote cycling, walking and public transport as realistic alternatives to car use.

Although a car can be useful in some parts of the country, notably the Scottish Highlands, if you don't want to contribute to – or get caught up in – British gridlock, then think about using public transport rather than hiring a car. And think twice before taking a domestic flight within Britain – remember it's a relatively small geographical area. Taking the London to Edinburgh route as an example, if you add on travel time from the city

HOW MUCH?

See also the Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

B&B £25 per person

CD £12

The *Guardian* (newspaper) 80p

Restaurant meal £25 per person

Large latte £2.30

COSTS FOR KIDS

Taking your children into museums and historic sites can be absolutely free, half-price, or just a bit cheaper than the adult cost, so we've detailed kids' rates (as well as adult prices) throughout this book. At camp sites and self-catering hostels, children usually pay about 50% to 75% of the adult rate. At hotels, children aged between two and 12 years old usually get 50% to 75% discount. Kids under two usually stay free of charge, while over-12s (or over-16s at some places) attract the full rate, on the assumption that growing children need a bed and will probably eat as much as their parents.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Travel in Britain is not like crossing the Sahara or exploring the Amazon. Anything can be bought as you go. Our advice is to take only what you absolutely need, which may include the following:

- rain jacket
- comfortable shoes
- small day-pack (for carrying that rain jacket when the sun shines)
- a taste for beer that isn't icy cold
- listening skills and a sense of humour

centre to the airport (one hour in London, 15 minutes in Edinburgh), and check-in time (say one hour, minimum) to the flight time (one hour), then the 4½-hour train journey actually looks pretty good (and you don't have to queue for check-in and security, either).

READING UP

There's nothing like a good book to set the mood for your own trip. The choice of books about Britain can be daunting, so here's a list of our favourites to add an extra dimension to your planning or help you penetrate that famous British reserve a little while you're on the road.

- *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson, although based on travels in the 1970s, is still incisive. This American author really captures the spirit of Britain three-and-a-half decades ago. When he pokes fun he's spot on, so the locals don't mind.
- *The English: A Portrait of a People* by Jeremy Paxman examines the evolution of English national identity in recent years, through the sharp and often cynical eyes of Britain's favourite blunt Yorkshireman and TV news presenter.
- *Coasting* by Jonathan Raban records a journey around Britain in an old sailing yacht, and is a brilliant and very readable meditation on the people and culture of this island nation.
- *London: The Biography* by Peter Ackroyd is the definitive description of Britain's biggest city as a living, breathing organism.
- *The Thistle and the Rose: Six Centuries of Love and Hate Between the Scots and the English*, by Allan Massie, takes a historical perspective on the often stormy relationship between Britain's two largest countries.
- *Adrift in Caledonia* by Nick Thorpe is an entertaining and insightful tale of travelling around Scotland by hitching rides on a variety of vessels, from canal barge and rowing boat to steam puffer and square-rigged sailing ship.
- *On Borrow's Trail* by Hugh Oliff retraces the journeys through Wales made by 19th-century writer George Borrow, combining a rich synopsis of the original observations with modern photos and colour illustrations.
- *Two Degrees West* by Nicholas Crane describes a walk in a perfectly straight line (two degrees west of the Greenwich meridian) across Britain, wading rivers, cutting through towns, sleeping in fields and meeting an astounding selection of people along the way.
- *Great British Bus Journeys* by David McKie is a wry and witty travelogue showing that 'unknown' towns and villages can be just as fascinating as tourist hot spots.

TOP 10



MUST-SEE MOVIES

Predeparture planning is no chore if it includes a trip to the cinema or a night on the sofa with a DVD. Our parameters for a 'British' film? Anything about Britain. Anything that gives a taste of history, scenery or peculiar cultural traits. For more info on some of these and other titles, see p76.

- 1 *Brief Encounter* (1945) Director: David Lean
- 2 *Whisky Galore* (1949) Director: Alexander Mackendrick
- 3 *Under Milk Wood* (1972) Director: Andrew Sinclair
- 4 *Educating Rita* (1983) Director: Lewis Gilbert
- 5 *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985) Director: Stephen Frears
- 6 *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994) Director: Mike Newell
- 7 *Trainspotting* (1996) Director: Danny Boyle
- 8 *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) Director: Gurinder Chadha
- 9 *Atonement* (2007) Director: Joe Wright
- 10 *Hot Fuzz* (2007) Director: Edgar Wright

RAVE READS

Travel broadens the mind. Especially if you read before you go. For a taste of life in Britain through the ages, try a few of these novels – from past classics to contemporary milestones. For more details on some of these (and other great books), see p73.

- 1 *Oliver Twist* (1837) Charles Dickens
- 2 *Wuthering Heights* (1847) Emily Brontë
- 3 *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) Thomas Hardy
- 4 *The Rainbow* (1915) DH Lawrence
- 5 *How Green Was My Valley* (1939) Richard Llewellyn
- 6 *Greenvoe* (1972) George Mackay Brown
- 7 *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995) Kate Atkinson
- 8 *Last Orders* (1996) Graham Swift
- 9 *White Teeth* (2000) Zadie Smith
- 10 *The Falls* (2003) Ian Rankin

TOP OF THE POPS

British popular music is probably the most popular in the world. Britain has produced hundreds of internationally famous bands and artists from the Beatles and the Rolling Stones to the Kaiser Chiefs and the Arctic Monkeys. Here's a lucky dip of typically British chart-topping pop and rock from 1960 onward.

- 1 *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me* by Dusty Springfield (1966)
- 2 *Honky Tonk Women* by the Rolling Stones (1969)
- 3 *Won't Get Fooled Again* by The Who (1971)
- 4 *Anarchy in the UK* by the Sex Pistols (1976)
- 5 *Love Will Tear Us Apart* by Joy Division (1980)
- 6 *House of Fun* by Madness (1982)
- 7 *Wonderwall* by Oasis (1995)
- 8 *Wannabe* by the Spice Girls (1996)
- 9 *If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next* by the Manic Street Preachers (2000)
- 10 *The Dark of the Matinee* by Franz Ferdinand (2004)

INTERNET RESOURCES

The internet is a wonderful planning tool for travellers, and there are millions of sites about Britain. Before plunging into the cybermaze, try these for starters:

A Nice Cup of Tea... (www.nicecupofteaandasaditdown.com) Light-hearted look at a quintessentially British pastime.

Backpax Magazine (www.backpaxmag.com) Cheerful info on cheap travel, visas, activities and work.

BABA (British Arts Festivals Association; www.artsfestivals.co.uk) Listing over 100 festivals around Britain: opera, theatre, literature, comedy, classical, folk, jazz and more.

BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) Immense and invaluable site from the world's best broadcaster.

DirectGov (www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople) Information and advice for travellers with disabilities, including interactive map showing wheelchair-accessible toilets, parking etc in 100 towns around Britain.

eFestivals (www.efestivals.co.uk) News, confirmed (and rumoured) artists, tickets and updates from the lively world of rock, pop, dance and world music gatherings.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Loads of travel news, features, accommodation reviews, and the legendary Thorn Tree bulletin board.

UK Student Life (www.ukstudentlife.com) Language courses, and where to go outside study time.

Visit Britain (www.visitbritain.com) The nation's official tourism website; accommodation, attractions, events and much more.

Events Calendar

Countless festivals and events are held around the country throughout the year. Below is a selection of biggies that are worth tying in with your travels, and some of the smaller – and, frankly, more bizarre – events that are also worth catching. In addition, many towns have annual fairs or fêtes; many of these are listed in the regional chapters.

JANUARY

UP HELLY AA last Tue of Jan
Shetland Islanders (p969) honour their Nordic heritage by dressing up as Vikings and burning a longship.

FEBRUARY

JORVIK VIKING FESTIVAL mid-Feb
Horned helmets galore, plus mock invaders and Viking longship races in York (p549).

SHROVETIDE FOOTBALL Shrove Tue
It's football, Jim, but not as we know it: day-long match, 3-mile pitch, hundreds of players, very few rules. See p462 for details.

MARCH

CRUFTS DOG SHOW early/mid-Mar
Highlight of the canine year. Top dogs abound in Birmingham. See p480 for details.

UNIVERSITY BOAT RACE late Mar/early Apr
Traditional rowing contest (p174) on the River Thames, between the teams of Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

APRIL

GRAND NATIONAL 1st Sat in Apr
The most famous horse race (p598) of them all, with notoriously high jumps in Aintree, Liverpool.

CHELTENHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL late Apr/early May
One of the largest jazz gatherings in the country; big names, up-and-comings, concerts and funky club-dance evenings. See p264.

MAY

FA CUP FINAL early May
Gripping end to venerable football tournament, held in Wembley Stadium, London. For more, see (p68).

BRIGHTON FESTIVAL May
If it's art, you'll find it at Brighton's lively and innovative three-week feast (p226), which covers everything from music, theatre, literature and the visual arts to a children's parade, pyrotechnics and performance poetry.

CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW late May
Blooming marvellous. See p174 for more.

BATH INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL mid-May–early Jun
Top-class classical music and opera in Bath, plus jazz and world music, with art-full Fringe attached. See p335.

COOPER'S HILL CHEESE-ROLLING COMPETITION late May
Simple concept, centuries old: a big lump of cheese is rolled down a very steep hill, chased by hundreds of locals. The winner keeps the cheese. Losers may have broken legs. See p262 for more.

GLYNDEBOURNE late May–Aug
Mozart is the mainstay of this world-famous opera festival, held annually since 1934 in country-house gardens near Lewes, Sussex. See p223 for details.

JUNE

DERBY WEEK early Jun
Horse racing and people-watching abound at the Epsom racetrack in Surrey (see www.epsomderby.co.uk for more details).

COTSWOLDS OLIMPICKS early Jun
Since 1612 the locals of Chipping Camden have competed in events such as shin-kicking, sack-racing and climbing the slippery pole. See p257.

ALDEBURGH FESTIVAL Jun
Classical music held in Aldeburgh, the spiritual home of Benjamin Britten (1913–76) – one of Britain's best 20th-century composers – see p422.

TROOPING THE COLOUR mid-Jun
Bearskins and pageantry in London's Whitehall for the Queen's birthday parade (p175).

ROYAL ASCOT mid-Jun
More horse racing, more people-watching, plus outrageous hats; find out more at www.ascot.co.uk.

ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL mid-Jun
Successful revival of the 1960s rip-roaring hippie happening; see p296.

WIMBLEDON LAWN TENNIS CHAMPIONSHIPS late Jun
Two weeks of rapid-fire returns; see p175.

GLASTONBURY FESTIVAL late Jun
The village of Glastonbury is practically synonymous with the Glastonbury Festival (www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk), an often mud-soaked extravaganza of music, street theatre, dance, cabaret, carnival, ecology, spirituality and general all-round weirdness that's been held on and off on Pilton Farm, near Glastonbury.

PRIDE Jun/Jul
Formerly Mardi Gras and Pride in the Park, and occasionally EuroPride – Britain's major gay and lesbian festival, held in London.

JULY

HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA early Jul
Premier rowing and social event. No hippies here. See p252.

T IN THE PARK early Jul
Open-air pop, rock and dance music. Scotland's answer to Glastonbury; see p823 for details.

WORLD MOUNTAIN BIKE BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS early Jul
Bogs, bikes and snorkels; the name says it all. Henley it ain't. See p377. There's another leg to the event in August, see p28.

INTERNATIONAL EISTEDDFOD mid-Jul
Lively mix of cultures from Wales and far beyond; see p755.

LATITUDE FESTIVAL mid-Jul
More than just a music festival, this relative newcomer to Britain's festival calendar (www.latitudefestival.co.uk) packs in poetry, literature, comedy and drama, too. Held in Henham Park, Southwold (p423).

BUXTON FESTIVAL mid-late Jul
Relaxed and eclectic mix of opera, music and literature, this renowned festival (www.buxtonfestival.co.uk) is one of the largest of its kind in the country.

SESIWN FAWR late Jul
Three-day rock, folk and beer bash in Dolgellau. Fast-growing and free. See p759.

ROYAL WELSH AGRICULTURAL SHOW late Jul
National agricultural and cultural gathering; see p736.

FARNBOROUGH AIRSHOW late Jul
Established in 1948 as a showcase for the best of British aviation, the world's largest air show is held in Farnborough, Surrey. The air show ranges from traditional WWII aircraft to cutting-edge technology, with thrilling aerobatic displays, fly-pasts and simulated aerial dogfights. See www.farnborough.com for details.

COWES WEEK late Jul/early Aug
The world's longest-running yachting regatta – dating from 1827 – is a spectacular display of world-class yacht racing and a highlight of the society calendar; see p295.

EDEN SESSIONS Jul/Aug
The famous biomes of the Eden Project (p382) are transformed into Cornwall's most spectacular live-music venue, where a 6000-strong crowd bops along to a line-up of the best of British rock and pop.

AUGUST

NATIONAL EISTEDDFOD early Aug
The ancient bardic tradition continues; a festival of Welsh language, music and literature at its most powerful. See p755.

THREE CHOIRS FESTIVAL early Aug
Britain's premier, and the world's oldest, choral festival (www.3choirs.org), held once every three years at the cathedrals of Gloucester (p267), Hereford (p499) or Worcester (p494).

EDINBURGH MILITARY TATTOO Aug
Three weeks of pageantry and soldierly displays.
For details, see p795.

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL Aug/Sep
World-class arts gathering, overshadowed only by its own Fringe. See p795.

GREEN MAN FESTIVAL mid-Aug
Set near Crickhowell, this festival is an old-school gathering of campfires and late-night guitar strumming, featuring the best of the UK modern folk scene plus international acts from the alternative world. See p731.

NOTTING HILL CARNIVAL late Aug
London's most colourful festival is a multicultural feast of music, dancing and costumed street parades that celebrates the city's African-Caribbean community. See also p175.

READING FESTIVAL late Aug
This three-day rock and pop extravaganza is a true original, from the glory days of 1970s prog rock and heavy metal to the 1990s appearances of Kurt Cobain and the Stone Roses. Recent years have seen the festival turn more mainstream, but unpopular bands can still expect to be sent packing amid a hail of hurled plastic bottles.

LEEDS FESTIVAL late Aug
Dubbed the 'Reading of the North', and pretty much the same type of thing; a rock-music extravaganza (see p522).

WORLD BOG SNORKELLING CHAMPIONSHIPS late Aug
Following July's filthy cycling event (for more information, see p27), now it's the swimmers' turn

to snorkel through the mire. Crazy, but the crowds love it.

BIG CHILL late Aug
Most head here to recover from summer's excesses; an eclectic and relaxed mix of live music, club events, DJs, multimedia and visual art. Held on the deer-park grounds of Eastnor Castle in Herefordshire; see p502 for more information.

SEPTEMBER

BRAEMAR GATHERING 1st Sat in Sep
With more than 20,000 people (including the royals), 'gathering' is an understatement for this famous Highland knees-up. See p899 for more information.

OCTOBER

HORSE OF THE YEAR SHOW early Oct
Birmingham's top show-jumping event. No long faces here. See also p480.

NOVEMBER

BONFIRE NIGHT 5 Nov
Bonfires and fireworks across Britain fill the skies in commemoration of Guy Fawke's failed Gunpowder Plot of 1605 (a terrorist attempt to blow up Parliament). See also Frenzied Pyromania (p223).

DECEMBER

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS 31 Dec
Get drunk and kiss strangers as the bells chime midnight. The biggest crowds are in London's Trafalgar Sq and Edinburgh's Princes St.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

HOORAY FOR HIGHLIGHTS **One to Two Weeks / London to Cambridge**

This is an unashamed tour of Britain's top tourist attractions. Yes, some can get crowded, but it's for a reason – they're stunningly scenic or rich in history.

Start with spectacular, irrepressible **London** (p130), then visit ancient cathedral cities **Winchester** (p281) and **Salisbury** (p311). Next is classic, pre-historic **Stonehenge** (p315); and onwards to **Bath** (p330) for Roman remains and grand Georgian architecture.

Loop over to **Cardiff** (p669) for fantastical castles and nautical heritage, and cruise through the rural **Cotswolds** (p253) to reach the university town of **Oxford** (p239) and Shakespeare's birthplace, **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p487).

Then strike out north to the **Lake District** (p611) and over the border to **Edinburgh** (p779) for its historic castles, new parliament and more tartan than you can shake a kilt at, before heading to the **Isle of Skye** (p937) for Scotland's most stunning scenery.

Heading south again, stop in at **York** (p542) for its glorious cathedral and first-class train museum before finishing at **Cambridge** (p401), another ancient university town, for more sightseeing and maybe a gentle punt on the river.



Without stopping much you could do this 1300-mile journey in a week and a half. But pause to drink in the culture and history, not to mention the occasional beer in a country pub, and three weeks becomes a much better option.

THE GRAND TOUR

One to Two Months /
London to Cambridge (The Long Way)

This is a trip for those with time, or an urge to see everything. So brace yourself, and let's be off. From **London** (p130) aim for **Canterbury Cathedral** (p206), then head down the coast to hip and happening **Brighton** (p223), and across to historic cities **Winchester** (p281) and **Salisbury** (p311) and the delightful **New Forest** (p291). Travel via prehistoric **Stonehenge** (p315) to Westcountry gems **Bath** (p330) and **Bristol** (p320).

Next to Wales, via stunning **Chepstow Castle** (p697) and energetic **Cardiff** (p669), to the coastal paradise of **Pembrokeshire** (p707). Retrace to the **Brecon Beacons** (p724) and through book-mad **Hay-on-Wye** (p732) to reach the cosy **Cotswolds** (p253), charming **Oxford** (p239), spectacular **Warwick Castle** (p485), and Shakespeare's birthplace **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p487). Continue north to **Chester** (p584), then divert into north Wales for the grand **Conwy Castle** (p751) and **Caernarfon Castle** (p770); and equally stunning mountains of **Snowdonia National Park** (p756). Then ferry across the Mersey to **Liverpool** (p588) and to **Manchester** (p572) for a taste of city life, followed by a change of scenery in the **Lake District** (p611) and a journey back in time along **Hadrian's Wall** (p655).

Hop across the border to Scotland, via the tranquil southern Uplands countryside and **border towns** (p827), to good-time **Glasgow** (p809). Then trek to **Ben Nevis** (p914), from where it's easy to reach for the **Isle of Skye** (p937).

Time to head south again, via **Loch Ness** (p918) and **Stirling Castle** (p866) to **Edinburgh** (p779), through the abbey border-towns of **Kelso** (p831) and **Jedburgh** (p833), to reach World Heritage Site **Durham** (p649) and the ancient Viking capital of **York** (p542), ending with a final flourish in beautiful **Cambridge** (p401).

This energetic pack-it-in loop is over 2000 miles. If you don't want to hurry, just leave out a few places. With even more time, you could expand the trip to include Devon and Cornwall, Norfolk and Suffolk, Mid Wales or the east coast of Scotland.



PASTORAL PLEASURES

Three to Four Weeks /
New Forest to Outer Hebrides

Britain may be small, and crowded in places, but there are some beautiful national parks and rural areas to enjoy.

First stop, the **New Forest** (p291) for a spot of walking, cycling or horse riding, or simply relaxing, then to **Devon** (p352) and **Cornwall** (p373), which tempt with wild moors, grassy hills, and a beautiful coast of cliffs and sandy beaches.

The **Cotswolds** (p253) promise quintessential English countryside, with neat fields, clear rivers and endless pretty villages of honey-coloured stone – all glowing contentedly when the sun is out.

Head west again, to Wales, through the rolling hills of the **Brecon Beacons** (p724), and down to the heavenly sea and sky of **Pembrokeshire** (p707). Then go north to scale the stunning peaks of **Snowdonia National Park** (p756), with mountains for walkers and steam trains for all the family.

Then it's back to England, through the valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales National Park** (p531) and over the mountains of the **Lake District** (p611), to Scotland where two new national parks await: the glorious combination of **Loch Lomond** (p851) and **Trossachs National Park** (p869), and the mountain wilderness of the **Cairngorms** (p908).

That may be wondrous enough, but Britain's pastoral pleasures are crowned by Scotland's famous Highlands and islands, where jewels include peaks, such as **Ben Nevis** (p914) and **Torriford** (p934), while out to sea the lovely islands – **Isle of Arran** (p842), **Isle of Islay** (p855), **Isle of Jura** (p857), **Isle of Mull** (p861), **Isle of Skye** (p937), **Lewis** (p945), **North Uist** (p949), **South Uist** (p950) and others – bask in the afternoon sun.



This is a tour to recharge your batteries and fill your lungs with fresh air. The main route is around 1300 miles, plus another 300 miles if you visit all the islands. Allow three weeks, or a month if you don't rush.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

URBAN ODYSSEY

One to Two Weeks / Bristol to Manchester

If you want to dig under Britain's skin a little, take this ride through some of the country's less well-known and revitalised cities.

Kick off in **Bristol** (p320), once a poor cousin to neighbour Bath, today with fierce pride, a rich historic legacy and a music scene that rivals cool northern outposts. Next stop **Birmingham** (p474), a city that oozes transformation, with an attractive waterside, energised museums and a space-age shopping centre. Continue north to dynamic **Leeds** (p521), the 'Knightsbridge of the North', a mecca for shoppers, clubbers and drinkers. But don't dawdle. Down your pint. We're off again – to culturally restyled and famously to-the-hilt party town **Newcastle-upon-Tyne** (p640).

Still want more? It's got to be **Glasgow** (p809). Sign up here for pubs and clubs, some truly electric venues, fabulous galleries and – only in Scotland – slick but unpretentious bars.

Pausing for coffee and toast, head next for **Liverpool** (p588). The Beatles are done to death, but there are lively *current* music venues and rich trade-port heritage – plus a rather famous football team.

Finish in **Manchester** (p572), self-styled 'Barcelona of Britain', a long-time hotbed of musical endeavour, with thriving arts and club scenes, galleries a go-go, dramatic new architecture and – oh yes – another well-known football team.

In theory you could do this 725-mile street trip in a week, but Britain's cities may tempt you to linger longer. Better to allow at least 10 days. Two weeks would be even better. Don't say we didn't warn you...



RURAL RETREATS

Two to Three Weeks / Norfolk to Fife

For some of Britain's best-known national parks and natural beauties, see p31; this fabulous jaunt takes you through less-frequented (but no less scenic) countryside.

Surprisingly close to London sit the tranquil counties of **Norfolk** (p424) and **Suffolk** (p416), their coastlines dotted with picturesque harbours, shingle beaches, salt marshes, bird reserves and the occasional old-fashioned seaside resort. Inland lie rivers and lakes, pretty villages and endless miles of flat countryside perfect for gentle cycling.

Next is **Wiltshire** (p311), best known for Stonehenge and Salisbury but also a rural delight of quiet country lanes and tranquil villages, plus the hills of the southern Cotswolds – low-key and less frequented than their northern counterparts in Gloucestershire.

Between England and Wales lie the farmlands and cider orchards of the **Marches** (p436), while over the border loom the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales (p722) – big, wild and rarely on tourist itineraries. Then it's back to England and the **North York Moors National Park** (p561), with heather-covered hills and delightful dales. Not far away, the **Northumberland coast** (p662) is famous for empty beaches, dramatic castles and delicious crab sandwiches.

Inland sit the wild and empty big-sky landscapes of the hills atop the **Cheviot** (p661) and **Northumberland National Park** (p660), blending into the undulating hills, green valleys, stately homes, ruined abbeys and ancient **border towns** (p827) of Scotland's southern Uplands.

For a final fling, cross the Firth of Forth to reach the 'kingdom' of **Fife** (p873), with lush rolling farmland ideal for cycling and a delightful coastline peppered with quaint harbours, perfect for an after-lunch stroll.



You could see these 'hidden' parts of Britain in two weeks if you don't stop much, covering about 1000 miles. Allow three weeks if you plan to wear your hiking boots, or want to relax over tea and cake, and catch a little local flavour off the beaten track.

TAILORED TRIPS

BRITAIN ON LOCATION

Love the movies? Here are a few places where you can visit the set.

Britain's best-loved film hero Harry Potter gets around – locations in the films include **Gloucester Cathedral** (p267), **Oxford University** (p241), **Alnwick Castle** (p663), **North York Moors Railway** (p565) and **Glenfinnan** (p936).

In Scotland, landmark Hitchcock thriller *The 39 Steps* features the **Forth Bridge** (p805); the comedy *Whisky Galore* was set in the **Outer Hebrides** (p944); **Edinburgh** (p779) is the scene for tartan-noir masterpiece *Trainspotting*; while **Dunnottar Castle** (p898) was the backdrop for Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*.

In Wales, the Dylan Thomas classic *Under Milk Wood* was filmed in **Fishguard** (p718) in Pembrokeshire, while some of Lara Croft's unfeasibly epic *Tomb Raider* adventures were shot in **Snowdonia National Park** (p756).

In northern England, quirky *Little Voice* was filmed in **Scarborough** (p557); *Calendar Girls* in the scenic valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales** (p531); and late-'90s hit *The Full Monty* in former steel-city **Sheffield** (p519).

For the latest film version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen power comes to Derbyshire; the stately home of **Chatsworth** (p473) plays Darcy's family abode, while dramatic Peak District outcrops provide a perfect spot for the heroine's love-lost contemplation. For *The Da*

Vinci Code **Lincoln Cathedral** (p448) stood in for Westminster, and visitor numbers doubled overnight.

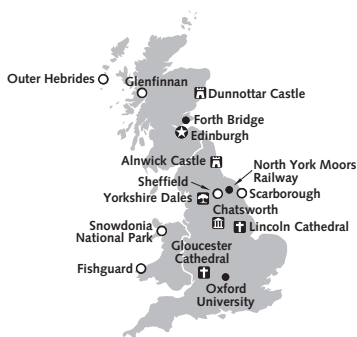
BRITAIN'S WORLD HERITAGE

Unesco's World Heritage Sites have great environmental or cultural significance. There are around 700 sites globally, and around 20 in Britain – together making up a great itinerary of highlights and unexpected treasures.

Obvious contenders include the **Tower of London** (p161), the historical maritime sites of **Greenwich** (p170), the ancient megaliths of **Stonehenge** (p315) and **Avebury** (p318), and the Roman-Georgian city of **Bath** (p330). Less obvious, but just as valid, sites include the industrial heritage of **Blaenavon** (p697) and **Ironbridge Gorge** (p506), the mills of **Saltaire** (p527) and the waterfront of **Liverpool** (p588), while the coast of **Dorset** (p297) and **East Devon** (p357) is one of the few natural sites on this list.

In the south of England there's **Blenheim Palace** (p251) and **Canterbury Cathedral** (p206), while the north boasts **Fountains Abbey** (p554). In Wales, the castles of **Caernarfon** (p770), **Conwy** (p751), **Baumaris** (p773) and **Harlech** (p765) together form one site, as do **Durham Castle** (p651) and **Durham Cathedral** (p650). In Scotland, sites include **Edinburgh's Old Town** (p781) and **New Town** (p790), **New Lanark** (p825), and the neolithic sites of the **Orkney Islands** (p952).

Recent additions to the list include **Hadrian's Wall** (p655) and the landscape and industrial heritage of the coast of **Cornwall** (p373). For more details see www.ukworldheritage.org.uk.



BRITAIN FOR KIDS

'Are we nearly there yet?' Travel through England with offspring in tow needn't be arduous. Certainly not if you visit some of these places.

London (p174) justifiably tops nearly every list – with a mesmerising choice of kid-friendly attractions. Bristol has **Explore @ Bristol** (p321), an interactive science museum bursting with hands-on exhibits, while Cardiff has a fairy-tale **castle** (p671) and up-to-the-moment **Techniquest** (p674).

For more battlements, there's **Warwick Castle** (p485) in Warwick. Knights in armour? You bet. And children of a ghoulish disposition can creep around the dungeons. It's a short distance, but a leap across centuries, to the **National Space Centre** (p443). Highlights include zero-gravity toilets and germ-devouring underpants. Kids love it. And it *is* rocket science.

Hungry after crossing the galaxy? **Cadbury World** (p477) in Birmingham is a lip-smacking exploration of chocolate production and consumption. Just make sure those samples settle in tiny tummies before you reach **Alton Towers** (p493), Britain's finest theme park, with a stomach-churning selection of roller coasters and other thrills.

The ultramodern **Glasgow Science Centre** (p814) is a bounty of discovery, complete with interactive science mall, and Dundee offers **Sensation** (p889) for more hands-on, and heads-in, activity.

Finish at **Our Dynamic Earth** (p789) in Edinburgh, a special-effects marvel recreating the planet's history from the Big Bang to teatime.



GREAT BRITISH GRUB

Eat and drink your way from Land's End to John o'Groats with this selection of the best of traditional British foodstuffs.

Cornwall (p373) is home to the Cornish pasty – any local bakery will sell them – while the dairy farms of **Devon** (p352) are famous for their clotted cream; you can enjoy a Devonshire cream tea at pretty much any tearoom in the county.

Kent (p204) grows the hops that give English beer its flavour – sample a pint of real ale at the **Thomas Becket** (p210) in Canterbury before heading to **London** (p130) to track down that classic delicacy, jellied eels.

Moving up through the **Midlands** (p436), you might fancy a nibble at a Melton Mowbray pork pie (p92) on your way to Wales, whose national cuisine is famed for tasty saltmarsh lamb, raised on the **Gower Peninsula** (p704) and laver bread (p89).

Heading north, you soon reach the home of **Lancashire** (p600) hotpot and **Yorkshire** (p515) pudding.

Classic British fish and chips are best enjoyed at the seaside – the **Magpie Cafe** (p568) in Whitby claims to serve the best in Britain.

Scotland's most famous dish is, of course haggis (p92), but there are plenty of other Scottish specialities, such as Cullen skink (p92). And no visit north of the border would be complete without sampling a single malt whisky – **Dufftown** (p903) is at the heart of the Speyside distillery region.



The Authors



DAVID ELSE **Coordinating Author; History; Food & Drink; Environment; Outdoor Activities; Directory; Transport; Health; Language; Glossary**

As a full-time professional travel writer, David has authored more than 20 books, including Lonely Planet's *England* and *Walking in Britain*. His knowledge of Britain comes from a lifetime of travel around the country (often on foot or by bike), a passion dating from university years, when heading for the hills was always more attractive than visiting the library. Originally from London, David has lived in Yorkshire, Wales and Derbyshire, and is currently based on the southern edge of the Cotswolds. David is married with two young children – often found on the back of their dad's tandem whenever the sun shines.



DAVID ATKINSON **Cardiff; South Wales; Mid Wales; North Wales**

David Atkinson is a full-time freelance travel writer based in Chester, England. He previously co-authored Lonely Planet's *Wales* and was subsequently asked to judge the 2007 National Tourism Awards for Wales. He writes about all aspects of travel from green issues to family journeys, and his stories appear in the *Observer*, the *Weekend Financial Times* and the *Daily Express*. David spent his early childhood holidays in Wales and returned after several years working overseas to find the new Wales is greener, chic-er and more compelling than ever before. He is now busy inspiring his two-year-old daughter with a sense of *hiraeth* (the longing to come home to Wales). More details at www.atkinsondavid.co.uk.



JAMES BAINBRIDGE **Channel Islands**

James can trace his history through the pages of this book, having grown up in Shropshire and studied in Glasgow before doing a Dick Whittington and heading to London. He has lived in Australia and Canada, and contributed to Lonely Planet guides ranging from *Africa to India*, but he always returns to England's 'green and pleasant land'. His trip to the Channel Islands was surprisingly eventful, as he found himself in the middle of a democratic revolution on Sark. A lifelong fan of British festivals, James co-authored Lonely Planet's *A Year of Festivals*, which features hundreds of worldwide events, including England's Glastonbury Festival and Cooper's Hill Cheese-Rolling Competition.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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OLIVER BERRY

Cumbria & the Lake District

A born and bred Brit, Oliver has been seeking out England's more eccentric corners for the last 30-odd years, and it was an absolute pleasure to do a bit more exploring for this book. Having worked on several previous editions of the *England* guide, for this book Oliver clambered down into the murky slate mines of Honister, tackled the trails of the Cumbrian fells, and stuffed himself silly with tattie hotpot, Grasmere gingerbread and Bluebird ale. When he's not out on the road, Oliver lives and works in Cornwall as a writer and photographer.



FIONN DAVENPORT

Northwest England; Northeast England

Dublin-based Fionn has been visiting and writing about northern England for about a decade, which is a good thing considering that this is his favourite bit of the country – mostly because the people remind him of the folks across the puddle in Ireland. When he's not traipsing around Newcastle or Manchester – or watching his beloved Liverpool FC at Anfield – he's juggling his commitments to Irish radio and TV, where he doles out travel advice and gives out about globalisation fatigue. And when he's not doing that, he spends most of his time wondering where he'd like to go to next.



BELINDA DIXON

Southwest England

Belinda was drawn to England's southwest in the 1990s to do a post-grad (having been impressed there were palm trees on the campus) and, like the best Westcountry limpets, has proved hard to shift since. She spends as much time as possible in the sea, but can also be seen and heard writing and broadcasting in the region. Personal highlights for this latest Lonely Planet adventure are sitting in the stone circle at Avebury, rigorously testing the new wave of Cornish cuisine and exploring utterly exhilarating Exmoor.



PETER DRAGICEVICH

London

After a dozen years working for newspapers and magazines in New Zealand and Australia, Peter could no longer resist London's bright lights and loud guitars. Like all good Kiwis, Peter got to know the city while surfing his way between friends' flats all over London. Now, living an even more nomadic life as a Lonely Planet writer, London is one of three cities that he likes to think of as home. He has contributed to nine Lonely Planet titles, including writing the Thames Path section of *Walking in Britain*.



NANA LUCKHAM Southeast England; The Midlands & the Marches

Nana spent most of her childhood in Brighton, aside from a few years in Tanzania, Ghana and Australia. After university, she worked as an editorial assistant in London and a UN press officer in New York and Geneva before becoming a full-time travel writer. Now based in London, she spends most of her time on research trips in exotic faraway climes. Hence, she jumped at the chance to rediscover her home region of the southeast and relive her university days in the Midlands, during which she developed a new-found enthusiasm for the old country.



ETAIN O'CARROLL Oxford, the Cotswolds & Around; East Anglia

Travel writer and photographer Etain grew up in small-town Ireland. Regular childhood trips to England were tinged with the excitement of eating gammon and pineapple in motorway service stations; examining the countless sparkly pens in swanky Woolies; and meeting all those cousins with funny accents. In between were the trips to the chocolate-box villages, stately homes, massive castles and ruined abbeys. Now living in Oxford, Etain's childish awe has become a long-term appreciation for the fine architecture, bucolic countryside and rich heritage of her adopted home. Work often takes her far away but she cherished the excuse to traipse around her own back yard searching for hidden treats.



ANDY SYMINGTON Central Scotland; Highlands & Northern Islands

Andy's Scottish forebears make their presence felt in his love of malt, a debatable ginger colour to his facial hair and occasional appearances in a kilt. From childhood slogs up the M1, he graduated to making dubious road-trips around the firths in a disintegrating Mini Metro and thence to peddling whisky in darkest Leith. Whilst living there, he travelled widely around the country in search of the perfect dram. Now resident in Spain, Andy continues to visit several times a year.



NEIL WILSON Destination Great Britain; Getting Started; Events Calendar; Itineraries; The Culture; Yorkshire; Edinburgh; Glasgow & South Scotland

From rock-climbing trips to Yorkshire, to weekend getaways in York and Whitby, Neil has made many cross-border forays into 'God's own country' from his home in Scotland. Whether hiking across the high tops of the Yorkshire Dales, savouring Britain's best fish and chips on the Whitby waterfront, or worshipping at the fountainhead of Theakston Ales in Masham, he's never short of an excuse for yet another visit. Neil's a full-time travel writer based in Edinburgh, and has written more than 40 guidebooks for various publishers.

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