Module : Culture(s)/ Civilization(s)

Academic year : 2021-2022

Lecture one: the Geography of Great Britain

The [United Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) is a [sovereign state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) located off the north-western coast of [continental Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Europe). With a total area of approximately 248,532 square kilometres (95,960 sq mi), the UK occupies the major part of the [British Isles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles) [archipelago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archipelago) and includes the island of [Great Britain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain), the north-eastern one-sixth of the island of [Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland) and many smaller surrounding islands.[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom#cite_note-2) It is the world's 7th largest [island country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_island_countries).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom#cite_note-world-atlas-3) The mainland areas lie between latitudes 49°N and 59°N (the [Shetland Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shetland_Islands) reach to nearly 61°N), and longitudes 8°W to 2°E. The [Royal Observatory, Greenwich](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Observatory,_Greenwich), in south-east London, is the defining point of the [Prime Meridian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Meridian).

The UK lies between the [North Atlantic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic) and the [North Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea), and comes within 35 km (22 mi) of the north-west coast of [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France), from which it is separated by the [English Channel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel). It shares a 499 km international land boundary with the [Republic of Ireland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Ireland).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom#cite_note-ReferenceA-4)[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom#cite_note-ReferenceB-5) The [Channel Tunnel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_Tunnel) bored beneath the English Channel now links the UK with France.

* The name [Britain](https://www.britannica.com/place/Great-Britain-island-Europe) is sometimes used to refer to the United Kingdom as a whole.
* The capital is [London](https://www.britannica.com/place/London), which is among the world’s leading commercial, financial, and cultural centres.
* Other major cities include [Birmingham](https://www.britannica.com/place/Birmingham-England), [Liverpool](https://www.britannica.com/place/Liverpool-England), and [Manchester](https://www.britannica.com/place/Manchester-England) in England, [Belfast](https://www.britannica.com/place/Belfast) and [Londonderry](https://www.britannica.com/place/Londonderry-city-and-district-Northern-Ireland) in [Northern Ireland](https://www.britannica.com/place/Northern-Ireland), [Edinburgh](https://www.britannica.com/place/Edinburgh-Scotland) and [Glasgow](https://www.britannica.com/place/Glasgow-Scotland) in Scotland, and [Swansea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Swansea-Wales) and [Cardiff](https://www.britannica.com/place/Cardiff-Wales) in Wales.

[](https://cdn.britannica.com/26/4826-050-915ED74D/United-Kingdom.jpg)

[**United Kingdom**](https://cdn.britannica.com/26/4826-050-915ED74D/United-Kingdom.jpg)

**2) The land**

* Apart from the land border with the Irish republic, the United Kingdom is surrounded by sea. To the south of England and between the United Kingdom and [France](https://www.britannica.com/place/France) is the [English Channel](https://www.britannica.com/place/English-Channel). The [North Sea](https://www.britannica.com/place/North-Sea) lies to the east. To the west of Wales and northern England and to the southeast of Northern Ireland, the [Irish Sea](https://www.britannica.com/place/Irish-Sea) separates Great Britain from Ireland, while southwestern England, the northwestern coast of Northern Ireland, and western Scotland face the [Atlantic Ocean](https://www.britannica.com/place/Atlantic-Ocean).
* At its widest the United Kingdom is 300 miles (500 km) across. From the northern tip of Scotland to the southern coast of England, it is about 600 miles (1,000 km). No part is more than 75 miles (120 km) from the sea. The capital, London, is situated on the tidal [River Thames](https://www.britannica.com/place/River-Thames) in southeastern England.

**3) The climate**

The climate of the United Kingdom derives from its setting within [atmospheric circulation](https://www.britannica.com/science/atmospheric-circulation) patterns and from the position of its landforms in relation to the sea. Regional [diversity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diversity) does exist, but the boundaries of major world climatic systems do not pass through the country. Britain’s marginal position between the European landmass to the east and the ever-present relatively warm Atlantic waters to the west exposes the country to air masses with a variety of thermal and moisture characteristics. The main types of air masses, according to their source regions, are polar and tropical; by their route of travel, both the polar and tropical may be either maritime or continental. For much of the year, the weather depends on the sequence of disturbances within the midlatitude westerlies that bring in mostly polar maritime and occasionally tropical maritime air. In winter occasional high-pressure areas to the east allow biting polar continental air to sweep over Britain. All of these atmospheric systems tend to fluctuate rapidly in their paths and to vary both in frequency and intensity by season and also from year to year. Variability is characteristic of British weather, and extreme conditions, though rare, can be very important for the life of the country.

At 1,345 metres, [Ben Nevis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Nevis) is the highest peak in the [UK](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom).

The ten tallest [mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain) in the UK are all found in Scotland. The highest peaks in each part of the UK are:

* Scotland: [Ben Nevis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Nevis), 1,345 metres
* Wales: [Snowdon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowdon) ([Snowdonia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowdonia" \o "Snowdonia)), 1,085 metres
* England: [Scafell Pike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scafell_Pike) ([Cumbrian Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cumbrian_Mountains)), 978 metres
* Northern Ireland: [Slieve Donard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slieve_Donard" \o "Slieve Donard) ([Mourne Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mourne_Mountains" \o "Mourne Mountains)), 852 metres

The lowest point of the UK is in [the Fens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fens) of [East Anglia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/East_Anglia), in England, parts of which lie up to 4 metres below [sea level](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_level).

**Rivers and lakes**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Geography_of_the_United_Kingdom&action=edit&section=9)]

The longest river in the UK is the [River Severn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Severn) (220 mi; 350 km) which flows through both Wales and England.

The longest rivers in the UK contained wholly within each of its constituent nations are:

* England: [River Thames](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Thames) (215 mi; 346 km)
* Scotland: [River Tay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Tay) (117 mi; 188 km)
* N. Ireland: [River Bann](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Bann) (76 mi; 122 km)
* Wales: [River Tywi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Tywi) (64 mi; 103 km)

The largest lakes (by surface area) in the UK by country are:

* N. Ireland: [Lough Neagh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lough_Neagh) (147.39 sq mi; 381.7 km2)
* Scotland: [Loch Lomond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loch_Lomond) (27.46 sq mi; 71.1 km2)
* England: [Windermere](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windermere) (5.69 sq mi; 14.7 km2)
* Wales: [Llyn Tegid (Bala Lake)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llyn_Tegid" \o "Llyn Tegid) (1.87 sq mi; 4.8 km2)

The deepest lake in the UK is [Loch Morar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loch_Morar) with a maximum depth of 309 metres ([Loch Ness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loch_Ness) is second at 228 metres deep). The deepest lake in England is [Wastwater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wastwater" \o "Wastwater) which achieves a depth of 79 metres (259 feet).

[Loch Ness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loch_Ness) is the UK's largest lake in terms of volume.