

Chapter 1

1

EXPERIENCE GREAT BRITAIN



20 ULTIMATE EXPERIENCES

Great Britain offers terrific experiences that should be on every traveler's list. Here are Fodor's top picks for a memorable trip.



1 Oxford and Cambridge

England is home to these two prestigious universities, where you'll find centuries of history among ancient buildings and museums. Tour the accompanying towns via punting boats on local waterways. (Ch. 4, 11)



2 London

London is the beating heart of England, a world-class city with museums, palaces, and iconic sights that define the country for many. (Ch. 3)



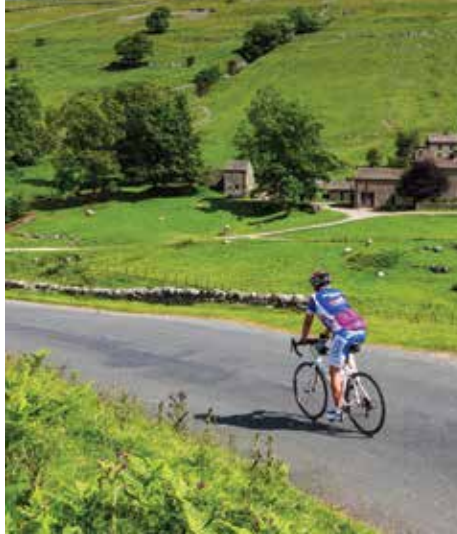
3 Isle of Skye

With the misty Cuillin Mountains and rocky shores, Skye has few rivals among Scotland's islands for sheer loveliness. (Ch. 20)



4 Seafood

From salmon to oysters, enjoy the delicious fish and seafood from Britain's rivers, lakes, and the sea. Fried fish-and-chips are the ultimate British comfort food. (Ch. 7, 12, 18)



5 Yorkshire

The stunning natural landscape of Yorkshire's moors and dales inspired the Brontës, and continues to attract hikers, cyclists, and nature-lovers. (Ch. 12)



6 Loch Lomond

The Trossachs are the essence of the Highlands. Clear water and access to Edinburgh and Glasgow make Loch Lomond a coveted retreat. (Ch. 17)



7 Glasgow

An urban renaissance has brought great shopping and nightlife to complement the city's rich architectural heritage and historic museums like the Kelvingrove. (Ch. 15)

8 The Cotswolds

Full of quaint English villages, the Cotswolds is one of the prettiest regions of the country, thanks to the stone cottages, famed gardens, and rural charm. (Ch. 8)



9 Castles

Castles dating from the medieval period to Victorian times are among Britain's glories, including Windsor in England, Dunnottar in Scotland, and Conwy in Wales. (Ch. 13)





10 Stratford-upon-Avon

The birthplace of William Shakespeare offers plenty for fans of the Bard, including performances of his plays at the Royal Shakespeare Company. (Ch. 8)



11 Afternoon Tea

For a quintessential British ritual, enjoy a pot of tea served in bone china alongside finger sandwiches, fruit scones, and cakes. (Ch. 3)



12 Cardiff

As the capital of Wales, Cardiff is lively and charming, with a whole host of castles, museums, and pubs to explore. (Ch. 13)



13 Golf

The home of golf, Scotland claims some of the world's most challenging holes but has courses for all levels, many in beautiful settings. (Ch. 14–20)

14 Snowdonia National Park

Experience the Welsh countryside at its most gorgeous and dramatic at Snowdonia National Park, home to the country's highest mountain. (Ch. 13)





15 Glencoe

The wild beauty of Glencoe's craggy peaks and deep valley provided the background for a tragic massacre in 1692. Today the area is popular for outdoor activities. (Ch. 20)



16 Whisky Tours

From Speyside to Islay, whisky distilleries offer tours and tastings of Scotland's signature drink. Their often-spectacular settings are an added bonus. (Ch. 18–20)

19 Edinburgh

Scotland's capital charms with its Royal Mile and Old Town, and events such as the Edinburgh International Festival and the Fringe keep it lively. (Ch. 14)



17 Cathedrals

The cathedrals of Salisbury, Westminster, Canterbury, and York Minster, among others, are an essential part of England's urban landscapes and history. (Ch. 3–12)



18 Historic Pubs

The history of Britain's taverns and pubs is the history of the island itself. Grab a pint or a gin cocktail, and get to know how the locals live. London has some of the best drinking holes. (Ch. 3)

20 Stonehenge

Awe-inspiring and mystical, Stonehenge is one of the most famous prehistoric sites in England, as well as one of history's most enduring mysteries. (Ch. 6)



WHAT'S WHERE

1 London. Not only Britain's financial and governmental center but also one of the world's great cities, London has mammoth museums, posh palaces, and iconic sights.

2 Oxford and the Thames Valley. London's commuter belt takes in Windsor, where the late Queen Elizabeth II is buried. Then there are the spires of Oxford, peaceful river towns such as Henley and Marlow, and stately homes like Blenheim Palace.

3 Canterbury and the Southeast. This compact region takes in Canterbury and its cathedral, funky seaside Brighton, Dover's white cliffs, and a host of gorgeous castles.

4 Stonehenge and the South. Hampshire, Dorset, and Wiltshire have quintessential English countryside. Explore the stone circles at Stonehenge and Avebury, stunning Highclere Castle, and historic cities like Winchester and Salisbury.

5 Cornwall and the West Country. Somerset, Devon, and Cornwall are sunnier and warmer than the



rest of the country. Of the cities, Bristol is the largest and most vibrant.

6 Bath, the Cotswolds, and Stratford-upon-Avon. The grand Georgian town of Bath is one of England's highlights with its Roman baths. Nearby, the Cotswolds region is famous for tranquil, stone-built villages. Stratford-upon-Avon is the place to see Shakespeare's birthplace and watch his plays.

7 Manchester, Liverpool, and the Peak District. Liverpool rides the Beatles' coattails but, like Manchester, has transformed its warehouses and docks into sleek hotels, restaurants, and shops. The surrounding Peak District has great opportunities for walking and visiting stately homes.

8 The Lake District. A popular national park, this is a startlingly beautiful area of craggy hills, wild moorland, stone cottages, and silvery lakes.

9 Cambridge and East Anglia. The biggest lure in this green, flat, low-key region is Cambridge, with its medieval halls of learning. The countryside is dominated by charming towns such as Lavenham and Aldeburgh.

WHAT'S WHERE

10 Yorkshire and the Northeast. This wilder part of England has great appeal for lovers of the outdoors, but the ancient walled city of York is also a center of attention. In the northeast, medieval Durham, Hadrian's Wall, and coastal castles are highlights.

11 Wales. Clinging to the western edge of England, Wales is impossibly green and ruggedly beautiful, with soaring mountains, magnificent coastlines, and stunning castles.

12 Edinburgh. The captivating Scottish capital is a huge tourist draw, famous for its high-perched castle, Old Town and 18th-century New Town, and the most celebrated arts festival in the world.

13 Glasgow. Scotland's largest city has evolved from prosperous Victorian hub to depressed urban center to thriving modern city with a strong artistic, architectural, and culinary reputation.

14 The Borders and the Southwest. The southern gateway from Scotland to England (or vice versa), the Borders offers a landscape of



pretty moors, gentle hills, and river valleys.

15 The Central Highlands, Fife, and Angus. This area encompasses some of Scotland's most beautiful terrain, including Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. In Fife, St. Andrews has world-famous golf courses.

16 Aberdeen and the Northeast. Malt-whisky buffs can use the prosperous port city of Aberdeen as a base for exploring the region's distilleries, including those on the Malt Whisky Trail. Aberdeen also makes a good starting point for touring Royal Deeside, with castles like Balmoral.

17 Argyll and the Isles. Remote and picturesque, this less-visited region of Scotland's southwestern coastline has excellent gardens, religious sites, and distilleries.

18 Inverness, Skye, and the Northern Highlands. An awe-inspiring valley laced with rivers defines the Great Glen. Inverness, the capital of the Highlands, is near Loch Ness. The beautiful Isle of Skye is a highlight for visitors, and the north's rugged highlands have wild moors.

Great Britain Today

Great Britain and the United Kingdom—what’s the difference? Historically the United Kingdom (or U.K.) has consisted of the countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland; the Channel Islands; and the Isle of Man. Great Britain, meanwhile, is the landmass occupied by England, Scotland, and Wales. Despite this precise definition, “Britain” is often used as a synonym of the U.K., and “the British” refer to all its citizens.

In a 2014 referendum, the Scottish people narrowly voted to remain as part of the U.K. However, a subsequent U.K.-wide vote in 2016 to leave the European Union (popularly termed “Brexit”), supported by a majority of voters in England and Wales, but only a minority in Scotland and Northern Ireland, has led to further debates about the future of the union.

It is important to note that neither Scotland nor Wales have ever been part of England, or vice versa, and each has their own unique heritage and culture. Get that wrong at your own peril—you haven’t seen angry until you’ve seen a Scot referred to as English. That being said, all three countries (and the rest of the U.K.) still pledge loyalty to the British Royal Family, and, despite each having selected devolved powers, are generally governed by the Parliament of the United Kingdom centered in London.

THE DEATH OF THE QUEEN

The passing of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022 was a seismic event. For most Britons, the Queen was the only monarch they’d ever known; just six months earlier, she had celebrated her Platinum Jubilee (70 years on the throne). For many, even those with anti-monarchy leanings, she was a respected figure, representing continuity and a living link to a nostalgic past—a fact evidenced by

the 10-mile-long queues to see her lying in state at London’s Westminster Abbey during the nation’s period of mourning. It’s unlikely that her son and successor, King Charles III (formerly Prince Charles), will garner the same kind of loyalty; a growing anti-monarchist sentiment among younger generations—as well as talk of various Commonwealth countries considering independence referendums—suggest that the British Monarchy could be set for some difficult years ahead.

THE ROYAL FAMILY

Essentially a figurehead monarchy with a symbolic political role, the Royal Family and each member of its three generations continue to exercise the public’s fascination, both at home and abroad. Although the taxpayer cost for supporting the family is estimated at £87.5 million (around \$107.5 million) a year, many have traditionally considered the tourists they bring worth the cost (tourism numbers have been helped along in recent years with the success of television shows like *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown*). However, the death of the Queen and the subsequent ascension of the less universally popular King Charles III in 2022—as well as a series of scandals involving the likes of Prince Andrew—may be beginning to change that sentiment.

Second in the line of succession is Prince William, whose personal life has generated plenty of buzz in recent years, from his 2011 wedding to Kate Middleton (now known publicly as Catherine, Princess of Wales) to the births of their three children: future king Prince George, Princess Charlotte, and Prince Louis. However, in the last few years, most of the headlines have gone to his younger brother Harry, first for his wedding to American actress Meghan Markle in May 2018, then for

the birth of their first child Archie, and then for the announcement in January 2020 that the couple would step down as senior members of the Royal Family and move to California.

POLITICS

Since the general election of 2015, the United Kingdom’s government has been in the hands of the Conservative Party. But the unexpected result of a June 2016 referendum, in which the country voted to leave the European Union (a decision known commonly as Brexit), led to the resignation of prime minister David Cameron, who was replaced by Theresa May. Following three turbulent years, May was replaced by Boris Johnson who, despite being seen as a deeply divisive figure, secured an overall parliamentary majority for the Conservatives at the December 2019 general election and proceeded to finally take the U.K. out of the European Union. But in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic turned the world upside down, and Britain’s exit from the E.U. slid down the list of most people’s priorities. In September 2022, the combined impact of Brexit, the pandemic, and the invasion of Ukraine on the cost of living in the U.K., as well as police investigations into lockdown parties at Downing Street, finally led to Johnson’s resignation. He was replaced in September 2022 by Conservative leader Liz Truss, but after just 50 days in office (the shortest reign of any Prime Minister in history, although one that spanned two monarchs) she was replaced in October 2022 by Rishi Sunak.

LONDON

Dynamic, complex, and cosmopolitan, London is undoubtedly a success story. Economically vibrant, it is Europe’s financial hub—although whether it will maintain this position following Brexit remains to be seen. London also holds the nation’s greatest concentration of

arts, contains some of its most iconic attractions, and boasts its most vibrant restaurant and theater scenes. Consequently, it’s also the U.K.’s top tourist draw, with ongoing debates about how to increase the capacity of its airports to meet visitor demand. London’s preeminence isn’t always good news for Londoners, many of whom have been priced out of a skyrocketing property market by investors and foreign buyers (London is, by quite some distance, the most expensive British city to live in).

SCOTLAND

At first glance, visitors to Scotland who have already been to its southern neighbor England will find much that is familiar. After all, the two countries have had a common history since their crowns were united in 1603 and their parliaments merged a hundred years later. Scotland’s distinctiveness soon becomes apparent, however, as does the country’s fiery pride in its own identity. It may only have 5.5 million people (to England’s 56 million), but in modern history Scotland has had an extraordinary global influence in everything from art and literature to science and engineering. Today, it continues to have some big ideas about where it’s headed socially, culturally, and economically—including whether that’s as part of the U.K. or as an independent country.

This self-confidence is immediately evident in its thriving arts scene, with arts festivals proliferating and such companies as the National Theatre of Scotland continuing to enjoy international success. And it’s just as evident when talking to locals, who will proudly proclaim their landscapes, their castles, and their food and drink to be the best in the world.

What to Eat in Great Britain



CULLEN SKINK

Cullen skink is a decadently creamy fish soup that's made with hearty smoked haddock, potatoes, onions, and cream. Think American chowder, but thicker, smokier, and served piping hot with bread. You'll find it on the menu in many Scottish pubs and restaurants, especially on the coasts.

FISH-AND-CHIPS

The U.K.'s most famous dish is available in almost every town and village. Best enjoyed out of a hot paper wrap from a typical fish-and-chip shop, or chippy, the meal should be eaten with a miniature wooden fork for extra authenticity. The fish is usually cod (but haddock, skate, and rock are not uncommon), covered in a crispy deep-fried batter. Chips are thick-cut fried potatoes and sides can include anything from pickled eggs to mushy peas. You can also opt for a sauce: regional English variations

including tartare, curry sauce, and gravy; while the Scots prefer "chippy sauce," a pungent mix of malt vinegar and brown sauce that's similar to American steak sauce).

HAGGIS, NEEPS, AND TATTIES

From the offal-heavy list of ingredients (minced heart, liver, and lungs mixed with onions, oatmeal, and spices) and the unconventional cooking method (the mixture is boiled in a sheep's stomach), haggis may not sound like the most appetizing of meals.

But there's a very good reason for its status as Scotland's national dish: it's delicious. Travel the country and you'll see haggis all over menus. It's traditionally served with neeps (turnips) and tatties (potatoes), but is also found at breakfast, in sandwiches, and even on nachos.

WELSH RAREBIT

The ultimate grilled cheese sandwich, Welsh rarebit (originally Welsh rabbit) comprises slices of toasted bread smothered in a savory sauce of melted cheese and other ingredients that might include ale, mustard, cayenne pepper, and Worcestershire sauce. Add a fried egg on top and you get a "buck rarebit," add tomatoes and it's a "blushing bunny."

CURRY

The 1970s saw a wave of South Asian immigrants arriving in the U.K. and setting up restaurants in big urban centers like London, Birmingham, and Manchester. These days, there's a mix of Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani restaurants in almost every town and village, serving some of the finest curry anywhere outside of Asia. Aside from classics like vindaloo, madras, and tandoori meats, the range of sweet, salty, spicy, and sour curries makes it one of the country's best-loved cuisines.

Full English Breakfast



SUNDAY ROAST

Roasted meat (chicken, beef, pork, or lamb), roast potatoes, assorted vegetables, cauliflower cheese, Yorkshire puddings, and condiments like mint sauce, bread sauce, English mustard, horseradish, and cranberry jelly make up some of the most important elements of a traditional Sunday roast, a meal that should leave you ready to sleep within 30 minutes of eating it. Almost every pub and restaurant in the U.K. serves a roast on a Sunday, and the quality ranges dramatically depending on the establishment. You'll also find "carveries" serving buffet-style roasts every day of the week.

CHEESE

The English stalwart Cheddar, Cheshire, Double Gloucester, and Stilton cheeses are complemented by traditional and experimental cheeses from small, local makers. Some cheeses

come wrapped in nettles or vine leaves, others stuffed with apricots, cranberries, or herbs. Dairies are also producing more sheep and goat cheeses, yogurts, and ice creams.

BANGERS AND MASH

Simple but effective, this pub grub staple comprises sausages served on a bed of mashed potatoes and topped with onion gravy. The "bangers" are usually Cumberlands—long, coiled, and particularly meaty pork sausages—but they can also be made from lamb or beef.

BARA BRITH

Literally translated as "speckled bread," this tasty, fruity Welsh loaf is made with flour, yeast, butter, eggs, dried fruits (usually raisins, currants, and sultanas) soaked overnight in tea, and mixed spices. When slathered with salted butter, it's the perfect tea time treat.

ETON MESS

Named after the famous boarding school near Windsor, this traditional dessert consists of meringue, whipped cream, and strawberries (or other summer fruits). As the name suggests, it looks a little messy, but it tastes divine.

SMOKED FISH

From Arbroath smokies to Finnan haddie, smoked fish is a staple of Scottish dining tables nationwide. Smokies are haddock, salted and dried overnight, then smoked in a barrel over a hardwood fire, while Finnan haddies are coldsmoked haddock, cooked over green wood and peat. And that's only the start of the many regional variations of smoked fish all over Scotland. Visitors will also find menus featuring smoked herring (kippers), smoked trout, and, of course, smoked salmon.

What to Drink in Great Britain



SCOTTISH WHISKY

No trip to Scotland is complete without trying a dram or two of Scotland's most famous tipple. There are several distinct Scotch whisky regions, each producing a single malt with its own complex character, from sweeter Speyside whiskies to smokier Islays.

AFTERNOON TEA

For the ultimate tea drinking experience, head to a posh hotel or restaurant for an afternoon tea, where steaming pots of loose-leaf tea are served alongside a tiered stand filled with cakes, pastries, finger sandwiches, and scones (with jam and clotted cream). In many establishments, you can expect a tea menu (and the fanciest might even have a tea sommelier) where you can consider the likes of Earl Grey, Assam (the late Queen's favorite teas), Darjeeling, and Ceylon.

REAL ALES

Also known as draught cask ale, real ale is unfiltered, unpasteurized beer that is served directly from a cask. The term was coined in the early 1970s to differentiate traditional English-style beers, containing live yeast and therefore naturally bubbly, from the highly processed, artificially carbonated beers made by big breweries of the time. Today real ales (from IPAs and stouts to golden ales and porters) are served in all good pubs throughout England, Scotland, and Wales; look for a traditional handpulled pump or for

beer being served directly from the cask. The ales can be from kegs, bottles, or casks, and they range from pale amber to full-bodied. The Casque Mark outside pubs signals their availability.

PIMM'S CUP

Best enjoyed while outside in the sun, Pimm's is a gin-based liqueur typically mixed with lemonade and ice, then filled with sliced strawberries, cucumber, and mint. Popular at weddings, regattas, Wimbledon, horse-racing tracks, and cricket matches, it is the British version of the Aperol Spritz and even more refreshing than water.

IRN-BRU

After whisky, Irn-Bru is the drink most associated with Scotland. The luminous orange carbonated soda even outsells Coca-Cola in these parts. Nobody can quite agree exactly what the flavor is, and it famously isn't to everyone's taste, but you can't say you have truly experienced Scotland without a sip of Irn-Bru.



Pimm's Cup

ENGLISH CIDER

Sweet and refreshing, traditional English cider is made from pure apple juice and twice fermented. The drink is usually carbonated, though some variations—like West Country specialty *scrumpy*—can be still. Perry is a similar drink made from pear juice.

GIN

Gin has had a big resurgence in recent years, and today you'll find a huge selection of gins available in pubs, clubs, and supermarkets across Great Britain. Opt for a stylishly packaged, 21st-century

gin like Curio, Sipsmith, or Hendrick's, or choose a classic, centuries-old spirit like Beefeater, Bloom, or Plymouth.

WINE

Believe it or not, wine-making in Southern England and Wales dates back to Roman times—and in recent years, there has been a major resurgence. There are now hundreds of vineyards producing internationally acclaimed, award-winning wines, including Chapel Down in Kent and Ancrè Hill Estates in Monmouthshire.

ENGLISH BREAKFAST TEA

Even if you're not going the full afternoon tea route, tea is still a quintessential drink to sample in Great Britain, and English Breakfast is probably the country's most popular blend. It's a full-bodied, robust black tea that goes well with a splash of milk and a spoonful of sugar. You can pick up common brands like Twinings and PG Tips from any supermarket or treat yourself to superior blends from the likes of Harrods and Fortnum and Mason.

What to Buy in Great Britain



BISCUITS AND TEA CAKES

A “biscuit” here is a hard, sweet, baked treat that’s akin to a cookie or a cracker in North America—and they’re a cornerstone of British life, from English chocolate digestives to Scottish shortbread biscuits.



CADBURY CHOCOLATE

The country’s best-selling chocolate bar is Cadbury Dairy Milk, which you’ll find in every corner shop (and airport duty-free store) in the land. Along with Dairy Milk, Cadbury makes dozens of other popular chocolate bars, from the biscuit-filled Boost to the honeycomb-toffee Crunchie.



FOOTBALL GEAR

Football is Britain’s favorite sport, so a soccer jersey—or any other item of football merchandise—makes the perfect souvenir. Take your pick from big-name Premier League clubs like Liverpool, Manchester United, and Chelsea, or opt for some merch from the England, Scotland, or Wales national teams.

HARRIS TWEED

A traditional cloth handwoven from pure virgin wool by crofters in Scotland’s Western Isles (not just Lewis and Harris, but also North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, and Barra), Harris Tweed is world-famous for its warmth, softness, resilience, and breathability. From jackets to scarves to blankets, Harris Tweed items are for sale across the Western Isles but also on the mainland; simply look for the official orb trademark.

KILTS

These knee-length pleated skirts, usually made from woolen cloth in a tartan pattern, are the traditional dress of men in the Scottish Highlands. While no longer everyday wear for most modern Scots, you’ll still see kilts worn on special occasions like weddings. Like the look of tartan but can’t see yourself in a kilt? No problem. You’ll find plenty of other tartan print products on sale in Scotland, from sweaters and scarves to coats and cushions to backpacks and bow ties.

ROYALTY-RELATED MEMORABILIA

From cheaply made key rings and mugs to high quality chinaware and jewelry, memorabilia celebrating the Royal Family comes in all shapes and sizes—and for all budgets. For the most

Kilts



authentic souvenirs, shop at the official Royal Collection stores, which you’ll find at royal residences like Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

QUAICH

An old Highland symbol of kinship and friendship, this shallow drinking vessel was the original whisky tumbler. Its distinctive

two-handle design means it can be shared amicably between friends and loved ones (and it’s still used to toast the bride at weddings). Though traditionally made of wood and modestly decorated, modern quaichs are commonly made from pewter and silver to allow for personalized engraving.



LOVE SPOONS

A Welsh tradition dating back to at least the 17th century, these intricately carved wooden spoons would be gifted to young women by men to show romantic interest.

LAVERBREAD

This traditional Welsh delicacy is not bread at all; it’s a gelatinous, iron-rich paste made from edible seaweed. Renowned Welsh actor Richard Burton memorably described it as “Welshman’s caviar.” Pick up a jar to take home; you can fry it with bacon, use it to make soups and sauces, or simply eat it cold as a salad.

HP SAUCE

A true icon of British culture, this “brown sauce” has a tomato base, blended with malt vinegar, sugars, dates, and tamarind. HP stands for Houses of Parliament, which explains the Westminster illustration on the front of the bottle.

Best Museums in Great Britain



KELVINGROVE ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM, GLASGOW

One of Scotland's most popular museums, Kelvingrove's collection includes works by Rembrandt, van Gogh, and Dali, an impressive collection of arms and armor, a gigantic concert pipe organ, and much more.



RIVERSIDE MUSEUM, GLASGOW

Set within an eye-catching, Zaha Hadid-designed building on the banks of the Clyde, the award-winning Riverside Museum has an exhaustive collection of transport exhibits, from skateboards to steam trains and everything in between. In addition, the *Tall Ship* at Riverside, a Victorian cargo ship, is moored outside.



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND, EDINBURGH

From Dolly the Sheep (the world's first cloned mammal) to the Lewis Chess Pieces (ivory-carved medieval game pieces), the National Museum of Scotland has a host of fascinating, family-friendly exhibits. It also has one of Edinburgh's best city views; take the elevator to the rooftop terrace for a stunning panorama of the city.



TATE MODERN, LONDON

This spectacular contemporary art gallery starts with a bang, thanks to its entrance, Turbine Hall, filled with gigantic temporary installations from artists including Ai Weiwei, Abraham Cruzvillegas, and Kara Walker. Venture further inside for the Tate Modern's impressive permanent collection of works by the likes of Warhol, Picasso, Dalí, Rothko, and Gormley.



THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON

Established in 1753, the British Museum has long been one of the world's most famous national museums. Today, the London landmark is home to a permanent collection of eight million works, including the Rosetta Stone and the Elgin Marbles.



INTERNATIONAL SLAVERY MUSEUM, LIVERPOOL

Tracing the shameful history and legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, in which Liverpool played a significant role, this important museum recreates what life was like in West African compounds and aboard crammed ships bound for the Americas with enslaved people imprisoned inside.



V&A DUNDEE

The V&A Dundee design museum is not only the first V&A outpost outside London but also the country's first design museum; it features permanent exhibits from designers across Scotland, including Charles Rennie Mackintosh.



ROMAN BATHS AND THE PUMP ROOM, BATH

The hot springs of Bath have drawn visitors to the city for thousands of years. Today, this museum displays relics from the Roman bath complex that used to stand on the site, as well as the Pump Room, a hang-out for 19th-century Bath society members.

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD

Known to locals simply as "The Ash," this extraordinary Oxford University museum was founded in 1683 (the first public museum in the United Kingdom). With a focus on art and archaeology, the collection spans everything from Egyptian mummies to Renaissance artwork.

NATIONAL MONUMENT CARDIFF

Situated right in the heart of the cosmopolitan capital of Wales, this striking neoclassical building houses several different exhibitions. Step inside to find a world-class art gallery (featuring one of Britain's finest collections of Impressionist paintings), an interactive science discovery center, and more.

Best Castles in Great Britain



EDINBURGH CASTLE

Scotland's most famous medieval fortress, Edinburgh Castle is the capital's crowning glory, having played host to kings, queens, soldiers, and prisoners for close to a millennium.



HEVER CASTLE

Arguably England's most picture-perfect castle, Hever Castle is a 700-year-old mass of romantic turrets, battlements, and manicured gardens, all enveloped by a moat. It was the ancestral home of Henry VIII's second wife Anne Boleyn until her 1536 execution.



CARDIFF CASTLE

Sitting pretty at the heart of the Welsh capital, Cardiff Castle is part Norman keep and part Victorian mansion, with ancient Roman roots. Admire it from afar or venture inside to explore its startlingly opulent interiors.

STIRLING CASTLE

Magnificent Stirling Castle was at the heart of the Wars of Independence, and the biggest prize for Robert the Bruce's famous victory at Bannockburn. The castle's royal connections lasted for centuries; it was later the childhood home of Mary, Queen of Scots. Today, exhibits tell the story of the castle's roles as a battle site, royal palace, and tourism hot spot.

ALNWICK CASTLE

Instantly recognizable to Harry Potter fans, Northumberland's beautiful Alnwick Castle—dubbed the “Windsor of the North”—is best known as the exterior of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the *Harry Potter* movie series.

HIGHCLERE CASTLE

This grand, Jacobean-style country house gained international fame during the 2010s as the main location for mega TV hit *Downton Abbey* and its movie adaptations. The house, gardens, and Egyptian exhibition are open to visit throughout the summer.

KENILWORTH CASTLE

Founded in the 12th century, this extraordinary fortification showcases five centuries of different English architectural styles. And these romantic ruins have seen a thing or two, from royal prisoners to civil wars.

Alnwick Castle



CAERNARFON CASTLE

This medieval fortress has watched over the Welsh town of Caernarfon for the best part of a millennium. Part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, its fascinating and bloody military history makes it one of the country's most visited tourist attractions.

GLAMIS CASTLE

Beautiful Glamis Castle has a long history of royal connections, from Macbeth, King of the Scots (who was the Thane of Glamis, as well as Cawdor) to Princess Margaret (who was born within its four walls). Consequently, for any lovers of Shakespeare or the British royal family, Glamis Castle is a must-see sight.

SUDELEY CASTLE

It may officially be called a castle, but this Cotswolds icon is more akin to a Tudor palace. Once the home of Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's sixth and final wife (the only one who “survived”), it was used as a refuge by Charles I and besieged by Cromwell's army, reducing it to ruins.

FLOORS CASTLE

Built in the 1720s as the seat of the Duke of Roxburghe, the enormous Floors Castle remains the property of the duke to this day. That makes it the largest inhabited castle in Scotland; it has grand rooms decorated with plush furnishings, old portraits, and precious porcelain.



EILEAN DONAN

Scotland's most picture-perfect castle, Eilean Donan sits pretty on a loch islet en route to the Isle of Skye. Often obscured by rolling fog, the 14th-century fortification is a merry mess of imposing towers, timber-framed roofs, and crooked staircases.

Best Royal Sites in Great Britain



BALMORAL PALACE

This imposing estate house has been an official residence of the royal family since 1852 and was the late Queen Elizabeth II's summer home. Its 19th-century design is faux-Scottish baronial, but its grandiose ballroom, formal grounds, and fascinating exhibits make it a worthwhile stop.



TOWER OF LONDON

Dating back almost a millennium, the world-famous Tower of London has at times been a fortress, a mint, a palace, a zoo, and a prison. Today, it welcomes tourists to explore its historic attractions, from the Bloody Tower to the Crown Jewels.



WESTMINSTER ABBEY

One of England's most famous buildings, Westminster Abbey has hosted 39 coronations (from William the Conqueror in 1066 to King Charles III in 2023) and 16 royal weddings. Fascinating royal sights include the Coronation Chair (used since 1308), Henry VII's Lady Chapel, and the tombs of Elizabeth I and her sister "Bloody" Mary I.



SANDRINGHAM HOUSE

The Royal Family traditionally spends Christmas at Sandringham, a vast, red-brick Victorian mansion and estate near the coast in East Anglia. But for most of the rest of year, it's open to visitors. Along with the opulent Edwardian interiors and pretty formal gardens, you'll also find a superb transport museum.



WINDSOR CASTLE

Visible for miles around, this enormous fortification-cum-royal residence (the largest inhabited castle in the world) has been used by the Royal Family since the Middle Ages. Explore Windsor Castle's beautiful St. George's Chapel, home to the tombs of English kings including Henry VIII and Elizabeth II, and the sumptuous State Apartments.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Probably the world's most famous royal residence, Buckingham Palace was Queen Elizabeth II's main home, and closed to the public for most of the year. With Charles III opting to keep Clarence House as his main home, the palace's 19 State Rooms may soon become open all year round.



PALACE OF HOLYROODHOUSE

The official residence of the reigning monarch in Scotland, the Palace of Holyroodhouse is located at the foot of Edinburgh's Royal Mile, opposite the modernist Scottish Parliament Building.



HAMPTON COURT PALACE

Situated 12 miles southeast of central London, this spectacular Tudor residence is one of England's most iconic royal buildings. Begun in 1515 by Cardinal Wolsey in order to curry favor with a young Henry VIII, Hampton Court's Great Hall and State Apartments provide a real insight into the lives of Tudor monarchs.

KENSINGTON PALACE

Kensington Palace has had some of the royal family's biggest names as residents, with William, Kate, and their three children continuing to call it home today. You can explore the Sunken Garden, the Queen's Apartments, and the King's State Apartments on a visit.

HIGHGROVE HOUSE

The country estate of King Charles III and Camilla, Queen Consort, Highgrove House is located 20 miles north of Bath. It's renowned for its exquisite gardens, orchards, and woodlands, which showcase Charles's enduring commitment to organic produce.

Playing Golf in Scotland

There are some 550 golf courses in Scotland for just 5.5 million residents, so the country has probably the highest ratio of courses to people anywhere in the world. If you're visiting Scotland, you'll probably want to play the "famous names" sometime in your career.

So by all means, play the championship courses such as the Old Course at St. Andrews, but remember they *are* championship courses. You may enjoy the game itself much more at a less challenging course. Remember, too, that everyone else wants to play the big names, so booking can be a problem at peak times in summer. Reserving three to four months ahead is not too far for the famous courses, although it's possible to get a time up to a month (or even a week) in advance if you are relaxed about your timing. If you're staying in a hotel attached to a course, get the concierge to book a tee time for you.

Happily, golf has always had a peculiar classlessness in Scotland. It's a game for everyone, and for centuries Scottish towns and cities have maintained courses for the enjoyment of their citizens. Admittedly, a few clubs have always been noted for their exclusive air, and some newer golf courses are losing touch with the game's inclusive origins, but these are exceptions to the tradition of recreation for all. Golf here is usually a democratic game, played by ordinary folk as well as the wealthy.

TIPS ON PLAYING

Golf courses are everywhere in Scotland. Most courses welcome visitors with a minimum of formalities, and some at a surprisingly low cost. Other courses are very expensive, but a lot of great golf can be played for between about £30 to £100 a round. Online booking at many courses has made arranging a golf tour easier, too.

Be aware of the topography of a course. Scotland is where the distinction between "links" and "parkland" courses was first made. Links courses are by the sea and are subject to the attendant sea breezes—some quite bracing—and mists, which can make them trickier to play. The natural topography of sand dunes and long, coarse grasses can add to the challenge. A parkland course is in a wooded area and its terrain is more obviously landscaped. A "moorland" course is found in an upland area.

Here are three pieces of advice, particularly for North Americans: (1) in Scotland the game is usually played fairly quickly, so don't dawdle if others are waiting; (2) caddy carts are hand-pulled carts for your clubs and driven golf carts are rarely available; and (3) when they say "rough," they *really* mean "rough."

Unless specified otherwise, hours are generally sunrise to sundown, which in June can be as late as 10 pm. Note that some courses advertise the SSS, "standard scratch score," instead of par (which may be different). This is the score a scratch golfer could achieve under perfect conditions. Rental clubs, balls, and other gear are generally available from clubhouses, except at the most basic municipal courses. Don't get caught by the dress codes enforced at many establishments: in general, untailored shorts, round-neck shirts, jeans, and sneakers are frowned upon.

The prestigious courses may ask for evidence of your golf skills by way of a handicap certificate; check in advance and carry this with you.

COSTS AND COURSES

Many courses lower their rates before and after peak season—at the end of September, for example. It's worth asking about this.

■ **TIP→** Some areas offer regional golf passes that save you money. Check with the local tourist board.

For a complete list of courses, contact local tourist offices or VisitScotland's official and comprehensive golf website, www.visitscotland.com/see-do/active/golf. It has information about the country's golf courses, special golf trails, regional passes, special events, and tour operators, as well as on conveniently located accommodations. U.K. Golf Guide (www.ukgolfguide.com/countries/scotland) has user-generated reviews.

For information about regional courses, also see individual chapters.

BEST BETS AROUND SCOTLAND

If your idea of heaven is teeing off on windswept links, then Scotland is for you. Dramatic courses, many of them set on sandy dunes alongside the ocean, are just one of the types you'll encounter. Highland courses that take you through the heather and moorland courses surrounded by craggy mountains have their own challenges.

Boat of Garten Golf Club, Highlands. With the Cairngorm Mountain as a backdrop, this beautiful course has rugged terrain that requires even seasoned players to bring their A game. As an added bonus, a steam railway runs alongside the course.

Carnoustie Golf Links, Angus. Challenging golfers for nearly 500 years, Carnoustie is on many golfers' must-do list. The iconic Championship Course has tested many of the world's top players, while the Burnside and Buddon courses attract budding McIlroys, Spieths, and Koepkas.

Castle Stuart Golf Links, near Inverness. A more recent addition to Scotland's world-class courses offers cliff-top hazards, sprawling bunkers, and rolling fairways overlooking the Moray Firth.

Cruden Bay Golf Club, Aberdeenshire. This challenging and enjoyable links course was built by the Great North of Scotland Railway Company in 1894. Its remote location beside a set of towering dunes makes it irresistible.

Dunbar Golf Club, East Lothian. This classic and challenging links course has dramatic weather and scenery, with a backdrop of the Firth of Forth, Bass Rock, and a lighthouse.

Gleneagles, Perthshire. Host of the 2014 Ryder Cup championship, Gleneagles has three 18-hole courses that challenge the pros and a nine-hole course that provides a more laid-back game. It's also home to the PGA National Golf Academy.

Machrihanish Golf Club, Argyll. A dramatic location on the Mull of Kintyre and some exciting match play make these links well worth a journey.

Royal Dornoch Golf Club, Sutherland. Extending across a coastal shelf, Royal Dornoch has fast greens, pristine beaches, and mountain views. In spring yellow gorse sets the green hills ablaze.

St. Andrews Links, Fife. To approach the iconic 18th hole in the place where the game was invented remains the holy grail of golfers worldwide.

Western Gailes Golf Club, near Glasgow. This splendid links course is a final qualifying course for the British Open. Sculpted by Mother Nature, it's the country's finest natural links course.

What to Watch and Read

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

This 1964 musical comedy film, which stars John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr as themselves, portrays a fictionalized 36 hours in the life of the band at the very height of Beatlemania. *Time* magazine rated it one of the 100 greatest films of all time.

BEND IT LIKE BECKHAM

Offering insight into England's society-wide obsession with soccer—and with its prodigal son David Beckham—this 2002 romantic comedy sports film follows 18-year-old Jess as she defies her conservative Sikh parents to play for her local women's football team.

BRAVE

The first Pixar film directed by a woman (Brenda Chapman) and the first with a female main character, this 2012 animated film tells the story of Merida, the headstrong daughter of a Scottish king and queen who wishes to defy tradition in the name of her independence. Along with a heartwarming tale of mother and daughter love and acceptance, it portrays gorgeous animation of the Scottish Highlands and Highland traditions.

BRAVEHEART

This 1995 classic starring Mel Gibson was many a filmgoer's introduction to Scottish history and remains one of the most quoted movies ever. It tells a very embellished story of the real 13th-century Scottish warrior, William Wallace, who did lead the Scots in the First War of Scottish Independence against England. While historians will be happy to point out the many historical inaccuracies, the film was nonetheless a commercial and critical success, earning several Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

BRIDGERTON

Another American take on an English setting, this Regency London period drama was a record-breaking lockdown hit for Netflix. Based on a collection of historical romance novels by Julia Quinn, it has been acclaimed for its strong female viewpoint and diverse cast. The second season was released in early 2022, with seasons three and four set to follow in the coming years.

THE CROWN

Since it debuted on Netflix in November 2016, this historical drama about the reign of Queen Elizabeth II has picked up a host of accolades and awards, from Emmys to Golden Globes. While you're unlikely to bump into a royal on your visit to England, you might well visit some of the many palaces, castles, and other locations featured in the show.

DOWNTON ABBEY

The hugely popular television series, which ran between 2010 and 2015, is one of England's most successful TV exports of recent years, while two movie adaptations were released in 2019 and 2022. Most of the filming for the show takes place at Highclere Castle in the South of England; it's available to visit throughout the summer.

GAVIN & STACEY

This popular British sitcom, written by and starring Ruth Jones and James Cordery (former host of *The Late Late Show*), focuses on two families, one from Essex and one from Wales, who are brought together by the relationship between the titular characters. First airing in 2007, the BAFTA-winning show was successfully revived in 2019 for a Christmas special.

THE GREAT BRITISH BAKE OFF

A quaint television baking competition has become an international phenomenon. Every season, a fresh-faced group of 10 amateur bakers are set a series of baking challenges over several weeks to determine the ultimate winner. The Bake Off has spawned dozens of international versions all over the world, including *The Great American Baking Show* on ABC, but the original—now 13 seasons in—remains the best.

OUTLANDER

If you're traveling to Scotland in the 21st century, chances are you're going to hear about the cultural phenomenon that is *Outlander*. The book series by Diana Gabaldon first captured the attention of the world in 1991, with many readers becoming dedicated fans of the time-traveling series through eight (and counting) novels. But then the television series debuted in 2014 on Starz and it seems the entire world fell for the love story between Claire Randall and Jamie Fraser amid a stunning Highlands backdrop. Both the book and the television show tell the same story: a nurse in 1946 finds herself sent back in time to 1743 Scotland, where she becomes entangled in the Jacobite uprising and falls in love with a Highland warrior. Many scenes are filmed on location, and you will find many a tour eager to take you to filming spots throughout the country.

POLDARK

Based on a series of historical novels by Winston Graham, this BBC drama series follows Captain Ross Poldark after his return to Cornwall following the 1783 American War of Independence. Poldark's developing romance with scullery maid Demelza, combined with regular shots of lead actor Aidan Turner's toned torso, sustained the show for 43 episodes over five seasons.

TED LASSO

This Emmy-winning Apple TV+ comedy-drama series tells the story of an American football coach moving to England to manage the fictional Premier League soccer team AFC Richmond. Although not always 100% accurate in its terminology (British journalists saying "tie" instead of "draw" is a particular clanger), it's a fun introduction to the strange world of elite Association Football.

BRICK LANE BY MONICA ALI

Set on the eponymous Brick Lane, the heart of London's Bangladeshi community, this novel follows the life of Nazneen, an 18-year-old Bangladeshi woman who struggles to adapt to life in England after marrying an older man.

COMPLETE POEMS AND SONGS OF ROBERT BURNS BY ROBERT BURNS

You'll likely encounter Scotland's most famous poet in the form of Burns Nights or Burns Suppers; Scots get together to recite poetry, eat haggis, and drink whisky to celebrate the life of Robert Burns on his birthday each year. To brush up on your Scottish history, read some of his 18th-century poems (including his most beloved, "Auld Lang Syne") that helped spur Scotland's entrance into Romanticism.

THE HARRY POTTER SERIES BY J. K. ROWLING

The best-selling book series in history, J. K. Rowling's epic fantasy novels chronicle the lives of young wizard Harry Potter, along with his friends Hermione and Ron, as they attend the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Visitors to the Northeast can explore the real-life Hogwarts at Alnwick Castle.

HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY BY RICHARD LLEWELLYN

This classic 1939 novel may be heavy on sentimentality and Welsh clichés (so much singing!), but 80 years on from publication it remains an enthralling tale of a respectable mining family in the valleys of South Wales. It was a huge hit in the U.S., winning the National Book Award, and was adapted into a 1941 movie by John Ford.

OLIVER TWIST BY CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens's second novel is perhaps his most famous, recounting the story of orphan Oliver Twist and his life as a juvenile pickpocket for the criminal Fagin. It offers a fascinating, unflinching insight into the criminal gangs and cruel treatment of orphans in London during the mid-19th century.

THE POEMS OF DYLAN THOMAS

In his short life (he died at 39 in New York City), Welshman Dylan Thomas managed a level of fame and popularity that is rarely afforded poets. Many of his written works have spawned well-known lines, including “do not go gentle into that good night” and “though lovers be lost love shall not,” while his seminal radio play *Under Milk Wood* is widely considered a masterpiece.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE BY JANE AUSTEN

This romantic, Regency-era novel is one of the world's most enduring love stories. It follows 20-year-old Elizabeth Bennet and the course of her relationship with the older Mr. Darcy. There have been several film and television adaptations of the book, but perhaps the most loved is the BBC's 1995 adaptation starring Jennifer Ehle and Colin Firth.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORIES AND MACBETH

The Bard's series of historical plays chronicle the lives of four centuries of English monarchs, including King John, Henry V, and Richard III. Although widely regarded as Tudor propaganda (Shakespeare lived during the reign of Elizabeth I, the last Tudor monarch), the histories are hugely entertaining and informative, too. And one of his most famous plays tells a distinctly Scottish tale. The play is based on the lives of actual men who fought for power in 11th-century Scotland although the real life versions of Macbeth, Macduff, and Duncan were quite different. Nevertheless the fiction that the Bard weaves is one of the most powerful stories of ambition, power, and politics (and witchcraft) ever written.

WHITE TEETH BY ZADIE SMITH

This award-winning 2000 novel focuses on the lives of two best friends—Samad Iqbal and Archie Jones—and their families in North London. The novel, which was Zadie Smith's debut, deftly explores themes of cultural identity, faith, race, and gender in modern England.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS BY EMILY BRONTË

Originally published under the pen name Ellis Bell, this English literature classic from the third-eldest Brontë sibling was groundbreaking and controversial for its stark depiction of mental and physical cruelty, gender inequality, and religious hypocrisy.