

Chapter 2

TRAVEL SMART

2

Updated by
Joseph Reaney

★ **CAPITAL:**

London

👤 **POPULATION:**

64,570,000

🗨️ **LANGUAGE:**

English

💰 **CURRENCY:**

Pound

📠 **COUNTRY CODE:**

44

⚠️ **EMERGENCIES:**

999 or 112

🚗 **DRIVING:**

On the left

⚡ **ELECTRICITY:**

240v/50 cycles; plugs have three rectangular blades

🕒 **TIME:**

Five hours ahead
of New York

🌐 **WEB RESOURCES:**

www.visitbritain.com
www.visitengland.com
www.visitlondon.com
www.visitscotland.com
www.visitwales.com

ATLANTIC
OCEAN



Know Before You Go

Great Britain is a big place, with several distinct regions, cultures, and landscapes. Here are a few tips that will help your trip go as smoothly as possible no matter where you're going.

THE QUEEN'S DEATH WAS A MONUMENTAL OCCASION.

After over 70 years on the throne, Queen Elizabeth II died in September 2022, leaving many in Britain and across the world to wonder what's next for the monarchy. The late Queen was incredibly beloved, and for most in Britain, she was the only monarch they had ever known. King Charles III has big shoes to fill, especially at a time when many in England, particularly those from the younger generations, are wondering whether the monarchy should continue to exist at all. Visitors to England honestly won't notice much difference with the new king, although visiting policies to some royal sites such as Buckingham Palace might change depending on how often the king is there. He's expected to carry on many of the royal traditions such as Trooping the Colour, although it's possible he may make changes compared to how the Queen did things. You may notice more subtle changes such as a likeness of King Charles on coins

and postage stamps or the curtain at the Royal Opera House embroidered with the initials CR instead of ER. You can also visit the Queen's final resting place in Windsor Castle.

THE WEATHER IN GREAT BRITAIN IS ALWAYS TRICKY.

The summer months of June, July, and August give the best chance of good weather, although the crowds are at their largest. The start of August can be very busy for major tourist attractions and hot weather can make traveling on London's non-air-conditioned Tube uncomfortable. November through March is when you'll find Britain's best flight and hotel deals. Winter, while not generally frigid, can be dismal; the sun sets at 4 pm and it's pitch-dark by 5. Late spring is the time to see the countryside and the royal parks and gardens at their loveliest, while fall brings autumnal beauty and smaller crowds. Temperatures are usually mild at both times.

BE PREPARED TO NOT UNDERSTAND THE SCOTTISH ACCENT.

The Scots language, which borrows from Scandinavian, Dutch, French, and Gaelic, survives in various forms, with each region having its own dialect. In the northeast they speak Doric, while the Shetland and Orkney "tongue" is influenced by the now-extinct Norn. The Gaelic language, the indigenous language of those from the Western Isles and Highlands, has been given a new lease on life. Many primary schools in the region are teaching a new generation of Gaelic speakers, and the language even has its own TV channel, BBC Alba. Otherwise, Scots speak English, though often with a strong accent that can be hard for Americans (and even other Brits) to understand. Don't worry, after spending some time with Scots, your ears will soon come to terms with it.

DON'T MIX UP YOUR SCOTS WITH YOUR WELSH.

Remember that although Scotland is part of the United Kingdom politically and does share many cultural links with England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, Scots do not take kindly to their country being called England or being called English. In recent years the Scottish have developed a burgeoning pride in their distinctive identity, which has even led to a waning sense of being British. So when in conversation, it's best not to associate

Scottish people with the much maligned London-based Parliament and its English elite.

LEARNING SOME BRITISH IDIOMS CAN BE HELPFUL.

Nearly everyone knows that Britain and America are, in the phrase usually attributed to playwright George Bernard Shaw, "two countries separated by a common language," so you'll find some knowledge of British idioms very helpful for communicating with locals. An elevator is a lift; instead of waiting in line, you queue; the bathroom is known as the toilet, the loo, or the WC (for water-closet) so in public spaces you may see a W/C sign instead of a restroom sign; pants are trousers; underpants are pants or knickers; french fries are chips; potato chips are crisps; and soccer is football. Say "cheers" while clinking glasses or to say good-bye or thank you. The list is extensive, so if something a local is saying doesn't quite make sense to you, it's probably a matter of slang.

CHECK TO SEE IF YOUR TRIP FALLS DURING A BANK HOLIDAY.

In England and Wales, holidays are January 1, New Year's Day; Good Friday and Easter Monday; May Day (first Monday in May); spring and summer bank holidays (last Monday in May and August, respectively); December 25, Christmas Day; and December 26, Boxing Day (day after Christmas). In Scotland, locals also get January 2

and usually St. Andrews Day (November 30) off, but not Easter Monday. If these holidays fall on a weekend, the holiday is observed on the following Monday. Many stores and some attractions might be closed, and other restaurants and museums might be much busier than usual. During the Christmas holidays many restaurants, as well as museums and other attractions, may close for at least a week—call to verify hours. Book hotels for Christmas travel well in advance, and check whether the hotel restaurant will be open.

AVOID TALKING POLITICS OR ROYALTY.

Recent years have seen major political upheaval in Britain, from the narrow vote to leave the European Union (better known as "Brexit") to the controversies of ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The country remains divided on many of these issues, so approach with caution. Following the death of Queen Elizabeth II in September 2022, you may find that views on the role of monarchy in British society have become increasingly divided, too.

TO SAVE MONEY, TRY A PASS.

If you plan to visit castles, gardens, and historic houses during your stay in England, look into discount passes or memberships that offer significant savings. Just be sure to compare what the pass or membership offers to your itinerary to see if it's worthwhile.

The National Trust, English Heritage, Historic Environment Scotland, the Historic Houses Association, and more each encompass hundreds of properties. English Heritage's Overseas Visitors Pass costs £39 for a nine-day pass and £46 for a 16-day pass for one adult. You can order it in advance by phone or online, or purchase it at a participating property in England. The National Trust Touring Pass, for overseas visitors, must be purchased in advance, either by phone or online. A seven-day pass is £37 per person while a 14-day pass is £43.

The Explorer Pass from Historic Environment Scotland, which is available from any staffed site or in advance online, allows visits to HES properties for seven consecutive days for £35.

The London Pass gets you into more than 90 attractions and tours in the capital at a considerable discount, and can help you bypass some lines. Packages range from one day (£89) to 10 days (£199). A similar pass for Yorkshire, the York Pass, enables discounted entrance to more than 50 attractions and costs from £55 for one day to £140 for six days. Annual membership in the National Trust (through the Royal Oak Foundation, the U.S. affiliate) is \$80 a year. English Heritage membership is £66, and the Historic Houses Association is £59. Memberships entitle you to free entry to properties, including free parking.

Getting Here and Around



Air

Flying time to London is about 6¾ hours from New York, 7¾ hours from Chicago, 9¼ hours from Dallas, 10½ hours from Los Angeles, and 20¾ hours from Sydney. From London, flights take 1 to 1½ hours to Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin, or Frankfurt, 2 hours to Vienna or Prague, and 2½ hours to Rome or Madrid.

Scotland's main hubs are Glasgow, Prestwick (near Glasgow), Edinburgh, Inverness, and Aberdeen. Glasgow and Prestwick are the gateways to the west and southwest, Edinburgh the east and southeast, Aberdeen and Inverness the north. All these cities have excellent bus and train transportation services and well-maintained roads that link them with each other and other cities within Scotland. Taxis are also an efficient and reliable option, but they are three to four times the cost of going by public transport.

Flying time to Glasgow and Aberdeen is 6½ hours from New York, 7½ hours from Chicago, 9½ hours from Dallas, 10 hours from Los Angeles, and 21½ hours from Sydney. Flying time to Edinburgh is 7 hours from New York, 8 hours from Chicago, 10 hours from Dallas, 10½ hours from Los Angeles, and 22 hours from Sydney. Not all airlines offer direct flights to Scotland; many go via London. For those flights, allow an extra four to five hours of travel (two to three for the layover in London plus an additional 1½ hours for the duration of the flight).

AIRPORTS

England: Most international flights to London arrive at either Heathrow Airport (LHR), 15 miles west of London, or at Gatwick Airport (LGW), 27 miles south of the capital. Most flights from the United States go to Heathrow, with Terminals 3, 4, and 5 handling transatlantic flights

(British Airways uses Terminal 5). Gatwick is London's second gateway, serving many U.S. destinations. A third, much smaller airport, Stansted (STN), is 40 miles northeast of the city. It handles mainly European and domestic traffic.

London City Airport (LCY), a small airport inside the city near Canary Wharf, has a daily business-class-only flight to New York on British Airways, as well as flights to European destinations. Luton Airport (LLA), 32 miles north of the city, and London Southend (SEN), 42 miles east of the city, are both quite small, and serve British and European destinations. Luton is a hub for low-cost airline easyJet. Manchester (MAN) in northwest England handles some flights from the United States, as does Birmingham (BHX).

Heathrow and Gatwick are enormous and can seem like shopping malls (Heathrow even offers a personal shopping service). Both airports have bars, pubs, and diverse dining options. Several hotels are connected to each airport, and both Gatwick and Heathrow are near dozens of hotels that run free shuttles to the airports. Heathrow has a Hotel Hoppa service that runs shuttles between the airport and around 25 nearby hotels for £5.50 (online) or £6 (on bus) each way. A free, subsidized local bus service operates between the Central Bus Station serving Terminals 2 and 3 and nearby hotels. The bus also stops directly outside Terminals 4 and 5. You can find out more at the Central Bus Station or at the Transport for London (TfL) Information Centre in the Underground station serving Terminals 2 and 3.

Scotland: The major international gateways to Scotland are Glasgow Airport (GLA), about seven miles outside Glasgow, and Edinburgh Airport (EDI), also about seven miles from the city center. Both offer connections for dozens

of European cities and regular flights to London's Gatwick (LGW) and Heathrow (LHR) airports. Aberdeen Airport (ABZ) has direct flights to most major European cities. Prestwick (PIK) has direct flights to some European cities at discounted rates. Inverness (INV) offers direct flights in and around the United Kingdom.

Wales: Cardiff Airport is the busiest airport in Wales, but only flies to a small number of domestic and European destinations. Just across the border in England, Bristol Airport offers more international connections—though these are still limited to Europe.

Airport tax is included in the price of your ticket. Generally the tax for economy tickets within the United Kingdom from European Union countries is £13. For all other flights it is £78. The standard rate for flights from the United Kingdom and European Union is £26; for all other destinations it's £146.

LONDON GROUND TRANSPORTATION

London has excellent bus and train connections between its airports and the city center. Train service can be the fastest, but the downside is that you must get yourself and your luggage to the terminal, often via a series of escalators and connecting trams. Airport buses (generally run by National Express) may be located nearer to the terminals and drop you closer to central hotels, but they're subject to London traffic, which can be horrendous. Taxis can be more convenient than buses, but prices can go through the roof. Minicabs are more economical, but go with recommended companies. From London Heathrow Airport, it's also possible to take the Tube (Piccadilly line) to the city center, while a Crossrail (aka Elizabeth) Underground line now operates a quick service to central London.

From Heathrow to Central London

Travel Mode	Time	Cost
Taxi	40–80 minutes	£45–£90
Heathrow Express Train	15 minutes	£25 one way
Underground	50 minutes	£6.30 one way
National Express Bus	45–80 minutes	£8–£12 one way

The Transport for London website has helpful information, as does Airport Travel Line. The official sites for Gatwick, Heathrow, and Stansted are useful resources for transportation options.

Heathrow by Bus: National Express buses take around 45 minutes (longer at peak time) to reach the city center (Victoria Coach Station) and start from £6 one way. Buses leave every 5 to 75 minutes from 4:20 am to 10 pm. The National Express Hotel Hoppa service runs from all terminals to around 25 hotels near the airport (£5.50). The N9 night bus runs every 15 minutes from 11:40 pm to 4:55 am to Kensington, Hyde Park Corner, and Trafalgar Square; it takes between 60 and 75 minutes and costs £1.65.

■ **TIP** → Like all London buses, the N9 no longer takes cash, so you will need an Oyster card or a contactless “tap and go” debit/credit card.

Heathrow by Train: The cheap, direct route into London is via the Piccadilly Line of the Underground (London's extensive subway system, or “Tube”). Trains normally run every three to seven minutes from all terminals from around 5 am until just before midnight (a 24-hour service runs every 10 minutes to Terminals 2, 3, and 5 on Friday and Saturday). The 50-minute trip into central London costs £6.30 (cash) or £5.50 (Oyster card). The

Getting Here and Around

Heathrow Express train is comfortable and very convenient, if costly, speeding into London's Paddington Station in 15 minutes. Standard one-way tickets cost £25 (peak), or £32 for business class. If you arrive without online tickets you should purchase them at a kiosk before you board, as they're more expensive on the train. There's daily service from 5:17 am to 11:47 pm, with departures every 15 minutes. The Crossrail (Elizabeth Line) Tube service runs from Terminals 2, 3, 4, and 5 to Paddington Station, takes about 25 minutes, and costs the same as the other Tube lines.

Gatwick by Bus: National Express buses run from Gatwick's north and south terminals to Victoria Coach Station (1½ to two hours, from £10 one way). Make sure you get on a direct bus not requiring a change, otherwise the journey could take much longer.

Gatwick by Train: There are three train services to Gatwick. The fast, nonstop Gatwick Express leaves for Victoria Station every 15 minutes 5 am–10:30 pm. The 30-minute trip costs £19.90 one way online. Tickets cost more on board. The Southern rail company's nonexpress services are cheaper. Trains run regularly throughout the day until midnight to London Victoria and Blackfriars stations; daytime departures are every 5–25 minutes (hourly between 1 am and 5 am), and the journey to London Victoria takes about 40 minutes. Tickets are from £12.90 one way and you can pay by Oyster card. Note that these are on commuter trains which can be crowded during rush hour, with little room for baggage and seats at a premium. You can also reach Gatwick by Southern trains coming from Brighton; this costs £9.90 and takes 40 minutes.

Stansted by Bus and Train: National Express Airport bus A6 (24 hours a day) to Victoria Coach Station via Waterloo Station and Southwark costs from £15 one way, leaves every 15 minutes (hourly 2:40 am to 5 am, then half hourly until 7:50 am), and takes about two hours. The Stansted Express train to Liverpool Street Station (with a stop at Tottenham Hale) runs every 15 to 30 minutes 5:30 am to 12:30 am daily. The 50-minute trip costs £20.70 each way if booked online. Tickets cost more on board.

Luton by Bus and Train: A free airport shuttle runs from Luton Airport to the nearby Luton Airport Parkway Station every 10 minutes, where you can take a train or bus into London. From there, the Thameslink train service runs to St. Pancras, Farringdon, Blackfriars, and London Bridge. The journey takes from 25 to 45 minutes. Trains leave every 10 minutes or so from 5 am until midnight, hourly at other times. One-way tickets begin at £15.50. The Green Line 757 bus service from Luton to Victoria Station runs every 30 minutes between 7 am and 12:35 am (hourly other times), takes 60 to 100 minutes, and costs from £11.50. National Express runs coaches from Victoria Coach Station to Luton from £12 one way.

Southend by Train: The train station right outside Southend Airport has six hourly trains to Liverpool Street Station in central London (via Stratford). The journey time is around 50 minutes and fares start from £19 one way.

Airports by Taxi: This is an expensive and time-consuming option. If your destination is within the city's congestion zone, £11.50 will be added to the bill during charging hours. If you get stuck in traffic,

a taxi from the stand will be even more expensive; a cab booked ahead is a set price. A taxi trip from Heathrow to Victoria, for example, can take more than an hour and cost anything up to £90. Minicabs and private-hire cars may be the same price or even less—currently the fee to Victoria Station is about £50 from Heathrow and £70 from Gatwick and Stansted, not including the congestion charge. Your hotel may also be able to recommend a car service. While the existence of Uber and other ride-sharing apps in London has been challenged in the courts over the last few years, they are still currently an option, but they are still subject to the same congestion charges and, of course, traffic.

SCOTLAND GROUND TRANSPORTATION

The best way to get to and from Scotland's airports based on speed and convenience is by taxi or ride-sharing apps. All airport taxi stands are just outside the airport's front doors and are well marked with clear signs. Most taxis have a set price when going to and from the airport to the city center but will turn on the meter at your request. Ask the driver to turn on the meter to confirm the flat-rate price.

If you're traveling with a large party, you can request a people carrier to transport everyone, luggage included. Luggage is included in the taxi fare; you should not be charged extra for it.

If you're traveling alone, a more economical transfer option is public transportation. Buses travel between city centers and Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Inverness airports. Trams travel between Edinburgh Airport and the city center; Edinburgh Gateway station links the airport to the tram and rail network; trains go direct to Glasgow Prestwick Airport. All are fast, inexpensive, and reliable.

Boat

Ferries and other boats travel regular routes to Britain (mainly southeast England) from France, Spain, Ireland, and Scandinavia. P&O runs ferries from Belgium, France, Ireland, and the Netherlands. DFDS Seaways and Stena Line also serve France, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Low-cost airlines and Eurotunnel (which lets you take a car from France on the train) have cut into ferry travel, but companies have responded by cutting fares and upgrading equipment. Prices vary; booking early ensures cheaper fares, but also ask about special deals.

WITHIN SCOTLAND

Because Scotland has so many islands, plus the great Firth of Clyde waterway, ferry services are of paramount importance. Most ferries transport vehicles as well as foot passengers, although a few smaller ones are for passengers only.

It's a good idea to make a reservation ahead of time, although reservations are not absolutely necessary. Most travelers show up on the day of departure and buy their tickets from the stations at the ports. Keep in mind that these are working ferries, not tourist boats. Although journeys are scenic, most people use these ferries as their daily means of public transportation to and from their hometowns.

The main operator is Caledonian MacBrayne, known generally as CalMac. Services extend from the Firth of Clyde in the south, where there's an extensive network, right up to the northwest of Scotland and all the Hebrides. Fares can range from £2 to £6 for a short trip to more than £50 for a longer trip with several legs.

Getting Here and Around

The Dunoon–Gourock route on the Clyde is served by Western Ferries.

Northlink Ferries operates a car ferry for Orkney between Scrabster, near Thurso, and Stromness, on the main island of Orkney; and between Aberdeen and Kirkwall, which is also on the mainland of Orkney. Northlink also runs an efficient ferry from Aberdeen to Lerwick on the island of Shetland; the journey is overnight, but comfortable cabins are available. These ferries can be busy in summer, so book well in advance.

TRANSATLANTIC AND OTHER CRUISES

Most cruise ships leave from southern England—particularly Southampton and Portsmouth. Some ships leave from Liverpool and Dover, or from Harwich, near Cambridge.



Bus

Britain has a comprehensive bus (short-haul, multistop public transportation) and coach (more direct, plusher long-distance buses) network that offers an inexpensive way of seeing the country. National Express is the major coach operator, and Victoria Coach Station, near Victoria Station in central London, is its hub in the capital. The company serves more than 1,000 destinations within Britain (and, via Eurolines, 500 more in continental Europe). There are 2,000 ticket agents nationwide, including offices at London's Heathrow and Gatwick airport coach stations.

Green Line is the second-largest national service, serving airports and major tourist towns. A budget option for long-distance travel, Megabus has double-decker buses that serve cities across Britain, with seats that turn into bunk beds on routes to Scotland. In London, Megabus departs from Victoria Coach Station as well as other

stops, while Green Line buses also stop at Baker Street and Hyde Park Corner.

Coach tickets can be much less than the price of a train ticket (even lower if you take advantage of special deals). For example, an Oxford Tube coach ticket from London to Oxford is £9, whereas a train ticket may be £28. Coaches are generally just as comfortable as trains, though they often take a while longer to reach their destinations. This disparity is particularly acute on long journeys—Glasgow to London by nonstop coach takes nine hours; by train it takes a little over five.

Double-decker buses, run by private companies, offer local bus service in cities and regions across Britain. Check with the local bus station or tourist information center for routes and schedules. Most companies offer daylong or week-long unlimited-travel tickets, and those in popular tourist areas operate special scenic tours in summer. Sit on the top deck for the best views (and the novelty).

DISCOUNTS AND DEALS

National Express's Young Persons' CoachCard for students age 16 to 26 costs £12.50 annually and gives a third off most fares—so as little as two journeys can make this worthwhile. A Senior CoachCard for the over-60s offers the same. Apex tickets (advance-purchase tickets) save money on standard fares, and traveling off-peak during the week is cheaper than over weekends and holidays. Tickets for children under 15 are usually discounted.

On Scottish Citylink, the Explorer Passes offer complete freedom of travel on all services throughout Scotland. Three permutations give three days of travel out of a five-day period, five days of travel out of 10, and eight days of travel out of 16. They're available from Scottish Citylink offices, and cost £52, £79, and £106 respectively.



Car

Britain can be a challenging place for most foreigners to drive. After all, people drive on the left side of the often disconcertingly-narrow roads, many rental cars have standard transmissions, and the gearshift is on the “wrong” side entirely.

There's no reason to rent a car for a stay in London because the city and its suburbs are well served by public transportation and traffic is desperately congested. Here, and in other major cities, it's best to rely on public transportation.

Outside the cities, a car can be very handy. Many sights aren't easily reached without one—castles, for example, are rarely connected to any public transportation system. Small villages might have only one or two buses a day pass through them. If you're comfortable on the road, driving between the tall hedges or on country roads is a truly British experience.

As a short-term visitor, your own driver's license is enough to drive in the U.K. However, you may choose to get an International Driving Permit (IDP), which can be used only in conjunction with a valid driver's license and which translates your license into 10 languages. Check the Automobile Association of America website for more info as well as for IDPs (\$20) themselves. These permits are universally recognized, and having one in your wallet may save you a problem with the local authorities.

PARKING

Parking regulations are strictly enforced, and fines are high. If there are no signs on a street, you can park there. Many streets have centralized “pay and display” machines, in which you deposit the required money and get a ticket allowing you to park for a set period of time. In

London's City of Westminster and some other boroughs, parking machines have been replaced by a pay-by-phone plan, enabling you to pay by cell phone if you've preregistered. In town centers your best bet is to park in a public lot marked with a square blue sign with a white “P” in the center.

If you park on the street, follow these basic rules: Do not park within 15 yards of an intersection. Never park in bus lanes or on double yellow lines, and do not park on single yellow lines when parking meters are in effect. On busy roads with red lines painted on the street you cannot park or stop to let a passenger out of the car.

RENTALS

Rental rates are generally reasonable, and insurance costs are lower than in the United States. If you want the car only for country trips, consider renting outside London. Rates are cheaper, and you avoid traversing London's notoriously complex road system. Rental rates vary widely, beginning at £54 a day and £132 a week for a midsize car, usually with manual transmission. As in the United States, prices rise in summer and during holidays. Car seats for children cost around £8 per day, and GPS is usually around £10 per day. You can also arrange for cell phone hire or a portable Wi-Fi hot spot with your rental.

Major car-rental agencies are much the same in Britain as in the United States: Alamo, Avis, Budget, Enterprise, Hertz, Thrifty, and National all have offices in Britain. Europcar is another large company. Companies may not rent cars to people who are under 21. A few agencies have an upper age limit of 75.

Getting Here and Around

ROAD CONDITIONS

There's a good network of major highways (motorways) and divided highways (dual carriageways) throughout most of Great Britain. Motorways (with the prefix "M"), shown in blue on most maps, are mainly two or three lanes in each direction. Other major roads (with the prefix "A") are shown on maps in green and red. Sections of fast dual carriageways (with black-edged, thick outlines on maps) have both traffic lights and traffic circles. Turnoffs are often marked by highway numbers, rather than place names. An exit is called a junction in Britain.

The vast network of lesser roads, for the most part old coach and turnpike roads, might make your trip twice as long but show you twice as much. Minor roads are drawn in yellow or white on maps, the former prefixed by "B," the latter unlettered and unnumbered. Should you take one of these, be prepared to back up into a passing place if you meet an oncoming car. These smaller roads are particularly prevalent in the Scottish Highlands.

RULES OF THE ROAD

Driving on the left side of the road might be easier than you expected, as the steering and mirrors on British cars are designed for driving on the left. If you have a standard transmission car, you have to shift gears with your left hand. Give yourself time to adjust before leaving the rental-car lot. Seat belts are obligatory in the front and back seats. It's illegal to talk on a handheld cell phone—or to have a phone in your hand for any reason—while driving.

Pick up a copy of the official Highway Code (£4.99) at a service station, newsstand, or bookstore, or check it out online: just put "Highway Code" in the search bar. Besides driving rules and illustrations of signs and road markings, this booklet contains information for motorcyclists, cyclists, and pedestrians.

Speed limits are complicated, and there are speed cameras everywhere (yes, everywhere—don't even try it). The speed limit (shown on circular red signs) is generally 20 or 30 mph in towns and cities, 40 to 60 mph on two-lane highways, and 70 mph on motorways. At traffic circles (called roundabouts), you turn clockwise. As cars enter the circle, they must yield to those already in the circle or entering from the right. If you're taking an exit all the way around the circle, signal right as you enter, stay to the center, and then signal and move left just before your own exit.

Pedestrians have the right-of-way on "zebra" crossings (black-and-white-stripe crosswalks between two orange-flashing globe lights). At other crossings, pedestrians must yield to traffic, but they do have the right-of-way over traffic turning left.

Drunk-driving laws are strictly enforced. The legal limit is 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 milliliters of blood, which means two units of alcohol—approximately one glass of wine, 1–1½ pints of beer, or two drams of whisky. However, these figures will vary according to the alcohol's strength, your size and weight (so women tend to reach the limit on less), and how much you've eaten that day.

Train

Operated by several different private companies, the train system in Britain is extensive and useful, though less than perfect. Some regional trains are old, and virtually all lines suffer from occasional delays, schedule changes, and periodic repair work that runs over schedule. The pricing structure is complex and prices tend to be high compared to the rest of Europe. While there are more than a dozen regional train companies operating in England and Wales, most of Scotland rail services are managed by just one: Scotrail.

All major cities and many small towns are served by trains—including some otherwise remote and hard-to-reach spots. Despite the difficulties, rail travel is the most pleasant way to cover long distances. Just keep in mind that rail service in rural areas is often limited on Sunday.

FARES AND SCHEDULES

National Rail Enquiries is a helpful, comprehensive, and free service that covers all the country's rail lines. National Rail will help you choose the best train, and then connect you with the right ticket office. You can also book tickets online. A similar service is offered by the Trainline, which provides online train information and ticket booking for all rail services. The Man in Seat 61, a website, offers objective information along with booking facilities.

Ticket prices are more expensive during rush hour, so plan accordingly. For long-distance travel, tickets cost more the longer you wait. Book in advance and tickets can be half of what you'd pay on the day of departure. For example, a journey from London to Cardiff might cost £15 or £20 if you buy a ticket two weeks in advance, but the fare is likely to rise to £50 if you wait until the day of your trip.

■ **TIP** → Ask the local tourist board about hotel and local transportation packages that include tickets to major events.

PASSES

National Rail Enquiries has information about rail passes such as All Line Rovers, which offers unlimited travel on National Rail services for a week, with some restrictions, for £540. Children, seniors, and disabled Rovers are one-half to one-third less.

If you plan to travel a lot by train throughout Great Britain, consider purchasing a BritRail Pass, which gives unlimited travel over the entire British rail network and can save you money. If you don't plan to cover many miles, you may come out ahead by buying individual tickets. Buy your BritRail Pass before you leave home, as they are not sold in Britain. The passes are available from most U.S. travel agents or from ACP Rail International, Flight Centre, or VisitBritain. Note that Eurail Passes aren't honored in Britain.

BritRail passes come in two basic varieties: the Consecutive Pass and the England FlexiPass. You can get a Consecutive Pass good for two, three, four, eight, 15, or 22 consecutive days or one month starting at \$119 standard and \$180 first class for two days. The FlexiPass for two, three, four, or eight days of travel within one month, or 15 days within two months, costs from \$151 standard and \$224 first class for two days. If you're based in London, the BritRail London Plus pass offers access to southern England destinations such as Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, or Stratford-upon-Avon from \$145 for standard class, \$205 for first class. Tickets can be used for three, four, or eight days of travel within one month.

Getting Here and Around

Don't assume that a rail pass guarantees you a seat on a particular train. You need to book seats even if you're using a rail pass, especially on trains that may be crowded, particularly in summer on popular routes.

CHANNEL TUNNEL

Short of flying, taking the Eurostar through the Channel Tunnel is the fastest way to cross the English Channel (and perhaps faster after factoring in airport travel time and security). Travel time is 2½ hours from London's St. Pancras Station to Paris's Gare du Nord. Trains also travel to Lille (1½ hours), Brussels (2 hours), and Disneyland Paris (2¾ hours) year-round, as well as Lyon (5¾ hours), Avignon (6½ hours), and Marseille (7¼ hours) on weekends from May through mid-September. On Friday (night train) and Saturday (day train) from late December through March, ski trains go to Moûtiers (9 hours) and four other nearby Alpine ski resorts.

Early risers can easily take a day trip to Paris if time is short. Book ahead, as Eurostar ticket prices increase as the departure date approaches. If purchased in advance, round-trip tickets to Paris start at £68 for weekdays; expect to add on 20% for weekends.

FROM ENGLAND TO SCOTLAND

There are two main rail routes to Scotland from the south of England. The first, the west-coast main line, runs from London Euston to Glasgow Central; it takes 5½ hours to make the 400-mile trip to central Scotland, and service is frequent and reliable. Useful for daytime travel to the Scottish Highlands is the direct train to Stirling and Aviemore, terminating at Inverness. For a restful route to the Scottish Highlands, take the overnight *Caledonian Sleeper* service, with comfortable ensuite sleeping carriages. It runs from London Euston, departing in late evening and arriving in its final destination (either Fort William, Aberdeen, or Inverness) the following morning.

The east-coast main line from London King's Cross to Edinburgh provides the quickest trip to the Scottish capital. Between 8 am and 6 pm there are usually trains every half hour to Edinburgh; three of them travel directly to Aberdeen. Connecting services to most parts of Scotland—particularly the Western Highlands—are often better from Edinburgh than from Glasgow.

Essentials

Activities

VisitBritain and local Tourist Information Centres can recommend places to enjoy your favorite sport.

BIKING

The national body promoting cycle touring is the Cycling UK charity, which can organize cycling vacations. Membership (£4 per month) includes free advice and route information and a magazine. Transport for London publishes maps of recommended routes across the capital, and British Cycling has online route maps of the United Kingdom.

BOATING

Boating—whether on bucolic rivers or industrial canals—can be a leisurely way to explore the English landscape. For boat-rental operators along Britain's several hundred miles of historic canals and waterways, from the Norfolk Broads to the Lake District, contact British Marine Inland Boating or Waterways Holidays. The Canal and River Trust has maps and other information. Waterways Holidays arranges boat accommodations from traditional narrow boats to wide-beam canal boats, motorboats, and sailboats.

WALKING

Walking and hiking, from the slowest ramble to a challenging mountainside climb, are enormously popular in Britain. National Trails, funded by Natural England and the Countryside Counsel for Wales, has great resources online. The Ramblers, a well-known charitable organization promoting walking and care of footpaths, has helpful information, including a list of B&Bs close to selected long-distance footpaths. Some of the best maps for walking are the Explorer Maps, published by the Ordnance Survey.

Customs and Duties

You're always allowed to bring goods of a certain value back home without having to pay any duty or import tax. But there's a limit on the amount of tobacco and liquor you can bring back duty-free, and some countries have separate limits for perfumes; for exact figures, check with your customs department. The values of so-called duty-free goods are included in these amounts. When you shop abroad, save all your receipts, as customs inspectors may ask to see them as well as the items you purchased. If the total value of your goods is more than the duty-free limit, you'll have to pay a tax (most often a flat percentage) on the value of everything beyond that limit.

Fresh meats, plants and vegetables, controlled drugs, and firearms (including replicas) and ammunition may not be brought into the United Kingdom, nor can dairy products from non-EU countries. Pets from the United States with the proper documentation may be brought into the country without quarantine under the U.K. Pet Travel Scheme (PETS). The process takes about four months to complete and involves detailed steps.

Once you are in the U.K., you'll face no customs formalities between England, Wales, and Scotland.

Dining

The stereotypical notion of British meals as parades of roast beef, overcooked vegetables, and stodgy desserts has largely been replaced—particularly in London, other major cities, and some country hot spots—with an evolving picture of the country as foodie territory. From trendy gastro-pubs to interesting ethnic-fusion restaurants to see-and-be-seen dining

shrines, British food is now known for an innovative take on traditional dishes, with an emphasis on the local and seasonal. In less cosmopolitan areas, though, you're still looking at lots of offerings that are either stodgy, fried, or sausage-heavy.

Eating out in Britain's big cities in particular can be expensive, but you can do it cheaply. Try local cafés, more popularly known as "caffs," where heaping plates of British comfort food (bacon sandwiches and stuffed baked potatoes, for example) are served. Britain has plenty of the big names in fast food, as well as smaller places selling sandwiches, fish-and-chips, burgers, falafels, kebabs, and the like. For a local touch, check out Indian restaurants, which are found almost everywhere. Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Morrison's, Tesco, Lidl, Aldi, and Waitrose are chain supermarkets with outlets throughout the country. They're good choices for groceries, premade sandwiches, or picnic fixings.

MEALS AND MEALTIMES

Cafés serving the traditional English breakfast (called a "fry-up") of eggs, bacon, sausage, beans, mushrooms, half a grilled tomato, toast, and strong tea are often the cheapest—and most authentic—places for breakfast. For lighter morning fare (or for real brewed coffee), try the Continental-style sandwich bars and coffee shops—the Pret-a-Manger chain being one of the largest—offering croissants and other pastries. In London, the Leon chain offers healthy alternatives.

At lunch you can grab a sandwich between sights, pop into the local pub, or sit down in a restaurant. Dinner, too, has no set rules, but a three-course meal is standard in most midrange or high-end restaurants. Pre- or post-theater menus,

offering two or three courses for a set price, are usually a good value.

Note that most traditional pubs don't have any waitstaff and you're expected to go to the bar to order a beverage and your meal. Also, in cities many pubs don't serve food after 3 pm, so they're usually a better lunch option than dinner, unless they're gastro-pubs. In rural areas it's not uncommon for pubs to stop serving lunch after 2:30 and dinner after 9 pm.

Breakfast is generally served between 7:30 and 9, lunch between noon and 2, and dinner or supper between 7:30 and 9:30—sometimes earlier and seldom later except in large cities and tourist areas. These days high tea is rarely a proper meal anymore (it was once served between 4:30 and 6), and tearooms are often open all day in touristy areas (they're rarely found at all in nontouristy places). So you can have a cup and pastry or sandwich whenever you feel you need it. Sunday roasts at pubs last from 11 am or noon to 3 pm.

Smoking is banned in pubs, clubs, and restaurants throughout Britain.

PAYING

Credit cards are widely accepted in restaurants and pubs, though some require a minimum charge of around £10. Be sure that you don't double-pay a service charge. Many restaurants exclude service charges from the printed menu (which the law obliges them to display outside), and then add 10% to 15% to the check. Others will stamp "Service not included" along the bottom of the bill, in which case you should add 10% to 15%. You can also add to the included charge if the service was particularly good. Cash is always appreciated, as it's more likely to go to the specific waiter.

PUBS

A common misconception among visitors to Britain is that pubs are simply bars. Pubs are also community gathering places and even restaurants. In many pubs the social interaction is as important as the alcohol. Pubs are, generally speaking, where people go to meet their friends and catch up on one another's lives. In small towns pubs act almost as town halls. Traditionally pub hours are 11–11, with last orders called about 20 minutes before closing time, but pubs can apply for a license to stay open until midnight, 1 am, or even later.

It might seem that there's a pub on almost every corner in any given British town, but in fact pubs are becoming something of an endangered species, with regular closures of independent, non-chain pubs in smaller localities.

Most pubs tend to be child-friendly, but others have restricted hours for children. If a pub serves food, it'll generally allow children in during the day with adults. Some pubs are stricter than others, though, and won't admit anyone younger than 18. Some will allow children in during the day, but only until 6 pm. Family-friendly pubs tend to be packed with kids, parents, and all of their accoutrements.

RESERVATIONS

Regardless of where you are, it's a good idea to make a reservation if you can. For popular restaurants, book as far ahead as you can (often 30 days) by phone or online, and reconfirm as soon as you arrive. (Large parties should always call ahead to check the reservations policy.)

WINES, BEER, AND SPIRITS

Although hundreds of varieties of beer are brewed around the country, the traditional brew is known as bitter and isn't carbonated; it's usually served at room temperature. Fizzy American-style beer is called lager. There are also plenty of other alternatives: stouts like Guinness are thick, pitch-black brews you'll either love or hate; ciders, made from fermented apples; and shandies are a low-alcohol mix of lager and lemon soda. Real ales, which have a natural second fermentation in the cask, have a shorter shelf life (so many are brewed locally) but special flavor; these are worth seeking out. Craft beers are also now big business, especially in cities. Generally, the selection and quality of cocktails is higher in a wine bar or café than in a pub. The legal drinking age is 18.

You can order Scotland's most famous beverage—whisky (most definitely spelled without an *e*)—at any pub, but the selection of single malts is generally better north of the border. It's also possible to tour numerous distilleries in Scotland, where you can sample a dram and purchase a bottle. Most are concentrated in Speyside and Islay, but there are notable ones all over the country, from Glasgow and Orkney to Skye and Shetland. In recent years a new breed of craft gin producers have opened stills, many producing small batches of botanically infused tipples and offering tours, tastings, and lessons.

Lodging

Our local writers vet every hotel to recommend the best overnights in each price category, from budget to expensive. Unless otherwise specified, you can expect private bath, phone, and TV in your room.

APARTMENT AND HOUSE RENTALS

If you deal directly with local agents, get a recommendation from someone who's used the company. Unlike with hotels, there's no accredited system for apartment-rental standards.

In the country your chances of finding a small vacation house are good; in the city you're more likely to find a flat (apartment) to let (rent). Either way, your best bet for finding these rentals is online. Individuals and large consortiums can own these properties, so it just depends on what you're looking for. Citybase Apartments is a handy resource for finding an apartment, from single studios to large apartments suitable for families and groups. Dreamhouse Apartments has swanky, serviced flats in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen. The National Trust for Scotland has many unique properties, from island cottages to castles, for rent. Mansley has 19 well-appointed, modern apartments in the heart of the Old Town, Edinburgh; it has 16 similarly smart apartments in Inverness, many with spectacular terrace views.

BED-AND-BREAKFASTS

B&Bs can be a good budget option, and will also help you meet the locals. Be aware that some rooms might not include a private bathroom; in this case, showers and toilets are usually down the hall.

FARMHOUSES AND COTTAGES

A popular option for families with children is a farmhouse or country cottage, combining the freedom of B&B accommodations with the hospitality of British family life. You'll need a car if you're staying deep in the countryside, though, and cottages, unlike B&Bs, usually do not provide breakfast. General information on rural stays is available from the Farm Stay website.

HOTELS

Most hotels have rooms with "ensuite" bathrooms, as private bathrooms are called. Especially in London, rooms and bathrooms may be smaller than those you find in the United States.

Besides familiar international chains, Britain has some local chains that are worth a look. Opt for a less expensive city center option, like the basic but bargain Travelodge or the slightly more upscale Premier Inn. You can also choose a trendy boutique like ABode, Hotel du Vin, and Malmaison instead.

HOTEL GRADING SYSTEM

Hotels, guesthouses, inns, and B&Bs in the United Kingdom are all graded from one to five stars by the tourism board, VisitBritain. Basically, the more stars a property has, the more amenities it has, and the facilities will be of a higher standard. It's a fairly good reflection of lodging from small B&Bs up to palatial hotels. The most luxurious hotels will have five stars; a simple, clean, acceptable hostelry will have one star.

Safety

Britain has a low incidence of violent crime. However, petty crime, mostly in urban areas, is on the rise, and tourists can be the targets. Use common sense: when in a city center, if you're paying at a shop or a restaurant, never put your wallet down or let your bag out of your hand. When sitting on a chair in a public place, keep your bag on your lap or between your feet. Don't wear expensive jewelry or watches, and don't flash fancy smart phones on the street in London, where there have been snatchings by moped-riding thieves. Store your passport in the hotel safe, and keep a copy with you. Don't leave anything in your car.

Although scams do occur in Britain, they aren't pervasive. If you're getting money out of an ATM, beware of someone bumping into you to distract you. You may want to use ATMs inside banks rather than those outside them. In London scams are most common at ATMs near tourist meccas like Oxford Street and Piccadilly Circus. Watch out for pickpockets, particularly in London. They often work in pairs, one distracting you in some way.

Always take a licensed black taxi or call a car service (sometimes called minicabs) recommended by your hotel. Avoid drivers who approach you on the street, as they may overcharge you. Always buy theater tickets from a reputable dealer. If you're driving in from a British port, beware of thieves posing as customs officials who try to "confiscate illegal goods."

While traveling, don't leave any bags unattended, as they may be viewed as a security risk and destroyed by the authorities. If you see an unattended bag on the train, bus, or Tube, find a worker and report it. Never hesitate to get off a Tube, train, or bus if you feel unsafe.

COVID-19

Most travel restrictions, including vaccination and masking requirements, have been lifted across the United Kingdom except in healthcare facilities and nursing homes. Some travelers may still wish to wear a mask in confined spaces, including on airplanes, on public transportation, and at large indoor gatherings, but that is increasingly a personal choice. Be aware that some local mandates still exist and should be followed.

Taxes

Air Passenger Duty (APD) is a tax included in the price of your ticket. The U.K.'s APD fees, currently among the highest in the world, are divided into two bands: short-haul destinations under 2,000 miles, £13 per person in economy and £26 in all first and business class; and long-haul destinations over 2,000 miles (including the United States), £84 economy and £185 first and business class.

The British sales tax (Value Added Tax, or V.A.T.) is 20%. The tax is almost always included in quoted prices in shops, hotels, and restaurants. The most common exception is at high-end hotels, where prices often exclude V.A.T. Outside of hotels and rental-car agencies, which have specific additional taxes, there's no other sales tax in England.

Refunds apply for V.A.T. only on goods being taken out of Britain. Many large stores provide a voluntary V.A.T.-refund service, but only if you request it. You must ask the store to complete Form V.A.T. 407, to be given to customs at departure along with a V.A.T. Tax Free Shopping scheme invoice. If no customs official is on duty, there will be a customs post box where you can leave your forms. Fill in the form at the shop, have the

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salesperson sign it, have it stamped by customs when you leave the country, then mail the stamped form to the shop or to a commercial refund company. Alternatively, you may be able to take the form to an airport refund-service counter after you're through passport control for an on-the-spot refund. There is an extra fee for this service, and lines tend to be long.

Global Blue is a Europe-wide service with 270,000 affiliated stores. It has refund counters in the United Kingdom at Heathrow and Gatwick, at Harrods, in The City, Victoria, and Bloomsbury, and in the Westfield Shopping Centre. Outside London, counters are in Birmingham, Manchester, Oxford, and at Manchester airport. Its refund form, called a Tax Free Check, is the most common across the European continent.

Tipping

Tipping is done in Britain just as in the United States, but at a lower level than you would back home, generally 12.5% to 15%. You can tip more if service was exceptional. The server is likely to get more if you leave cash (employers can deduct administrative costs if it's left as a service charge or on a credit card). Don't tip bar staff in pubs—although you can always offer to buy them a drink. There's no need to tip at clubs (it's acceptable at posher establishments, though) unless you're being served at your table. Rounding up to the nearest pound or 50p is appreciated. Always tip housekeepers at a hotel at least £2 per day.

Visitor Information

All of Britain's regions, along with most major towns and cities, have their own dedicated tourism websites providing information. VisitBritain, the official visitor website, focuses on general information for Britain-bound U.S. travelers, from practical tips to money-saving deals; you can even find out about movie locations.

For country-specific tourism websites, check out VisitEngland, VisitWales, and VisitScotland respectively. There are several regional and city visitor websites available too, most notably VisitLondon.

Many of England and Wales's historic sites are managed by one of two organizations: English Heritage and the National Trust. Scotland's sister organizations are called Historic Environment Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland. In addition, the Royal Family has an official website with information about visiting royal homes.

Best Festivals and Events

SPRING

St. David's Day. Leeks and daffodils are ubiquitous on Wales' national day on March 1, with carnivals and processions in Cardiff and other places.

Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations. In late April, the Bard is celebrated with full pageantry and drama in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon. www.shakespearecelebrations.com

RHS Chelsea Flower Show. This five-day floral extravaganza in May is also a society event, held in London's upmarket Chelsea neighborhood. www.rhs.org.uk/chelsea

SUMMER

Highland Games. This annual shindig takes place in Highland locations between May and September, and includes hammer-throwing, caber-tossing, and traditional dancing. www.shga.co.uk

Trooping the Colour. For more than 270 years, the British Sovereign's official birthday has been marked in majestic style in mid-June in London's Horse Guard Parade—and King Charles III is expected to maintain this tradition. www.royal.uk/trooping-colour

Glastonbury Festival. Iconic and idiosyncratic, this not-quite-annual music event sprawls across Somerset farmland and features hundreds of big-name bands over three days in late June or early July. www.glastonburyfestivals.co.uk

Royal Henley Regatta. High society lines the banks of the Thames River to cheer on rowers from around the world during this five-day event in early July. www.hrr.co.uk

Eisteddfod. The International Musical Eisteddfod is a gathering of choirs and dancers from around the world in the Welsh town of Llangollen in July. The National Eisteddfod of Wales in August

focuses on Welsh culture, alternating between venues in north and south Wales. www.international-eisteddfod.co.uk and www.eisteddfod.org.uk

Edinburgh's Festival. Taking over Scotland's capital every August, this cultural cornucopia is an amalgam of festivals running concurrently. Most prominent are the Edinburgh International Festival (www.eif.co.uk), featuring everything from opera to cutting-edge theater; the rowdier Edinburgh Fringe (www.edfringe.com), which highlights comedy and cabaret; and the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (www.edintattoo.co.uk), a heady mix of music, dance, and military pageantry.

The Proms. The main venue for this distinguished July–September series of classical music concerts is in London's Royal Albert Hall. www.bbc.co.uk/proms

FALL

Open House London. Taking place in late September, this popular weekend-long event gives the public free, behind-the-scenes access to some of the city's most famous, historic, and architecturally interesting buildings. www.open-city.org.uk

Guy Fawkes Day. A foiled attempt in 1605 to blow up Parliament is remembered every November 5, when fireworks are set off all over the country. Lewes and York stage some of the biggest festivities.

WINTER

Hogmanay. Scotland's ancient, still-thriving New Year's bash extends over three days, with celebrations that are especially exuberant in Edinburgh. www.edinburghshogmanay.com

Burns Night. Ceremonial dinners are held throughout Scotland to celebrate poet Robert Burns on his birthday, January 25.

Great Itineraries

The Best of Scotland in 10 Days

Scotland isn't large, but its most famous cities and most iconic landscapes take time to explore. This itinerary packs in numerous national icons: Edinburgh's enormous charm and Glasgow's excellent museums; an iconic castle or two; and misty lochs, soaring mountains, and an impossibly green island.

DAYS 1 AND 2: EDINBURGH

The capital of Scotland is loaded with iconic sights in its Old Town and New Town. Visit **Edinburgh Castle** and the **National Gallery of Scotland**, and take tours of the **National Museum of Scotland** and the modern **Scottish Parliament Building**. Walk along Old Town's **Royal Mile** and New Town's **George Street** for some fresh air and retail therapy. Later on, seek out a traditional pub with live music.

Logistics: Fly into Edinburgh Airport if you're flying via London. If you're flying directly into Glasgow from overseas, make your way from Glasgow Airport to Queen Street station via taxi or bus. It takes an hour to travel from Glasgow to Edinburgh by car or bus, about 45 minutes to an hour by train. Explore on foot or by public transportation.

DAY 3: STIRLING TO ST. ANDREWS

Rent a car in Edinburgh and drive to the historic city of **Stirling**. Spend the day visiting **Stirling Castle** and the **National Wallace Monument**. If you're eager to tour a distillery, make time for a stop at the **Glenurret Distillery** in **Crieff**. For your overnight stay, drive to the seaside town of **St. Andrews**, famous for golf.

Logistics: It's 35 miles or a one-hour drive to Stirling from Edinburgh, and 50 miles and 90 minutes from Stirling to St.

Andrews. You can easily take a train or bus to these destinations.

DAY 4: ST. ANDREWS TO AVIEMORE

Spend the morning exploring **St. Andrews**, known for its castle and the country's oldest university as well as its golf courses. If you've booked well in advance, play a round of golf. After lunch, drive to **Aviemore**. Along the way, either make a detour to **Dundee** and its spectacular V&A Dundee design museum or **Blair Castle** (just off the A9 and 10 miles north of **Pitlochry**). Head to Aviemore, gateway to the Cairngorm Mountains and Britain's largest national park, for two nights. The town is a center for outdoor activities and has many choices for accommodations, dining, and shopping, but you can also consider the more attractive surrounding villages and towns such as **Kingussie** for your stay.

Logistics: It's 120 miles from St. Andrews to Aviemore via the A9, a drive that will take 2½ hours. You can also take a train or bus.

DAY 5: THE CAIRNGORMS

For anyone who enjoys outdoor pursuits or dramatic scenery, the arctic plateau of the Cairngorms is a must. Hiking, biking, and climbing are options (Glenmore Lodge is a renowned outdoor-sports center), but so is visiting attractions such as the **Cairngorm Reindeer Centre** and **Highland Folk Museum**.

DAYS 6 AND 7: THE ISLE OF SKYE

Leave Aviemore early and head west to **Skye**. You'll pass through **Inverness**, worth a stop for a stroll around **Inverness Castle**, and pass by the postcard perfect **Eilean Donan Castle**, which is beautifully set on an island among three lochs (though the interiors are comically underwhelming). Spend two days exploring **Skye**: **Glen Brittle** is the perfect place to



enjoy mountain scenery including the crystal clear **Fairy Pools** at the foot of the Black Cuillins while **Armadale** is a good place to go shopping for crafts. Base yourself in **Portree** for good hotels and restaurants, as well as easy access to the stunning **Trotternish Peninsula**.

Logistics: It's 30 miles (a 40-minute drive) via the A9 from Aviemore to Inverness, and then it's 80 miles (a two-hour drive) from Inverness to Skye. Public transportation is possible but a car is best.

DAY 8: OBAN VIA BEN NEVIS

Leave Skye after breakfast and head for **Fort William** (leave before breakfast and you can make a stop at **Loch Ness**). The town isn't worth stopping for, but the view of Britain's highest mountain, the 4,406-foot **Ben Nevis**, is. If time permits, take a hike in **Glen Nevis**, and then continue on to **Oban**, a traditional Scottish resort town on the water, to overnight. Outside Oban, stop by the **Ocean Explorer Centre**. At night, feast on fish-and-chips in a local pub.

Logistics: It's nearly 100 miles from Skye to Oban; the drive is 3½ hours without stopping. Public transportation is challenging.

DAYS 9 AND 10: LOCH LOMOND AND GLASGOW

Enjoy a waterfront stroll in Oban, before setting off for **Glasgow** via **Loch Lomond**. Arrive in Glasgow in time for dinner; take in a play or concert, or just relax in a pub on the first of your two nights in this rejuvenated city. Spend the next day visiting the sights; **Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**, Charles Rennie Mackintosh's iconic buildings, and the **Riverside Museum** are a few highlights. Hit Buchanan and Sauchiehall streets for some of Britain's best shopping (clothes, whisky, and tartan items are good things to look for) before heading to the airport and home.

Logistics: It's 127 miles (a three-hour drive) from Oban to Glasgow via Balloch. Traveling by train is a possibility, but you won't be able to go via Balloch. Return your rental car in Glasgow. It's less than 10 miles (15 minutes) by taxi to Glasgow's international airport in Paisley but more than 30 miles (40 minutes) to the international airport in Prestwick.

Great Itineraries

The Best of Wales in 5 Days

It may be smaller than New Hampshire, but Wales packs an awful lot into a compact space. This five-day itinerary takes in just some of its highlights, including the thriving cosmopolitan capital, gorgeous mountain and coastal scenery, and, of course, historic castles. Traveling via public transport is possible, but can be surprisingly challenging for such a small region, especially if your trip involves traveling between southern and northern Wales. Renting a car is your best option.

DAY 1: CARDIFF

The Welsh capital is one of Britain's most interesting, cosmopolitan cities. Spend the day exploring its many sights, from its **hilltop castle** to its **National Museum**; go shopping in **St David's Dewi Sant** mall; or take in a game of rugby at the **Principality Stadium**. In the evening, head down to **Mermaid Quay** overlooking Cardiff Bay for some of the city's best bars and restaurants.

Logistics: Fly into Cardiff directly if possible. Otherwise, fly into London or Bristol and take a train to the Welsh capital. You can explore the city on foot or by public transport.

DAY 2: BRECON BEACONS

Slip on your walking boots and hop on a bus from Cardiff to Brecon. There are several points at which you can jump off the bus and start hiking, but the most popular trail is to **Corn Du** and **Pen y Fan**. Start from the Storey Arms bus stop and finish in the town of Brecon; the whole thing should take around four to six hours. In the evening, you can either take the bus back to Cardiff or to Wales's second city, **Swansea**.

Logistics: The T4 bus runs from Cardiff to Brecon every hour between 9 am and 7 pm; return buses are every two hours. The T6 bus runs from Brecon to Swansea five times a day.

DAY 3: PEMBROKESHIRE

If you don't already have a car, rent one today to explore the stunning shorelines of Wales's southwestern tip. There are dozens of beautiful beaches to choose from, including **Barafundle Bay**, **Tenby North Beach**, and **Freshwater West**. Spend the evening in pretty **St. Davids**, the U.K.'s smallest city (population 1,840), which has some fine sandy beaches of its own.

Logistics: It's a 2¼-hour drive from Cardiff to St. Davids at the far west of Pembrokeshire (or a 1¾-hour drive from Swansea).

DAY 4: SNOWDONIA

Drive up Wales's craggy west coast, passing through a number of pretty seaside towns and villages, and into **Snowdonia National Park**. Named for its headline mountain **Snowdon**—at 3,560 ft, the highest peak in England and Wales—the park is a staggering landscape of craggy peaks, glacial valleys, and glistening lakes. There are several different hiking trails up Snowdon, as well as a cog railway for those unable (or unwilling) to walk it.

Logistics: Start early today as it's a scenic, four-hour drive from St. Davids to Pen-y-Pass car park, a good starting point for a six-hour hike up and down Snowdon. If you take the railway, it's only one hour.

DAY 5: CASTLES

On your last morning, see some of northwest Wales's famous fortifications, including **Caernarfon Castle**, **Beaumaris**, and **Conwy**. Then, you can either drive back to Cardiff or Swansea to return the rental car, or cross the border into England to continue your journey (including an overnight stay in the beautiful Roman walled city of **Chester**).

Logistics: If you are returning the car to Cardiff or Swansea, factor in a four-hour drive back from Conwy. By comparison, Chester is less than an hour away.



Great Itineraries

The Best of England in 12 Days

DAY 1: LONDON

The capital is just the jumping-off point for this trip, so choose a few highlights for one day here. If it's the Changing of the Guard at **Buckingham Palace**, check the ceremony time to be sure you catch the pageantry. If **Westminster Abbey** appeals to your sense of history, arrive as early as you can. Pick a museum (many are free, so you needn't linger if you don't want to), whether it's the **National Gallery** in Trafalgar Square, the **British Museum** in Bloomsbury, or the **Tate Modern** on the South Bank. Stroll through **Hyde Park** or take a boat ride on the Thames before you find a gastro-pub or Indian restaurant for dinner. End with a play; London's theater scene is world-renowned.

DAY 2: WINDSOR

Resplendent with centuries of treasures, **Windsor Castle** was the favorite residence of the late Queen Elizabeth II, the most recent of several royal residents over the centuries (10 kings and queens are buried in the magnificent St. George's Chapel on the grounds, while Elizabeth herself is buried in the castle's King George VI Memorial Chapel). A tour will give you an appreciation of the monarchy's history and power. The State Apartments are open if the Sovereign isn't in residence. Time permitting, take a walk in the adjacent **Great Park**. If you can splurge for a luxurious stay (as opposed to taking a day trip from London), head to **Cliveden**, the Thames Valley's most upscale hotel.

Logistics: Trains from Paddington and Waterloo stations leave about twice hourly and take less than one hour. Green Line buses depart from the Colonnades opposite London's Victoria Coach Station.

DAY 3: SALISBURY AND STONEHENGE OR STOURHEAD

The soaring spire of **Salisbury Cathedral** is visible for miles around and is a marvel of medieval engineering. The cathedral itself contains one of the original copies of the Magna Carta in its Chapter House. Walk through the town to the water meadows to see the view John Constable immortalized in his painting. While here, you shouldn't miss the opportunity to visit nearby **Stonehenge** (reachable by car or tour bus). Viewing is by timed ticket, so make sure to book in advance to guarantee seeing this extraordinarily fascinating and evocative site. It's usually at its least crowded early or late in the day. If Stonehenge doesn't appeal, visit the gardens of **Stourhead** instead, a superb example of the romantic 18th-century naturalistic landscaping for which England is famous. Save some time to tour the grand Palladian mansion on the site as well.

Logistics: For trains to Salisbury from Windsor and Eton Riverside, head back to London's Waterloo to catch a train on the West of England line.

DAY 4: BATH

Bath's immaculately preserved, gold-en-stone Georgian architecture transports you back to the world of the late 18th century. Take time to explore the city on foot; check out the harmonious **Royal Crescent** (and the period interiors of No. 1) and sample the Pump Room's sulfuric "curative" water favored by Jane Austen and her contemporaries. Originally established by the Romans when the city was an outpost of empire, the baths have been restored and expanded as the **Thermae Bath Spa** and today you can relax in the mineral waters fed by the same hot springs the Romans enjoyed. There's plenty to do here in the way of museums, shopping, and theater.

Logistics: Trains and buses leave hourly from Salisbury to Bath.



DAY 5: THE COTSWOLDS

Beloved for its mellow stone villages and dreamy green landscapes, the **Cotswolds** have much to offer a visitor, whether you're after antiques (try charming Stow-on-the-Wold) or just feeding ducks in a picturesque setting (the brook in Lower Slaughter). Choose a rainy or off-season day to visit lovely **Broadway** or risk being stuck in jams of tourist traffic. To really experience the bucolic landscape, take a walk on the **Cotswold Way** or any local path.

Logistics: You'll need a car to explore the beautiful countryside. Alternatively, opt for a guided tour bus.

DAY 6: OXFORD AND BLENHEIM PALACE

Join a guided tour to get the best access to **Oxford's** glorious, centuries-old quadrangles, chapels, and gardens. This leaves time for an excursion to **Blenheim**, a unique combination of baroque opulence and faux-naturalistic parkland, the work of the great 18th-century landscape designer Capability Brown. For other classic Oxford experiences, rent a punt or go on a pub crawl around town.

Logistics: Hourly trains depart from Bath for Oxford. Buses frequently depart from Oxford's Gloucester Green for Blenheim Palace.

DAY 7: STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

A place of pilgrimage for Shakespeare enthusiasts, in **Stratford-upon-Avon** you can visit the **Shakespeare's birthplace**, **Anne Hathaway's Cottage** (the childhood home of the Bard's wife—walking there is a delight), and then finish by taking in a memorable performance at the **Royal Shakespeare Company's** magnificently renovated main stage. Start the day early and be prepared for crowds.

Logistics: From Oxford, trains involve one or two changes; there is less-frequent Stagecoach bus service.

DAY 8: SHREWSBURY TO CHESTER

Head north to see the half-timber buildings of **Shrewsbury**, one of the best preserved of England's Tudor cities, and best experienced on foot. The architecture in **Chester** is very similar (if not always authentic), but don't miss the impressive city walls or the **Rows**, a terrace of two-story shops with medieval crypts beneath. You can walk part or all of the city walls for views of the town and surrounding area.

Logistics: For Shrewsbury, change trains at Birmingham. The train ride to Chester is less than an hour.

Tips



■ Train travelers should keep in mind that regional “Rovers” and “Rangers” offer unlimited train travel in one-day, three-day, or weeklong increments. See www.nationalrail.co.uk for details. Also check out BritRail passes, which must be purchased before your trip.

■ Bus travel is time-consuming, but more scenic and cheaper than train travel. National Express offers discounts including fun fares—return fares from London to various cities (including Cambridge) for as low as £5 if

booked more than 24 hours in advance. Or check out the low-cost Megabus.

■ To cut the tour short, consider skipping Chester and Shrewsbury and go directly to the Lake District from Stratford-upon-Avon on day eight. Likewise, you could consider passing up a visit to Cambridge and opt for Oxford instead. Or you can simply add the time to your London stay or any place else you'd like to linger.

■ Buy theater tickets well in advance for the Royal Shakespeare Company performances in Stratford-upon-Avon.

DAYS 9 AND 10: THE LAKE DISTRICT

The lakes and surrounding mountains extending north beyond Kendal and Windermere in the area known as the **Lake District** are renowned for their beauty and peacefulness despite the crowds of hikers in summer and on weekends; rent a car so you can seek out the more isolated destinations. Take a cruise on Lake Windermere or Coniston Water, or rent a boat for another classic Lakeland experience. If you have time for one Wordsworth-linked site, head for **Dove Cottage**, where you can have afternoon tea, too.

Logistics: Take the train to Oxenholme with a change at Warrington Bank Quay. At Oxenholme you can switch to Windermere.

DAY 11: YORK

The highlight of this historic cathedral city crammed with 15th- and 16th-century buildings (many found in the **Shambles**) is **York Minster** with its stunning stained glass and soaring Gothic architecture.

Explore the city's Viking past in one of the many museums then unwind with afternoon tea at **Betty's** or a pint at a pub. A walk along the top of the medieval walls offers excellent views.

Logistics: By train from Oxenholme, switch at Manchester Piccadilly, or from Carlisle change at Newcastle or Leeds.

DAY 12: CAMBRIDGE

Spend the afternoon touring **King's College Chapel** and the gardens and sprawling meadows of the Backs, then refine your punting skills on the River Cam. A visit to the excellent **Fitzwilliam Museum**, full of art and antiquities, is another option, as is the **Polar Museum**.

Logistics: For train service, switch at Peterborough. Trains leave Cambridge for London frequently.

Contacts



Activities

BICYCLING

CONTACTS British Cycling. ☎ 0161/274-2010
 🌐 www.britishcycling.org.uk. **Cycling UK.**
 ☎ 01483/238300 🌐 www.cyclinguk.org.

BOATING

CONTACTS British Marine Inland Boat-ing. ☎ 01784/473377
 🌐 www.britishmarine.co.uk. **Canal and River Trust.** ☎ 0303/040-4040
 🌐 www.canalrivertrust.org.uk. **Waterways Holidays.** ☎ 01252/796400
 🌐 www.waterwaysholidays.com.

WALKING

CONTACTS National Trails. ☎ 01752/876938 🌐 www.nationaltrail.co.uk. **Ordnance Survey.** ☎ 03456/050505
 🌐 www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk. **Ramblers.**
 ☎ 0203/961-3300 🌐 www.ramblers.org.uk.



Air

AIRLINE SECURITY ISSUES Transportation Security Administration.
 ☎ 866/289-9673 in U.S.
 🌐 www.tsa.gov.

ENGLAND

AIRPORT INFORMATION Birmingham Airport. (BHX). ☎ Birmingham ☎ 0871/222-0072
 🌐 www.birminghamairport.co.uk. **London City**

Airport. (LCY). ☎ London ☎ 0207/646-0000
 🌐 www.londoncityairport.com. **London Gatwick Airport.** (LGW). ☎ 0844/892-0322 🌐 www.gatwickairport.com. **London Heathrow Airport.** (LHR). ☎ London ☎ 0844/335-1801 🌐 www.heathrow.com. **London Luton Airport.** (LTN). ☎ 01582/405100 🌐 www.london-luton.co.uk. **London Stansted Airport.** (STN). ☎ 0808/169-7031
 🌐 www.stanstedairport.com. **Manchester Airport.** (MAN). ☎ Manchester ☎ 0808/169-7030 🌐 www.manchesterairport.co.uk.

SCOTLAND

AIRPORT INFORMATION Aberdeen Airport. (ABZ). ☎ Aberdeen ☎ 0344/481-6666 🌐 www.aberdeenairport.com. **Edinburgh Airport.** (EDI). ☎ Edinburgh ☎ 0131/357-6337 🌐 www.edinburghairport.com. **Glasgow Airport.** (GLA). ☎ Glasgow ☎ 0344/481-5555 🌐 www.glasgowairport.com. **Glasgow Prestwick Airport.** (PIK). ☎ Prestwick ☎ 0871/223-0700 🌐 www.glasgow-prestwick.com. **Inverness Airport.** (INV). ☎ Dalcross ☎ 01667/464000 🌐 www.invernessairport.co.uk.

WALES

AIRPORT INFORMATION Bristol Airport. (BRS). ☎ Lulsgate Bottom ☎ 0871/334-4444
 🌐 www.bristolairport.com.

co.uk. Cardiff Airport. (CWL). ☎ Rhose ☎ 01446/711111 🌐 www.cardiff-airport.com.



Boat

CONTACTS DFDS Seaways. ☎ 03305/878787
 🌐 www.dfds.com. **P&O.**
 ☎ 01304/448-888 🌐 www.poferies.com. **Stena Line.**
 ☎ 03447/707070 🌐 www.stenaline.co.uk.

SCOTTISH CONTACTS Caledonian MacBrayne.

☎ 0800/066-5000
 🌐 www.calmac.co.uk. **Northlink Ferries.**
 ☎ 0800/111-4422
 🌐 www.northlinkferries.co.uk. **Western Ferries.**
 ☎ 01369/704452 🌐 www.western-ferries.co.uk.



Bus

CONTACTS Green Line.
 ☎ 0344/800-4411 🌐 www.arrivabus.co.uk/greenline. **Megabus.** ☎ 0141/352-4444
 🌐 www.uk.megabus.com. **National Express.** ☎ 0871/781-8181
 🌐 www.nationalexpress.com. **Oxford Tube.**
 ☎ 0345/241-8000 🌐 www.oxfordtube.com. **Scottish Citylink.** ☎ 0871/266-3333
 🌐 www.citylink.co.uk. **Traveline.** ☎ 0871/200-2233
 🌐 www.traveline.info. **Traveline Scotland.**
 ☎ 0871/200-2233 🌐 www.travelinescotland.com.

Contacts

Lodging

FARMHOUSES AND COTTAGES

CONTACTS Farm Stay UK. ☎ 02476/696909

🌐 www.farmstay.co.uk.

Holiday Cottages.

co.uk. ☎ 01237/426790

🌐 www.holidaycottages.co.uk.

Unique Home Stays.

☎ 01637/881183 🌐 www.uniquehomestays.com.

HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONTACTS Celtic Castles.

☎ 01422/323200 🌐 www.celticcastles.com.

English Heritage Holiday Cottages.

☎ 0370/333-1181

🌐 www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/holiday-cottages.

Landmark Trust.

☎ 01628/825925 🌐 www.landmarktrust.org.uk.

National Trust Cottages.

☎ 0344/800-2070

🌐 www.nationaltrust.org.uk/holidays.

HOTELS

LOCAL CHAINS ABode Hotels.

☎ 01244/347000

🌐 www.abodehotels.co.uk.

Apex Hotels.

☎ 0800/049-8000

🌐 www.apexhotels.co.uk.

Hotel du Vin. ☎ 0330/016-0390

🌐 www.hotelduvin.com.

Leonardo Hotels.

☎ 0870/410-0800 🌐 www.leonardohotels.co.uk.

Malmaison. ☎ 0330/016-0380

🌐 www.malmaison.com.

Premier Inn. ☎ 0333/033-8101 🌐 www.premierinn.com.

Travelodge. ☎ 08719/848484 🌐 www.travelodge.co.uk.

Taxes

V.A.T. REFUNDS Global Blue.

☎ 0870/766-6789 in U.K. 🌐 www.globalblue.com.

HM Revenue and Customs. ☎ 0300/200-3700

🌐 www.gov.uk/tax-on-shopping.

Train

FARE INFORMATION The Man in Seat 61. 🌐 www.seat61.com.

National Rail Enquiries. ☎ 03457/484950

🌐 www.nationalrail.co.uk.

ScotRail. ☎ 0344/811-0141

🌐 www.scotrail.co.uk.

Trainline. ☎ 0333/202-2222

🌐 www.thetrainline.com.

DISCOUNT PASSES

ACP Rail International.

☎ 866/938-7245 in U.S.

and Canada 🌐 www.acprail.com.

BritRail.

☎ 866/938-7245 in U.S.

and Canada 🌐 www.britrail.com.

VisitBritain Shop.

☎ 0151/805-0395 🌐 www.visitbritainshop.com.

CHANNEL TUNNEL

CHANNEL TUNNEL CAR TRANSPORT Eurotunnel.

☎ 0345/735-3535 in U.K.

🌐 www.eurotunnel.com.

CHANNEL TUNNEL PASSENGER SERVICE Eurostar.

☎ 03432/186-186 in U.K.

🌐 www.eurostar.com.

Rail Europe. ☎ 800/622-8600

in U.S. 🌐 www.raileurope.com.

SPECIAL TRAINS Caledonian Sleeper. ☎ 0330/060-0500

🌐 www.sleeper.scot.

Visitor Information

CONTACTS English Her-

itage. ☎ 0370/333-1181

🌐 www.english-heritage.org.uk.

Historic Environment Scotland. ☎ 0131/668-

8600 🌐 www.historicenvironment.scot.

National Trust. ☎ 0344/249-1895

🌐 www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

National Trust for Scotland. ☎ 0131/385-7490

🌐 www.nts.org.uk.

The Royal Family. ☎ 0207/930-

4832 🌐 www.royal.uk/royal-art-and-residences.

VisitEngland. 🌐 www.visitengland.com.

VisitScotland. ✉ Edinburgh

🌐 www.visitscotland.com.

VisitWales. 🌐 www.visitwales.com.