

SEE BRITAIN

A BRIEF GUIDE FOR HOW TO SEE BRITAIN

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Mainland Britain offers some of the most varied types of scenery within its relatively small space. From the Highlands of Scotland with their mountains, lochs and firths, through fells, lakes and mountains of Cumbria, the moors and dales Yorkshire, the mountains and valleys of Wales, the peaks, caves and dales of Derbyshire, the broads and beaches of Norfolk, the downs of Sussex and the moors of Devon to the Mediterranean like climate of Cornwall. It even has a desert at Dungeness in Kent. It also has within it some of the most varied villages, towns and cities. From Dornoch and Cromarty in the Scottish Highlands, through Edinburgh, Durham, Blackpool, Beverley, Keswick, Aberystwyth, Welshpool, Hereford, Cromer, Dereham, Norwich, Rye, Lewes, Exmouth, Barnstable, Okehampton, Truro, Falmouth to Penzance. History can be found everywhere be it in original forms such as Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland and Cumbria through the great cathedrals and parish churches of the island stretching from the Scottish Highlands to Devon and Cornwall or conserved forms such as the Yorvik Viking Museum in York or Beamish Museum near Chester-Le-Street.

Britain may not have the best weather but it does have a lot to offer. Also you don't need to change your currency if you already live here. The purpose of this brief guide is to visit Britain and is intended for those living in Britain. It is taken from personal experience.

Contrary to popular belief mainland Britain comprises four separate identities. The countries of England, Scotland and Wales and the Duchy of Cornwall. Cornwall is Celtic like Wales even though it adjoins Devon.

Where to go. The answer is that that is for you to decide. Equally it is for you to decide when to go. Having said that I would recommend avoiding any new town. Architecturally new towns are uninspiring. I've even been advised against visiting towns which have a large London overspill. Having been to one on a day trip I would say that the person who advised me had a very good point. **The town in question did have some historic buildings, but it didn't feel the same as the rest of the county I was in. Also be careful of going places on Sundays. Whilst some places are open others are not. I went to two places closely connected on a Sunday and whilst in one newsagents were open and you buy postcards in the other the newsagents were closed. It was the smaller place in which the newsagents were open. Fortunately a preserved railway connected the two - and they had steam running that day.**

Churches and cathedrals. Not all churches are open outside of the times of services. Not all cathedrals belong to the Church of England. For example the cathedrals of Lancaster and of Shrewsbury are Roman Catholic. Some places such as Norwich and Liverpool have both Church of England and Roman Catholic cathedrals. All Roman Catholic cathedrals are open free of charge. Some Church of England cathedrals such as St Paul's in London and York Minster charge to go in, as does Westminster Abbey. This is actually to discourage visitors. Sometimes this can backfire. For example South Street Roman Catholic church in Exeter is a more beautiful building than nearby Exeter cathedral.

Some museums have free entry and some do not. Depending on what is in them will decide if you feel that the visit was worth it. Some cathedrals, churches and historic houses prohibit it. Some cathedrals and churches charge a small fee to let you take photographs and some cathedrals, churches and historic houses allow it free of charge.

Photography is a sore point. The advice I was given by an Essex police sergeant was that photography in a public place is not prohibited and that if it could be printed in a newspaper photograph it. Obviously don't deliberately take photographs of security equipment and if possible avoid the use of flash photograph particularly on railway stations and public roads so as not to temporarily blind driver and other railway and road users.

Guide books – are they worth buying? That again is a matter of personal choice. One problem with them is not what they put in, but what they leave out. I'd suggest if you bought half a dozen you'd still find something missing. The local tourist board can be just as helpful. **For what it is worth, in my opinion the most comprehensive guidebook to Britain that was ever published was the 1937 edition of Baedeker's Guide to Great Britain. And even that got some things wrong including the entry for Billericay. For what it is worth, in my opinion the most comprehensive guidebook to Britain that was ever published. However I do not recommend using a 1937 guidebook as things have changed since then.**

Where to stay. That again is for you to decide based on your personal circumstances. What I would say though is that you should either ask the local tourist board to help you or get a copy of their current accommodation brochures. I would advise against picking out somewhere from a newspaper advert. Accommodation booked through the local tourist board or included in their brochures will have been looked by them. Anything else may not be up to their standards. As to how much to pay per night, well that is for you to decide. I can only comment on guest houses and hotels, but from my experience I've found that they varied from the very good to the superb. As I only stayed in one pub, which was excellent and had a wonderful restaurant attached I can't comment on pubs, but be guided by what the local tourist board or their brochure says.

Where to eat. That again is for you to decide. However this will to some extent depend on what pubs, cafes and restaurants are about and what times and days they open. **If for example Burger King or McDonalds is the only place that is open at a particular time in a place don't be ashamed to use it. Just don't eat every meal there.**

What to drink. Always try the local beer, whisky or wine if you can get it. Wine is produced in England and Wales and beer and whisky in all constituent parts of the island.

Travel insurance. That is for you to decide.

Security. Take the usual precautions and be guided by what others say about places. If you do get lost don't look as if you are lost. Don't mention politics or religion or sport, particularly football. Be careful in Glasgow as to whether a pub is frequented by Protestants or Catholics or both. If you're not sure avoid. It is advisable to use humour such as depreciating your own team or your own

country's team. In Scotland it is advisable for the English to remember that they were beaten by the Scots in a home international following England's victory in the world cup in 1966. I have used this true story in an Inverness pub when England or rather Scum were playing Brazil. Scots or Welsh think of something. English or Scots don't say anything about rugby in Wales. Welsh don't say anything about rugby in England or Scotland. Keep off cricket unless you are Scottish or Welsh are feel like reminding England of the occasion your country beat England or when England lost to Ireland or the Netherlands. Cricket phobes from England may also feel like doing the same thing with cricket supporters.

Dress codes and other problems. Some places have dress codes. These can range from the sensible such as no beach wear in the middle of a town to the downright old fashioned such as requiring formal dress such a jackets and ties for men even on a hot day. Equally restaurants for example will discriminate against the single person or the family with young children by either putting them at the back or the restaurant or saying that they are full, but can they wait a bit. My advice where what is perceived as unreasonable discrimination is practiced is to avoid it at a later even if you meet the establishments requirements. They are clearly undesirable establishments and definitely not worth patronising.

Language. There are parts of Wales where Welsh is the natural language. Be careful. I am reliably informed by a friend from Mid Wales that the inhabitants of North Wales not only dislike people from outside of Wales, but also people from outside of North Wales. **One may feel tempted to try speaking to native Welsh speakers who can speak English in some language other than English. Sadly whilst I sympathise I would resist – unless of course your native language is not English.** Whilst Gaelic is spoken in parts of the Scottish Highlands I didn't hear it, but then I didn't get to the outer islands.

How to get there. Unless you have a car I would recommend using either a train or a coach. If possible register on-line with either your local train operating company or National Express. If not contact the train operating company through the nearest big railway station or National Express through a travel centre. You can get some very good deals by booking in advance. However sometimes if you are travelling by what can be described as local trains such the London and South East area where super cheap advance fares within the area are not available. For example advance tickets from London to Eastbourne are more expensive that London to Buxton although the latter is further away. I would advise against using the High Speed Line from London to Kent as it is more expensive than the ordinary lines. Also it is less interesting from a scenic point of view. The surface sections of the London Underground are more interesting. Through bookings that include travelling through London include the cost of the Underground ticket in the fare. Unless, you are so desperate to get there in a hurry I would strongly advise against flying as not can the hidden extra make the cost of travel more expensive, but the time saved in the air will be lost by the time needed to get to the airport, check in and then get from the airport to your destination. **The overall journey times from the centre of London to the centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow are actually faster by train than flying.** Also you won't have the nail file or bottle of mineral water in your rucksack confiscated by security. **Nor for that matter your bottle of whisky or scrumpy or wine.** An alternative to flying if you are in a hurry is to take a sleeper. There are still two sleeping car trains in Britain. One

runs from London to Penzance (**the Night Riviera**) and the other from London to Scotland (**the Highland Sleeper**). On these only reservation is compulsory. On most other trains it is not. To reach the Isle of Wight it is necessary to take a ship of some sort. Certainly for foot passengers reservation is not necessary on them. **The two premier day trains in Britain are the London, York, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Perth, Inverness Highland Chieftain and the London, Exeter, Plymouth, Truro, Penzance Cornish Riviera. Some train and coach services from one provincial town or city to another provincial town or city avoid London. Thus it is possible for example to go from Edinburgh to Penzance or Norwich to Liverpool without going through London. However it is not possible to go from Norwich to Penzance or Cardiff to Eastbourne without going through London. Public holiday weekends in particular are not good times to travel by train. Particularly if you have a lot of luggage. But don't let this put you off using trains.**

As to getting around at the destination. That is for you to decide. If you don't drive Britain still has a reasonable bus service to most places that people want to visit. There are even local train services to some places. In addition in summer some places are served by preserved railway lines although these do not run every day and do not always connect with the national network. The more sentimental or nostalgic may note however that with a tiny minority of places these can be used as part of the overall journey and it may be possible to complete the journey behind steam. **Public transport at weekends is not the same as on weekdays. Some bus routes only run on Mondays to Fridays or Mondays to Saturdays. In some instances Saturday times are different from the rest of the week. Often bus routes on run at a reduced service. There are a few routes where the opposite happens. Beware of engineering works on the railways at weekends and sometimes on weekdays nights. Again public holiday weekends in particular are not good times to travel by train. Particularly if you have a lot of luggage**

London apart from being expensive is in a category of its own. London thinks it's the only place in Britain that counts. I wouldn't necessarily describe it as friendly. I worked there for over 30 years and I would describe it as an ugly bully. **London thinks it's the only place in Britain that matters. Which is rubbish.** I much prefer Edinburgh as a capital city. London's museums are not as good as they used to be. Edinburgh's museums are free like London's but they are better. **Even Birmingham's better than London. That is no disrespect to Birmingham.** The local transport system **in London** is reasonable, but not cheap. London is an international city and is not typical of Britain. It was said by the 18th century diarist Dr Johnson that when one was tired of London one was tired of life. I would argue that he had it totally wrong. When one realises how awful London is, then one is enjoying life. **The difference between getting round on London either on transport or on foot and a rugby scrum is that the latter is a more civilised affair. I'm afraid it's every person for themselves and blow the rest.**

If you have any questions please contact me at: charlesetphillips@yahoo.co.uk