

# Destination Great Britain

Britain is perfect for exploring, for acting on a whim, for having an adventure, for doing exactly what you want to do. Find a delightful village as you're touring the coast? Check into that friendly inn overlooking the harbour. See a dramatic castle on the skyline? Turn off the road and stroll round dramatic battlements. Love the hip hotel in the city? Stay another night. Or two. Sure, you'll make some plans in advance – especially if time is tight – but you can leave things to chance as well, enjoying the excitement that only freedom can provide.

And along with freedom, Britain offers variety. You can immerse yourself in history at the Tower of London, or marvel at modern architecture in Manchester. You can eat fish and chips from a paper tray in Whitby, or relish the delights of Celtic fusion cuisine in Cardiff. You can walk on a wild mountain near Loch Ness or enjoy Edinburgh's energetic nightlife. Travel chameleons love it. And however familiar things may seem, in Britain there's always something unexpected.

You might be from far-flung regions, or maybe you're exploring your own back yard. Either way, this book is for you. We've picked the places we think are best, but there's much more we couldn't fit in. So use this book as a guide – to steer you from place to place – and mix it with your own discoveries. In Britain, you won't be disappointed.

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# Getting Started

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

## WHEN TO GO

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

Despite apparent randomness, there is a seasonal pattern. Rain falls less often in summer (June to August), and there's normally more sunshine, although there'll be cloudy days too. Conversely, winter (November to February) may enjoy fantastic clear spells between bouts of snow, while spring (March to May) or autumn (September to October) can sometimes produce the best weather of the year. There are also variations over distance: southern England might be chilly, while northern Scotland enjoys a heat wave. Or vice versa. Be prepared for anything and you won't get a surprise.

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

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

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

## COSTS & MONEY

If you're a global traveller, whatever your budget you'll know that Britain is expensive compared with many other countries. But don't let that put you off. If funds are tight you'll still have a great trip with some forward planning,

### COSTS FOR KIDS

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

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

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

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

a bit of shopping around and a modicum of common sense. A lot of stuff is cheap or good value, and some is completely free. The following gives some guidelines; for more details see the Directory and Transport chapters.

For midrange travellers, basic hotels are about £20 to £50 per person, except in London, where midrange hotels start at around £80, and around £100 gets you something pretty decent for the night, although you could easily spend more. When it comes to eating, a decent three-course meal with wine in a smart restaurant will set you back about £20 to £30 per person. In London this jumps to about £50, although if you choose carefully you can still get a great meal (with a glass or two of wine) for around £25. Of course, you can go wild at somewhere outrageously posh or trendy, and not get much change from £125.

Backpackers on a tight budget need £30 a day for bare survival in London, with dorm beds from £15, basic sustenance £10, and transport around £5 unless you prefer to hoof it.

Whatever your bracket, extras in London might include clubbing (£5 to £10, up to £20 at weekends), a pint in a pub (£2.50 to £3) or admission to museums and galleries (£10 to £20 a day, though many places don't charge).

Out of London, costs drop. Shoestringers need around £25 per day for hostels and food. Midrangers will be fine on £50 to £75 per day, allowing £20 to £30 per person for B&B accommodation, £10 to £15 for lunch, snacks and drinks, £10 to £20 for an evening meal. Admission fees are the same for everyone – work on £10 per day.

Travel costs depend on transport choice. Trains can cost anything from £5 to £50 per 100 miles, depending when you buy your ticket. Long-distance buses (called coaches in Britain) cost about half the train fare for an equivalent journey. Car drivers should allow £10 per 100 miles for fuel, plus around £5 per day for parking. Rental costs £20 to £50 per day, depending on model and duration.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

There's nothing like a decent travelogue to set the mood for your own trip. The choice of books about travel in Britain can be daunting, so here's a list of our favourites to add an extra dimension to your planning or help you dig under the British skin a little when you're on the road (arranged roughly chronologically).

- *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning* by Laurie Lee is a classic English travelogue. A young man literally walks out of the time-warped 1930s Cotswolds, then carves out a life in London – before heading off to Spain.
- *Notes from a Small Island* by Bill Bryson, although based on travels in the 1970s, is still incisive. This American author really captures the

### HOW MUCH?

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

B&B £20 per person

CD £12

The Times (newspaper) 50p

Restaurant meal £15 per person

Large latte £2

For more weather facts and figures, see the climate charts on p954.

## TOP TENS

### Must-See Movies

Predeparture planning is no chore if it includes a trip to the cinema or a night on the sofa with a DVD and a bowl of popcorn. Our parameters for a 'British' film? Anything about Britain. Anything that gives a taste of history, scenery or peculiar cultural traits. For reviews of these and other cinematic gems, see p72.

- *Brief Encounter* (1945) Director: David Lean
- *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) Director: Henry Cornelius
- *Trainspotting* (1996) Director: Danny Boyle
- *Brassed Off* (1996) Director: Mark Herman
- *The Full Monty* (1997) Director: Peter Cattaneo
- *Shakespeare in Love* (1999) Director: John Madden
- *Billy Elliot* (2000) Director: Stephen Daldry
- *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002) Director: Gurinder Chadha
- *Pride and Prejudice* (2005) Director: Joe Wright
- *Love + Hate* (2006) Director: Dominic Savage

### Rave Reads

Travel broadens the mind. Especially if you read before you go. For a taste of life in Britain, try a few of these novels – from past classics to contemporary milestones. For more details on these and other great books, see p68.

- *Oliver Twist* (1837) Charles Dickens
- *Wuthering Heights* (1847) Emily Brontë
- *The Trumpet Major* (1895) Thomas Hardy
- *The Rainbow* (1915) DH Lawrence
- *How Green Was My Valley* (1939) Richard Llewellyn
- *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1962) Muriel Spark
- *Waterland* (1983) Graham Swift
- *Brick Lane* (2003) Monica Ali
- *Small Island* (2004) Andrea Levy
- *The Book of Dave* (2006) Will Self

### Favourite Festivals

Serious opera, fringe comedy, world music, drama, poetry or dancing your head off in the rain. Whatever you're into, there's a festival to weave your travels around. Here's a list of our favourites. For more details and inspiration see the individual town and city sections throughout this book, and the festivals list on p956.

- Bath International Music Festival (Bath) May – see p260
- Brighton Festival (Brighton) May – see p236
- Bradford Mela (Bradford, Yorkshire) June – see p513
- Glastonbury Festival (Glastonbury, Somerset) June – see p269
- Womad (Reading, Berkshire) July – see p957
- International Eisteddfod (Llangollen) July – see p717
- T in the Park (Balado) July – see p796
- Edinburgh International Festival (Edinburgh) August – see p761
- Notting Hill Carnival (London) August – see p153
- The Big Chill (Herefordshire) August – see p393

spirit of Britain three decades ago. When he pokes fun he's spot on, so the locals don't mind.

- *Lights Out for the Territory* by Iain Sinclair is a darkly funny, entertaining and acerbic exploration of 1990s London, taking in – among other things – Jeffrey Archer's penthouse and an East End gangster funeral.
- *Native Stranger* by Alistair Scott describes the author's journey through Scotland, a homeland he hardly knew after decades of globetrotting journalism. Slightly dated, but it remains incisive and deep.

- *On Borrow's Trail* by Hugh Oliff retraces the journeys through Wales made by 19th-century writer George Borrow, combining a rich synopsis of the original observations with modern photos and colour illustrations.
- *Park and Ride* by Miranda Sawyer is a wry and minutely observed 2001 sojourn through English suburbia, the land of never-ending home improvements and keeping up appearances.
- *Two Degrees West* by Nicholas Crane describes a walk in a perfectly straight line (two degrees west of the Greenwich meridian) across Britain, wading rivers, cutting through towns, sleeping in fields and meeting an astounding selection of people along the way.
- *Slow Coast Home* by Josie Drew is a cross between journal of miscellany and chatty letter to a friend, as the globetrotting cyclist completes a 5000-mile tour of England and Wales.
- *Great British Bus Journeys* by David McKie is a wry and witty travelogue showing that 'unknown' towns and villages can be just as fascinating as tourist hot spots.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

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

**Able to Go** ([www.abletogo.com](http://www.abletogo.com)) Excellent listings for visitors with mobility difficulties.

**Arts Festivals** ([www.artsfestivals.co.uk](http://www.artsfestivals.co.uk)) Listing over 100 festivals around Britain: opera, theatre, literature, comedy, classical, folk, jazz and more.

**Backpax** ([www.backpaxmag.com](http://www.backpaxmag.com)) Cheerful info on cheap travel, visas, activities and work.

**BBC** ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)) Immense and invaluable site from the world's best broadcaster.

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

**i-UK** ([www.i-uk.com](http://www.i-uk.com)) Official site for all business, study and travel information.

**Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Loads of travel news, a bit of merchandise, and the legendary Thorn Tree bulletin board.

**UK Student Life** ([www.ukstudentlife.com](http://www.ukstudentlife.com)) Language courses, and where to go outside study time.

**Visit Britain** ([www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com)) The country's official tourism website; accommodation, attractions, events and much more.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

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

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

Start with spectacular, irrepressible **London** (p112), then visit ancient cathedral cities **Winchester** (p210) and **Salisbury** (p286). Next, a site of even older religion: prehistoric **Stonehenge** (p289); and onwards to **Bath** (p256) for Roman remains and grand Georgian architecture.

Loop over to **Cardiff** (p645) for fantastical castles and nautical heritage, and cruise through the rural **Cotswolds** (p356) to reach university town **Oxford** (p344) and Shakespeare's birthplace, **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422).

Then strike out north to **Edinburgh** (p747) for historic castles, new parliament and more tartan than you can shake a kilt at, before heading to **York** (p527) for its glorious cathedral and first-class train museum.

Finish at **Cambridge** (p459), another ancient university town, for more sightseeing and maybe a gentle punt on the river to recover from your whirlwind tour!

Without stopping much you could do this 1000-mile journey in a week. But pause to drink in the culture and history, not to mention the occasional beer in a country pub, and two weeks becomes a much better option.



### PASTORAL PLEASURES Three to Four Weeks / New Forest to Outer Hebrides

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

First stop, the **New Forest** (p219) for a spot of walking, cycling or horse riding, or simply relaxing, then to **Devon** (p295) and **Cornwall** (p315), which tempt with wild moors, grassy hills, and a beautiful coast of cliffs and sandy beaches.

The **Cotswolds** (p356) promise quintessential English countryside, with neat fields, clear rivers and endless pretty villages of honey-coloured stone – all glowing contentedly when the sun is out.

Head west again, to Wales, through the rolling hills of the **Brecon Beacons** (p693), and down to the heavenly sea and sky of **Pembrokeshire** (p675). Then go north to scale the stunning peaks of **Snowdonia** (p720), with mountains for walkers and steam trains for all the family.

Then it's back to England, through the valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales** (p517) and over the mountains of the **Lake District** (p591), to Scotland where two new national parks await: the glorious combination of **Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park** (p825), and the mountain wilderness of the **Cairngorms** (p879).

That may be wondrous enough, but Britain's pastoral pleasures are crowned by Scotland's famous Highlands and islands, where jewels include peaks like **Ben Nevis** (p885) and **Torrifon** (p904), while out to sea the lovely islands – **Arran** (p816), **Islay** (p829), **Jura** (p831), **Mull** (p834), **Skye** (p905), **Lewis** (p913), **North Uist** (p918), **South Uist** (p918) and others – bask in the afternoon sun.



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

**THE GRAND TOUR** One to Two Months / London to Cambridge (the long way)

This is a trip for those with time, or an urge to see everything. So brace yourself, and let's be off.

From **London** (p112) aim for **Canterbury Cathedral** (p191), then head down the coast to hip and happening **Brighton** (p234), and across to historic cities **Winchester** (p210) and **Salisbury** (p286) and the delightful **New Forest** (p219). Travel via prehistoric **Stonehenge** (p289) to Westcountry gems **Bath** (p256) and **Bristol** (p245).

Next to Wales, via stunning **Chepstow Castle** (p665) and energetic **Cardiff** (p645), to the coastal paradise of **Pembrokeshire** (p675). Retrace to the **Brecon Beacons** (p693) and through book-mad **Hay-on-Wye** (p703) to reach the cosy **Cotswolds** (p356), charming **Oxford** (p344), spectacular **Warwick Castle** (p420), and Shakespeare's birthplace **Stratford-upon-Avon** (p422).

Continue north to **Chester** (p568), then divert into north Wales for grand castles at **Conwy** (p737) and **Caernarfon** (p740), and equally stunning mountains of **Snowdonia** (p720). Then ferry across the Mersey to **Liverpool** (p571) and to **Manchester** (p556) for a taste of city life, followed by a change of scenery in the **Lake District** (p591) and a journey back in time along **Hadrian's Wall** (p632).

Hop across the border to Scotland, via the tranquil southern Uplands countryside and **border towns** (p801), to good-time **Glasgow** (p784). Then trek to **Ben Nevis** (p885), from where it's easy to reach for **Skye** (p905).

Time to head south again, via **Stirling Castle** (p839) to **Edinburgh** (p747), through the abbey border-towns of **Kelso** (p805) and **Jedburgh** (p806), to reach World Heritage Site **Durham** (p627) and the ancient Viking capital of **York** (p527), ending with a final flourish in beautiful **Cambridge** (p459).

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

**ROADS LESS TRAVELLED****URBAN ODYSSEY**

One to Two Weeks / Bristol to Manchester

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

Kick off in **Bristol** (p245), once a poor cousin to neighbour Bath, today with fierce pride, a rich historic legacy and a music scene that rivals cool northern outposts. Next stop **Birmingham** (p408), a city that oozes transformation, with a renovated waterside, energised museums and a space-age shopping centre. Nearby is **Nottingham** (p435), forever associated with Robin Hood but renowned today for some very merry nightlife. If hitting the dance floor isn't your thing, relax in the city's great pubs. But don't dawdle. Down your pint. We're off again – to culturally restyled and famously to-the-hilt party town **Newcastle-upon-Tyne** (p618).

Still want more? It's got to be **Glasgow** (p784). Sign up here for pubs and clubs, some truly electric venues, fabulous galleries and – only in Scotland – slick but unpretentious bars.

Pausing for coffee and toast, head next for **Liverpool** (p571). The Beatles are done to death, but there are lively *current* music venues and rich trade-port heritage – plus a rather famous football team.

Finish in **Manchester** (p556), self-styled 'Barcelona of Britain', a longtime hotbed of musical endeavour, with thriving arts and club scenes, galleries a go-go, dramatic new architecture and – oh yes – another well-known football team.



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

## RURAL RETREATS

Two to Three Weeks / Norfolk to Fife

For some of Britain's best-known national parks and natural beauties, see p29; this fabulous jaunt takes you through less frequented (but no less scenic) countryside.

Surprisingly close to London sit the tranquil counties of **Norfolk** (p479) and **Suffolk** (p472), their coastlines dotted with picturesque harbours, shingle beaches, salt marshes, bird reserves and the occasional old-fashioned seaside resort. Inland lie rivers and lakes, pretty villages and endless miles of flat countryside perfect for gentle cycling.

Next to **Wiltshire** (p285), best known for Stonehenge and Salisbury but also a rural delight of quiet country lanes and tranquil villages, plus the hills of the southern Cotswolds – low-key and less frequented than their northern counterparts in Gloucestershire.

Between England and Wales lie the farmlands and cider orchards of the **Marches** (p381), while over the border loom the Cambrian Mountains of Mid Wales (p691) – big, wild and rarely on tourist itineraries. Put them on yours!

Then it's back to England and the **North York Moors** (p544), with heather-covered hills and delightful dales. Not far away, the **Northumberland Coast** (p637) is famous for empty beaches, dramatic castles and delicious crab sandwiches.

Inland sit the wild and empty big-sky landscapes of the **Cheviot Hills** and **Northumberland National Park** (p641), blending into the undulating hills, green valleys, stately homes, ruined abbeys and ancient **border towns** (p801) of southern Scotland.

For a final fling, cross the Firth of Forth to reach the 'kingdom' of **Fife** (p845), with lush rolling farmland ideal for cycling and a delightful coastline peppered with quaint harbours, perfect for an after-lunch stroll.

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



## TAILORED TRIPS

### BRITAIN ON LOCATION

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

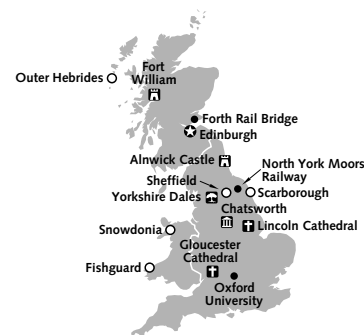
Britain's best-loved film hero Harry Potter gets around – locations in recent films include **Gloucester Cathedral** (p366), **Oxford University** (p345), **Alnwick Castle** (p637), **North York Moors Railway** (p549) and **Fort William** (p884).

In Scotland, landmark Hitchcock thriller *The 39 Steps* features the **Forth Rail Bridge** (p771), comedy *Whisky Galore* was set in the **Outer Hebrides** (p912), **Edinburgh** (p747) is the scene for tartan-noir masterpiece *Trainspotting*, while **Dunnottar Castle** (p865) was the backdrop for Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*.

In Wales, the Dylan Thomas classic *Under Milk Wood* was filmed in **Fishguard** (p686) in Pembrokeshire, while some of Lara Croft's unfeasibly epic *Tomb Raider* adventures were shot in **Snowdonia** (p720).

In northern England, quirky *Little Voice* was filmed in **Scarborough** (p541), *Calendar Girls* in the scenic valleys of the **Yorkshire Dales** (p517), and late-'90s hit *The Full Monty* in former steel-city **Sheffield** (p503).

For the latest film version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen power comes to Derbyshire; the stately home of **Chatsworth** (p455) plays Darcy's family abode, while dramatic Peak District outcrops provide a perfect spot for the heroine's love-lost contemplation. For *The Da Vinci Code* **Lincoln Cathedral** (p491) stood in for Westminster, and visitor numbers doubled overnight.



### BRITAIN'S WORLD HERITAGE

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

Obvious contenders include the **Tower of London** (p142), the historical maritime sites of **Greenwich** (p150), the ancient megaliths of **Stonehenge** (p289) and **Avebury** (p293), and the Roman-Georgian city of **Bath** (p256). Less obvious, but just as valid, sites include the industrial heritage of **Blaenafon** (p666) and **Ironbridge Gorge** (p397), the mills of **Saltire** (p514) and the waterfront of **Liverpool** (p571), while the coast of **Dorset** (p274) and **East Devon** (p300) is one of the few natural sites on this list.

Back to the classics, and in the south of England there's **Blenheim Palace** (p354) and **Canterbury Cathedral** (p191), while the north boasts **Fountains Abbey** (p538). In Wales, the castles of **Caernarfon** (p740), **Conwy** (p737), **Beaumaris** (p742) and **Harlech** (p731) together form one site, as do **Durham Castle** (p629) and **Durham Cathedral** (p628). In Scotland, sites include **Edinburgh's Old Town** (p752) and **New Town** (p758), **New Lanark** (p800), and the Neolithic sites of the **Orkney Islands** (p919).

Recent additions to the list include **Hadrian's Wall** (p632) and the landscape and industrial heritage of the coast of **Cornwall** (p315). For more details see [www.culture.gov.uk/historic\\_environment/World\\_Heritage.htm](http://www.culture.gov.uk/historic_environment/World_Heritage.htm)



## BRITAIN'S BEST BEACHES

In Cornwall, art fans and adrenaline-seekers love **St Ives** (p328) while surfers and beach-bums dig **Newquay** (p331). Next-door Devon boasts more seaside favourites, including **Croyde** (p308) and **Torquay** (p300).

Dorset's **Portland harbour** (p282) is perfect for water sports, and will be the base for the 2012 Olympic sailing races. Yachties also enjoy the golden shores of the **Isle of Wight** (p222), along with the bucket-and-spade brigade.

In southeast England, **Brighton** (p234) boasts hip beachfront bars, while **Ramsgate** (p197) has abundant maritime history and **Whitstable** (p195) satisfies any cravings for seafood.

In Wales, **St David's** (p683) and the Gower's **Rhossili Bay** (p672) have decent surf. Broad sands sweep the coast near **Barmouth** (p732) and the otherworldly

**Llyn Peninsula** (p743), while traditional seaside resorts include **Llandudno** (p734) and **Tenby** (p678).

In Scotland, the big waves of **Durness** (p900) attract serious surfers, while historic **St Andrews** (p846) boasts two fabulous strands. The isles of **Harris** (p916), **North Uist** (p918), **South Uist** (p918) and Orkney's **Sanday** (p931) have awe-inspiring beaches.

Yorkshire boasts charmingly old-fashioned **Scarborough** (p541) and gothic-festival-port-resort **Whitby** (p549). Nearby is **Skegness** (p498) – dubbed Skeggie-Vegas by admirers.

In Suffolk, historic **Aldeburgh** (p477) has a shingle shore and fine dining, while wonderfully quaint **Southwold** (p478) offers prom, pier and lighthouse, and some of the most expensive sheds (sorry, highly prized beach chalets) in the country.



## BRITAIN FOR KIDS

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

**London** (p153) justifiably tops nearly every list – with a mesmerising choice of kid-friendly attractions. Bristol has **Explore** (p248), an interactive science museum bursting with hands-on exhibits, while Cardiff has fairy-tale **castles** (p647) and up-to-the-moment **Techniquist** (p650).

For more battlements, there's **Warwick Castle** (p420) in Warwick. Knights in armour? You bet. And children of a ghoulish disposition can creep around the dungeons. It's a short distance, but a leap across centuries, to the **National Space Centre** (p431). Highlights include zero-gravity toilets and germ-devouring underpants. Kids love it. And it *is* rocket science.

Hungry after crossing the galaxy? **Cadbury World** (p412) in Birmingham is a lip-smacking exploration of chocolate production and consumption. Just make sure those samples settle in tiny tummies before you reach **Alton Towers** (p428), Britain's finest theme park, with a stomach-churning selection of roller coasters and other thrills.

Glasgow's ultramodern **Science Centre** (p788) is a bounty of discovery, complete with interactive science mall, and Dundee offers **Sensation** (p871) for more hands-on, and heads-in, activity.

Finish at **Our Dynamic Earth** (p756) in Edinburgh, a special-effects marvel recreating the planet's history from the Big Bang to tea time.





# Snapshot

In the previous edition of this book, we wrote that British newspaper and TV coverage was dominated by events in Iraq. Two years on, in early 2007, we're writing *this* edition, and things don't seem to have changed much: Iraq still dominates the headlines in the British media, and frequently dominates discussions in the British parliament. And when it comes to public opinion in Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair's support for the original American-led invasion is now a very sore point indeed. Mr Blair is seen either as President George W Bush's puppet (or 'poodle', as the press love to have it) or a moderating force in a gung-ho environment, but either way Iraq goes from bad to worse, and pessimistic pundits close to the ground predict imminent civil war.

But that's not all. British forces are tied down in an equally ambiguous conflict in Afghanistan, and once again violent or distressing images on the TV news help call the whole affair into question. Add to that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East – notably the mid-2006 outbreak of fighting between the Israeli army and Hezbollah militias in Lebanon, where Britain's call for a ceasefire was conspicuous by its absence – and those are just some of the international issues Tony Blair and his government are facing.

But it has to be said that not all British people concern themselves with foreign wars and global politics. So what else do they talk about? At the time of going to press, what hot topics are being discussed at dinner parties, on the bus or in the pub?

There's sport of course. The national passion is football, or 'soccer' as it's sometimes known (but never in Britain), with cricket and rugby not far behind, and there's more interest than usual in other events thanks to London's hosting of the 2012 Olympic Games. As well as world-class competition, the Games will ensure the arrival of large numbers of overseas visitors (and the money they spend), a raised profile for British tourism, new stadiums and housing, plus increased fitness and improved health for the entire nation. Or so say supporters. Detractors claim that the billions of pounds spent are unlikely to be recouped, local groups protest that a nature reserve, garden allotments and even popular sports venues will be bulldozed to make way for the Olympic Park, and infamously dour commentator Will Self wrote about 'the ludicrous notion that many hours of vegetating on couches watching toned young athletes is going to make any ordinary person more sportive'.

Perhaps of more immediate interest to many Brits is the role of the monarch. Not normally a hot topic, but the marriage of Prince Charles to Camilla and the Queen's 80th birthday celebrations in 2006 ignited discussion – albeit in rather confused terms as people fail to separate Britain's constitutional affairs from actual individuals, so attempts to discuss the relevance of hereditary monarchy are met with responses like 'the Queen works very hard' or 'the Royal Family attracts tourists'. The muddled debate may continue for decades, especially as Prince William (the *next* in line after Charles) is a popular figure thanks to his pin-up looks, action-man image and deft handling of the world's media.

Discussions about monarchy have an extra dimension in Scotland and Wales of course, where many people see Elizabeth II as Queen of *England*, especially as these separate nations within Britain enjoy increased devolution – most recently emphasised by the Welsh Assembly opening in March 2006. There's already a Scottish Parliament, and increasing calls south of the border for a separate English parliament too.

## BRITAIN FAST FACTS

Population: 58 million

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

Inflation: 2.5%

Unemployment: 5%

Head of State: Queen  
Elizabeth II

Per capita GNP: ap-  
proximately £14,000  
(US\$26,000)

Per-person average  
annual spend on alcohol:  
£1300

Per-person average an-  
nual spend on takeaway  
food: £300

Per-person average  
annual spend on fruit and  
veg: £280

Proportion of British  
people overweight or  
obese: 60%



Another topic of discussion for many Brits is increasing rates of crime. Although levels of some offences (such as violence resulting in injury) are actually going down, vandalism and nuisance behaviour caused by binge drinking remain serious problems. Responses range from some shopping centres banning teenagers wearing hoodies (hooded jackets – a symbol of surly youthdom) to the government's introduction of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) allowing police to curtail persistent offenders. Thus Tony Blair keeps the first part of his promise to be 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime', but state funding is in desperately short supply for youth clubs and other activities that might keep kids out of trouble in the first place.

On the up-side, ASBO swiftly entered the English language as an acronym ('I was caught spraying graffiti and had an asbo slapped on me') then became a byword for any control device. This, for example, from a gushing motor journalist: '...a car so powerful it doesn't just need brakes, it needs an asbo'.

Controls of a far more serious nature – security restrictions – are another talking point for many British people. As part of the global 'war against terror' (the first time in history that hostilities have been declared on an abstract noun, as Monty Python comedian and columnist Terry Jones famously noted) Brits are getting used to visible changes like longer searches at airports and armed police on the streets, while in the background controversial laws are introduced – limiting freedom of speech and public protests, holding prisoners without charge for longer periods – a 'bonfire of the liberties' according to the *Independent* newspaper.

Security tightened even more after the bomb attack in London in July 2005, giving England its own 7/7 after America's 9/11, an event all the more shattering when it transpired that the attackers were British. How bad have things got, asked the newspaper commentators, how big a rift has been created, when world events inspire disaffected young men to randomly attack hundreds of their fellow citizens?

So with the political scene at home and abroad not looking so rosy, a general air of disillusion prevails, and is perhaps why the voter turnout in 2006's council elections was around 40%, with some areas only 25%. In reality, voter numbers have been dropping since the 1960s, but right now it seems the British are particularly tired of politicians whatever their hue. It's a telling indictment that more people vote in TV talent shows than for their country's leaders.

That in turn is a symptom of Britain's ever-growing obsession with fame and celebrity. Popular newspapers carry endless articles about stars of fashion, pop, TV and sport, while celebrity magazines *Hello!* and *Heat* sell half-a-million copies every week. And it seems the Brits love to see pictures of these happy smiling people on the beach, leaving the gym, or – ideally – snorting cocaine, even though their 'celebrity' status is based on little more than the ability to sing a jolly tune, look good in tight trousers or kick a ball in the right direction.

And that brings us to back to football. There is no British national side – political devolution may be new, but there's always been separate football teams – but England reached the final stages of the World Cup in 2006, then put in a lacklustre performance, while Scotland and Wales didn't even qualify. Nimbly overlooking politics and world events, irrepressible British sports fans are already looking forward to 2010's championship. Let's hope the national teams do a bit better next time...

# The Authors



## DAVID ELSE

### Coordinating Author

As a full-time professional travel writer, David has authored more than 20 guidebooks, including Lonely Planet's *England* and *Walking in Britain*. His knowledge of Britain comes from a lifetime of travel around the country – often on foot or by bike – a passion dating from university years, when heading for the hills was always more attractive than visiting the library. Originally from London, David slowly trekked northwards via Wiltshire, Bristol and Derbyshire (with periods of exile in Wales and Africa) to his present base in Yorkshire. For those interested in domestic matters: David is married with a baby daughter, who already finds herself tramping over mountains – in a backpack carried by her dad – whenever the sun shines.

### My Favourite Trip

While researching this book, I revisited some of my favourite places in Great Britain: the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and North York Moors, three wonderful national parks. I combined them into a coast-to-coast jaunt, and just for fun covered the entire distance (with a group of friends) by mountain bike, avoiding roads wherever possible. The route took us from St Bees Head, along the tranquil valley of Ennerdale, through Wordsworth's birthplace Grasmere, across the Pennine Hills via the lovely valley of Swaledale, round the edge of the Cleveland Hills escarpment and along sylvan Eskdale, to finish at Robin Hood's Bay. Great countryside, tough challenge, good company – all the ingredients for a favourite trip. We'll do it again next year.



## JOLYON ATTWOOLL

### The Midlands

Jolyon's earliest childhood memory is of travelling in England as a toddler perched on the top floor of a Manchester double-decker bus. Although his primary-school years in Melbourne, Australia, stifled a nascent northern accent, Jolyon's connection to the green and pleasant land had only just begun. Aged 11, he returned with his family to settle in the West Midlands metropolis of Coventry where he has remained on and off for more than two decades. Following stints as a bookseller, and web and magazine editor, Jolyon now works as a full-time travel writer. When away from the Midlands, he is most likely to be somewhere in Latin America.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).


**CHARLOTTE BEECH** Southeast England, The Marches, Eastern England

By happy coincidence, Charlotte found herself covering both the Marches region of her birth and her old university haunts in eastern England for this guide. And she was pleased to discover, even with rose-tinted specs dutifully laid aside, they were still home to some of the loveliest gems in the country. Now a part-time Londoner and full-time travel writer, Charlotte has penned guidebooks from South America to Asia, but in taking on this book discovered that she relished writing in her own back yard as much as anywhere.


**OLIVER BERRY** Southwest England, Cumbria & the Lakes

Oliver graduated from University College London with a degree in English and now works as a freelance writer and photographer. He's been proud to call the land of Kernow home for most of the last 28 years, and is always looking for excuses to wander around the county's beaches and clifftops; writing a guidebook is the best one yet. For this book he also braved the perils of the traditional British beach holiday, ate cheddar in Cheddar, had a bath in Bath, went in search of Wordsworth & Co and met an unmistakably English assortment of white witches, latter-day druids, morris dancers, bell-ringers and zorbing instructors along the way. Oliver has received several awards for his writing including the *Guardian* Young Travel Writer of the Year.


**LAETITIA CLAPTON** London, Southeast England

Laetitia was born in London and, having grown up in Canada, Cambridge-shire and Shropshire, has spent the last 10 years happily living in the capital. When she's not exploring the city's shops, galleries, markets and hidden corners, she escapes the smoke of the Big Smoke with weekend breaks in the lush and underrated Home Counties, or further afield. She has always been passionate about travel, studying French and German at Cambridge University, spending a year in Normandy teaching English to adolescents and generally trotting the globe at every available opportunity. These days she makes a living as a freelance writer and publishing consultant.


**FIONN DAVENPORT** Yorkshire, Northwest England, Northeast England

Dublin-born and bred, Fionn has been traipsing about his favourite bits of England (north of the Watford Gap) for nearly a decade, getting lost in Newcastle suburbs, snowed under in northern Lancashire and mobbed by pensioners in York. All the while he's learnt to love a country so near to his own yet so utterly unknown to most who assume that England is just one giant suburb dotted with roundabouts. His favourite place is the Northumberland coast, followed closely by the Trent House Soul Bar in Newcastle and his beloved Anfield in Liverpool.


**BELINDA DIXON**
**Channel Islands**

Carted, uncomplainingly, off to the Channel Islands each year on family holidays, Belinda has been visiting ever since, which now constitutes more years than she dares count. Those visits, and some stints working on the islands in her other role as a terribly serious news journalist, made this a dream job. Research by boat and bicycle was a first and she's decided all work in future will have to accommodate swims between fact-checking, sunset strolls and memorable, moonlit bike rides.


**GEORGE DUNFORD**
**Edinburgh, Southern Scotland, Highlands & Northern Islands**

Working as a cook on a remote island in Scotland during the mid-1990s gave George a thirst for the Highlands and islands that he was keen to slake with this trip. This time around he was attacked by bonxies, enjoyed the ceilidh of Skye Music Festival and never drank enough Irn Bru to chase away that hangover. When not living life to the hilt, George is a Melbourne-based writer who has co-authored various Lonely Planet guidebooks.


**ETAIN O'CARROLL** Oxfordshire, the Cotswolds & Gloucestershire

Coming from small-town Ireland, Etain found everything on childhood trips to England exotic: the motorway service stations serving gammon and pineapple; the sparkly pens in swanky Woolworths; the brightly lit supermarkets with endless aisles; and the cousins with funny accents. She barely registered the castles, abbeys and stately homes she saw in between. Now living in Oxford, the childish awe has become a long-term appreciation of the fine architecture, bucolic countryside and rich heritage of her adopted home. As a travel writer and photographer, Etain still gets her kicks from observing the subtle, everyday differences in life around the world, but cherished the opportunity to wax lyrical about her favourite spots in her own back yard.


**ANDY SYMINGTON**
**Central Scotland**

Andy is from Sydney but descended from proud Scottish stock, which mainly manifests itself in a love of malt, a debatable ginger colour to his facial hair and occasional appearances in a kilt. From childhood slogs up the M1 he graduated to making dubious road-trips around the firths in a disintegrating Mini Metro and thence to peddling whisky in darkest Leith. Whilst living there, he travelled widely around the country in search of the perfect dram, and, now resident in Spain, continues to visit as often as humanly possible. Andy is the author of several guidebooks and contributed to the previous edition of *Great Britain*, among other Lonely Planet titles.

**NIGEL WALLIS****Cardiff, South Wales, Mid Wales, North Wales**

Hailing from England's industrial north, Nigel's first encounter with Wales was on a long-forgotten camping trip with the Scouts. Since then he's made frequent trips to this ancient land, most often to scramble the rocky peaks of Snowdonia but lately also in exploration of the Pembrokeshire coast. Between these two extremes he can be found, every August, loitering in the Brecon Beacons at his favourite music festival. Nigel graduated from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne with a degree in English, after which he returned to his hometown of Leeds where various trades keep him solvent. This project is a milestone for Nigel – his first for Lonely Planet.