

A Yank's Guide to

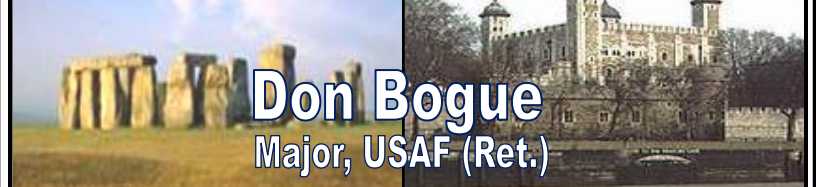


BRITAIN



England and Scotland

A brief compendium of knowledge both useful and trivial not found in other guidebooks



Don Bogue
Major, USAF (Ret.)



2013 Edition

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About the author

Don Bogue is a retired US Air Force pilot who has traveled to 17 countries and 45 states. He was stationed in the United Kingdom for three years as Chief of the Command and Control Division of the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing (USAFE) at RAF Upper Heyford and resided in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. He travels to England and Scotland every year.

He recognizes his Scottish heritage serving as Senior Drum Major for the Atholl Highlanders Pipes and Drums USA of Stone Mountain, Georgia (www.usahpd.com). He is the Senior Drum Major on Parade for the Blairsville [Georgia] Scottish Festival and Highland Games (blairsvillescottishfestival.org). He has been the Senior Drum Major for the Alabama Highland Games, the Loch Hartwell Highland Games and the Charleston Highland Games and has led parade divisions in Scotland on two occasions.

He has his own business – Don Bogue, Artificer – supplying theatrical props and special effects. (www.donbogue.net)



The author leading the massed pipe bands at the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games

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NOTES

About this guide

This began as a series of travel tips for members of the Atholl Highlanders Pipes and Drums USA prior to a trip to Scotland in 2005. It gradually evolved into its present form but greatly expanded, categorized and illustrated. Included are sections on food and drink, getting around, the weather, the monetary system and a glossary of terms, all based on more than 20 years experience living and traveling in the United Kingdom.

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GETTING THERE

When to go is your first big decision. Summer is the height of the tourist season when airfares and hotel tariffs can be very high. The lowest fares come out in November and December, and many hotels are begging for business then. The weather can be a bit damp and dreary at times, but many of the tourists are gone and the lines for tickets at the places you visit are dramatically reduced.

The choice of airline is up to you and/or your travel agent. For many years I have used British Airways exclusively, because the level of service and comfort - even in coach - is unsurpassed. And no, BA is not paying me to say this. You can sign up on their web site (www.ba.com) to receive alerts of special fare offers and package deals. Other airlines may sometimes offer slightly lower fares, but you generally get what you pay for with multiple stops and plane changes and, in some cases, a degree of [non-] service roughly on par with a cattle shipment.

For information on ground transportation from London airports to the city, see "London, Black Cabs and the Knowledge" on page 16. Direct, fast trains run hourly from London Kings Cross Station to Edinburgh and from London Euston Station to Glasgow. You can check train times, routes and schedules for all UK rail journeys online at: <http://ojp.nationalrail.co.uk/service/planjourney/search>

Glasgow International Airport is eight miles southwest of the city center. The nearest rail station is Paisley Gilmour Street, which is just one mile from the airport and easily reached by taxi or bus. There are direct rail services from Paisley Gilmour Street to Glasgow Central, Ayr and Clyde Coast destinations. Direct trains run from Glasgow Central to Edinburgh; or take a taxi (or walk the few blocks) from Glasgow Central to Glasgow Queen Street Station then take the train to Edinburgh.

Edinburgh Airport is eight miles west of the city. There is an Airlink airport shuttle bus to the city center which is much cheaper than a taxi fare (www.flybybus.com). The new Edinburgh tram system is under construction and due to start up next year. It will link the airport with Edinburgh Park Station, Haymarket Station and Princes Street. www.edinburghtrams.com

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to friends in the UK for years of guidance and for putting up with "the Yank".

David ("Dodger") and Rosemary Lodge
Mike and Sarah Wilkes
Peter Heritage
RSM (Ret) Harry and Joyce Knowles
Thomas Grotrian
Magnus Orr

All the regulars at the "Blue Boar" and the "Chequers"
...and sundry other folk encountered over the years.

MY FAVORITE ACCOMMODATIONS

Royal British Hotel

★★★

20 Princes Street
Edinburgh EH2 2AN
☎ 0131-556-4901

www.royalbritishhotel.com

The Grosvenor Hotel

★★★★

101 Buckingham Palace Road
(at Victoria Rail Station)
London SW1W 0SJ
☎ 0871-376-9038

www.Grosvenor-Hotel-London.co.uk

Crown and Cushion Hotel

★★★

23 High Street
Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire OX7 5AD
☎ 01608-643818

www.crownandcushionhotel.com

White Hart Hotel

★★★

1 Charlotte Street
Port Ellen, Isle of Islay
☎ 01496-300120

www.whiteharthotelIslay.com

Your choice of accommodations in the UK is another matter of personal taste. You will find a wide range of options including hostels, self-catering cottages, B&Bs, American hotel chains and so on up to 5-star palaces. You can often get a really good deal by checking hotel rates on the Internet, then calling the hotel directly and asking if they can do better on the rate. I recommend going with the best you can afford. My definition of "roughing it" is getting stuck in a two-star hotel – after all, I'm on holiday and I like to think I deserve better.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Your cell ("mobile") phone will not work in the UK unless it has GSM 1800 capability. If it has this frequency, it should work. Consult your owner's manual for details. Check with your mobile service provider for special roaming rates and their roaming partners in the UK. See www.mobileworldlive.com/maps/ You can also purchase a European SIM card with prepaid airtime for your phone which will offer lower roaming rates (www.onesimcard.com is one example).

If your phone is not GSM1800 capable, rental UK mobile phones are available from a number of companies in both the US and the UK. Here are some general calling guidelines (check with your service provider for specifics of your system): to call a US mobile phone in the UK from the US, just enter the 10-digit number. To call the US from the UK on your US phone or to call another US mobile phone in the UK from your US mobile (also in the UK), enter 001 plus the 10-digit number. To call a local UK number from your mobile, enter the number as listed.

When calling UK numbers from the US, whether on land line or mobile, you do not have to use the "0" after the country code, e.g., to call 01608-64523 you would enter 011-44-1608-64523.

Satellite phones, while more expensive, eliminate many of the procedures outlined above.

American walkie-talkies (FRS or GMRS) will work in the UK, but operating them is illegal and subject to very stiff penalties. See www.walkie-talkie-radio.co.uk/walkie-talkie-international-issues.htm

FOOD AND DRINK

Many hotels in the UK include a “full English breakfast” in the room rate. This will usually consist of bacon, eggs, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms, potatoes, sausages (“bangers”), toast and, perhaps, black pudding (blood pudding). British bacon is more like Canadian or Danish bacon, very lean and not smoked. American-style bacon is called “streaky bacon”.

Restaurants often have light brown “demerara” sugar, rather than the white sugar you are accustomed to. Pepper is generally white rather than black, and contrary to American practice, the pepper shaker is usually the one with more holes. Don’t be surprised if you see “baked beans on toast” offered on the menu.

If you ask for a biscuit with your breakfast, you’ll get a quizzical look and a cookie. The closest thing to an American biscuit is a scone, which is denser and sweeter. Potato chips are “crisps” (in more flavors than you can imagine) and French fries are “chips”. If you want your coffee black, you’ll generally have to specify that, inasmuch as coffee and tea are usually served half-and-half with milk. Don’t even ask for iced tea – you won’t get it. The Brits drink their tea hot and are adamant about it. You may encounter “British Rail tea” or “railway tea” on a rail journey. This is simply dreadful hot, strong, bitter tea made with too many industrial-strength teabags steeped too long in large pots of unnaturally scalding-hot water, served with milk and sugar cubes (one lump or two?). An alternative method of preparation, for a single cup, is to stir the milk, sugar, teabag and super-heated water together for that uniquely generic taste, available at less-fine station cafés and on the train. It can also be used to develop film or to remove paint in a pinch.

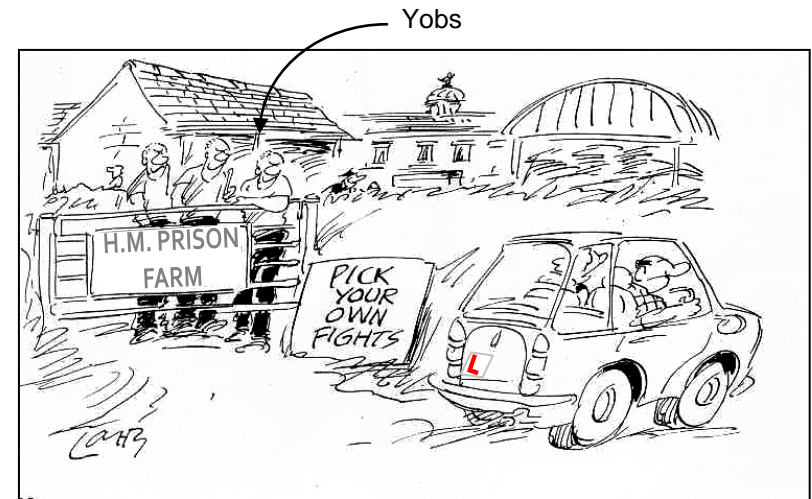
Traditional ales are served not warm as many Americans believe, but at cellar temperature, usually 40-45°F. If you don’t want a full pint, you can order a half-pint, e.g., “half a bitter, please”. And yes (shudder!) you can now get Budweiser on tap (“draught”) in most pubs, yet another nail in the coffin of the British Empire. Scotch whisky is called simply “whisky” as opposed to American or Irish whiskey (note spelling difference). A single measure of whisky or other spirits (25 ml) is called a “small”, e.g., “a small whisky, please” and a double is a “large”. “Lemonade” is vaguely similar to 7-UP™, and is an essential ingredient in a “shandy”, an appalling half-and-half mix with lager. Strong or “winter” ales are available from November through March. One pint of these will put most people over the legal limit to drive.

English

wog *
wrinklies
Yank
yob or yobbo
Zed
zig-zag bend
999

American

foreigner, esp. from Africa
parents or persons over 40
American
hooligan, esp. at football matches
last letter of the alphabet
S-curve
UK emergency number, cf. to 911



English

store
 surgery
 suspenders
 swede
 ta
 ta-ta
 tailback
 takeaway [food]
 tannoy
 tap
 tart [oneself] up
 tatties
 taxi rank
 tea [as a meal]

thick
 [the] Thunderer
 tick
 Time, gentlemen, please
 tin
 toad in the hole

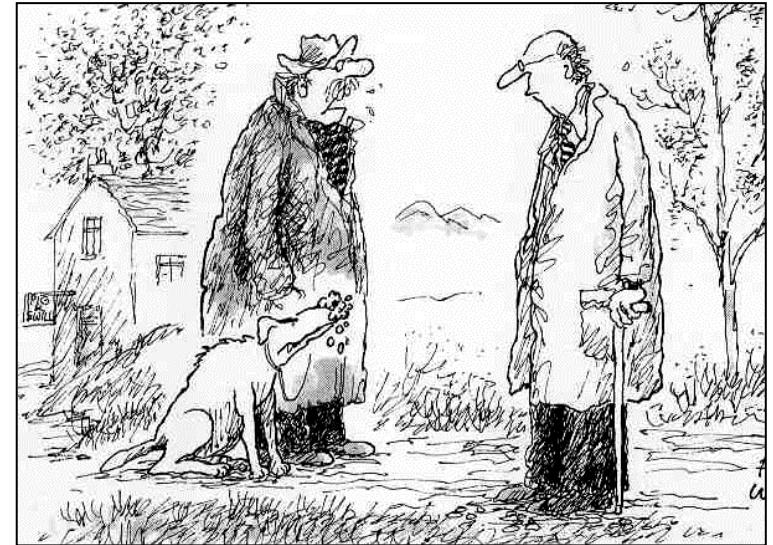
toastie or toasty
 toffee apple
 tomato sauce
 torch
 tram
 tramp
 treacle
 trolley
 V-sign *
 varnish remover
 verge
 vest
 waistcoat [WESS-kit]
 wally or twit

wardrobe
 way out
 wee hairy beasties (coos)
 wellies or wellingtons
 white mice

American

department store
 doctor's office
 garters
 rutabaga
 thanks
 bye; see you later
 traffic jam
 takeout, to go
 loudspeaker
 faucet
 dress up
 potatoes [Scotland]
 taxi stand
 light late afternoon meal ("Eat your tea")
 slow, stupid
 The Times (London newspaper)
 check mark or to so mark
 closing time at the pub
 can
 sausage cooked in batter, vaguely similar to a corn dog
 toasted sandwich
 caramel apple
 ketchup
 flashlight
 streetcar
 bum, hobo
 molasses or thick syrup
 shopping or baggage cart
 obscene gesture; the bird, flipping off
 nail polish remover
 road shoulder
 undershirt
 vest
 idiot (in the extreme, a "proper Charlie")
 armoire, closet
 exit
 highland cattle [Scotland]
 rubber boots
 tampons

It's perfectly all right to take your children into the pub (public house, boozey, local) – these are gathering places where whole families (and sometimes the family dog as well) go out for the evening. If you want ice in your drink, you may have to ask for it. The barman may actually ask, "With ice?" when he realizes – usually simultaneously with your ordering your drink – that you're a Yank.



"Rabid, my foot – he's just been for a pint"

If your budget is tight, avoid the fancy restaurants and try "pub grub", particularly the daily specials. You'll get really good food at a much lower price. Various savory (meat) pies include steak and kidney, chicken with mushroom and shepherd's pie. Pork pies (with Colman's English Mustard) are really good – and portable. A "ploughman's lunch" is excellent value for money. Try bangers and mash (sausages and mashed potatoes), or faggots (meatballs) and mash. Do not feed the pub dog no matter how much he begs. Get your haggis fix in Edinburgh at the Abbotsford in Rose Street. If you absolutely must have American fast food, there's Pizza Hut, KFC, Wendy (Wendy's), McDonald's and Burger King. There are also numerous steak house chains and snack stands ("buffets") around, as well as Chinese take-aways, Indian restaurants and chip shops. There are "potato pubs" which serve baked ("jacket") potatoes with a mind-boggling choice of toppings. One of these is a meal in itself.

GETTING AROUND

If you'll be traveling around the country, consider a BritRail pass. These are excellent value for money, and family or group passes are available. You can get consecutive day passes for 3, 4, 8, 15 or 22 days, or 1 month of rail travel in England, Scotland and Wales. Flexible passes are for 3, 4, 8 or 15 days of travel within a two-month period, first or standard class. A Senior First Class pass is available for only a few dollars more than standard class. All passes are valid for travel on the Gatwick or Heathrow Express. Rail passes must be purchased prior to US departure – they cannot be sold in the UK. Discounted (up to 20%) off-season passes are available for travel November through February.

See www.BritRail.com or www.britainontrack.com



UK high-speed train

You can reserve seats for upcoming train travel at most stations. Railway passenger cars are called “carriages” or “coaches”, and are either first or second (“standard”) class. They are marked with a “1” or “2” near the end of the carriage. On some trains only first class is so marked, and some local trains are all standard class. A one-way ticket is called a “single”; a round-trip is a “return”. The conductor is the “guard”. You may notice that much of your rail journey appears to be in a ditch, and it is – many of the railways were built in the old pre-Victorian barge canals. The canals were built by “navigators”, hence the term “navvy” for a laborer. British Rail *nee* British Railways was privatized in 1993.

A “bus” is what you ride around the city. For longer trips or touring, you would board a “coach”. These are not only comfortable; some of them are downright luxurious with TV, stewards, snacks, beverages and the morning newspapers.

English

push chair
queue
'round the bend
rugger
salad cream

saloon car
Sellotape, sticky tape
semi-skimmed milk
serviette
shire
[at] sixes and sevens
shop (n.)

American

stroller
line of people or to so line up
crazy, insane
English rugby
term sometimes used for
mayonnaise
sedan
Scotch™ tape
2% milk
table napkin or paper napkin
county
confused, mixed up
store



shop assistant
silver foil
sleeping policeman
snogging
soldiers
Sod's Law
solicitor
spending on the never-
never
spotted dick
stalls [theatre]
starters
stick

sales clerk
aluminum foil
speed bump (“speed retarder”)
kissing
toast cut into strips for children
Murphy's Law
civil lawyer
credit card purchase

steamed suet pudding with currants
orchestra seats
first course of a meal or appetizers
abuse, criticism

English	American
moggie	cat
MP	Member of Parliament (House of Commons)
mucking about	fooling around
napkin	diaper or sanitary napkin (“sanitary towel”)
nappy	diaper
neeps	turnips [Scotland]
nick	to steal or to arrest; also a jail
not half	to an extreme degree: “It’s not half hot today”
nought	zero
noughts and crosses	tic-tac-toe
nowt	nothing: “I’ve done sweet nowt all day”
OAP	Old Age Pensioner, retired person
off-license or packy	liquor store (“spirits merchant”)
Old Bailey	Central Criminal Court [London]
Old Blighty	England
Old Lady of Threadneedle Street	Bank of England [London]
Paki *	anyone or anything from the Indian subcontinent
payment card	debit card
PC (police constable), bobby [London], copper, Mr. Plod	police officer (a WPC is a female police officer)
pecker	courage, spirit: “Keep your pecker up”
peckish	somewhat hungry
perisher	exasperating person or bratty child
pillar box	red, cylindrical mail box
pissed	drunk
plaice	fish commonly served with chips
plimsolls or trainers	sneakers
plonk	cheap wine
PM	Prime Minister
[the] Pond	Atlantic Ocean
posh	luxurious, elegant
post	mail
postcode	ZIP code
power point	electrical outlet
pram	baby carriage
publican	pub proprietor, usually called “landlord”
pudding	general term for dessert

And then there are taxis. Lots of taxis. Streets chock-a-block full of taxis – except when you need one. If you do manage to hail a cab, make sure it’s not a minicab or gypsy cab, which are unlicensed and unregulated. They generally look like some bloke’s family car with or without a “taxi” sign, as opposed to the big taxis, sometimes called “black cabs” (see “London, Black Cabs and The Knowledge” on page 16).


If you choose to drive in the UK, you’ll need an International Driving Permit, available at AAA offices in the US, and before you go you should download and study the Highway Code, which is available online in PDF. See www.direct.gov.uk/highwaycode

Check with your insurance company to be sure your policy covers driving a rental (“hire”) car in the UK. Next, remember that they drive on the left there. That’s **LEFT**. Keep reminding yourself of that every few minutes. Primary (A) and secondary (B) roads are mostly two-lane (“single carriageways”), while freeways (“motorways”) are “dual carriageways”. There are numerous one-lane (“single track”) roads in the countryside, but they have wide spots (“laybys”) every so often where vehicles can pass each other. Passing is referred to as “overtaking”. There are very few long stretches of straight road in England and most of those are built over old Roman roads. The **AA** (*Automobile Association*, cf. to AAA) **Road Atlas** is an invaluable aid in navigating the roads and is available at most newsagents and booksellers.

Be prepared for anything – you might come up behind a steam tractor on some country lane. In Scotland, sheep and/or cattle (“coos”) may sometimes block the road. In traffic circles (“roundabouts”), yield to traffic coming from your right. You should plan on an average speed of no more than 30 mph for the trip, even if you use motorways. Gasoline (“petrol”) is *very* expensive (“dear”). At last check it was £1.35 or more per litre – that’s more than US\$8 a gallon, and diesel (“derv”) costs even more. Still want to drive yourself around?

Cars there have lots of differently named parts: “backlight” – rear window; “bonnet” – hood; “boot” – trunk; “demister” – defroster; “fascia” – dash; “gearbox” – transmission; “handbrake” – parking brake; “headlamps” – headlights; “hood” – convertible top; “hooter” – horn; “mudguard” or “wing” – fender; “tyres” – tires; “windscreen” – windshield. A truck is called a “lorry”; an 18-wheeler is an “artic” (“articulated lorry”).

Artics with an additional trailer are called “juggernauts”. Then there are skip lorries, tipping lorries, bowsers and a host of other specialized vehicles. Travel trailers (campers) are “caravans”. And you thought there wasn’t a language barrier.

The sidewalk is referred to as “the pavement”. Pedestrian crossings are called “zebra (pronounced ZEB-rah, rather than ZEE-bra) crossings” from the pattern of stripes painted on the street. They are also sometimes called “pelican crossings”, for reasons known only to the Ministry of Transport. Motorists are required to stop for pedestrians in these crossings, which may be marked by “Belisha beacons” – flashing orange globes on striped poles. In larger cities, “Look Right” is sometimes stenciled on the curb (“kerb”) to remind foreigners that traffic indeed drives on the left in the UK. You should be especially wary of *any* vehicles with  placards – these are driven by “learner drivers”.



Zebra crossing with Belisha beacons

Although the Brits drive on the left side of the road, when walking they tend to keep to the right. You’ll see this on sidewalks, stairs and escalators.

English

fag
fancy
Finnan Haddie
fire brigade
flat
flyover
football
free house
frog or froggie *
haggis

hair lacquer
HM (Her Majesty)
High Street
[on] holiday
hoover
ice cream cornet
inverted commas
ironmonger’s
jacket potato
jam sandwich

jumper
kippers
kitchen towel
knackered
knees-up
knickers
knock you up
ladder
lashings
launderette
left luggage office
lighting up time
lip salve
lost property office
macintosh
maize or sweet corn
mash
met office

American

cigarette
to like or to want (“Fancy a pint?”)
boned, salted and smoked haddock
fire department
apartment
overpass
soccer
independently-owned pub
Frenchman, or anything French
traditional Scottish dish, served with neeps and tatties
hair spray
the Queen
main street
[on] vacation
vacuum cleaner, or to use one
ice cream cone
quotation marks
hardware store
baked potato
white police car with orange or green stripe (also called “panda car” or “Zed-car”)
sweater
smoked herring
paper towel
tired
a really good party
underpants
give you a wake-up call
run in a stocking or pantyhose (“tights”)
lots of, abundance
laundromat
baggage room (railway, airport)
time when car headlights must be on
Chap Stick™
lost and found
raincoat
American corn
mashed potatoes
the weather forecasters

English

booking
braces
brackets
broly
brothel creepers

buffet car
bugger off, sod off
bum
call box
cinema
chemist or chemist's
child minder
chippie or chippy
cling film
cock a snook
corn
corner shop
[sewing] cotton
cotton buds
cotton wool
courgette
cracker
cream cracker
cream tea

cuppa
daft
dialling code
directory enquiries
diversion
DIY
dogsbody
[in] donkey's years
dress circle [theatre]
dressing gown
dustbin; dustman
elastic band
electronic post
estate car
eye-tie *
face flannel

American

reservation
suspenders
parentheses
umbrella
quiet, thick-soled shoes or, ironically,
large clodhoppers
railway car serving snacks and drinks
go away, get lost, beat it
butt, derriere, fanny
phone booth or kiosk
movie theatre
drug store
baby sitter
fish-and-chips shop, or a carpenter
Saran WrapTM
to thumb one's nose
barley, wheat, rye, oats
convenience store, ("newsagent")
thread
Q-tipsTM
cotton balls
zucchini
a Christmas noisemaker
soda cracker, saltine
tea and scones with clotted [thick]
cream ("Devonshire cream") and jam
a cup of tea
silly, foolish
area code
telephone information
detour
do-it-yourself store (Home DepotTM)
gofer, errand boy
a long time
mezzanine seats
bathrobe
rubbish container; rubbish collector
rubber band
e-mail
station wagon
anyone or anything from Italy
washcloth

A "subway" in the UK is a pedestrian tunnel under a street. The London Underground transit system is called "the tube" or "underground". It is extensive, generally fast and quite easy to use. A Visitor Oyster Card is good value for money. It doesn't expire, it can be reloaded and it allows you unlimited travel on tubes and buses while avoiding the queues at ticket windows and kiosks. You can even order your card online and it will be mailed to you before your departure (<http://visitorshop.tfl.gov.uk/>). You can also loan your card to friends who are traveling to London. Londoners took refuge from the aerial blitz of World War II in the underground stations, and sometimes spent days at a time on the platforms. You can, too, if there happens to be a strike ("industrial action") going on.



London Underground

For a good stretch of the legs, there are numerous footpaths throughout the country. Maps of these paths are available at most newsagents or booksellers. For the truly adventurous, there is a popular hiking trail from Land's End in the southwest of England all the way to John o' Groats in the north of Scotland – 874 miles.

Many towns have shops where you can rent ("hire") bicycles. You can also rent motorcycles, scooters or mopeds if your International Driving Permit is endorsed for them.

WILL IT WORK?

UK electricity is 240 volts, 50 Hz as opposed to US 120 volts, 60 Hz. Any electrical devices you plan to take that are not dual voltage will require a transformer with a UK plug. Dual-voltage items will require only a UK plug adapter. Motorized devices (e.g., hair dryers) will run slightly slower on the lower frequency. Most hotels have a dual-voltage receptacle labeled “shavers only” in the bathroom, and many have permanently installed hair dryers. Adapters and transformers are available at Radio Shack, Target, Wal-Mart and other stores, or go to www.world-import.com/plugs.htm



UK 3-prong plug adapter

ETIQUETTE

Tipping is not a customary practice in the UK. However, if you've been in the pub all evening (and had good service) you may, when settling your bill, tell your barman or server to “put one in for yourself”. Restaurants may include “service” in the bill for large groups. Some hotels have a jar or box on the reception desk for “staff gratuities”, which are divided equally amongst all the staff.

The Brits regard themselves as British, not European, and are generally a polite lot (“yobbos” excepted). They are the only people in the world who will apologize to you if *you* accidentally step on *their* toes. They also love to put up signs in construction areas to “apologise for the inconvenience”. Similarly, they appreciate good manners, such as “a pint of Guinness, please”, instead of “gimme a Guinness”. “Please” and “thank you” go a long way; you may even get a free top-up on your drink. By the bye, don't refer to that pouch slung around your waist as a “fanny pack” (“fanny” is slang for, ah, female genitalia). The Brits call it a “bum bag”.

ENGLISH vs. AMERICAN

Yes, we are two nations separated by a common language, as George Bernard Shaw observed. But how common is it? Booksellers in the UK sell books and learning tapes in all the expected languages: French, German, Italian, Swahili – and “American”. One of the first things you'll notice is the spelling. Words ending in “-or” are spelt (yes, that's right, too) with “-our”: colour, neighbour, harbour, flavour. Most words that Americans spell with “-ize” and “-zation”, the Brits spell “-ise” and “-sation”. Then there is the rather uniquely British way of using collective nouns. American usage treats collective nouns as singular: Congress is, the staff offers, the family has, and so on. British usage prefers the plural: Parliament are, the staff offer, the family have. Exceptions to this exist, as you might expect.

Note: some of the terms (★) in the following list are derogatory, disparaging or downright insulting. Their inclusion implies neither endorsement nor condemnation of the terms but is done merely so that you may be aware of them.

English

American

account card	charge card or credit card
afters	dessert
agony aunt	advice columnist, cf. to Dear Abby
aluminium	aluminum
American muffin	English muffin
aubergine	eggplant
Auld Reekie	Edinburgh
Auntie Beeb, the Beeb	BBC – British Broadcasting Company
baby's dummy	pacifier
bairn, wee bairn	small child [Scotland]
banger	link sausage or an old, beat-up car
barmy	crazy, daft
barrister	trial lawyer
beefburger	hamburger, served on a bun (“bap”)
[a] bit of kip	nap, sleep
bitter	dark, unhopped British ale
bloaters	dried, salted herring
block of flats	apartment building
bloke	chap, guy
bloody	generic, all-purpose swearword
Bob's your uncle	presto, voilà, there you are
boffin	scientist, nerd, geek

St. Andrews – “the home of golf”. To play here, you must enter a lottery for tickets and trust to luck.
University of St. Andrews (1413), Scotland’s oldest university

Stirling – site of the Battle of Stirling Bridge (1297) where William Wallace (“Braveheart”) defeated Edward I
Church of the Holy Rude – 1567 coronation site of James VI of Scotland (James I of England)
Cambuskenneth Abbey ruins (1140)
Stirling Castle – fell to Edward I following siege (1304)
Museum of the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders
Chapel Royal – coronation site (1543) of Mary, Queen of Scots
Wallace Monument



TIME MARCHES ON

Time displayed on airport, tube and railway station clocks and departure boards is in 24-hour format. In conversation, however, time is usually expressed in 12-hour form. The UK is on Greenwich Mean Time (GMT or Zulu time for ex-GIs) from the end of October to the end of March. “British Summer Time”, similar to our Daylight Saving Time, runs from the end of March to the end of October, and is one hour ahead of GMT. In any case, the UK is almost always 5 hours ahead of US Eastern Time. You may hear 30 minutes past the hour expressed as “half...”, e.g., “half eight” would be 8:30.

WHEN NATURE CALLS

Public toilets are abundant and go by a number of names: the loo, the bog, the Ladies, the Gents, the necessary, lav, lavatory, the WC (water closet), public convenience and many more too impolite to be included here. Some places such as railway stations and airports may have pay toilets (usually around 30p). Originally pay toilets cost a penny, hence the term “spend a penny” for going to the bathroom. British toilets are a marvel unto themselves. Considering that the modern flush toilet originated there, one wonders why they never went on to perfect it. Some toilets require multiple pumps on the flush lever to get the desired results. In older buildings, you may still find toilets with the elevated tank and pull cord. These actually work better than most of the more modern units.



THE BRITISH WEATHER

The only consistent thing about the weather in the UK is its inconsistency. A popular saying, “Britain has no climate, only weather”, pretty well sums it up. Edinburgh in the summer will usually have highs in the upper 60s to low 70s, with lows in the low to mid-50s. London can be much warmer and quite uncomfortable if your hotel is not air-conditioned, and many are not. On the other hand, you could as easily encounter damp, chilly weather for days on end. The moral to this cautionary tale is to be prepared for anything. See www.weather.co.uk

London	December	July
Average maximum	45°F	72°F
Average minimum	34°F	52°F
Average precipitation	3.1 in	1.8 in

Edinburgh	December	July
Average maximum	44°F	66°F
Average minimum	35°F	51°F
Average precipitation	2.4 in	2.5 in

“The British Winter” – when many folks take off for holidays in sunnier climes like Spain, Portugal, Greece and the south of France – can be wet, cold and gray interspersed with crystal-clear, crisp days. A good waterproof windbreaker with a hood and a couple of wool sweaters are well worth taking along. Wool has the added advantage of keeping you warm even when it is wet.

If you plan to attend the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo you will want to take a sweater (“jumper”) and/or a windbreaker (“anorak”) with you. Even in August it can get quite chilly toward the end of the show what with the wind coming in right off the North Sea, and the show goes on rain or shine. You can rent seat cushions at the Tattoo for a “quid” (£1) – a good investment, as the seats are hard (and narrow). See www.edintattoo.co.uk

The weather reporter (“presenter”) on the TV (“telly, boob tube, the box, goggle box”) or radio (sometimes still called “the wireless”) will give the temperature in degrees Celsius. Here are a couple of quick conversions which are reasonably accurate ($\pm 2^\circ$) in the 30°-70°F range: $(^\circ\text{C} \times 2) + 30 = ^\circ\text{F}$ $(^\circ\text{F} - 30) \div 2 = ^\circ\text{C}$

Barometric pressure is reported in millibars rather than inches of mercury: 1013.20 mb = 29.92 in. hg. $(\text{mb} \div 33.835 = \text{in. hg})$

Royal Mile – runs from the Castle to Holyrood Palace
 Royal Mile Whiskies – huge selection of single malts
 Geoffrey Tailor – occasional unadvertised bargains
 Whisky Heritage Centre
 Sir Walter Scott monument

Falkirk – Edward I (“Longshanks”) defeated William Wallace (1298)
 Falkirk Wheel – world’s only rotating boatlift

Glencoe – site of the 1602 massacre of the MacDonaldis by the Campbells

Glasgow
 Piping Museum
 Glasgow Cathedral
 Tennant’s brewery

Inverness – Loch Ness

Isle of Islay (pronounced “eye-lah”) – wild, rugged isle in the Hebrides; eight distilleries and golf at Machrie (1891)

Killiecrankie – Pass of Killiecrankie: Jacobites, led by John Graham (Bonnie Dundee) defeated William III (1689)

Perth – Scotland’s capital from the 11th century to 1437
 In 1559, John Knox preached a famous sermon against idolatry at the Church of Saint John the Baptist, the oldest (c.1440) building remaining in the city.

Roslin – Rosslyn Chapel (15th cent.) exquisite carvings and mysterious Knights Templar lore



Roslyn Chapel

Oxford – Oxford University (12th cent.); lots of bookstores

Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire – Shakespeare country;
Shakespeare's birthplace; Ann Hathaway's cottage

Warwick, Warwickshire

Warwick Castle –the finest medieval castle in England; nice
armoury

Scotland

Aviemore – ski the Cairn Gorm, the UK's second highest peak
(4084 ft.); distillery tours

Ayr – the heart of Robert Burns country

Bannockburn – monument to the 1314 battle when Robert the Bruce
defeated Edward II and gained Scottish independence

Blair Atholl – Blair Castle (13th cent.), seat of the Dukes of Atholl; home
of the Atholl Highlanders (the only private army in Britain)

Culloden – site of the 1746 defeat of the Jacobites under Bonnie
Prince Charlie (Charles Edward Stuart)

Dundee – center of power for Kenneth I, first Scottish king (9th cent.)
Discovery – ship of Capt Robert Scott, Antarctic explorer

Edinburgh

Edinburgh Castle - armoury, Stone of Destiny (Stone of Scone)

Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (August)

Royal Palace of Holyroodhouse – residence (1561-1567) of Mary,
Queen of Scots and the Queen's official residence in Scotland

Pubs – The Scotsman, in Cockburn Street - live piping

Guildford Arms – one of the oldest pubs in the city (1841)

Sheep Heid Inn – oldest pub in Scotland (1360)

Rose Street – *lots* of good pubs

The Abbotsford – good food, large selection of whiskies

The Saltire – nice atmosphere

Brecks – good food and atmosphere

Auld Hundred – good food and atmosphere

The Cat and Bagpipes – interesting clientele

Princes Street Gardens

Romanes & Paterson – good prices on woolens and cashmere

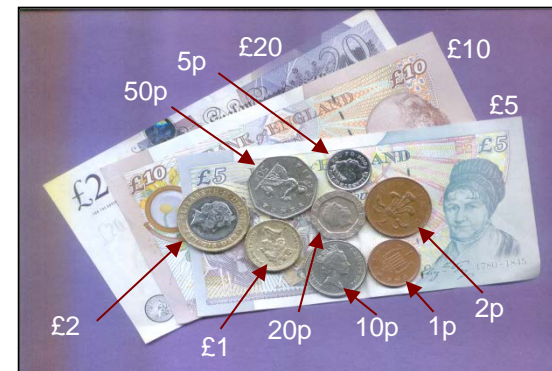
COIN OF THE REALM

Get your money from an ATM (“cashpoint” or “till machine”) rather than a currency exchange – the rates are much better. Many ATMs in the UK do not have letters on the keys, so if your PIN (“pass code”) is a word, you'll have to learn the numbers associated with it. Check with your bank to be sure your ATM card will work there, and if they are partnered with a UK bank, e.g., Bank of America is partnered with Barclay's Bank. Such partnerships generally result in lower or no ATM fees. There will be a charge or commission for the currency conversion, but it will be substantially less than at currency exchanges on the street.

The British monetary system is based on the Pound Sterling (£) and was decimalized in 1971, meaning you don't have to muck about with guineas, shillings, farthings and sixpence.

Currency you will likely be dealing with is £5, £10 and £20 notes (the £1 note was abolished in 1984). Each denomination of banknote is a different color and they vary in size, being slightly larger with increasing value. A £5 note is called a “fiver”; a £10 note is a “tenner”. Pounds are frequently referred to as “quid”. In Scotland, you may find that banknotes are issued by the Bank of Scotland, rather than the Bank of England. Not to worry, they spend just as well throughout the kingdom.

Coinage is 1 pence (p) – also called a “penny”, 2p (“tuppence”), 5p, 10p, 20p, 50p, £1 (also called a “sovereign”) and £2. You may on rare occasions hear 5p referred to as “one bob” (the old shilling). The coins are heavy and accumulate in your pocket at an absolutely alarming rate, although you never seem to have enough coin at any one time to buy a pint. All prices in the UK include VAT (value added tax or sales tax), so there's no add-on at the cash register (“till”).



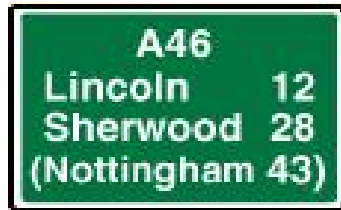
OTHER ODDITIES

In most public buildings and hotels, the first floor is the ground floor, e.g., G, 1, 2, 3 and so on. Hotel room numbering generally follows no logical pattern whatsoever. Elevators (“lifts”) in some older hotels can be quite small, holding only two or three passengers without luggage. They can also be excruciatingly slow.

Your toast at breakfast will likely come to the table in a little metal toast rack. This is yet another questionable British innovation, using the laws of thermodynamics to help your toast get cold faster. You will, however, usually have real butter to slather on it, although the butter will be icy cold and somewhat reluctant to spread on the cold toast.



Although the UK uses metric measurements (litres, kilos, millibars), distances on roads and speed limits are posted in miles.



Ales and beer are served in imperial pints (20 oz., rather than the US 16 oz.) or halves. Body weight is still sometimes measured in “stones” (1 stone = 14 pounds), e.g., “Blimey, ’e must weigh 20 stone”.

Brits have a somewhat different concept of “old” and “new”. For example, the “New Forest” in Hampshire was created by William the Conqueror in 1079 as a royal hunting ground.

South

Canterbury – Canterbury cathedral (11th cent)
site of the murder of Thomas á Becket (1170)

Portsmouth – *HMS Victory*, Lord Nelson’s flagship at Trafalgar (1805)
Mary Rose, Henry VIII’s flagship (1511 –1545)

Stonehenge – near Salisbury, Wiltshire

Southwest

Bath, Somerset – beautifully restored Roman baths

Glastonbury Abbey (ruins, 7th cent.) -- Glastonbury, Somerset
legendary burial place of King Arthur and Guinevere

Tintagel, Cornwall – Tintagel Castle (1145)
“Merlin’s Cave”, the place where legend holds that the infant
Arthur (“the once and future king”) was found

Midlands

Avebury, Wiltshire – ancient stone circle

Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire
birthplace of Winston Churchill; home of the Duke of
Marlborough

Banbury, Oxfordshire – see the Banbury Cross (“Ride a cock horse to
Banbury Cross...”)

Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire
almost too-picturesque village on the River Windrush (photo on
cover)

Coventry, West Midlands – site of Lady Godiva’s ride (11th cent.)
Coventry Cathedral (1043)
Coombe Abbey (12th cent.) – great medieval banquet

Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

“Gateway to the Cotswolds”; market town. The word “chipping”
(variants: cheap, chip) denotes a market place.

King John granted charter to hold a market (1205)

Parish church of St Mary the Virgin, 12th cent.

Best pub – The Blue Boar (1683) my “local” (photo on cover)

The Chequers – oldest pub in town (16th cent.)

Rollright Stones, stone circle predating Stonehenge, nearby

Despite all this, London really is a great place to visit. One of the best ways to get an overview is to book the Big Bus tour. The ticket is good for 24 hours, and you can hop on and off the bus at will. Of course, depending on where you stay you may have to take a black cab to get to the bus tour. See www.bigbustours.com

SOME PLACES TO GO AND THINGS TO SEE IN THE UK

An admittedly abbreviated list based on personal experience

London

British Museum

Buckingham Palace – the royal standard is flown when the Queen is in residence

Covent Garden – setting for the opening of “My Fair Lady”

Downing Street – No. 10 is the PM’s residence

Greenwich Observatory

Hampton Court Palace – Henry VIII’s favorite

Harrod’s – mecca for shoppers

Houses of Parliament

“Big Ben” is the largest bell in the Westminster clock tower

Hyde Park – Speaker’s Corner

Imperial War Museum

Kew Gardens

London Eye – world’s largest observation wheel

Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum

The Monument – near Pudding Lane, site of the Great Fire of 1666

National Gallery

National Portrait Gallery

Petticoat Lane – huge open-air market

Piccadilly Circus – the statue on the fountain is “Eros”

Royal Air Force Museum

Royal Albert Hall

St Paul’s Cathedral (17th cent.)

Tower Bridge – this is *not* the old London Bridge, which is in Arizona

Tower of London - Norman keep built by William the Conqueror (1078)

be sure to see the armoury and crown jewels

Pub near Tower Green: “The Hung, Drawn and Quartered”

Trafalgar Square – Admiral Lord Nelson monument

Victoria and Albert Museum (“the V and A”)

Westminster Abbey

Westminster Cathedral

Windsor Castle

DIVERSIONS

A “diversion” in the UK is a roadway detour, but here we’re talking about amusements, specifically pub games. The first pub game most Yanks think of is darts, and it is by far the most popular. There are even televised darts championships which rank right up there with golf for pulse-pounding excitement. Many pubs have their own darts teams that travel to other pubs for competitions. Other games include quoits, skittles, nine men’s morris, cribbage, tiddlywinks, snooker, billiards, draughts (checkers) and shove ha’penny. Almost every pub will have at least one slot machine (“fruit machine”) or poker machine.

In summer, the games move from mere eccentricity toward absolute lunacy with conger cuddling, Portuguese sardine racing and rhubarb thrashing, to name a few. One of the most unusual games I’ve encountered (mostly in rural pubs) is “dwile flonking”, where a blindfolded person hurls or “flonks” a beer-soaked cloth (“dwile”) at his opponents. He uses a “flonking stick” or “driveller” to do this. Then there’s “wellie wanging”, a contest to see who can throw a rubber boot the farthest distance. I’ll leave any discussion of the dubious sport called “ferret down the trousers” until another time.



Dwile Flonking

LONDON, BLACK CABS AND “THE KNOWLEDGE”

A brief primer for those making their first journey to London

Your first decision upon arriving in London is how to get from the airport into the city. From Gatwick, the only sensible choice is the Gatwick Express to Victoria Station. It's a 30-minute ride and the trains run every 15 minutes. Purchase your ticket before boarding – it will cost much more if purchased on the train. From Heathrow, you have the Heathrow Express to Paddington Station, arguably the world's most expensive train ride (per minute) or the tube (“Underground”). **Note:** a BritRail pass is valid for travel on the Heathrow or Gatwick Express. There are also coach lines from the airports to the city.

In any case, your other option is the world's second most expensive taxi ride (Tokyo is first). For only the price of a round trip flight from London to Lisbon on EasyJet, you can easily zip into central London in just about an hour – depending on traffic, roadworks and a host of other factors. The Brits like to brag that their roads are the most congested in Europe. This seems to be a peculiarly British trait: they simply burst with pride telling you that something is the worst/most dangerous, highest taxed/most expensive, least efficient/wettest.

But I digress: back to the taxi. This is referred to as a “black cab”, to distinguish it from minicabs or gypsy cabs, which you should avoid at all costs. And “black” is a purely generic term – once upon a time they were all black but now they come in every color and hue imaginable, and some are emblazoned with advertising. Highly regulated by law, the “black cab” must not only be clean, in good running order and so on, but the roof must also be high enough to allow a gentleman to enter without having to remove his top hat (no kidding!).



Black cab

The black cab driver has an opinion on any and every conceivable issue. Fortunately there is a glass partition - which can be closed - between his rantings and you. He also has a comprehensive knowledge of the streets of London, acquired by zipping about the city on a moped for six months. “The Knowledge”, as it is known in the trade, is part of the exam cabbies have to take to get their license.

You will appreciate how difficult “The Knowledge” is once you realize just how large and confusing London really is. When Londoners speak of “South London”, they mean south of the Thames, but “North London” seems to be north of Hyde Park; and the West End (not to be confused with West London) is in the center. “The City”, which is the financial district, is to the east of the West End and west of the East End, which is most of east London. Got it?

Don't assume there's any rationale to postcodes, either. All the SEs are south of the river but the SWs are on both sides. And NW3 is next to NW1, N4 is next to N19, which is next to N6, which is next to NW5. More confusing are street names, which can be roads, high streets, mews, crescents, terraces, closes, walks, groves, gardens, drives, hills, places, rows, squares or ways. All of these can have the same name, such as Warwick Place, Warwick Gardens, etc. And you can have more than one with an identical name – there are Warwick Places in W5, W9 and SW1.

So, armed with your trusty **A-to-Z** (pronounced “A to Zed”) **Street Guide**, it should be no problem finding an address, except you can travel for a mile on a London road without seeing any sign indicating which one it is, making maps somewhat useless. And if signs do exist, they may be hanging from posts, hung on garden fences or stuck high up on buildings, where they are obscured by scaffolding. Another thing – many streets change their names several times, such as Oxford Street which becomes New Oxford Street, then Bloomsbury Way, Theobald's Road, Clerkenwell Road and finally Old Street.

Good luck on finding the number, too. Most streets have even numbers on one side and odd on the other, but some have consecutive numbers up one side, then they turn around at the end and come back down the other side, so number one is across the road from number 99. And there is no convention about at which end the numbers begin, i.e., always on the south or west.