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► EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Land and Climate. England is located in the British Isles, which include Great Britain, Ireland, and several smaller islands in the area. England, Scotland, and Wales are located on the island of Great Britain. Politically, Great Britain and Northern Ireland comprise the country known as the United Kingdom (UK), which is about the size of Oregon. England itself makes up just over half the UK's area at 50,363 square miles (130,357 square kilometers) and is about the size of the state of New York.

Low mountains and rugged hills in the north contrast with flat countryside in the east and level and rolling plains in the southeast and southwest. Nearly 30 percent of the land is cultivated. Almost half is meadow or pasture. The climate is temperate, but skies are overcast more often than not. Weather changes are frequent, but spring and fall weather are more predictable. The north and west are wetter and slightly cooler than the south and east. The east coast is very fog prone. Winter temperatures rarely drop below 25°F (-4°C); summer temperatures average 72°F (22°C). Humidity levels, ranging from medium to high, can make it seem colder or warmer than temperatures indicate.

History. The earliest signs of human presence in Britain date back to 5000 B.C.; the oldest remaining structures (stone circles, tombs, etc.) date back to 3000 B.C. Julius Caesar's expeditionary forces reached Britain in 55 B.C., but the Romans did not invade until A.D. 43, during the reign of Tiberius. They incorporated the area into the Roman Empire and stayed until 426, when Rome was in decline, and raiding Angles and Saxons (two Germanic tribes) drove them out of Britain. The tribes brought organized government and many basic standards of living. Vikings began raiding the islands in the late

eight century. In 865, Danish-led forces invaded and ushered in two centuries of Viking domination. Other groups also invaded. The last invasion was in 1066, when William the Conqueror (or William of Normandy) won the Battle of Hastings. This Norman Conquest ushered in a new period of great political and social change. The signing of the Magna Carta in 1215 was one such change; it established important principles of human rights and limits on the monarchy.

Decades of struggle between two branches of the royal family (known as the War of the Roses) ended in the 15th century when Henry Tudor emerged with the crown. Later, Elizabeth I ruled as the empire began to span the globe, leading to the saying that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." Through acts of union, Wales (1535), Scotland (1707), and Ireland (1801) joined England. The empire was known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. When most of Ireland became independent in 1921, the name changed to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Britain established itself as a great naval power by defeating the mighty Spanish Armada in 1588. It became the world's most powerful economy during the Industrial Revolution. With these strengths and by acquiring colonies around the globe, Britain was firmly established as an international force and one of the Great Powers of Europe. Although the colonies that became the United States were lost in 1776 (Canada was a colony until 1867 and then became an autonomous part of the Commonwealth), Britain acquired new lands in the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

After World War I, expansion halted, and the empire began to shrink (some colonies had already claimed independence before the war). During World War II, under the leadership of

England

Winston Churchill, the British withstood intense Nazi bombings, which nearly destroyed many areas. After the war, Britain granted most of its colonies (more than 50) independence and formed the Commonwealth. The majority remained voluntarily in the Commonwealth, and some even retain Queen Elizabeth II as their nominal head of state. Britain was a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949. It joined the European Union (EU) in 1973.

The UK established itself as a modern welfare state in 1945. Under the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, the UK placed greater emphasis on the private sector. Elections in May 1997 brought Tony Blair's Labour Party to power, ending 18 years of Conservative rule.

Since taking office, Blair has initiated sweeping political changes. New legislative assemblies in Scotland and Wales were formed and granted limited powers. Blair is trying to resurrect the collapsed Northern Ireland peace agreement signed in April 1998 that established a Northern Ireland Assembly and stronger provincial links to the Republic of Ireland. He has also worked to implement welfare reforms and increase funding for health and education.

THE PEOPLE

Population. England is the largest nation of the UK, which has an overall population of more than 60.1 million and is growing at 0.3 percent annually. The English comprise roughly 49.5 million of that total. The nation is highly urbanized, and nearly 90 percent of the people live in cities. London has close to 7.5 million people. Although most people living in England are Caucasian, Britain's colonial heritage has brought many cultures together. Ethnic groups from India, Africa, and Asia also reside in England. South London is home to a large West Indian and African population; Leeds-Manchester has a large Asian population. However, as in other western European countries, the government has recently passed laws to limit immigration.

Language. English is the official language of the UK. Different dialects are spoken throughout England, as are the foreign languages of minority groups. What is known as BBC or Oxford English is now spoken only by a minority of British, principally those attending private schools.

Religion. During the reign of Henry VIII, England split from the Roman Catholic Church to form the Church of England (Anglican Church), which became the country's established religion. The Church of England exercised great influence over the country throughout history, but it no longer has political power. Still, the queen is head of the church. At least 27 million Anglicans reside in the UK. Anglicans and other Christians make up the majority of the population, but several other religions also have large followings. About 3 percent of England's people is Muslim, 1 percent is Hindu, .7 percent is Sikh, and .5 percent is Jewish.

Society is generally secular, despite the presence of an established church. Many congregations are diminishing as Sunday increasingly becomes a day for recreation. One in ten adults regularly attends Sunday church services; of these, only about one-third attend the Church of England. Many English consider religion a private matter and feel it is impolite to ask about one's religious beliefs.

General Attitudes. Having a long and rich history, the English greatly enjoy traditions and customs. In general Britons value moderate behavior and emotional reserve. Traditionally they are suspicious of extremes and may be embarrassed by dis-

plays of emotion or excessive enthusiasm. The great outpouring of emotion after the death of Princess Diana has challenged this tradition and revealed a deeper need for public compassion, particularly from the monarchy.

Politeness and humor are revered. The English are known for a wry sense of humor and sarcasm that allows them to be self-critical. However, visitors need to be careful about being too critical. Britons appreciate others who have some knowledge of their history and system. The dominance of England's traditional class system has begun to decline in the last generation. Apart from the upper class, which includes a handful of wealthy or titled families with royal connections, it is far less important in the lives of most people and is not discussed. Nevertheless, class distinctions can still be observed in people's accents, educational backgrounds, clothing, tastes in furnishings, and leisure activities. Social status generally is defined by one's home, car, and education.

Personal Appearance. The English dress much the same as people do in the United States, except that fashion trends are more closely tied to Europe. Casual dress is the norm. Dress for eating out is less formal than it is in the rest of Europe. Dress tends to be dark, reflecting the weather and mood of long winters. Older women tend to wear dresses more often than women in the United States do. Business attire is conservative.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings. A handshake is the most common form of greeting among the English, whether for formal occasions, visits, or introductions. Handshakes generally are firm but not aggressive. When people are already acquainted, they often use verbal greetings instead. Among friends, women often are kissed lightly (by men and women), usually on one cheek. When one passes a stranger on the street, it is appropriate to smile and say *Good morning*, *Hello*, *Good afternoon*, or *Good evening*, if one establishes eye contact with that person. Such exchanges occur less frequently in large cities. Most people call friends and young people by first name but use titles (*Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Dr.*, etc.) in formal situations or to show respect.

Gestures. The English are in general a reserved people. They do not approve of loud or demonstrative behavior (except in very informal gatherings). People respect each other's personal space and feel uncomfortable when someone stands too close to them during conversation. Touching is generally avoided. Manners are important, although standards are not as high among the youth, who comprise nearly one-fifth of the population.

Visiting. Although it is a common courtesy to call ahead before visiting, people may or may not do so. Hosts are not expected to serve refreshments but may offer tea if they are not too busy to receive visitors. More formal visits are arranged in advance. Guests may bring gifts, such as a bottle of wine, chocolates, or flowers. Sending a thank-you note afterward is also appropriate. The English admire good manners and expect visitors to practice them. When one uses someone's phone, it is courteous to offer to pay, as even local calls are billed separately. However, hosts rarely accept the offer.

Britons enjoy discussing a wide variety of topics during *tea*. This is a 4 p.m. snack of tea, *buns* (cupcakes), or *biscuits* (cookies). The food is often enough to constitute a meal. Because of work schedules, the English tradition of *tea* is no longer practiced widely, except when entertaining visitors.

Eating. The English eat in the continental style, with the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right. Proper table manners

are a must; loud behavior is avoided. People in England generally eat three meals a day. The name for each meal (except breakfast) depends on family background and local tradition. Most people call the noon meal *lunch* and the evening meal *dinner*. However, some call the noon meal *dinner* and the evening meal *tea*. Others call the evening meal *supper*, while still others use *supper* to refer to a snack before bedtime. Lunch is usually not heavy; most prefer to eat the main meal in the evening when the family is together. However, more and more families eat in front of the television.

At a restaurant, diners summon a server by raising the hand. The server brings the bill on a plate, on which a 10 percent tip should be left. Tips usually reflect the quality of service given. Pubs provide the best value for dining out; fine restaurants are hard to find except in major cities.

LIFESTYLE

Family. English families are small and tightly knit. The traditional standard has been two children in a family. However, this pattern is changing as fewer people marry, and those that do so marry later. Women are having fewer children and having them later. More women work outside the home, and there are more single-parent families.

Most families enjoy a comfortable standard of living. The middle class represents Britain's majority. The English ideal is to have a house and garden. Two out of three families have their own homes. Apartment (*flat*) living is not popular and is common only in large cities. There is a trend away from urbanization. People are moving to the countryside to develop an attachment to the land and to avoid big-city problems.

Dating and Marriage. Dating activities in England are similar to those in the United States, but dating patterns are different. British youth generally have only one boyfriend or girlfriend at a time and do not date other people during that time. A person may legally marry at age 16, but most marry in their mid-to late twenties. Marriage customs are much the same as those in the United States.

Diet. A full traditional breakfast consists of bacon, sausages, grilled or fried tomatoes, mushrooms, eggs, and bread fried in fat or oil. Fewer people now eat this heavy meal on a regular basis, preferring to stick with various combinations of cereal, toast, juice or fruit, and tea or coffee. The British eat a wide variety of European and ethnic foods. Many traditional foods such as beef and potatoes have given way to poultry and pasta dishes. Fast food has also become more prevalent, and hamburger restaurants now rival the traditional *fish-and-chip* shops in popularity. Numerous Chinese and Indian restaurants and pizza houses provide *take-away* service, and many pubs (*public houses*) serve anything from snacks to full meals. Traditional English dishes include roast beef and *Yorkshire pudding* (a baked batter usually served in muffin form), and steak and kidney pie.

Recreation. A variety of activities are enjoyed in England, which developed many of the world's favorite sports. Although *football* (soccer) may have been invented elsewhere, English college students created the first standardized rules for the game, which is now the most popular sport in the country. Rugby is also enjoyed. There are two types of rugby, union and league, the latter of which is played in the north. Horse racing (over jumps in the winter and on a flat track in the summer) is also followed. The English enjoy cricket in the summer. Modern lawn tennis was first played in England, and modern boxing rules came from the country. Other favorite forms of rec-

reation include badminton, sailing, swimming, *snooker* (a billiards game), darts, and squash (similar to racquetball).

The English like to walk and play golf, and many participate in *angling* (fishing). Gardening represents a favorite way to relax and is a huge industry (gardening books can become bestsellers). Gardens of flowers, shrubs, and decorative plants are most common, but some people also plant vegetables. Pubs offer a place to meet, socialize, and relax with friends and neighbors. However, relaxing in the home is more popular. The English watch more television than any other group except people from the United States. They claim it is because of the quality of their programming. Movies and videos are also popular.

The Arts. The English have made significant and varied contributions in the arts. William Shakespeare is the most recognizable name from a long list of legendary English authors, including Jane Austen, John Milton, Geoffrey Chaucer, and others. In the performing arts, England is widely recognized for its theater. London boasts some of the world's premier art galleries, theaters, and concert halls.

English music has crossed a variety of time periods, styles, and genres, with works by such artists as Henry Purcell, George Friedrich Handel, William Gilbert, Arthur Sullivan, and Gustav Holst. Since the Beatles in the 1960s, British rock music has maintained a worldwide influence. The English have made their mark in painting, architecture, and sculpture. Folk arts such as embroidery, tapestries, jewelry, furniture, and glass are appreciated by many today.

Holidays. The English have the fewest public holidays in Europe. They include New Year's Day, Good Friday and Easter Monday, May Day (1 May), spring and summer bank holidays, Christmas, and Boxing Day (26 Dec.). For New Year's Day and May Day, workers receive a day off on the following Monday if the holiday falls on Saturday or Sunday. Virtually everything closes for Christmas, including shops and restaurants. Many offices close between Christmas and New Year's because of slow business. Boxing Day is named for the tradition of giving small boxed gifts to servants and tradesmen. It is now a day for visiting friends and family.

Holidays that are celebrated but not treated as days off from work include the Queen's Birthday (second Saturday in June), Remembrance Day (closest Sunday to 11 November), and Guy Fawkes Day (5 Nov.). Guy Fawkes Day, or Bonfire Night, commemorates the capture of Guy Fawkes, who plotted to destroy the houses of Parliament in 1605. Huge bonfires are lit and fireworks displays are put on for the public. Most people receive four or five weeks of personal vacation from work. July and August are popular months for taking trips, and many people also vacation in the winter. Spain and Greece are favorite destinations, as are English resorts on the south coast.

Commerce. Businesses generally are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. An increasing number of shops are lengthening business hours and staying open on weekends. Government offices and some rural shops close for lunch between 1 and 2 p.m. and stay open until 5:30 p.m. Most businesses are closed on Sunday, although some stores are open.

SOCIETY

Government. Britain has no written constitution. The constitutional arrangements are the result of acts of Parliament, common law, and precedent. The importance of a parliament was established following the 1649 civil war and execution of King Charles I. Upon the death of Oliver Cromwell, who had led the

England

revolution, the monarchy was reestablished, but parliamentary sovereignty remained prominent. The monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is head of state, but elected officials govern through Parliament.

The House of Commons is the main legislative body. It has 659 members, 529 of whom are from England. The party with the most Members of Parliament (MPs) forms the government, and that party's leader becomes the prime minister (who is officially appointed by the queen). The prime minister (currently Tony Blair) and cabinet govern as the executive body. The voting age is 18. Elections are held at least every five years but can be called by the prime minister at any time. There are no limits to the number of terms the prime minister can serve.

Parliament's upper chamber is the House of Lords, which has 1,200 members. The chamber's chief legislative role is to veto legislation, which in practice simply delays it. In July 1999, Scotland held its own 129-member Parliament, with limited powers over taxation, health, and education. At the same time, Wales opened a 60-member Assembly with similar powers, except for taxation.

Economy. With one of the largest economies in Europe, the UK remains a global economic power. Most Britons enjoy a good standard of living, although there is a fairly large gap between the upper and lower classes. Inflation and unemployment are low.

Britain does the bulk of its trading within the EU. Natural resources include oil, natural gas, iron ore, and salt. Important exports include crude oil (from the North Sea), manufactured goods, and consumer items. The service sector is more important than manufacturing, and London is one of the world's most important financial centers. The currency is the pound sterling (GBP). Although usually just called a "pound," the term "sterling" is added because the currency was once made of silver and now to distinguish between the currency and the unit of weight. The English remain uncertain about the effects of adopting the EU's euro.

Transportation and Communications. Travel by road is the favored method of transportation. The British drive on the left side of the road, and a car's steering wheel is on the right side of the car. Taxis are common in the cities. Public transportation is well developed in most urban areas. London's subway is called the *Tube* or the *Underground*. Manchester and Newcastle also have subways. Buses and trains service major cities, but public transport in rural areas is not as extensive. Domestic and international air travel is well developed. London's Heathrow Airport is the busiest in the world.

The Channel Tunnel (or Chunnel) connects England and France by rail under the English Channel. The tunnel offers a three-hour ride between London and Paris (about 35 minutes in the actual tunnel) for passengers, freight, and private cars.

Telecommunications are advanced, with fiber optic cable links and satellite systems. Most British homes have telephones and televisions. The British Broadcasting Corporation is a publicly funded and government-regulated multimedia provider. Daily newspapers are available throughout the nation. Both tabloids and *broadsheets* (more serious newspapers) are popular. Internet use has grown rapidly. Mobile phones outnumber traditional phone lines.

DEVELOPMENT DATA

Human Dev. Index* rank	13 of 175 countries
Adjusted for women	11 of 144 countries
Real GDP per capita	\$24,160
Adult literacy rate	99 percent (male); 99 (female)
Infant mortality rate	5 per 1,000 births
Life expectancy	75 (male); 80 (female)

Education. A large portion of English tax revenues is spent on education needs. Schooling is free and compulsory for students between ages five and sixteen. Many students begin earlier with nursery school, and some stay beyond age 16 to prepare for entrance to college. A grade level is called a *form*. Public schools are called *state schools*, and private schools are called *public schools*. At age 16, students take an exam to earn the General Certificate of Secondary Education. At 18, they may take the General Certificate of Education, which is used as an entrance exam by England's universities and colleges. In addition to more than 40 universities and various professional schools, England has an Open University, which offers correspondence and broadcast courses. England's quality of higher education is evident in many important scientific and technological contributions made by the British, as well as British achievement in the arts and other areas.

Health. Britain's National Health Service (NHS) provides, on the basis of taxation, free medical treatment and many other social services. Individuals only pay for prescriptions and some dental services. Quality of care and facilities are high, but the country struggles under the increasing cost of financing the NHS. Private care is also available, and many people now have private insurance to avoid long waits for surgical treatment covered by the NHS.

AT A GLANCE

Events and Trends.

- In early 2004, Prime Minister Tony Blair put his reputation and leadership on the line to support a controversial plan to allow British universities to charge higher tuition and fees. After student protests, a heated Parliamentary debate, and a rebellion by many members of his own party, the House of Commons narrowly backed the plan.
- Britain has been the United States' closest ally in fighting international terrorism and toppling Saddam Hussein in the 2003 Iraq war. Critics of the war in Iraq accused the British government of embellishing the case for war. Many of them blamed the government for the suicide of a nuclear scientist who had expressed reservations about the intelligence used to justify the war. However, an inquiry into the scientist's death exonerated the government and heavily criticized the BBC for distorting his comments.

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