

Speaking Card 55

The United Kingdom: Basic Facts

September 2019

Geography: The UK is a country in the north-west of Europe. It is made up of four different countries – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. England, Scotland and Wales make up the island of Great Britain. These three countries plus Northern Ireland are called the United Kingdom.

England: Most of England is pretty flat, with some hills in the north. The highest place is Scafell Pike (978m). The capital city, London, is one of the most famous cities in the world and nearly 9 million people live there. Other big cities include Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and the university cities of Oxford and Cambridge. Other well-known places are Stonehenge, the Lake District, the Eden Project and the White Cliffs of Dover.

Scotland: Scotland is a naturally beautiful country, and is quite mountainous, especially in the north. The highest mountain in the UK is in Scotland – Ben Nevis (1,345m). Scotland has many lakes (called lochs), and the most famous is Loch Ness, where a monster is said to live. The capital of Scotland is Edinburgh, which is famous for its castle and its arts festival every August – the biggest in the world.

Wales: Wales is another country full of natural beauty, with mountains in the north and many miles of coastline and beaches. The highest mountain is Snowdon (1,085m). The capital of Wales is Cardiff, and other cities include Swansea and Newport. Wales also has its own language, and all road signs are in both English and Welsh.

Northern Ireland: The northeast part of the island of Ireland is part of the UK, and its capital is Belfast. It is a very green country with lots of lovely countryside. One of the biggest tourist attractions is the Giant's Causeway, a natural rock formation on the coast of County Antrim in the north of the country.

Political System: The UK is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. That means it has a Queen as head of state, but also a prime minister and parliament. The Queen doesn't really have any real power, and is more of a figurehead. Parliament is split into two houses – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. MPs (members of parliament) in the House of Commons are elected by the people. MPs in the House of Lords are chosen by the Queen based on the advice of the Prime Minister.

History: Although it has a very long history, the UK as we know it today was only formed in 1922 (when the Republic of Ireland became independent). Many important historical events took place in the country including the signing of the Magna Carta (the first document giving citizens rights), the Industrial Revolution and the invention of the world wide web.

People: The population of the UK is around 66 million people. Most of those live in England (nearly 56 million) with around 5 million in Scotland, just over 3 million in Wales and nearly 2 million in Northern Ireland. Some famous people from the UK you might know include actors Benedict Cumberbatch, Emma Watson and Ian McKellen, musicians Adele, Ed Sheeran and Elton John or sportspeople Andy Murray, Lewis Hamilton and Gareth Bale.

Culture: The UK is well-known for rainy weather, cups of tea with milk, fish and chips and a special sense of humour. The UK has produced many musicians, actors and scientists and is well-known for its royal family.

SOLUTIONS

Photos: 2 The Houses of Parliament and Big Ben with a double-decker bus, London, 3 Snowdonia, Wales, 4 Edinburgh Castle, Scotland; **Task 2:** A kilt, B Welsh dragon, C football

Discussion

What can you see in the pictures?
Where are they (2–4)?

How many countries make up the UK? Can you name them? What are their capital cities?

Have you ever been to the UK?
If yes, what did you see there?
If not, what would you like to see there?

What is the UK famous for?
Do you know any famous people from the UK?

01



02



Task 1

You are going on holiday to the UK for one week. Prepare an itinerary for your trip. What places would you like to see?

Task 2

Can you recognize the objects connected with the UK?

A



B



C



03



04

