



GREAT BRITAIN



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Regardless of the revolution we had 200 years ago, many American travelers feel that they “go home” to Britain. This most popular tourist destination has a strange influence and power over us.

Geographically, the isle of Britain is small—600 miles long, and 300 miles across at its widest point. Its highest mountain is 4,400 feet, a foothill by our standards. The population is a fifth of the United States'. At its peak in the mid-1800s, Britain owned one-fifth of the world and accounted for more than half of the planet's industrial output. Today, the empire has been reduced to the isle of Britain itself, a troubled province in Northern Ireland, and small, distant outposts like Gibraltar and the Falklands.

Economically, Great Britain's industrial production is about 5 percent of the world's total. For the first time in history, Ireland has a higher per capita income than Britain. Still, the economy is healthy, and inflation, unemployment, and interest rates are all low.

Culturally, Britain is still a world leader. Her heritage, her culture, and her people cannot be measured in traditional units of power. London is a major exporter of actors, movies, and theater, rock and classical music, and writers, painters, and sculptors.

British television is so good—and so British—that it deserves a mention as a special sightseeing treat. After a hard day of sightseeing, watch the telly over tea in the living room of your B&B. England has five channels. BBC-1 and BBC-2 are government-regulated, commercial-free, and traditionally highbrow. Channels 3, 4, and 5 are private and a little more Yankee, and they have commercials—but those commercials are

How Big, How Many, How Much

- 95,000 square miles (about the size of Oregon or Michigan)
- 60 million people (nearly the same as California)
- 1 British pound sterling (£1) = about \$1.80

Great Britain



clever and sophisticated and provide a fun look at England. Broadcasting is funded by a £126-per-year, per-household tax. Hmmm, 60 cents per day to escape commercials and public television pledge drives.

Oscar Wilde said, “The English have everything in common with the Americans—except, of course, language.” Traveling through England is an adventure in accents and idioms. Every day, you’ll see babies in prams, sucking dummies as their mothers change wet nappies. Soon the kids can trade in their nappies for smalls and spend a penny on their own. “Spend a penny” is British for a visit to the loo (bathroom). In England, chips are fries and crisps are potato chips. A hamburger is a beefburger on a toasted bap. One of the beauties of touring the British Isles is the illusion of hearing a foreign language and actually understanding it—most of the time.

People of leisure punctuate their afternoon with a “cream tea” at a tearoom. You’ll get a pot of tea, small finger foods (like cucumber sandwiches), homemade scones, jam, and thick clotted cream. For maximum pinkie-waving taste per calorie, slice your scone thin like a miniature loaf of bread. Tearooms, which often serve appealing light meals, are usually open for lunch and close around 17:00, just before dinner.

My chocoholic readers are enthusiastic about English chocolates. Their favorites include Cadbury Wispa Gold bars (filled with liquid caramel), Cadbury Crunchie bars, Nestle’s Lion bars, Cadbury’s Boost bars (a shortcake biscuit with caramel in milk chocolate), and Galaxy chocolate bars (especially the ones with hazelnuts). Thornton shops (in larger train stations) sell a box of sweets called the Continental Assortment, which comes with a tasting guide. The highlight is the mocha white-chocolate truffle. British M&Ms (Smarties) are better than American ones. For a few extra pence, adorn your ice cream cone with a “flake”—a chocolate bar stuck right into the middle.

ACCESSIBILITY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Great Britain is one of the world’s more accessible countries in terms of attractions, accommodations, and transportation. London, easily the best destination for a first-time visitor, is the epicenter of all things British—one of Europe’s most accessible and most enjoyable cities.

The **British Tourist Authority** provides information to help people with disabilities plan a visit to the United Kingdom (551 Fifth Ave. #701, New York, NY 10176, tel. 800-462-2748, fax 212/986-1188, www.visitbritain.com, travelinfo@visitbritain.org).

Transportation

Great Britain provides some helpful resources for people with disabilities: For example, London Taxi International's "black cabs" are wheelchair-accessible. Eurostar, which runs the "Chunnel" train to Paris or Brussels, offers special fares for wheelchair users and their companions (see www.ricksteves.com/eurostar). If traveling by rail within Britain, wheelchair users and one companion can automatically receive a 34 percent discount on point-to-point tickets or 50 percent off same-day round-trips.

Transport for London Access & Mobility provides maps, station guides, and information on access to the London Underground, buses, and river services for people with disabilities. Recent improvements include better wheelchair accessibility and the introduction of audio and visual cues to announce stops on the Tube. This organization will help keep you up-to-date on all the changes (42/50 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0TL, tel. 020/7941-4600, fax 020/7941-4605, www.tfl.gov.uk, access&mobility@tfl.gov.uk). For more details on available resources, see page *TK.

Wheelchair Travel rents adapted, lift-equipped vans (with or without driver) that can accommodate up to three wheelchairs. They also rent cars with hand controls and "Chairman" cars (1 Johnston Green, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 6XS, near London, tel. 01483/233-640, fax 01483/237-772, www.wheelchairtravel.co.uk, info@wheelchairtravel.co.uk).

Organizations

Great Britain has numerous organizations designed to support the needs of disabled travelers.

British Council of Organizations of Disabled People (BCODP) provides information to those with disabilities (Litchurch Plaza, Litchurch Lane, Derby DE24 8AA, tel. 01332/295-551, TTY 01332/295-581, www.bcodp.org.uk, general@bcodp.org.uk). Also consider the **Disability Rights Commission** (www.drc-gb.org).

National Association of Disablement Information and Advice Lines (DIAL) can direct you to local groups in the United Kingdom that offer free information and advice on all aspects of disability (www.dialuk.info).

Greater London Action on Disability (GLAD) is a voluntary organization that provides valuable information for disabled visitors and residents. It publishes the biweekly *Disability Update* (relevant excerpts from national newspapers), the monthly *London Disability News*, and the bimonthly *Boadicea* for disabled women (London Bridge 1, London SE1 9BG, tel. 020/7022-1890, www.glad.org.uk).

Government Codes for Accessible Lodging

In London, accommodations are coded for accessibility using a four-tiered National Accessible Scheme (NAS):

- M1** Typically suitable for a person who can climb a flight of stairs, but who also might benefit from grab bars.
- M2** Typically suitable for a person with restricted walking ability and those who occasionally use a wheelchair or a scooter.
- M3** Typically suitable for a person who depends on the use of a wheelchair, and who transfers unaided to and from the wheelchair.
- M4** Typically suitable for person who depends on a wheelchair and needs help in transferring from a caregiver, assistant, or a hoist.

Notice that this scheme—while helpful—is upside-down from the Accessibility Levels used in this book (where Level 1 is the most accessible, and Level 4 is the least accessible). If you see an M4 lodging in London, know that it is the same as my “Level 1” designation.

RADAR (Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) provides information and referral to resources for people with disabilities in the United Kingdom. They operate a National Key Scheme (NKS), allowing people with disabilities to get a map and key for 5,000 accessible toilets throughout the UK (£8, tel. 020/7250-3222, fax 020/7250-0212, TTY 020/7250-4119, www.radar.org.uk, radar@radar.org.uk). RADAR also offers a search engine for finding accessible accommodations (www.directenquiries.com).

Holiday Care Services is an advisory service with free listings of accessible accommodations. They also have a good Web site on the travel industry for people with disabilities, and they offer phone support (tel. 01293/774-535 or 01293/784-647, UK info line 0845/124-9971, www.holidaycare.org.uk).

These London companies specialize in travel for people with disabilities: **Can Be Done** (tel. 020/8907-2400, www.canbedone.co.uk, holidays@canbedone.co.uk) and **Access Travel** (www.access-travel.co.uk).

Artsline has information on disabled access to arts and entertainment events in London and on adapted facilities in cinemas, art galleries, restaurants, and theaters (Mon–Fri 9:30–17:30, 54 Chalton St, London NW1 1HS, tel. 030/7388-2227, www.artsline.org.uk).

Web Sites

Undiscovered Britain, run by Ann Litt, is an excellent resource when planning a trip to Britain (www.undiscoveredbritain.com/access).

Tourism For All offers access guides and disability information (www.tourismforall.org.uk).

DisabledGo, funded largely by Marks & Spencer, covers hotels, restaurants, shopping, and attractions in Britain (www.disabledgo.info).

The Irish Wheelchair Association's Web site is a service provider for wheelchair travel in the UK (www.iwa.ie).

Disability Action provides education, advice, and access for travelers with limited mobility (www.disabilityaction.org).

You're Able offers disability-related information, news, chat rooms, and other resources (www.youreable.com).

Guidebooks and Publications

This guidebook should fulfill your needs for a visit to London. But here are a few other guides to consider, especially if you're lingering in London or venturing further into the British Isles.

The Greater London Association for Disabled People publishes a free *London Disability Guide*, available by mail (336 Brixton Road, London SW9 7AA, tel. 020/7346-5800).

London Disability Arts Forum (LDAF) produces a 32-page monthly magazine—*Disability Arts in London*, or *DAIL*—with listings, reviews, and articles on disabled artists (£10/yr or £30/yr for overseas subscribers, www.ldaf.org).

Access in London, written by Gordon Couch, William Forrester, and David McGaughey, and published by Pauline Hephaistos Survey Projects, provides detailed information on London accessibility for people with disabilities (Access Project, 39 Bradley Gardens, West Ealing, London W13 8HE, www.accessproject-phsp.org, gordon.couch@virgin.net). The same team also produces the book *Access in Paris*.

Holidays in Britain and Ireland: A Guide for Disabled People, which features more than 1,400 places to stay in the UK and Ireland, is published by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (see below for more on RADAR; book costs £15, tel. 020/7250-322, fax 020/7250-0212, TTY 020/7250-4119, www.radar.org.uk, radar@radar.org.uk). You can also search RADAR's Web site for accessible accommodations (www.radarsearch.org).

The National Trust Disability Office annually publishes the booklet *Information for Visitors with Disabilities*, which contains useful information on the accessibility of National Trust properties available in

standard or large print and on audiocassette; National Trust Disability Office, 36 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AS, tel. 020/7447-6742, accessforall@ntrust.org.uk).

Comments from Readers

These thoughts on traveling in Britain were submitted by my readers, mostly through my "Graffiti Wall" Web site (www.ricksteves.com).

"Always ask for special discounts when traveling in London if you have a disability (these discounts are called 'concessions')."

"At the Tower of London, we were approached by a Beefeater guard who took us on a private tour and assisted by pushing the chair over the rough terrain. Every place we visited in London was terrific with the assistance and the accessibility. The Londoners came to us everywhere we went; we never needed to ask for help. America could learn some lessons!"

"The Tube was a good option, and we used the Westminster, South Kensington, and Olympia routes at least three times to get around the city. (Lifts always were in good working order when we were there.) But had I not had an able-bodied companion to jump the 'gap,' I don't think I would have used it. My wheelie skills are not that good!"

"My companion and I used London city buses, the Tube, the railway, black cabs, and a Thames riverboat, as well as renting a car and driving in and around Somerset and Yorkshire. A few standout memories include the 45 minutes it took for the National Express coach driver (and several other coach staff) to figure out how to operate the beautiful brand-new wheelchair lift on the coach from Heathrow to Bath—with teamwork, it finally got figured out and the commuters on the coach were quite understanding about the delay...and we got to Bath!"

"Living and working in London, I use black cabs every day with my electric wheelchair. To get an idea of how the ramp works, the cab manufacturers have videos on their site: www.lti.co.uk."