**Great Britain**, also known as **Britain** [/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English)[ˈbrɪ.tən](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English#Key)[/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA_for_English), is an [island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Island) in the [North Atlantic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Atlantic) off the north-west coast of [continental Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Europe). With an area of 229,848 km2 (88,745 sq mi), it is the [largest island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_the_British_Isles) of the [British Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles), the[largest island in Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_European_islands_by_area) and   
the [ninth-largest in the world](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_by_area).[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-5)[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-6) In 2011 the island had a population of about 61 million people, making it the [third-most populous island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_by_population) in the world, after [Java](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Java) in Indonesia and [Honshū](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honsh%C5%AB" \o "Honshū) in Japan.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-ons-7)[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-8) It is surrounded by over 1,000 smaller islands.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-9) The island of [Ireland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland) lies to its west.

The archipelago has been referred to by a single name for over 2000 years: the term British Isles derives from terms used by classical geographers to describe this island group. By 50 BC Greek geographers were using equivalents of *Prettanikē* as a collective name for the [British Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles).[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-12) However, with the [Roman conquest of Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_conquest_of_Britain) the Latin term [*Britannia*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Britannia) was used for the island of Great Britain, and later [Roman occupied Britain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Britain) south of [Caledonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caledonia).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-13)[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-14)[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-sax1-15)

The earliest known name for Great Britain is [*Albion*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albion) ([Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_language): Ἀλβίων) or *insula Albionum*, from either the Latin *albus* meaning white (referring to the [white cliffs of Dover](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_cliffs_of_Dover), the first view of Britain from the continent) or the "island of the *Albiones*", first mentioned in the *[Massaliote Periplus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massaliote_Periplus" \o "Massaliote Periplus)* in the 6th century BC, and by [Pytheas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pytheas" \o "Pytheas).[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-snyder-16)

The oldest mention of terms related to Great Britain was by [Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle) (c. 384–322 BC), or possibly by [Pseudo-Aristotle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pseudo-Aristotle), in his text [*On the Universe*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Universe), Vol. III. To quote his works, "There are two very large islands in it, called the [British Isles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Isles), [Albion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albion) and [Ierne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ierne_(placename)" \o "Ierne (placename))".[[17]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-17)

[Pliny the Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pliny_the_Elder) (c. AD 23–79) in his [*Natural History*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_History_(Pliny)) records of Great Britain: "Its former name was Albion; but at a later period, all the islands, of which we shall just now briefly make mention, were included under the name of 'Britanniæ.'"[[18]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-PlinyE.284.41.29-18)

The name *Britain* descends from the Latin name for Britain, *Britannia* or *Brittānia*, the land of the Britons. [Old French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_French) *Bretaigne* (whence also [Modern French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_French) *Bretagne*) and [Middle English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_English) *Bretayne*, *Breteyne*. The French form replaced the [Old English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English) *Breoton, Breoten, Bryten, Breten* (also *Breoton-lond, Breten-lond*). Britannia was used by the Romans from the 1st century BC for the British Isles taken together. It is derived from the travel writings of the [ancient Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) [Pytheas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pytheas" \o "Pytheas) around 320 BC, which described various islands in the North Atlantic as far north as [Thule](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thule) (probably [Norway](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norway)).

[Marcian of Heraclea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcian_of_Heraclea), in his *Periplus maris exteri*, described the island group as αἱ Πρεττανικαὶ νῆσοι (the Prettanic Isles).[[19]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-MarcianPeriplus-19)

The peoples of these islands of *Prettanike* were called the Πρεττανοί, [*Priteni*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priteni) or *Pretani*.[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-snyder-16) *Priteni* is the source of the [Welsh language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welsh_language) term [Prydain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prydain" \o "Prydain), *Britain*, which has the same source as the [Goidelic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goidelic_languages) term [Cruithne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruithne_(people)" \o "Cruithne (people)) used to refer to the early [Brythonic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brythonic_languages) speaking inhabitants of Ireland.[[20]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain#cite_note-20) The latter were later called [Picts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Picts" \o "Picts) or [Caledonians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caledonians) by the [Romans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome).