

## **The UNITED KINGDOM, LONDON**

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is one of the most important European countries. It consists of two large islands (Great Britain and the northern part of Ireland) and about 5 thousand smaller ones (e.g. the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, the Orkneys, and the Shetlands). The UK's neighbours are Ireland and France; its area is about 245 thousand sq. km (the country is about three times larger than Czechia).

The island of Great Britain can be divided roughly into the lowland area and the highland area. The largest lowlands can be found in England, the highlands especially in Northern England (the Lake District), in Wales and in Scotland. In Scotland you can see the highest mountain of the UK – Ben Nevis (1,342 m). The mountains in the UK are not very high but they are romantic, with many lakes.

The best-known lakes are those in the Lake District and in Scotland. Lakes are called “lochs” in Scottish English – the largest of them is Loch Lomond, Loch Ness is famous for its Loch Ness Monster. The longest rivers in the UK are the Severn and the Thames.

The climate in the UK is mild, there are not great differences in temperatures between summer and winter (in comparison with the Czech Republic, summers are colder and winters are warmer); it rains a lot during the whole year.

The UK has a population of almost 70 million; most inhabitants live in England, in towns. That's why the population density (especially in the South) is one of the highest in the world. Most people speak English, the minority languages – Welsh (in North-Western Wales), Scottish Gaelic (in the Northwest of Scotland) and Irish Gaelic (in Ireland) are of Celtic origin.

The UK is quite rich in mineral resources (coal, tin, gas, oil, iron ...), its industries as well as agriculture are highly developed. 80 % of labour forces work in services however.

The United Kingdom is divided into four parts: England (its capital London is the capital of the whole UK too), Wales (Cardiff), Scotland (Edinburgh) and Northern Ireland (Belfast).

It is a constitutional monarchy. It means that the head of the state is the King (now Charles III.) but he can act only on the advice of his ministers (= the Government). In fact, the most powerful person in the state is the Prime Minister (now Rishi Sunak from the Conservative Party; the other traditional important political party is the Labour Party). The government offices, the Parliament (consisting of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords) and the main residence of the King are situated in London.

Great Britain is an important member of the UNO (= the United Nations Organization) and the NATO (= the North Atlantic Treaty Organization). It also belonged among the oldest members of the EU (= the European Union). However, in 2016 more than 50% of British people voted to leave the EU, and the so-called Brexit has been a big problem since. The currency is the pound.

### **LONDON**

This town is the capital of the United Kingdom. It is the biggest city in Europe – it has a population of about 9 million. London is situated on the river Thames in South-Eastern England. It was founded as a Roman settlement. The great fire in 1666 destroyed almost all the city. During WWII. it was damaged a lot by Germans (the Battle of Britain).

There are many places of interest. You can see them by walking or by various means of transport. The most popular are the famous red double-deckers, taxis (usually black) and the underground, which is the oldest underground in the world. In London there are several airports, the most important of them is Heathrow.

The Houses of Parliament are in Gothic style but were built only in the 19th century after a fire. The only part which escaped the fire was Westminster Hall. You can also see a famous clock-tower with Big Ben. (It is said that it got its name after an MP called Benjamin.)

Whitehall is the street where government offices are. Horse Guards Parade takes place here.

Downing Street 10 is the official home of British Prime Ministers.

Westminster Abbey is a beautiful Gothic cathedral. British Kings and Queens are crowned here; the royal weddings also often take place here. Many famous people are buried in Westminster Abbey: Kings and Queens, statesmen, poets, and artists.

St. Paul's Cathedral is one of the largest cathedrals in the world. It stands in the City. This great renaissance dome is the work of the famous architect Sir Christopher Wren. It was built in the 17th century after the great fire.

The City is the oldest part of London around St. Paul. It was founded by Romans; there are many banks and offices there now.

The Tower of London is the name of an old castle. It served as a royal palace first, then prison and fortress. It is a museum now. Most people come to see the coronation jewels that are guarded by the Beefeaters in their traditional uniforms.

Tower Bridge is one of the most famous symbols of London. It was built in the 19th century. It can open in the middle and let large ships go through.

Buckingham Palace is the King's residence in London. One of the biggest London's parades is Changing the Guard here.

Trafalgar Square was named after Admiral Nelson's victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Nelson's statue is situated on a high column. The square is a popular place for various meetings and demonstrations. At Christmas time a big Christmas tree stands here and on New Year's Eve many people come, sing and dance.

There are many museums and galleries in London. The most important of them are The National Gallery situated in Trafalgar Square and The British Museum which is the largest museum in the world.

The most famous shopping centres in London are in Piccadilly Circus, Regent Street and Oxford Street.

There are a lot of parks in London. The largest of them is Hyde Park. It is also known for its Speaker's Corner where anybody can have a speech.

You can see a lot in London and it is still true what an English writer Samuel Johnson said two hundred years ago: "*When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life.*"

## **QUESTIONS:**

### **GREAT BRITAIN:**

- 1) What is the official name of Great Britain; what does it consist of? Enumerate the neighbours and give the area of G. B.
- 2) Describe the countryside of Great Britain (lowlands, highlands).
- 3) Which are the best-known lakes and the longest rivers?
- 4) What do you know about British climate?
- 5) How many people live in the UK, where do most of them live? Enumerate languages spoken there.
- 6) What is typical of the UK's national economy?
- 7) Give four parts of the UK and their capitals.
- 8) Characterize the political system in the UK.
- 9) A: Have you ever been to the United Kingdom? How did you travel there? Where did you stay? Which places did you see? What did you like (dislike) about the country?  
B: Would you like to travel to Britain? Which places would you like to see – why?

### **LONDON:**

- 1) How big is London?
- 2) Where is it situated?
- 3) How old is it?
- 4) What do you know about means of transport in London?
- 5) What is the seat of the British Parliament?
- 6) Give the names of streets important for the British government.
- 7) Which are the two best-known London cathedrals?
- 8) What do you know about the Tower of London?
- 9) What is the Queen's residence in London now?
- 10) Which are the largest museum and gallery in London?
- 11) Say a few words about London parks.
- 12) Where can you find famous shopping centres in London?
- 13) Give other places of interest in London.
- 14) What did S. Johnson write about London?