

# United Kingdom: Important Phrases

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The first thing that visitors from outside the United Kingdom (UK) should appreciate is that the UK's full name is **The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**.

The UK is made up of the countries of **England, Scotland, Wales** (on the island of Great Britain) and **Northern Ireland** (on the island of Ireland).

The Channel Island bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey, and the Isle of Man are Crown Dependencies; this means they are constitutionally tied to the British monarch but are not part of the UK.

Although it is common for many foreigners to use the terms "British" and "English" as though they are interchangeable, you must appreciate the difference. The United Kingdom is a political union of countries - England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Just as you would never call a Texan a 'Yankee', you should be careful of using "England" to describe the UK or "English" to describe something or someone British, it is likely to cause offence particularly to those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Using the term "British" to describe something or someone from Northern Ireland is not recommended as it will cause offence to those with Irish nationalist views.

English language speakers from outside the UK will find few problems in making themselves understood. Many people in the UK have friends and relatives throughout the English-speaking world, particularly in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the USA, Africa, the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Hong Kong and the Caribbean.

The UK is home to an astounding number of languages, dialects and accents, many of which are quite bewildering to visitors from other parts of the UK, not to mention foreign visitors. Some dialects run along the borders of the four constituent countries but other trends follow ancient borders no longer marked (e.g. the Danelaw, the Saxon Kingdoms). Some of these dialects will already be familiar to other English language speakers through movies like *The Full Monty* (Yorkshire, specifically Sheffield, in England), anything starring the Beatles (Liverpool in England) and any British gangster movie (London in England) and *Trainspotting* (Edinburgh in Scotland). Most unfamiliar phrases will be obvious from context, and once locals realise they are speaking to someone from out of town, they will usually make an effort to moderate their speech towards standard English.

If English is not your first language, remember that fluent speakers of other languages are quite uncommon in England, even in the hospitality industry. The situation is naturally different in larger cities, and is improving vastly due to a strong influx of migrant workers in the country and the need for effective communication. Nevertheless, if you cannot speak English, you will have a hard time travelling in the UK.

Until recently French was a compulsory academic subject in Scotland, taught for up to five years, and is therefore the foreign language most commonly understood by Scots, followed by German, Spanish and Italian.

All schools in Wales teach both English and Welsh, and in a growing number of schools Welsh is the medium for teaching the entire curriculum.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, it was compulsory for school pupils to take a course in a foreign language. The range of foreign languages taught varied and included the traditional European languages such as French, German and Spanish and some schools, mainly private, also teach Chinese Mandarin, or Russian or Arabic. Some attempts are being made to start teaching foreign languages earlier, at primary school level. Schools in England increasingly encourage exchange trips abroad and further language study.

**Here are a few tips to get you started, mainly with the American traveler in mind:**

**Clothing:** The word "pants" means underwear in Britain. What Americans would refer to as "pants" are called "trousers" in the UK. Y-fronted underpants are also known as "Y-fronts" or "undies". 'Sweaters' are known as 'jumpers'. Also "trainers" are tennis shoes or sneakers. You'll often see "no trainers" listed in the dress code of clubs.

**Places:** Main Road = Highway, Slip Road = Off Ramp, Motorway = Freeway, Petrol Station/Filling Station = Gas Station, Level Crossing = Railroad Crossing, Zebra Crossing = Pedestrian Crossing, Off Licence/Off Sales = Liquor Store, Public Toilet = Restroom; Chemist = Drug Store

**Foods:** Aubergine = eggplant, courgette = zucchini, baps/muffins/barmcakes = soft rolls, (bap is also a term for breasts so is best avoided), white coffee = coffee with milk, biscuit = cookie, chips = fat french fries, crisps = chips, coriander = cilantro, bangers = sausages, mash=mashed potatoes, piece (Scotland only) = sandwich, jam = preserve - a term that is often also used for jam, Jelly is not something you put on toast but a childrens sweet desert that comes in a variety of colours.

**Misc:** lift = elevator, queue = line, bin = trash, brilliant = wonderful, "I'll give you a lift" = "I'll give you a ride", "I'll give you a ring/bell" = "I'll call you", pissed = drunk (not angry), "boot" used in context of a car = "trunk", Petrol = Gas/Gasoline, Cashpoint/Hole In The Wall = ATM, ground floor = first floor

**Hand signals:** There's only one that really matters. When you're indicating the number "two" with your fingers (as in, "two pints, please", it is advised to use your thumb and first finger, NOT your first and middle fingers. If that "V" gesture is used with nails facing the person you're talking to, it is construed as raising the middle finger would be elsewhere (the middle finger raise also being offensive in the UK). If you are going to use the "V" to indicate two, face the palm towards the person you're addressing.

**The "F" word!** Fanny, that is. In the UK, this is a word used for the female genitals. The English equivalent for fanny is "bum" (fanny packs being called bum bags). Another "F" word to be aware of is "fag", which in Britain is a slang word for 'cigarette' - **not** the modern US usage of a derogatory term for a homosexual man - so do not fret if you hear the sentence in a bar: "I'm going outside for a fag"!!!

If asked to pass a rubber it does not mean pass a condom but an eraser. Australians need to be careful when asking for Durex. It's not a roll of sellotape but the leading brand of men's contraceptives.

## The "Lingo"

**Standard English** is spoken throughout most of the UK with some regional variations in pronunciation and intonation. English language speaking visitors generally have no difficulty in "tuning-in" to local accents. There are also numerous local dialects which visitors may initially have difficulty in following, although people will normally speak more slowly and adopt Standard English when they are speaking with visitors to their country or region. The following are examples of **English** regional dialects:

### 1. London and the South East of England

- "Guv'nor" (or simply "Guv") - Commonly used by Londoners, a contraction of the word "Governor", it is the equivalent of saying "chief", "mac" or "buddy" in colloquial American.
- "All right?" - Greeting
- "Cheers" - Used sometimes instead of "thank you" or "goodbye". Also a salutation when drinking a toast.
- "Ta" - "Thank you"
- "Khazi" - Toilet / restroom

### 3. The North of England

- "Eh up?", "How do", or "Now Then" - Terms used instead of "hello".
- "Ta" - Means "thanks".
- "Brew" - A mug of tea or used in the context of making a cup of tea as in "to put a brew on".
- "Luv" or "Darling" - Very common to hear almost everywhere (e.g. "Here's your brew, luv"). In some regions, thought of as out-dated and chivalrous. In others, used in most verbal exchanges where one or both parties are female.
- "Cheers" - Used instead of "thank you" and as a salutation when drinking a toast.

## Scotland

Scotland has three official languages; English, Scots, and Scottish Gaelic (*Gàidhlig*.)

Scottish Gaelic is similar to Irish and is primarily spoken in parts of the North West Highlands and the Western Isles of Scotland. The further north and west you go the greater the chance of hearing it and seeing signposts written in it. Some signposts are only Gaelic in the remotest areas. As a general rule older generation Gaelic speakers are more likely to be heard conversing in the language than the younger generation. It is highly unlikely that any Gaelic speaker will at any point address a visitor in Gaelic.

A blend of Scots and English are primarily spoken in the Borders, Dumfries & Galloway, Ayrshire, and around Glasgow.

Some Scots words in common use that you may hear are;

- aye = yes (pronounced like English word eye)
- naw = no
- ay = always
- no = not
- ken (ye ken) = know (you know)
- burn = stream or brook

- hauf = half (usually means a single measure of whisky)
- drookit = soaked
- droothie = dry (thirsty)
- stane dyke = stone wall
- bairns / weans (predominantly used in west) = children
- kirk = church

In and around Aberdeen, in the north east of Scotland, there is a true dialect called *doric*, while in the south of Scotland many of the original Scots words are still in use. In the Orkney and Shetland islands, which saw 600 years of Norse rule, there is no Gaelic, but each archipelago has its own Scots-based dialect and accent, with many words from old Norse (which is similar to modern Icelandic or Faroese) incorporated.

**Above all, if you speak English, it will be understood in the UK so do not worry too much.**