

Britain lies off the north-west coast of Europe across the English Channel, the Strait of Dover and the North Sea. It consists of two large islands (Great Britain and Ireland) and about 5,000 smaller ones (e.g. the Isle of Wight, the Isles of Scilly, the Isle of Man, Anglesey, the Hebrides, the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Channel Islands). Its neighbours are Ireland to west and France to south-east. It covers the area of 244,805 square kilometres.

England is mostly rolling land, rising to the Uplands of southern Scotland. The main mountain regions here are the **Cornish Heights** (south-west England), the **Cambrians** (Wales), the **Cumbrian Mountains** (in the Lake District), the **Pennines** (the Backbone of England) - they run north-south through the central part of northern England. The **Cheviot Hills** are on the border between England and Scotland. The **Highlands of Scotland** are the highest mountains in Britain (with the highest mountain Ben Nevis - 1,342 m). Coast is heavily indented, especially on west.

The longest rivers are the Severn (354 km) and the Thames (336 km).

There are beautiful lake areas in Cumbria and the Highlands of Scotland. British Isles have milder climate due to the Gulf Stream which comes from the Gulf of Mexico to Western Europe.

2. LONDON

London is the capital of the United Kingdom. It is the 9th largest city in the world its population is about 10 million (with suburbs). London is situated on the river Thames in south-east England. It was founded as a Roman settlement. The great fire in 1666 destroyed almost all the city.

There are many places of interest. We can see them by walking or by various means of transport. London's famous red double-deckers go almost everywhere. For fast transport we can go by the Underground. It is the oldest underground in the world. Now it operates 11 lines and is 418 km long (in Britain only 3 cities have the underground: London, Glasgow and Newcastle). There are also 3 airports in London. The most important are Heathrow and Gatwick.

The **Houses of Parliament** are in gothic style but were built only between 1840 - 1852 after the old building had burnt down. The only part which escaped the fire was Westminster Hall. There is also a famous clock-tower with Big Ben and its characteristic bell-ringing. (It is said that it got its name after one rather fat and round MP called Benjamin).

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

Downing Street 10 is the official home of British Prime Ministers since 1731.

Westminster Abbey was founded in the 11th century. Britain's Kings and Queens are crowned here. England's greatest poets, artists, statesmen and other famous people are buried here in the Poet's Corner (e.g. Chaucer, Newton, Wordsworth, Handel, etc.). The Abbey is an excellent example of gothic architecture. Since 1066 the Abbey is the place where many state occasions and royal weddings take place (including that of the present Duke and Duchess of York - Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson in 1986).

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 and it was built in the 17th century. The Cathedral is known for its Whispering Gallery. Standing on this Gallery you can clearly hear what is whispered on the opposite side 107 feet far from you. During the World War II it was badly damaged by bombs. In 1981 Prince of Wales (Prince Charles) and Lady Diana were married here.

The City is the oldest part of London around St. Paul. The City was founded by Romans in 43 AD. There are many banks (the most important is the Bank of England) and offices here (e.g. Mansion House - the Lord Mayor's home).

The **Tower** was built in the 11th century. It served as royal palace first, then prison and fortress. It is a museum now. The Crown Jewels guarded by the Beefeaters in their traditional Tudor uniforms are kept here.

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

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 with its fountains is a very popular place for various meetings and demonstrations. At Christmas time a big Christmas tree stands here and on New Year's Eve people gather here at midnight, sing and dance.

The **National Gallery** is in Trafalgar Square. It houses paintings by nearly all the great European artists of the past and a large collection of British paintings and sculptures. The admission is free.

The **British Museum** is the largest museum in the world. It houses the biggest collection of all kinds of animals and minerals and rocks. There is a collection of fine and applied arts of all countries, periods and styles, e.g. antiquities from ancient Greece, Rome and the Orient, Egyptian mummies, Middle Ages manuscripts and also a good collection of drawings by the Czech artist Václav Hollar who had lived in England for a long time. He died in London in 1677. The British Museum's library is the largest in the world. The admission is free.

Buckingham Palace is the Queen's residence in London since the Queen Victoria's reign. One of the biggest London's parades is Changing the Guard here.

The most famous shopping centres in London are in **Piccadilly Circus**, **Regent Street** and **Oxford Street**. The other well-known streets are Carnaby Street, Charing Cross Road and Pall Mall.

There are many parks in London, e.g. **St. James's Park**, **Green Park**, **Regent's Park**. The largest of them is **Hyde Park**. It is also known for its Speaker's Corner where anybody can have a speech.

The **Post Office Tower** is the tallest building in Great Britain. It is adapted for telephone and TV services. It is nearly 190 m high.

With its 40 theatres and music halls London is the centre of Britain's theatre life. The most important are **The National Theatre** (which moved in 1975 to new buildings on the South Bank), the Royal Shakespeare Company (which usually plays in Stratford, but also here in the Barbican centre). **The Royal Festival Hall** and **the Royal Albert Hall**, **the Queen Elizabeth Hall** are the main concert halls.

There is much to see in London and still is true, what an English writer Samuel Johnson said two hundred years ago: "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." Anyway you can make day trips to various places such as Cambridge, Oxford, Canterbury, Salisbury, Brighton.

Windsor Castle is the residence of nearly all the British sovereigns outside London.

Greenwich is the seat of the National Maritime Museum where the Royal Observatory is - here is a brass ship which marks the prime meridian