



## **Bicycle Adventure Club ENGLAND TOUR 2007 TRIP PLANNER**

Iron Donkey Bicycle Touring looks forward to another joint venture with the Bicycle Adventure Club: Heritage Tour of Southwest England

We will do our utmost to ensure that your tour is one that will live on in your memory - for all the right reasons!

This trip planner has information that we hope you will find useful in preparing for your tour. However, you will almost certainly have questions that are not answered here - so please feel free to contact us as often as you like in the run up to your tour.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tony Boyd'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tony Boyd  
Company Director  
Email: [info@irondonkey.com](mailto:info@irondonkey.com)

# Britain Facts

## Statistics

Population is around 56 million, with 48 million in England, 3 million in Wales and 5 million in Scotland

## Geography

England covers just over 50,000 square miles, much of it flat or low-lying. Wales covers approximately 8000 square miles. About two thirds of Scotland's 30,000 square miles is mountain and moorland.

## Political Boundaries

Scotland and Wales are separate countries from England with their own legislative assemblies. They have different customs, traditions, and, in the case of Scotland, different legal and educational systems.

## Government

Britain has no constitution – its law is a mixture of legislation, legal precedents (common law) and convention. It is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. The House of Commons and The House of Lords together with the Monarch make up the parliament. The Labour Party has been in power since 1997, and the current Prime Minister is Tony Blair.

## Climate and Weather

Weather in the UK is unpredictable, and is the universal topic of conversation! There are variations from region to region, from day to day and even from hour to hour. Generally the south has warmer, dryer weather than the north. The key to bicycle touring in Britain is to be prepared for whatever the elements may bring your way. Prevailing winds are from the Southwest.

Comprehensive (and generally accurate) short-range weather forecasts appear in the press, on the radio and on television after news bulletins

## Major Dates

1<sup>st</sup> January (New Years Day)

2<sup>nd</sup> January (New Years Day)

Good Friday (the Friday before Easter Sunday)      April 6<sup>th</sup>

Easter Monday (the day after Easter Sunday)      April 9<sup>th</sup>

Labour Day      May 1<sup>st</sup>

Last Monday in May (Spring Bank Holiday)      May 28<sup>th</sup>

Last Monday in August (Summer Bank Holiday)      Aug 27<sup>th</sup>

25<sup>th</sup> December (Christmas Day)

26<sup>th</sup> December (Boxing Day)

## BRITAIN A TO Z FOR THE VISITOR

### Documents and Visas

All visitors should carry a passport that is valid for the period of the visit and for at least 6 months afterwards. You should check well in advance of your proposed trip whether you require a visa. Currently, US, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand and South African nationals do not need visas. Citizens of the European Union can move freely within and between member countries.

### Electricity

The mains supply in the UK is at 240 Volts with flat, 3-pin plugs. Shaving sockets in bathrooms supply at 110V. Appliances bought in North America will need a plug adapter to fit an American plug into a UK outlet. If your device's AC power supply says 110-240V or the like, then all you need is an adapter. If your electronics don't have dual-voltage supplies, you will need a *transformer* type converter.

### Emergencies

Dial 999 and ask for police, fire brigade or ambulance.

### Health

EU nationals visiting Britain are entitled to free medical treatment under reciprocal arrangements. They should obtain form E111 before departure, complete it and present it when seeking any form of treatment. Nationals of non-EU countries should ensure that they have comprehensive medical insurance.

**Vaccinations** – none necessary for travel to Britain.

**Chemists and pharmacies** - Non- prescription medicines are available in supermarkets and pharmacies. A pharmacist, who can advise on whether a doctor should be consulted, can often solve minor medical problems.

### Internet access

Most towns of any significant size have an internet cafe. Public libraries also have internet access. Wireless network (Wi-Fi zones) are becoming increasingly common throughout the UK.

### Laundry

Most small towns have at least one coin-operated laundrette – if you are staying for a couple of nights, you will be able to leave your washing with the attendant who will do it for a small extra charge. Most hotels (3\* and upwards) will provide a same-day laundry service – at a price.

### Money

Currency is the Pound Sterling (£), divided into 100 pence. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own notes – and these are legal tender throughout Britain, though not often encountered in England. Many shops in the larger cities will also accept Euros (€).

#### **Travellers' cheques**

These are accepted in most hotels and shops accustomed to tourists. Some form of ID is usually required.

#### **Credit cards – and getting cash from ATMs (Cashpoints)**

The major credit cards (MasterCard and Visa) are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, and larger shops. Credit cards and cash cards (you will need your PIN – personal identification number) are also the most convenient way of getting cash from the ATM's that are now found in every small town and village. Since you pay a flat fee, it is better not to withdraw very small amounts.

#### **Exchanging money**

There are facilities for changing money on ferries, at airports, at tourist offices, and in many shops and hotels. The rate of commission varies widely. Banks offer the best rates.

#### **Banking hours**

Normally 9.30 am to 3.30 pm. In larger towns a few branches will open on Saturday morning.

## **National Parks**

The National Parks represent the highest level of landscape protection in Britain. Other protected areas include AONBs (areas of outstanding natural beauty) and SSSIs (sites of special scientific interest).

## **National Trust**

This charity was formed in 1895 to preserve the nation's valuable heritage in the face of burgeoning factories, roads, mines and houses. It owns and manages many historic houses and gardens, and vast stretches of the countryside and coastline.

## **Post**

Most post offices are open 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and from 9am to noon on Saturday. An airmail letter takes around 5 days to get to North America.

## **Pubs and drink and smoking**

Pubs are a great British social institution – the legacy of centuries of hostelrys, ale-houses and stagecoach halts. Most pubs are “tied” to a particular brewery and only stock that brewery's selection of beers. Free houses are independent and will stock beers from several different breweries. Many pubs serve food at lunchtime and in the earlier part of the evening – those that do generally advertise the fact outside. Pubs are now allowed flexible opening hours with the potential for up to 24 hour opening. The minimum age for drinking alcohol in a bar is 18. As from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2007 a new law will come into effect banning smoking in all pubs and bars.

## **Restaurants and food**

Britain has shaken off its once dismal reputation for food. This is partly due to the influx of foreign chefs and cooking styles – but homegrown restaurateurs have revamped traditional British food beyond all recognition. Breakfast will normally be included in the cost of your accommodation – the most expensive hotels paradoxically being the exception to the rule. Expect orange juice and cereal, then bacon, sausage and eggs or similar cooked plate, finished off with toast and marmalade. Yoghurt and fruit are an alternative to the fried stuff.

The picnic and the pub are probably the best alternatives for lunch on the road. The ingredients for the perfect picnic can be bought in the general stores and delicatessens found in every village main street. Many pubs provide a wide range of lunch options – from sandwiches to steaks – at a reasonable price. Lunch times in pubs tend to be from noon to around 2.30 pm.

You won't be stuck for choice when it comes to your evening meal. Pubs again come well up on the list, particularly if cost is a consideration. Most small towns also have several restaurants – with Chinese and Indian establishments well represented. Take – away options include fish and chips, burgers and pizzas. In addition there are the more expensive restaurants where you may need to make a reservation in advance. The best source of information and advice about the possibilities for your evening meal will come from your accommodation providers.

Vegetarians are generally well catered for in Britain – most restaurants and pubs will offer a selection of vegetarian options. Chinese and South Indian restaurants have a tradition of vegetarian cuisine.

## **Telephones**

Payphones are still common, though the numbers are falling. Local, national and international calls are charged by time. Rates are cheapest at weekends and between 6pm and 8am on weekdays. Phone cards can be bought in many newsagents and small supermarkets.

To call the UK from North America: dial 011 44 (drop the initial zero)

To call North America from the UK: dial 001

## **Time**

The UK operates on Greenwich Mean Time during the winter months. From the end of March to the end of October, clocks go forward by one hour. Generally, the UK is 5 hours ahead of the East Coast of North America, and 8 hours ahead of the West Coast.

## **Tipping**

Tip 10% in a restaurant if the bill does not include a service charge. Taxi drivers expect around 10%. Tipping in pubs is not expected if you are just having a couple of drinks - if you are eating and are served at a table, 10% is OK.

## **Toilets**

There are public toilets in most towns and villages – they are often clearly signed. If not, ask a local, or at the tourist office. All pubs, cafes and restaurants have toilet facilities – but it would be considered bad form to use the facilities without buying something. The purchase of a cup of coffee means that you can take your relief with a clear conscience. Out in the countryside, you may just have to make do with a hedge – but watch for nettles!

## **Tourist Offices**

Tourist Information Centres (TICs) are found in all towns and in many large villages. They carry a wide range of information on the surrounding area in the form of leaflets and brochures. The staff (who are often volunteers) should be able to answer most general questions – or point you to someone who can help with your particular query. Opening hours can be variable – usually 9am to 5 pm Monday to Friday with shorter hours at the weekend.

## **VAT (value added tax)**

This tax (rate currently 17.5%) is charged on virtually all goods and services except food (restaurant meals are not exempt) and books. Marked prices will always include the VAT, so you know what you will pay before you go to the checkout. Visitors from outside the EU who stay for less than 3 months may claim the VAT back on larger purchases. Take your passport when you go shopping for gifts, souvenirs etc. You must complete a form in the shop and hand a copy to the customs authorities when you leave the country. If you arrange to have the goods shipped from the store, the VAT should be deducted before you pay.

## **Weights and Measures**

In theory, Britain has adopted the metric system, but in practice many of the old Imperial Measures are still in popular use. Distances are always in miles. Draught beers are sold in pints and half pints.

## **Websites**

### **Tourist boards**

[www.visitbritain.com](http://www.visitbritain.com)  
[www.visitheartofengland.com](http://www.visitheartofengland.com)  
[www.westcountrynow.com](http://www.westcountrynow.com)  
[www.visitbath.co.uk](http://www.visitbath.co.uk)

### **English Heritage**

[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

### **National Trust**

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

### **Embassies/Consulates**

[www.canada.gc.ca](http://www.canada.gc.ca)  
[www.usembassy.org.uk](http://www.usembassy.org.uk)

### **Trains, timetables, bike transport and tickets**

[www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk)  
[www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk)  
[www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/Documents/Custom/Cycling%20By%20Train.pdf](http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/Documents/Custom/Cycling%20By%20Train.pdf)

### **Coach timetables**

[www.gobycoach.co.uk](http://www.gobycoach.co.uk)

### **Maps**

[www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk](http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk)  
[www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)

### **Weather**

[www.weather.co.uk](http://www.weather.co.uk)

## WHAT TO BRING CHECKLIST

### Recommended bike wear

- “Layering” is the best option. Tops with full-length zippers are a good idea.
- Cycling shorts / shorts.
- Sweat pants / joggers.
- Cycling gloves.
- Two or three cycling tops or T-shirts – one with long sleeves.
- Lightweight windproof jacket.
- Fleece jacket.
- Cycling shoes or training shoes with rigid soles.
- Sports socks.
- Raingear – Gore-Tex or similar “breathable” material is best.
- Helmet
- Sunglasses.

### Recommended off-bike wear

- Casual clothing for evening wear.
- Sweater.
- Swimwear.
- Shoes
- Hiking shoes or boots – if the idea of a bit of walking appeals to you.
- Sleepwear.

### Miscellaneous

- Any current medications and a prescription
- Sun screen and lip balm
- Insect repellent
- Travel alarm clock
- Camera and film
- Toiletries
- Day sac
- Travel Guide
- Book
- Trip diary

### Documents

- Passport (if required) or other identification
- Plane / train / ferry tickets
- Travellers cheques
- Credit card
- ATM card
- Insurance documents

## CYCLING IN BRITAIN

### Safe cycling

Bicycles are common in England, particularly in rural areas. Provided that you exercise reasonable care and attention and observe the common-sense safety precautions when on the road, you should not encounter too many problems.

Helmets for cyclists are optional in Britain, but we strongly recommend their use.

In Britain, we drive on the LEFT. Those accustomed to riding on the right at home need to take extra care, especially at junctions.

Brightly coloured clothing is a good idea.

On busier roads, you should ride in single file.

### Bringing your own bike

It is important that your bike is in excellent condition if you plan to bring it along for your tour. If you are not too confident about your own skills as a mechanic, then take your bike to a reputable cycle shop to be serviced. It is a good idea to fit new tubes and possibly new tyres if they are old or worn.

If your bike is brand new, then you should ride it at least 100 miles and then take it to a mechanic to be adjusted.

Check with your carrier(s) well in advance of your journey as to their requirements regarding the carriage of bicycles. Most carriers charge for a bicycle. Airlines may require that you box your bike. This entails removing the pedals and (usually) the wheels, and turning the handlebars. If you are new to this, it may be best to take your bicycle to a bike shop to be boxed.

A useful link with information about taking your bike on trains to SW England is:

<http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/Documents/Custom/Cycling%20By%20Train.pdf>

### Bicycle equipment checklist (for those bringing their own bikes)

- Helmet
- Rear rack
- Handlebar bag
- Lock
- Pump
- Spare tube
- Puncture repair kit
- Pocket tool kit
- Specialised tools specific to your bike

### Cycle shops/ repairs

Specialist cycle shops are rarely found outside the larger towns and cities. However, most small towns have a shop that sells some bicycles and someone who can carry out minor repairs. Getting hold of specialist parts may be a time consuming and expensive business – so carry whatever spares you are likely to need.

### Roads

Classification	Description
M	Motorways – bicycles not allowed.
A roads	These roads can be very busy, often with a lot of commercial traffic. Some stretches may have a good shoulder – but this often ends with no warning. Sometimes dual carriageway. Surface usually very good Rarely pleasant cycling.
B roads	A mixed bag. Some of these roads are quiet and make for great cycling. Others can be very busy. Surface generally good
Other routes	The best roads for cycling. Generally very little traffic. Surface can be variable – but is very good on most minor roads.

### Bike security

Generally, security is not a problem outside the cities and larger towns. However, bike theft is common in centres of population. Generally it is a good idea to lock your bike in a visible spot whenever you leave it. Your accommodation will always have somewhere to put your bike away for the night under lock and key.

IRON DONKEY BICYCLE TOURING LTD  
15 BALLYKNOCKAN ROAD  
SAINTFIELD  
COUNTY DOWN  
N. IRELAND  
BT24 7HQ  
TEL: +44 (0) 2890 813200  
E-MAIL: [INFO@IRONDONKEY.COM](mailto:INFO@IRONDONKEY.COM)  
WEB: [WWW.IRONDONKEY.COM](http://WWW.IRONDONKEY.COM)