**Great Britain**

The official name of the country is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It occupies the territory of the British Isles. The British Isles consist of two large islands: Great Britain and Ireland and about five thousand small islands. The total area is over 244 000 square kilometres.

The United Kingdom is made up of four countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Their capitals are: London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast respectively. The population of the country is over 57 million people; about 80 % of them live in cities and towns.

Great Britain is separated from the European continent by the English Channel and the Strait of Dover. The west coast of the country is washed by the Irish Sea, the east coast is washed by the North Sea. There are a lot of rivers in Great Britain, but they are not very long and not good for navigation. The chief rivers are the Severn and the Thames.

The climate in the United Kingdom is generally mild and temperate due to the influence of the Gulf Stream. It is mild, humid and changeable. It is never too hot or too cold. Great Britain is well known as a foggy and rainy country.

The United Kingdom is a highly developed industrial country. It is known as one of the world's largest producers and exporters of machinery, electronics, textile, aircraft and navigation equipment. One of the main important industries of the country is shipbuilding. The largest cities of Great Britain are: London, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield, Bristol, Leeds, Edinburgh.

The United Kingdom is a monarchy. The Queen is the official head of the state. The legislative power is vested in Parliament. It consists of two chambers: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. There are three main political parties: the Labour, the Conservative and the Liberal. The party which wins the majority of seats in Parliament forms the Government and its leader becomes Prime Minister. The Prime Minister chooses about twenty MP's from his party to become Cabinet Ministers. Each minister is responsible for a particular area of government.

English is the official language, but some people speak Scottish, Welsh and Irish. The flag of the United Kingdom, known as the Union Jack, is made up of three crosses. The upright red cross is the cross of St. George, the patron saint of England. The white diagonal cross (with arms going into the corners) is the cross of St.Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. The red diagonal cross is the cross of St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland. David is the patron saint of Wales. Rose is a symbol of England, daffodil is a symbol of Wales, thistle is the symbol of Scotland and shamrock is the symbol of Ireland.