**The United Kingdom**

The UK of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is situated on the British Isles. The British Isles consist of two large islands: Great Britain and Ireland and about 5000 small islands. The total area is over 244 thousand square km. It’s population is over 57 million. The UK is made up of four countries: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Their capitals are: London, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast. Great Britain consists of England, Scotland and Wales. The capital of the UK is London.

The British Isles are separated from the continent by the North sea, the English Channel and the Strait of Dover. The western coast of Great Britain is washed by the Atlantic ocean and the Irish sea. The surface of the British Isles varies very much. The north of Scotland is mountainous and is called Highlands. The south which has beautiful valleys and plains is called Lowlands. The north and west of England are a vast plain. Mountains are not very high. Ben Nevis in Scotland is the highest one (about 1343 m). There are a lot of rivers in Great Britain, but they are not very long. The Severn is the longest river while the Thames is the deepest and the most important one. The mountains, the Atlantic ocean and the warm water of Gulf Stream influence the climate of the British Isles. It is mild the whole year round.

The UK is a highly developed industrial country. It produces and exports machinery, electronics, textile. One of the chief industries of the country is a shipbuilding.

The National Flag of the UK is known as the Union Jack. "Union" stands for union of England and Scotland in 1606, "Jack" because the flag is flown on the jackstaff (flagstaff – флагшток) of ships to show their nationality. It 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 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.

The UK is a constitutional monarchy. It means that the head of the state is a queen or a king who reigns but doesn't rule. The legal authority is given to Parliament and executive authority – to the government. The Parliament consists of the Sovereign and two houses which are the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The present Sovereign of the UK is Queen Elisabeth II. As Head of State the Queen is informed and consulted on every aspect of National life. But in practice she is more a beautiful tradition than real Sovereign. The UK is governed by the Government – a body of ministers who are responsible for the administration of national affairs. The ministers are the leading members of the political party which wins a majority seats in Parliament. The most Senior Ministers compose the Cabinet. The Prime Minister is the leader of the party with a majority. The Opposition party which is not currently in power forms the "Shadow Cabinet".

The capital of the UK is London, its political, economic and cultural centre. London with its suburbs has a population of about 11 million people. Once London was a small roman town on the north bank of the Thames. Slowly it grew into one of the world’s major cities. London survived the Plague which killed nearly 100 hundred people and the Great Fire. Little damage occurred during the First World War but the Second World War brought tremendous destruction. Many buildings of great historic value were laid into ruins and today the face of London is changed. Different areas of London seem like different cities.

The districts of London are: the City, the East End, the West End and Westminster. The City is the country’s financial and business centre with the Stock Exchange, the Royal Exchange and the Bank of England. The finest part is the West End with many big houses, theatres, cinemas, museums, picture galleries, long streets, fine shops. The West End is called "the goods" of the city. Working class of London is the East End. It is a district of docks, factories, poor little houses and narrow streets. The East End is the industrial center of London.

The heart of London is Westminster. There are a lot of beautiful sights of interest here, and I’d like to tell about some of them, otherwise it will take a lot of time to speak on all of them. Westminster is known as the district of governmental offices. Here in Westminster are the Houses of Parliament: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Both are situated in one and the same building but at the opposite ends of it. On the highest tower of the building there is the clock and bell "Big Ben".

Opposite the Houses of Parliament stands Westminster Abbey which was built by the architect sir Christopher Wren. Westminster Abbey is famous for the Poet’s Corner because many of great writers are buried here: Dickens, R. Kipling, Tennyson and etc.

Buckingham Palace is the official London residence of the Sovereign. Picadilly Circus has become an important meeting point. The majority of London’s places of entertainment are concentrated around Picadilly Circus. The geographical center of London is Trafalgar Square with Nelson’s Column in the middle of it. At each corner of the monument there is a bronze lion.

Like all big cities London has many big parks, full of trees, flowers and grass. Londoners are proud of their parks in which they forget that there is a large city around them, so beautiful and restful they are. Sit on the grass in the middle of Hyde Park or Kensington Gardens, and you will think that you're in the country, miles away.

Many people think that London is all grey but in fact London's favourite colour is red. The buses are red, the letterboxes are red and the mail vans are all bright, bright red. If you are in London during any celebration - then the flags, the soldiers' uniforms, the cheering crowd, the carriages and horses all sparkle in the sunshine – if it's not raining, of course!

So time to time again we have a chance to convince ourselves that London is a beautiful city.