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# Introduction

The UK is a land made up of many regions, each with a special character and cultural heritage. There are non-stop cities; festivals of music, theatre, literature and the arts; and regional countryside with rolling hills, dramatic cliffs, ancient forests, rugged mountains and tranquil lakes. There are also wonderful islands to visit including the extraordinary range of the Scottish Islands, the Isle of Man, Anglesey, the Scilly Isles, the Isle of Wight and the Channel Islands. They have different traditional cultures, delightful scenery and offer many habitats for wildlife.

To get the most of the variety on hand you could base yourself in a particular city or region. London, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and the major regional cities offer historic and modern architecture, a spectrum of culture and more choice of day and night entertainment than you can fit into a hectic schedule. Or visit the beaches and the mountains of north Wales; absorb the dramatic scenery of Scotland and the Scottish Isles, and its whisky; sail, swim, cycle and walk in the Lake District in Cumbria; visit the dramatic shores and fine countryside of Northern Ireland; take in the wildlife from a boat in the Fens of East Anglia; enjoy the cliffs, beaches, fishing and sailing resorts of Cornwall and Devon in the south-west.

There is still so much more: the Yorkshire Moors or coastal resorts; walking and mountain-biking in the Pennines; the Derbyshire towns and dales; the Welsh borders; the south coast resorts; the 'garden' of Kent; Pembrokeshire and the Gower Peninsula in south Wales.

The British Isles is visited by millions of people each year, many returning time and again. It is seeped in history and has some stunning landscapes. It is also quirky at times, so you are assured of an interesting visit!

Wales

The principality of Wales is full of fascinating places to visit and stay. The castles of Beaumaris, Conwy, Harlech and Caernarfon are officially listed as World heritage sites and provide an insight into the troubled past of this great land. The national park of Snowdonia is stunning and provides walkers and climbers with ample opportunities to challenge their limits. South Wales also has interesting places to visit: Pembrokeshire is especially inviting for tourists.

England

We all know about the attractions of London but England has a lot more to offer outside of the city. The ‘English Riviera’, Torquay, is blessed with good weather and is a major tourist attraction. This is a great place to stay and explore the local seaside resorts and go inland towards the vast moors.
Windsor castle is a great place to visit and the town and surrounding areas are beautiful. Warwick castle in the centre of England is world famous and holds regular evens to show how life was like in the time it was built.

Chester

This Roman town has a fascinated history stretching back over 1500 years. This can be seen from the Roman, Medieval and Tudor remains liberally scattered across the city. The Walls surrounding the city can be walked around in a couple of hours and allow plenty of opportunity to take photographs. The world famous Rows date back over 500 years and are great for walking and shopping.

Scotland

A great place to visit, Scotland still has many places that are relatively uninhabited. And are great for getting away from it all. Ben Nevis is the highest mountain in the British Isles and the numerous lochs provide great fishing (Beware of the Loch Ness monster!) . In parts you can still hear Gaelic spoken and we all know about the Scottish expertise in making Whisky! You can also visit the ski resorts of Aviemore in the Cairngorms . Glasgow, the capital is now recognised as a centre of culture as well as being a great shopping centre.

Perhaps the best thing about the British Isles is its compactness. You can visit many places in a relatively short period of time. The most fascinating part of visiting is travelling the back roads and coming across places not regularly visited by Tourists. Come to the British Isles and see for yourselves what it has to offer.

# The UK on the world tourist`s map

## Accommodation

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### Hotels and Guest Houses

You will find a significant difference in both price and facilities between hotels and guest houses in the UK. Hotels usually offer breakfasts, lunches, teas, dinners, a licensed bar and a range of services and facilities to suit individuals, families and often business groups. Country house hotels will often add recreational facilities in their grounds such as golf, tennis, swimming, health spas, gyms and attended play areas for children. Top league international hotels in London and major cities offer comprehensive amenities and services for business and holiday guests, and a choice of first class and luxury accommodation. Guest houses may not have bars or offer lunch or teas, but will have television and sitting lounges.

In England and Wales the AA, RAC (the largest UK motoring organisations) and the English Tourist Council have come together to provide an overall star for hotels and diamond rating for guest accommodation, including bed and breakfast. Hotels have between one and five stars; guest accommodation between one and five diamonds. In Scotland and Northern Ireland all tourist accommodation is also graded regularly to provide a clear indication of the level of facilities you can expect.

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### Renting and Buying

If you are planning a longer stay in the UK, you may consider renting or buying property in the UK.

Rented property is available all over the UK and there is a large rental market for properties in London. Rented property is offered both furnished and unfurnished and typically involves short-lease tenancies. In London and major cities, there are agencies that specifically offer property for rent. National, regional and local estate agents also represent owners of rented property and you can also find apartments ('flats') and houses available to let through online agencies, newspaper advertisements and dedicated property magazines.

Estate agents often provide a complete service for those wishing to buy property. This typically includes professional services such as valuing and surveying potential properties. They may also offer in-house or affiliated legal services to cover the buying process (known as 'conveyancing') and often have links to established mortgage firms who provide long-term loans for purchases. Conveyancing services are also widely available through solicitors, and finance is offered competitively through banks, building societies and other financial institutions.

It is highly recommended that you seek independent legal advice if you are considering buying property in the UK.

### Leisure and Holiday Parks

Leisure and holiday parks are a way of enjoying an extremely wide variety of recreational and leisure pursuits at one site. They are located all over the UK with many based at or near coastal resorts. They usually offer accommodation for touring or camping as well as lodges, chalets or spacious static caravans for hire - all well equipped so you can set up your temporary home as you wish.

The great benefit of this form of holiday accommodation is the facilities for young children which can include kids clubs, attended play areas, activity workshops, waterslides, heated indoor and outdoor swimming pools, children's farms, pets corners and even summertime pantomimes. For teenagers and adults there are nightclubs, pubs, restaurants and a variety of sports. Some leisure parks focus on particular interest holidays such as sailing, golfing, fishing or horse-riding.

The British Graded Holiday Parks Rating Scheme, which gives ratings reflecting facilities and environment, may help you choose from the variety on offer.

**Hostels**

There are many hostels located all over England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Hostels vary in style and amenities but they offer bedrooms with between two and six beds for young people, families and groups. They usually provide substantial breakfasts and dinners at low prices and have communal kitchen facilities if you prefer to cater for yourself.

The main hostel organisations are the Youth Hostel Association (YHA), the Scottish Youth Hostel Association (SYHA) and Hostelling International Northern Ireland (HINI). You do not have to be a 'youth' to stay because there is no upper age limit (in Scotland the lower age limit is 5). But you do have to be a member of the YHA or SYHA, which involves paying a small annual membership fee. There are also a variety of independent hostels offering accommodation. Staying in hostels is traditionally popular with people pursuing backpacking, walking, cycling or generally exploring outdoor pursuits. But there are also hostels in many towns and cities, which enable members to enjoy good basic accommodation on a low budget.

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### Caravanning and Camping

Many visitors, often families, choose caravanning or camping (C&C) over other accommodation - for good reason. A camping park does not tie you down; it can be a stopover, a base for exploration, or a place of leisure. C&C parks in the UK are cheap but offer many advantages. All provide good washing facilities, basic amenities and utilities to enable comfortable living. There's often a shop on site and recreation facilities for children and adults. Many are open all year and are good for short breaks in spring, autumn or even the winter months.

Most parks admit tents, touring and motor caravans and offer a range of central facilities. The larger parks will have caravan holiday homes for hire. These are usually spacious and well equipped with two or three good sized bedrooms, a sitting room with comfortable furnishings and a separate dining area. They will often have modern conveniences such as colour televisions, fridges, hot showers, en-suite bathrooms and microwaves.

There's a great choice all over the UK. To help you choose, the national tourist boards inspect C&C sites in their regions and grade them according to the British Graded Holiday Parks Scheme. Ratings of between one and five stars are awarded, based on cleanliness, environment and the quality of facilities and services provided.

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### Bed and Breakfast

Bed and breakfast accommodation, advertised by the famous 'B&B vacancies' sign, is mostly in private homes and the emphasis is on bedrooms rather than on facilities such as a bar or restaurant. They are often the least expensive form of guest accommodation although prices vary between those in the most popular holiday locations and those offering stopovers 'en route'.

Thousands of bed and breakfasts have been visited anonymously by tourist officers to be inspected for a diamond rating of between one and five stars. This is intended as a guide to the quality of accommodation and food on offer.

As private homes, including farmhouses and working farms, B&Bs tend to offer a very personal welcome, and an insight into British ways of life in different parts of the country. Breakfast is intended to fill you and will often include bacon, eggs, fried bread, tomatoes, even fried potatoes and local additions such as black pudding. Or you can enjoy a 'continental' breakfast: cereal, bread, toast, tea, coffee and juice.

## Transportation

### Coach information

Travelling by coach is a great way to travel across most parts of the country at much cheaper prices than travelling by train. Coach services can be used to take you on business and leisure, and more people are finding coach travel, espically when commuting to work, a useful mode of transport.

National Express and it's associated companies provide the most comprehensive coach service across the UK, and times and fares for their services can be seen on the National Express web site.

There are far more coach services than National Express, here is a short list of useful ones.

Buy Coach Tickets Online:

National Express - National coach operator

Regular Coach services:

AirLinks - Provides connections to, from and between airports.

Armchair - Provides commuter coach services from Reading and Maidenhead to London.

Berry's Coaches - Services between London and the West Country.

EasyBus - A potential coach service to keep your eye on, which is intending to offer London to Birmingham for £1.

Green Line - Provides connections across South East England.

MegaBus - Amazingly cheap intercity bus travel across the UK

National Express - Travel around Britain with National Express.

Oxford Bus - Services between London and Oxford.

Scottish Citylink - Travel around Scotland with ease.

### Bus information

Unlike other forms of transport within the UK, bus travel is not nationally coordinated and there is no national online bus journey planner, although Traveline is a good attempt. In addition two unofficial services are worth checking out. CarlBerry is an excellent attempt at helping people plan bus journeys across the UK. Xephos Internet has tried to produce the ultimate system, a combined bus and train journey planner.

Advice about bus times can be gained up ringing 0870 608 2 608, which is the National Public Transport information line.

Depending on numbers involved, coach travel is probably the cheapest way to get around the UK, particularly between the major towns and cities. National Express, Scottish Citylink and Ulsterbus offer daily services to more than 1,300 destinations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. National Express offers discount coachcards to students and young people aged 16 to 25; there is also a Tourist Trail Pass offering unlimited travel for a fixed period. The Scottish Explorer Pass covers coach services to around 190 destinations in Scotland. Coaches have toilet and washroom facilities and long routes usually provide videos and steward services offering snacks.

Tourist operators provide a great many special coach tours taking in local and regional sites. Coaches and minibuses are also widely available for corporate travel and group hire.

There are regular local and regional bus services operated by town and city councils throughout the UK. However, services to and from remote rural areas tend to be infrequent.

For the latest Road travel Information please visit the following web sites:

AA Roadwatch - AA traffic reports.

AA Route Planner - Plan your journey across the UK.

Geostar - Very detailed route planner for the whole of Europe.

Get Me There - Plan your journey across the UK and Europe. Provided by Toyota.

Highways Agency - Motorway traffic reports.

RAC - With the latest traffic reports and journey planner, this is a good site for all car drivers.

Traffic Wales: North - Latest traffic report from the North Wales Regional Traffic Control Centre.

Traffic Wales: South - Latest traffic report from the South Wales Regional Traffic Control Centre.

### Sea Travel

The UK is surrounded by water, but with the low cost of air travel, where and when is sea travel a viable option? Here is a guide the main ferry services from the UK.

### Rail Information

The railway in the UK, started in 1825, is the grandfather of all railway systems, now featuring more than 2,400 stations serviced by 15,000 daily departures. The fast inter-city trains have standard or first class seats, the latter offering varying degrees of luxury and additional service, depending on the service operator. Standard seating is generally comfortable and most trains have restaurant or buffet cars or mobile refreshments. There are air-conditioned sleeping cars on overnight services from London to Wales, Scotland and the south-west of England.

Whenever you travel by train, ask which kind of ticket will save you the most money. There are many variables depending on when you travel. Also ask your local British Tourist Authority office or travel agent about railway ticket discount packages. The BritRail Pass, for example, is not sold in the UK. In North America it is available from Rail Europe in New York, and in Europe you can get it from Rail Europe offices, selected travel agents and major railway stations. Please not that travel on the London Underground or Heathrow Express is not included in a BritRail pass.

Make advance reservations to carry cycles by train; sometimes there is a small charge for this.

Timetables

Network Rail - Provides rail timetable information for Britain's national rail network.

DB Timetable search - Provides european (including UK) rail timetable information.

Xephos Internet - Although unofficial, a very good public transport journey planner. Includes bus and rail timetables.

Travel InfoSystems - Provides online and software application based journey planning solutions.

Live Train Running Information

National Rail - Provides a central source for all UK rail enquiries including real time running information for train services across the British railway network.

### Tram information

Tram systems now exist in the following parts of the country:

Blackpool Trams - Operates between Blackpool and Fleetwood.

Croydon Tramlink - Serves parts of South London.

Metrolink - Operates in the Greater Manchester area.

Midland Metro - Operates between Birmingham and Wolverhamption.

Stagecoach Supertram - serves the city of Sheffield with three light rail routes covering 29 kilometres across the city.

### Air Travel Information

| Book Airline Tickets | Airport Information | Airline Information | Track A Flight | Air Travel News | Air Travel Photos |

Book Airline Tickets (from InfoTransport)

Ebooker - Great prices from hundreds of airlines to anywhere in the world.

Air France - Travel the world with Air France.

German Wings - Great prices to Germany.

KLM UK - Travel the world with KLM.

Singapore Airlines - Direct flight to Singapore.

Virgin Atlantic - Flights around the world.

**Catering**

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### Restaraunts

There are about 50,000 restaurants in the United Kingdom. Their turnover amounted to £18.2 billion in 2001. Almost two-thirds of businesses offer takeaway facilities.

The industry is highly fragmented, with low entry barriers. The majority of restaurants are independent small businesses, trading through a single outlet.

In 2002, 93% of VAT-registered firms had a turnover of less than £500,000 (with 43% having sales of under £100,000). Only 3% of VATregistered firms had a turnover of £1m or more. The three largest chains are estimated to account for less than 10% of the market; the leading 40 chains account for less than 15%.

The degree of concentration varies though:

• almost all ‘traditional’ cafes, snack bars and

tearooms are single-outlet businesses

• chains are more prominent in the ‘modern’ fast

food (especially burgers and pizzas) and midpriced

‘family’ restaurant sectors.

Competition takes place in local markets and is strong - major chains are expanding their operations and new entrants continue to be attracted to the market.

The number of VAT-registered restaurant and takeaway businesses has continued to rise over the last five years (at a higher rate than the total number of VAT-registered enterprises which, indeed, fell slightly in 2002) and problems of overcapacity exist in some areas.

Expansion of capacity has been greatest in the low to mid-priced segments of the market, most notably amongst fast food operators and ‘niche’ operators such as coffee bar chains. For example, one estimate suggests that the number of coffee bar outlets has increased by more than 55% over the last four years. Moreover, expansion has been most rapid amongst the leading five coffee bar operators which, collectively, have more than doubled their number of outlets since the end of the 1990s. The two largest coffee bar chains are estimated to account for about 45% of the market.

Expansion has been greatest in London and the south. However, with the capital, in particular, showing signs of market saturation, the leading chains are increasingly seeking to expand in other geographical areas.

The continued expansion in the number of restaurants and takeaways in recent years has been encouraged by a long-term trend towards consumers eating-out more frequently. At the same time, the increasing willingness of consumers to try a broader range of cuisine has encouraged the development of new eating-out concepts (with London remaining a ‘testing ground’ for many).

However, catering’s share of total consumers’ expenditure has declined over the last decade as eating-out has had to compete with other goods and services for a share of consumers’ leisure spending. In 2001, catering accounted for 7.8% of total real consumers’ expenditure compared with 8.1% in 2000 and 10% in 1990.

Certainly, over the last five years, spending on eating-out has risen less rapidly than total consumers’ expenditure, with demand for catering services being particularly weak in 2001. Having increased by 3% in real terms in 2000, spending on eating-out rose by only 0.5% in 2001. Within this trend, demand deteriorated during the course of the year, spending levels being 0.4% lower in the second half of 2001 than in the corresponding period of 2000.

The foot-and-mouth crisis played a role in the deterioration in the industry’s performance in 2001, impacting adversely on independent businesses operating in rural locations, as well as on those dependent on overseas visitors.

In addition to the adverse impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis, some catering businesses dependent on overseas visitors reported a further downturn in trade following the 11th September US terrorist attacks. For example, in October 2001, the Restaurant Association of Great Britain reported that some restaurants had suffered a 20% fall in business since 11th September.

Restaurants located in London have been most adversely affected by the fall in overseas visitor numbers (especially from the United States and Japan).

Real consumer spending on eating-out has shown signs of improving in 2002: in the second quarter of the year, spending levels were 1.2% higher than a year earlier - this compares with a year-on-year increase of only 0.1% in the first quarter of 2002.

Nevertheless, spending on eating-out continues to rise at a slower rate than total consumers’ expenditure: total real consumer spending rose by 3.5% in the first quarter of 2002 and by 4.1% in the second quarter of the year.

Given that the number of restaurants and takeaways has continued to rise but that consumer spending on eating-out has weakened over the last two years, competitive pressures have increased as problems of overcapacity have been exacerbated. In the light of recent trading conditions, some chains have been re-assessing their operations (e.g. concentrating on developing the most successful areas of their businesses, ‘refreshing’ brands and disposing of underperforming areas).

However, a number of chains are continuing to pursue aggressive expansion programmes.

Consequently, there is no prospect of an easing of competitive pressures in the foreseeable future.

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### Public houses

There are about 60,000 public houses in the United Kingdom. Collectively, their turnover amounted to £19.1 billion in 2001.

In 2002, 93% of VAT-registered firms had a urnover of less than £500,000; only 2% had sales of £1 million or more.

The ownership structure of the pub trade has changed significantly over the last decade: the 1989 Beer Orders forced the national brewers to reduce the size of their tied estates, providing opportunities for the ‘free trade’ to more than double in size since that time. In particular, ‘newer’ large independent pub chains have been gaining market share at the expense of smaller ‘traditional’ freehouses.

In contrast, the number of brewery-owned pubs fell from about 44,000 in 1989 to just over 10,000 in 2001. However, the major brewers’ share of pub turnover has fallen less rapidly than their share of outlets since 1989: with a limit on the number of tied outlets which they may own, the major brewers have been developing estates of larger outlets.

Following a review of the 1989 Beer Orders, it was announced in December 2000 that the cap on the size of brewers’ tied estates was to be removed.

The removal of the cap could make it easier for the major brewers and larger regional brewers to expand their pubs portfolios. However, those not wishing to incur acquisition costs will still be able to secure outlets for their beer through supply agreements. Indeed, some brewing groups are seeking to dispose of - rather than acquire – pub outlets.

Alcoholic Drink Total Consumer Spending Total consumer spending on alcoholic drink has been weak for much of the last decade.

In 2001, the foot-and-mouth crisis exacerbated problems for some independent pubs in rural locations, as well as those dependent on overseas visitors. In addition, some businesses dependent on overseas visitors reported a downturn in trade following the 11th September US terrorist attacks.

Some improvement in trading conditions was seen in the first half of 2002 with sales being boosted by the World Cup and the Golden Jubilee. However, trading conditions have been mixed subsequently with, for example, poor weather being blamed for a weakening in demand in July.

Moreover, pubs continue to compete with other licensed premises, as well as the take-home trade, for a share of spending on drink. Consequently, many pub operators have been seeking to broaden their customer base by offering a wider range of services and facilities (e.g. placing greater emphasis on food sales, a move which has resulted in the pub trade increasing its share of the eatingout market). However, lower turnover pubs tend to trade through smaller outlets, the physical constraints of which limit their ability to develop new income sources.

Against this background, both brewers and independent pub operators continue to review their estate portfolios. At the same time, industry consolidation is increasing with, in particular, merger and acquisition activity amongst independent pub chains having risen over the last year. The ten largest operators are now estimated to own over 45% of UK pub outlets.

Little improvement in trading conditions is expected in the short term, with total alcohol consumption expected, at best, to rise only modestly over the next twelve months. Pubs will continue to vie with other licensed premises, as well as the take-home trade, in a fiercely competitive market.

Opportunities for some pubs to gain business from nightclubs may arise in the medium term when proposed licensing reforms come into force. Large city centre/high street pubs would be most likely to take advantage of the opportunity to extend opening hours. However, only a very small proportion of pubs would be likely to open 24 hours.

Pubs which offer a wider range of products and services will generally fare better than purely drink-oriented pubs. This trend is unfavourable to small, lower turnover outlets which will remain most at risk of disposal or closure as estate portfolios continue to be reviewed. Given the benefits that can be gained through economies of scale, further industry consolidation is expected.

# Tourist industry in the UK

## London

The Romans founded the city of Londinium in the first century on the banks of the river Thames. They went about their business, building roads and aqueducts, as you would expect. Parts of these roads are still visible today. Amazing.

In 1066 the Normans (Frenchmen) invaded England and London seemed like a good choice as the capital city. Apparently this was the last time the British lost a battle on home soil......don't mess with these guys. By the year 1600 London was home to 200,000 inhabitants and things were going along swimmingly.

This all changed in 1665 with the arrival of the bubonic plague (Black Death), carried by rats, which wiped out half of the population. The next year (1666) marked the Great Fire of London. This had the effect of dealing the death blow to the remnants of the plague, while destroying most of London at the same time. Talk about consecutive action-packed years. The modern city is based upon the subsequent rebuilding of the city.

London expanded all the while. This was facilitated particularly by the opening of over ground and underground railway systems. The first underground line was opened in 1863 and used steam engines to ferry passengers around. Think about that the next time you're on the tube.

World War II bombing and commercial expansion have changed the face of London. Recently the Docklands area has been rejuvenated and the Millennium Dome (the largest of its type in the world) has been added to Greenwich.

London, an amazing city where the old lives alongside the new.

## Tips for tourists

There are a few obvious things to take care of before you head off to the UK, like buying an air ticket and sorting out your visa. There are a few other factors to consider too that will take care of any hitches that you may experience on your travels.

Travel insurance

Don't take a chance with your health. Foreign doctors bills can be massive when converted into home currency. Also, it is much easier to communicate with medical staff in a non-English speaking country in the foreign backwaters when you flash your medical insurance card.

International drivers licence

You may want to demonstrate your driving prowess on the narrow lanes of the English countryside. You will not hire a car without your international driver's licence. A short visit to your local AA branch with a few passport photos, your licence and an administration fee will get you sorted out. Money well spent.

Car Insurance

You may wish to purchase a runabout while in the UK. The decision on whether you opt for car insurance or not in the UK is made for you. Car insurance is compulsory. Your car insurance should be subjected to a discount if you have a reference letter from your local insurers. This should be on a letterhead and state that you have paid your premiums and what your no claims bonus is.

Photocopy vital documents

Losing your passport in the UK is not a pleasant experience, especially as its loss would typically dawn upon you 2 weeks before you are due to jet off to the holiday destination of your dreams. There is, however, a worse experience and that is losing your passport and not having a photocopy of it. Make a copy of all important pages, including your visa. This will not only speed up the application process, but you may need the photocopy of your UK visa to get back into the UK, if you don't have time to apply for a new one. In fact, photocopying all important documents (ID book, international driver's licence etc.) is highly recommended.

Travellers cheques

Carry most of your cash in travellers cheques. Remember to keep your receipt with the cheque numbers separate from your cheques and keep a list of these numbers in your diary. There are a number of ways of converting these cheques into cash. The best is to put them into the safe haven of a bank account. Alternately, you could visit a branch of your travellers cheque issuer in London and exchange them for cash. The third, and most expensive, option is to exchange them at a Bureau de Change. These places can sting you with commissions and non-favourable exchange rates. Stay away if possible.

International Student Identity Card (ISIC)

A number of discounts are available to these members (youth hostels, transport, cinemas etc.) The ISIC card is available from your student body or selected travel agents.

Passport photographs

Take a few of these with you. You will use them for everything from purchasing travelcards to applying for visas etc. One of those really handy items for the wallet. There are photo machines at most underground stations, but you can't beat having your own stock when it comes to cost and convenience.

## Development of tourist industry

For an epidemic which occupied acres of newsprint for several months, the lasting impact of the foot-and-mouth crisis on British tourism seems likely to be somewhat less than apocalyptic.

It was a point well made during the crisis that, while most public attention and sympathy focused on the farmers whose flocks were being culled, the greater impact on the economy was likely to be on the tourist trade.

Tourism is far more important than the foot-and-mouth afflicted parts of agriculture to the UK economy. Agricultural output is only around 2 per cent of the economy, and livestock farming just 0.5 per cent.

Hotels and restaurants alone account for more than this, about 3 per cent of the economy; but the overall importance of the tourist industry is far larger, with knock-on effects on retail and other services spending. The British Tourist Authority calculates that about 7 per cent of gross spending in the economy is done by tourists.

It was with the tourist trade in mind that dire predictions of gloom for the economy were made.

The Centre for Economic and Business Research, a small think-tank, created a splash by predicting that foot-and-mouth would cost the country Ј9bn, about 1 per cent of the UK's annual national income, with Ј6.4bn of this a result of the effect on the tourist trade. This was regarded by many as scaremongering and the overall figure was subsequently revised down to just over Ј6bn.

Fears that the UK was being seen as a disease-ridden hellhole became so bad that Gordon Brown, the chancellor, in New York in May to talk about the global struggle against HIV and other diseases, found time to stop off and plug the UK tourist industry.

However, as far as can be estimated, the negative effect of the outbreak is concentrated in particular parts of the tourism industry rather than being a generalised blow.

Reams of anecdotal and survey evidence suggest that rural tourism, which depends heavily on day and weekend trippers, has undoubtedly been hit hard. Around a fifth of all workers in areas like Cumbria, Devon, Dumfries and Galloway are employed in the tourist-dependent sectors of distribution, hotels and restaurants.

The English Tourism Council says that tourism is losing Ј140m a week, and underlines the meagre amounts of compensation going to tourist businesses compared with that offered to farmers.

But more sober analysis recently by the Bank of England suggests that much of the spending will be switched elsewhere within the tourism sector or indeed elsewhere in the economy.

Retailers have done particularly well in the past few months, for example, as residents - and indeed tourists - locked out of the countryside have gone on shopping sprees in the towns instead. Retail sales in May grew at their fastest annual rate since July 1997.

The analysis and the available evidence also suggests that the impact on overseas visitors is likely to be around the region of a 10 per cent fall for a couple of months - somewhat less than catastrophic.

The latest figures appear to bear this out; the Office for National Statistics estimate that 2m tourists from overseas visited the UK in April - down from 2.2m in April 2000, but not a disastrous fall, and probably to be expected anyway at a time of weakness in the global economy.

In March, the first month in which the outbreak became serious, the numbers of overseas visitors was actually higher than in March last year. They also seemed to be spending about the same as ever, outlaying a seasonally adjusted Ј1.1bn in March 2001 as against Ј1.07bn last year.

The reason for the overall muted effect is fairly clear from a cursory examination of where tourists actually come in the UK. Despite the international image of Britain as a green and pleasant land, most visitors come for the cities.

London and the south east, one of the regions least affected by foot-and-mouth, account for the vast majority of spending by overseas visitors. The south east also makes up 45 per cent of total spending by UK tourists and overseas residents in the UK (exluding day trips), suggesting that the overall effect of the foot-and-mouth disease on tourism will be muted.

Even the English Tourism Council estimates that the English countryside is the destination for only a quarter of British people holidaying in England.

Just as agriculture is nothing like as important a part of the economy as popular belief might hold, so tourism outside London and the south east is also less important than the images of thousands of visitors tramping through the national parks might imply.

Of the 1,918 independently-owned attractions in the UK which charge admission and which feature in the Good Britain Guide, 722 have put their prices up this year, according to the guide's latest edition.

More than half of the 414 places owned by national organisations, including the National Trust, have also raised their prices, usually by a margin of around 10%.

"These price increases are hardly the way to attract more visitors, at a time when the British holiday industry is seriously worried about its future," said the guide's editor, Alisdair Aird.

Mr Aird held up the houses of parliament as an exceptionally bad offender. The increase in the cost of a tour from £3.50 to £7.50 marked Westminster out as the country's "worst price-hike villain", and the rise was particularly unpalatable because parliament was a body which "ought to know better". Mr Aird went on to express his alarm that "this year - against a background of near-zero inflation - so many holiday places have steeply increased their prices."

The guide also went on to bemoan the inconvenient opening times of many attractions, the fact that so many places stay shut for as long as half a year and subsequently have to limit their numbers when they finally open their doors; and the lack of effort to link attractions with places to stay and public transport.

However, all was not entirely doom and gloom. "On the plus side," Mr Aird went on to say, "is the amazing number of establishments that not only stay open for the whole year, but are absolutely free. This year we have been particularly impressed by the friendliness and helpfulness of all the people we dealt with in Scotland."

Mr Aird also praised "the thousands of volunteers helping to staff so many of the country's attractions, from little local museums to great historic buildings".

Britain's top tourist attractions

Family attraction of the year Ironbridge Gorge Museum, Shropshire.

Visitor city of the year York.

Museum of the year Imperial War Museum, London.

Newcomer attraction of the year The Deep, Hull.

Gallery of the year The National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

Historic house of the year Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (Sir Winston Churchill's birthplace).

Living museum of the year Historic Quay, Hartlepool, Northumbria.

Specialist museum of the year National Space Centre, Leicester.

Theme park of the year Thorpe Park in Surrey.

Castle of the year Warwick Castle.

Discovery centre of the year Thinktank, Birmingham.

Tour of the year National Coal Mining Museum, Middlestown, Yorkshire.

Railway of the year Snowdon Mountain Railway, Llanberis, North Wales.

Zoo of the year Chester Zoo, Cheshire.

Garden of the year Groombridge Place Gardens, Kent.

Adventure of the year Hawkstone Park Follies, Shropshire.

Aquarium of the year National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth.

Farm park of the year Cotswold Farm Park, Kineton, Gloucestershire.

Boat trip of the year Lundy Day Trip, north Devon.

Bird centre of the year Flamingo Park Wildlife Encounter, Isle of Wight.

# Conclusion

Tour operators and travel agents cater to almost every need in the UK. Many have bases overseas. Your nearest British Tourist Authority (BTA) office will provide information on the tour operators and travel agents in your country that organise holidays and tours to the UK. You can also use the BTA's VisitBritain website to search their directory of tour operators and travel agents who offer online booking.

Your local tourist operators or those based in the UK can provide a broad range of services to make your visit easy and comfortable. They can help you plan and book every part of your journey, as you wish it, sending you advanced information about the regions you will visit, the accommodation you will stay in, special activities and other needs. Others offer travel packages where you join in a variety of pre-arranged tours. Many tours involve travel by coach with accommodation in hotels recommended by the AA, RAC, and the English Tourist Council, among other accommodation grading systems. If you use the services of UK-based travel agents, you are recommended to choose agents that are members of the Association of British Travel Agencies (ABTA).

Many tour companies provide holidays geared to special interests. For example there are specialist operators offering yacht chartering and sailing holidays; garden tours; rambling and hill-walking holidays; horse-riding and trekking; golf or tennis holidays; cycling holidays; canal boating. Others provide tickets and travel to all kinds of sport events, or packages including hotel, theatre tickets and organised visits to key sites.

The national tourist boards can provide details about recommended tour operators in their regions.

# Literature

Barclays UK Hotels & Catering, December 2007.

http://www.londonlink.co.za

http://uk.paley.com