The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the UK) occupies most of the territory of the British Isles. It consists of four main parts: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. London is the capital of England; Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland, Cardiff — of Wales and Belfast — of Northern Ireland. The UK is a small country with an area of approx. 244,100 square kilometers. It occupies only 0.2 per cent of the world s land surface. It is washed by the Atlantic Ocean in the north-west, north and south-west and separated from Europe by the North Sea in the east and by the English Channel in the south. The Strait of Dover or Pas de Calais is the narrowest part of the Channel. The North Sea and the English Channel are often called "the narrow seas"; they are not deep but are frequently rough and difficult to navigate during storms.

In the west the Irish Sea and the North Channel separate the UK from Ireland. The seas around Britain provide exceptionally good fishing grounds. The country has many bays favourable for shipping. In their shelter are Britain's main ports such as London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Hull and others.

One will not find very high mountains or large plains in Great Britain. Everything occupies very little place. Nature, it seems, has carefully adapted things to the size of the island itself. The highest mountain is Ben Nevis in Scotland, 4,406 feet high. The longest river is the Severn in England, about 200 miles long.

The population of the United Kingdom is over 57 million people. Foreigners often call British people "English", but the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh do not consider themselves to be English. The English are Anglo-Saxon in origin, but the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish are Celts, descendants of the ancient people, who crossed over from Europe centuries before the Norman Invasion. It was this people, whom the Germanic Angles and Saxons conquered in the 5th and 6th centuries AD. These Germanic conquerors gave England its name — "Angle" land. They were conquered in their turn by the Norman French, when William the Conqueror of Normandy landed near Hastings in 1066. It was from the union of Norman conquerors and the defeated Anglo-Saxons that the English people and the English language were born.

The official language of the United Kingdom is English. However, in western Scotland, some people still speak Gaelic and in northern and central parts of Wales, people often speak Welsh.

The UK 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 chief industries of the country is shipbuilding.

The UK is a constitutional monarchy. In law, Head of the State is Queen. In practice, the country is ruled by the elected government with the Prime Minister at the head. The British Parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

There are three main political parties in Great Britain: the Labour, the Conservative and the Liberal parties.

The flag of the United Kingdom, known as the Union Jack, is made up of three crosses. The big Red Cross is the cross of Saint George, the patron saint of England. The white cross is the cross of Saint Andrew, the patron saint of Scotland. The red diagonal cross is the cross of Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland.