

BRITISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Religion and Beliefs

- The official state-sanctioned religion in the UK is the Church of England which is of the Christian Protestant faith. However, there has been a huge decline in the role of the Church in Britain since the middle of the last Century with less than half the population attending Church services or believing in God.
- It is estimated that a third of the population have no religious connection. Thirty percent of the UK population affiliates to the official Church of England while ten percent identify with the Roman Catholic religion. Those who affiliate to the Christian religion outside of Protestantism and Catholicism accept other Protestant denominations: Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist.
- Whilst Christianity is the dominant religion in the UK, minority religions include Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism.

Major Celebrations/Secular Celebrations

- Major celebrations in the UK calendar include: Christmas Day (25th December), Boxing Day (26th December), New Year's Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, the Queen's Birthday on the second Saturday in June.
- Other celebrations are known as Bank Holidays: May Day, celebrated on 1st May, the Spring Bank Holiday on the last weekend of May and the Summer Bank Holiday on the last weekend of August. Bank Holidays take place at the weekend with most other businesses and institutions closed on the following Monday.

The Family

- Until the middle of the 20th Century, marriage was the standard for British families which comprised two parents with the father as the head of the household. However, in the last few decades, there has been a rise in single parent families and many more couples are choosing to co-habit rather than to marry. Half a century ago, living together would have been socially unacceptable and was known as 'living in sin'.
- Divorce at one time was also unthinkable but in the last few decades it has become more acceptable.
- Marriage too is changing with same sex couples now permitted to marry in law or enter into Civil Partnerships. Although in the last few decades, there has been some reported instability in family life regarding single motherhood and marital breakdown family relationships continue to be close with two thirds of the population living in close proximity to immediate family and extended family.
- There remains a commitment for younger family to take care of elderly relatives.
- Mobility in the workforce has changed in the last decade so that many younger people live some distance from close family but kinship relationships continue to be close with regular communication and family reunions.

Economy

- The UK imports a quarter of its food from the EU but with the collapse in the value of the Pound against the Dollar following the vote for Britain to leave the European

Union, prices are set to rise dramatically. In 2015, Britain exported £18 billion worth of food and drink whilst spending around £38 billion on importing food and drink.

Food

- Even if British food has not got an exceptional reputation in the world, there are some traditional foods in the United Kingdom and traditional British beers. The English breakfast and fish and chips are the most iconic dishes in the UK.
- Traditional British foods typically centre around the concept of ‘meat and two veg’, which means in essence that the dish will contain a type of meat (usually beef, pork, lamb or chicken), two types of vegetable (typically root vegetables) and potatoes.
- Furthermore, as it is a multicultural country, you can now enjoy food from all parts of the world in the UK. Curry is now the nation’s favourite dish, being brought over from the Indian sub-continent with migrants.

Arts, Humanities and Popular Culture

- The British people have traditionally enjoyed social interaction relating to popular culture throughout the centuries.
- The theatres have long been well supported with entertainment ranging from music to drama and to comedy. In the 19th Century, the Music Hall was the mainstay of entertainment offering all manner of acts from singing to acrobatics.
- The cinema is very popular as are the numerous social clubs across the country. Music too plays an important role in popular culture and has been the forerunner in exports.
- The UK is home to the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Adele, and many other artists who have made it to the world stage. Jungle, Dubstep, Grime and other modern forms of dance music also originate from the UK.
- Traditionally music and social gatherings have been the cement in isolated communities over the centuries with dancing and singing. The Scottish and Irish Ceilidh is a traditional social gathering involving Gaelic folk music and dancing either in a house or larger venue. The Welsh people are known for their singing voices and the Welsh Men’s Choir is renowned World Wide

Visiting a home

- Unlike many European cultures, the British enjoy entertaining people in their homes.
- Although the British value punctuality, you may arrive 10-15 minutes later when invited to dinner.
- It is not always required to remove your shoes when entering a British home, but it is recommended that you ask upon entry whether or not shoes can be worn.

Taboos

- Do not rest your elbows on the table.
- Do not stare.
- Do not be overly familiar with people you do not know well.
- Do not ask personal questions such as how much someone earns, who they voted for etc.
- Do not speak too loudly or cut into a conversation.

A poem to better understand the British Melting Pot

The British Melting pot

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures
And let them settle,
Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.
Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years
Add lots of Norman French to some
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.

Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,
Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,
Vietnamese and Sudanese.

Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians
And Pakistanis,
Combine with some Guyanese
And turn up the heat.

Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,
Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some
Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese
And Palestinians
Then add to the melting pot.

Leave the ingredients to simmer.

As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish
Binding them together with English.

Allow time to be cool.

Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,
Serve with justice
And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

Benjamin Zephaniah, "The British", *Wicked World !*, 2000

1. settle (v.) [setl] = *s'installer*
2. overrun (v.) [ˌəʊvəˈrʌn] = invade
3. remove (v.) [rɪ'mu:v] = take away
4. stir (v.) [stɜ:] = to mix
5. blend (n.) [blend] = mixture
6. sprinkle (v.) [ˈsprɪŋkl] = *saupoudrer*
7. simmer (v.) [ˈsɪmə] = cook on low heat
8. bind (v.) [baɪnd] = join
9. bitter (adj.) [ˈbɪtə] = *amer*