**BASIC GEOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**

The British Isles are situated off the north-western coast of the Continent of Europe, and they comprise two states:

* **the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**, with the area of cca.244,000 square kilometres (sq km);
* **the Irish Republic or Eire** [eərə], situated on the second largest island. The UK consists of four parts: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland.

**Main parts of the UK**

1. **England**

England is the largest part of the UK and it has a dominant position in the spheres of language, culture and public life. Besides, English custom and practice have influenced many aspects of everyday life in the rest of the UK. It is **predominantly a** **lowland** country. **Upland** regions can be found in **the North and in the South West**. England has a dense network of **rivers**, **the longest** one being the **Severn**, which flows to the Bristol Channel, and **the best known** one the **Thames**, on which London is situated. Many rivers are connected by canals, which used to serve for transporting goods, but are utilized for holidaying today.

1. **Scotland**

The area of the Scottish mainland and islands is cca.75,000 sq km. The mainland can be divided into **three geographical areas**: **The southern uplands** near the border with England is a hilly region of small towns and sheep farming**. The central Lowlands** and the strip of plains along the east coast extending northwards contain the best farming land in Scotland and the country’s largest cities. That is why more than 80 per cent of the population live there. **The Highlands** consist of mountains (the Grampians; the highest peak, Ben Nevis, is also the highest mountain in the British Isles, with its 1,343 m) and deep valleys. The region is very sparsely populated (cca.1 million people), as well as the numerous small islands off the west coast. The chief Scottish archipelagoes are the Hebrides, Orkneys and Shetlands. Scotland’s two major cities are Edinburgh and Glasgow**. Edinburgh** is half the size of Glasgow, but it is the **country’s capital**, the centre of administration, law, culture and scholarship. It has many fine historical buildings. **Glasgow** is **Britain’s third largest city**. It was the centre of heavy industry, especially shipbuilding, but it is also a cultural centre, with one of Scotland’s oldest universities.

1. **Wales (Welsh name: Cymru [kəmri])**

The area of Wales is nearly 21,000 sq km. Only a strip of land along the south-east of the country is flat, and the majority of the population live there; the rest consists of mountains (the Cambrians, with Snowdon, which reaches 1,085 m, are the highest) with large river valleys, plateaus and hilly areas. Beautiful **National Parks** can be found there – **Snowdonia** in the north-west is the largest one in Britain. counties than with Welsh ones. The south-eastern coastal strip used to be the centre of industry, especially coalmining, iron and steel. **Cardiff,** **the Welsh capital**, only has a population of about a quarter of a million.

1. **Northern Ireland**

The area of this part of the UK is 14,120 sq km. About one half of all the inhabitants live in the eastern coastal region, whose centre is the capital, **Belfast**. The terrain resembles a saucer, with flat farming land centred on **Lough Neagh** [loch nei], the largest lake in the British Isles; the plain is surrounded by hills and mountains, many of spectacular beauty. They, however, only reach the height of cca.850 m in the Mourne Mountains in the south-east.

**London**

London is the capital of the UK as well as of England. Its population is over 8 million, and it is highly cosmopolitan. Administratively, it is divided into 32 boroughs and the City, but its three main parts are the following:

* **The City** is the oldest part of London. Today it is the business and banking centre of the UK; that is why very few people live there. The chief tourist attractions of the City are St Paul’s Cathedral and the Tower of London.
* **The West End** is the centre of governmental institutions, centred in Westminster (e.g. the Houses of Parliament) and along Whitehall and Downing Street; of shopping (e.g. Oxford Street, Regent Street or Bond Street); and of entertainment (e.g. Soho; Piccadilly or Leicester Square, known for numerous theatres and cinemas). The main sights are Westminster Abbey and the royal palaces, especially Buckingham Palace, as well as large and beautiful parks: the best known one is Hyde Park with the famous Speakers’ Corner.
* **The East End** used to contain London docks, wharfs with large warehouses and slums inhabited by working people and London’s poor, the Cockneys. The Port of London was replaced by the Docklands, an area of skyscrapers (the Canary Wharf Tower, 240 m high, is the tallest in the UK) and expensive flats.

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