



GB General Overview

Lying off the north-west coast of Europe, there are two large islands and several much smaller ones. Collectively, they are known as *The British Isles*. The largest island is called *Great Britain*. The other large one is called *Ireland*.

In the British Isles there are two states. One of these governs most of the island of Ireland. This state is usually called *The Republic of Ireland*. It is also called '*Eire*' (its Irish language name). Informally it is referred to as just '*Ireland*' or '*the Republic*'.



The other state has authority over the rest of the British Isles (the whole of Great Britain, the northeastern area of Ireland and most of the smaller islands). The official name of this country is *The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland* although it is usually known by a shorter name: '*the United Kingdom*'. In everyday speech this is often shortened to '*the UK*'. In other contexts it is referred to as '*Great Britain*'. This, for example, is the name you hear when a gold medal winner steps onto the rostrum at the Olympic Games. The stickers on cars ('*GB*') are another example of the use of this name. In writing and speaking that is not

especially formal or informal, the name '*Britain*' is used. The normal adjective, when talking about something to do with the UK, is '*British*'.

Albion is a word used in some poetic or rhetorical contexts to refer to England. It was the original Roman name for Britain. It may come from the Latin word *albus*, meaning 'white'. The white chalk cliffs around Dover on the south coast are the first part of England to be seen when crossing the sea from the European mainland.

Britannia is the name that the Romans gave to their southern British province (which covered, approximately, the area of present-day England). It is

Britannia



also the name given to the female embodiment of Britain, always shown wearing a helmet and holding a trident (the symbol of power over the sea), hence the patriotic song which begins 'Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves'. The figure of Britannia has been on the reverse side of many British coins for more than 300 years.

Crown dependencies

There are two small parts of the British Isles which have special political arrangements. These 'Crown dependencies' are the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. Each has complete internal self-government, including its own Parliament and its own tax system. Both are 'ruled' by a Lieutenant Governor appointed by the British government.

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