



Geographical data

Scotland is part of the United Kingdom (officially: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), but most people call it just England which is not really true. The last countings tell there are about 5.2 million inhabitants at this moment, an average population density of 66 people per square kilometer (the average in the whole UK is 381 p. sq. km.). But the number of people is declining and the expectation is there will be no more than 5 million people in 2026. Scotland makes up for almost 35% of the surface of the UK (78.722 sq. km.), but only 9.5% of the population lives there.

Scotland and its offshore islands are the northern part of the British island. On the west and north coast the Atlantic forms the border and in the east coast the Northsea. In the south the border with England goes over the Cheviott Hills, for 90 kilometers. The biggest distance from north to south on the Scottish mainland (Cape Wrath - Mull of Kintyre) is 441 km. and from east to west (Applecross-Peterhead) 248 km. The west coast is, in a straight line, 416 km. long, but in reality (because of the many bays) 3200 km. Scotland counts 790

islands, of which 130 are inhabited.

Geographically Scotland consists of 2 parts: the mainland and the islands. On the mainland, one can discern 3 clear landmasses: the northern Highlands, the central Highlands and the Lowlands. The Highlands are divided by the Great Glen, a narrow gap in the mountain landscape. For a matter of fact, the glens are very characteristic to the whole country. They are valleys, made by glaciers with steep walls and often with elongated lakes (lochs). The highest top in this area (and of the whole of the UK) is Ben Nevis (1344 meters), near Fort William

The rough and tumble landscape of Scotland was once covered by glaciers during the Pleistocene Ice Age. When those masses of ice retreated (or melted) they left in their wake a rocky, pockmarked landscape of mountains and rolling hills, dozens of deep lakes, cold water rivers and streams.

The Northern Highlands are generally mountainous with many lofty peaks. This isolated area is widely considered one of the most scenic spots in Europe.

The granite Grampian Mountains extend southwest to northeast, and include Scotland's (and the UK's) highest point, Ben Nevis, at 1,344 meters (4,409 ft).

Scotland has nearly 800 islands. The major groups include the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland; most are hilly and rugged.

The Central Lowlands, a valley of sorts, formed by ancient volcanic eruptions, is a relatively flat area punctuated by hills.

The Southern Uplands is a hilly area with wide, green valleys, fronted in the south by the Cheviot Hills on the border with England.

There are numerous bodies of inland freshwater including Loch Lomond and Loch Ness. The Tweed and Clyde are the largest rivers

Climate

Scotland lies on the edge of the European continent and is surrounded by water on 3 sides. It has a moderate seaclimate with soft winters and cool summers. A belt of westward winds continuously sends a dense layer of clouds over the land.

The west coast is generally wetter than the east but less windy. On the east coast the rainfall averages 650mm and on the west coast it averages 1500mm. Average summer highs are about 19 degrees and winter temperatures rarely drop below 0 degrees.

Generally, there is snow in the higher areas from December until March. For the most sunshine and a minimum of rain, one has to go there in May or June. July and August are hotter, but also more wet and there are countless midgets. The autumn really can be called unstable: sometimes beautiful and dry, sometimes wet, but quiet, sometimes very stormy. From experience we know that for the last few years the weather is very unpredictable and different than it used to be: too much rain and low temperatures. We never went for the weather, but seem to have been quite lucky: most days were dry and on almost every day we saw at least a bit of sunshine.

In Scotland, the weather can show every season in a single day! Even on the sunniest of days care needs to be taken on the hills and mountains. On a mountain, within only 5 minutes, a mist can envelope a walker and make navigation difficult. On the other hand, brooding clouds can ease to spectacular shafts of bright sunlight.

Flora and fauna

[The Highlands](#) are barren and inhospitable. The landscape consists of infertile plains without trees. The vegetation includes heather, fern, a variety of grasses, Juniper berry and similar small bushes. Some 4.000 years ago, there were mainly pine trees (Scots pine), but deforestation, intensive grazing by sheep and changes in climate, have replaced the once extensive woods with a thick layer of peat. Reforesting has begun, but the new woods are quite one-sided and monotonous.

There is a great variety of birds, near the coast more than in the interior. On the islands and on the steep cliffs of the mainland, many seabirds nest, like ospreys, auks, terns and gannets. In the mountain areas there are golden eagles and ravens, on the moors snow hen and pheasants and owls and songbirds in the woods.

The largest mammal on land is the deer, which causes a lot of damage to new plantations and nests of rare birds. Big mammals, like the wolf, beaver, bear and elk are extinct already in the 18th century.

The sheep, the Scottish Highlanders, and also the [Shetland pony's](#), which all walk about freely, are half wild.

Population

The population distinguishes itself from the English through its own language and literature, jurisdiction, education and organisation of the church. The Scots have a strong historical consciousness. The greater part of the population springs from the original Scottish population, which in fact is a jumble of Picts, Celts and Normans.

Contrary to the rest of the UK, less people live in the cities and more in the countryside. With a population density of 66 people per square kilometer it is fairly quiet. Yet the distribution is very uneven: more than 1.5 of the 5 million inhabitants lives in one of the 4 big cities: Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee.

Our experiences have shown us that the people are very friendly and helpful, but they seem to have an inferiority complex in relation to the English; they still feel being dominated by them. It is almost, after centuries of British rule, as if it is genetically determined.