

International Students connect

"living and learning in Britain"

Sept 07
- Aug 08

British Man Jumps
Queue Shock!

Exclusive: "I Was A Teenage
Windowshopper"

British Customs Ate
My Hamster!





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(or: what's inside our Pandora's Box)



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Finish off the page on the left with your own details.

Cover stories: sorry, they don't exist - they're just lies to get you to look inside...





Welcome!

to International Students Connect,
the magazine that makes you feel at home in Britain by explaining some of the strange, amusing, weird and wonderful things this country and its people have to offer.

This fun-packed magazine is now yours to keep, you lucky thing – you can fill in the ‘untidy desk’ (inside front cover) with your personal stuff, make notes in the back, and take it with you on your return to your home country to show your friends and relatives what strange material the British produce for their foreign students.

In the pages to come we will try to guide you through some areas of British life that need a bit of explaining. Sometimes we will include a glossary (see below) to offer instant help on the page with some of the harder or stranger words or phrases we use. You might also want to keep your dictionary handy*.

A word about the style of this magazine.

G *handy: an informal, slightly old-fashioned word meaning ‘to hand’, i.e. you can easily get your hands on it when you need to. ‘Handy’ also means ‘useful’ – so if you were dying of thirst in the desert, and your friend had a bottle of water, you could ask: ‘Have you got your bottle handy?’ And if he did, then that would be handy. But if your friend said, ‘No, I dropped it in the sand’ you would probably want to kill him. With your bare hands.

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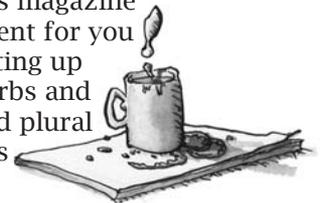
A

R *satire is where books, cartoons, magazines etc. make fun of important issues or people as a way of showing

Y

It is obviously quite light-hearted; sometimes it will be satirical*, poking fun at British customs*, but usually there will be serious messages lurking beneath the humorous surface. (See pages 43-5 for a fuller discussion of that strange thing, the British sense of humour.)

Learning a foreign language is hard work and – let’s be honest – quite boring at times, unless you are one of those people who thinks it’s fun to write lists of vocabulary in little books which you keep losing. We want this magazine to be a bit of entertainment for you – a ray of sunshine* lighting up your gloomy world of verbs and tenses and noun lists and plural formations. It also makes a handy coaster*.



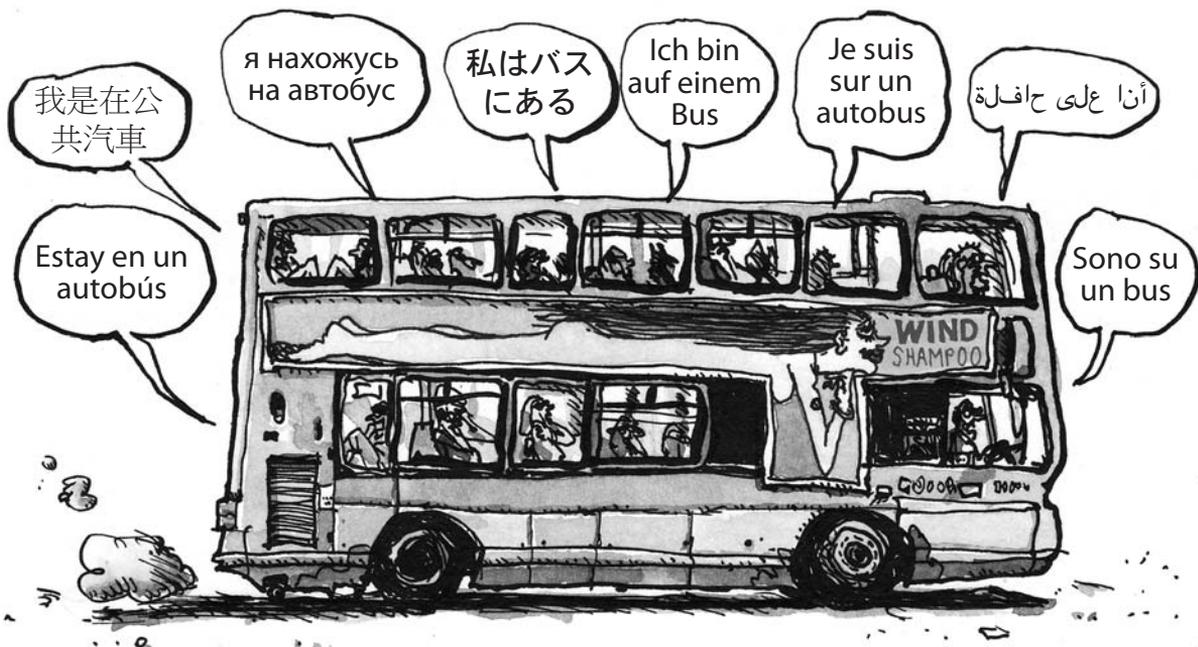
up their weaknesses.

*that’s customs as in ‘habits’, not British Customs and Excise – it would be silly to poke fun at a British Customs Officer, unless you’re fond of prison food.

*ray of sunshine: an example of a metaphor, where you compare something to something it is not to make a point (this magazine is obviously not a ray of sunshine, otherwise it would have set itself on fire).

*coaster: a little mat to put your drink on so that it doesn’t make white rings on your landlady’s polished tabletops. Keep the magazine handy at all times.





A London bus - the perfect place to learn the phrase 'I'm on a bus' in 20 languages.

listen, and try to count the number of languages being spoken around you. Britain is very much a 'melting pot' of different cultures - and actually always has been (see 'Identities' on p.10). For that reason, as a foreigner, it may seem more welcoming to you than you expected.

However, there are people in Britain who are uncomfortable with its increasingly multicultural* profile. There are even a small number who are nastily opposed to it. But these are very much a minority, and the vast majority of people in Britain whom you meet will be friendly and welcoming. In general, it is probably not very different to people's attitude to foreigners in your own country.

And as in your own country, the same

rules apply: if you show politeness, and a willingness to try and speak the language, people will respond generously and warmly. It's generally true that people meet rudeness with rudeness - but it's especially true in Britain.

Talking of rudeness, once you start making friends with people of your own age, your vocabulary will immediately start to swell with 'rude words' or 'swear words'. Young people do like their jokes, and one of the easiest is to trick a new, foreign student into using swear words inappropriately*. It would not be a good start to your stay if you told your host you thought their mother had been a bit too familiar with a selection of farmyard animals. Tread carefully. (See p.63 for more on language and swearing in the UK.)

***aeroplane:** British English. American English = airplane. Ask your teacher for more common differences between British and American English.

***grubbier:** 'more grubby' - grubby is slang for dirty.

***ethnically diverse backgrounds and**

***multicultural:** note the 'correct' ways of talking

about how the British population is a mix of people from many different races, beliefs and cultures.

***inappropriately:** not properly or not suitably.

***top deck:** upstairs on a double-decker bus - this may be slower than the 'tube' (ie underground train), but you see so much more!

Notes from a real student...

Marina Garcia-Pinilla is an Argentinian who came, via Spain, to study in Britain, where she lived in Salford, Salisbury and London. Here she recalls her life in the UK.*



“**B**efore coming to Britain, I had high expectations of an old, settled and mellow society, one that is rational, reserved, cultured, extremely polite and sophisticated.

Culture shock

Although I was an Anglophile before coming here, I still experienced a great deal of culture shock - most of it positive. There are many different subcultures and classes in Britain, and more ethnic diversity than I was expecting.

I did adapt to British culture. For example, I became more punctual, and my speech got more to the point; and I had to become more formal (less openly friendly) as the British are more reserved and protective of their intimacy. On the other hand, Argentinians are playful with words and so are the British. I really enjoy British humour and wordplay.

British character traits...

The British can go from one extreme to another very quickly. They are often very shy and need to get drunk to have fun. They are very polite in their manners but can suddenly ‘explode’ with anger. I think they should let go more often so they don’t go to extremes.

On the other hand, many British people have a strong social conscience. Voluntarism is common here, whilst it is rarer in my culture. To be charitable with your time - to give your time to cleaning up a field, or conserving an historic building, or saving some animals - is an admirable trait.

Culture is very sexy here in England, and democratic too! There are lots of chances for study and leisure, amazing museums, exhibitions, historic buildings, fabulous gardens... so much culture!

The British endure a great deal because of their weather: Glastonbury, picnics, summer barbecues, gardening, surfing - they endure them all. Mad, very mad people! Dali said that Surrealism will never develop in Britain because the British themselves are so bizarre!

Educational culture

Iwas surprised by how good higher education is in the UK. Colleges and universities know all about the difficulties foreign students have and are well prepared for them, helping with accommodation, extra English courses, societies to join, etc.

* This is an edited version of our interview with Marina. Ask your tutor to download the full version from our online support material.

>> "Making friends with the British is easy. What's difficult is keeping in touch with them!"

Subjects are well structured, and students are not left to fend for themselves but get lots of support and advice. They are guided and know what is expected of them. There are mock exams, good handouts, extra tutoring, excellent libraries, and it's amazing how easy it is to talk to tutors - even professors - and how open and supportive they are.

Making friends

Making friends with British people is easy. What's difficult is keeping in touch with them! People here work so hard that it is difficult to see them, even when they are in the same city or town.

Perhaps this is more of a big city problem, but people in Buenos Aires or Barcelona are not like that. Here it's anathema to suggest seeing somebody during the week. It has to be the weekend and you have to call to arrange an appointment!

This 'organized leisure' is another aspect of British culture that I found hard to adapt to. Everything here has to be organized - dates, times, food, entertainment, music - even the house has to be organized... People treat picnics as if they were Arctic expeditions; parties are organizational feats. Leisure here is a very exhausting business!

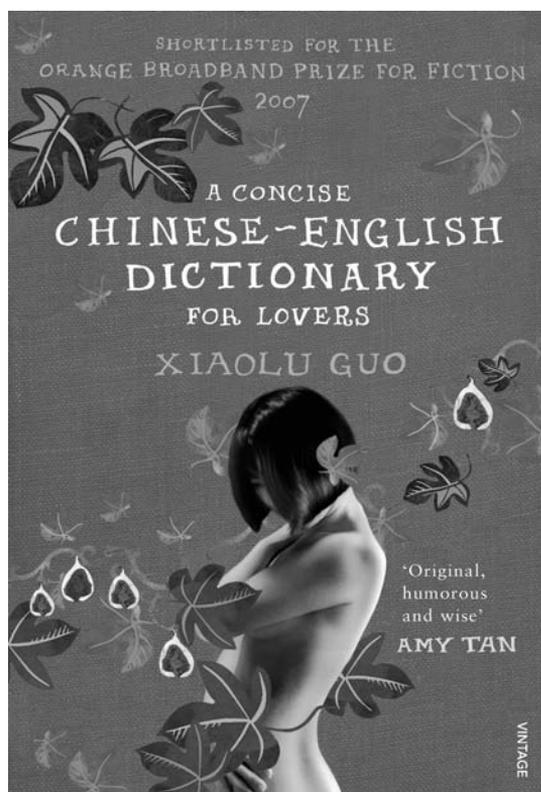
The best of Britain

When I came to Britain I fell in love with the country. I liked working here. You are not treated like a slave; and the institutions reflect the respect that there is for the individual. There are lots of chances to develop aspects of yourself - like doing pottery, for instance - which you wouldn't have somewhere else.

Culture is paramount for me: so being able to see exhibitions of works by Picasso and Matisse, after no more than a short train ride, was a dream come true.

I came to understand something of the British mentality - their reserve and respect - and I like it. I like their organizational abilities and pragmatism, although they can sometimes go a bit far!

Generally, I like the sophistication of British culture, the respect, the mutual consideration, and how all this translates into everyday life. ”



For a different take on British culture from the viewpoint of an international student, you could read *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary for Lovers* by Chinese novelist and film maker Xiaolu Guo (Chatto & Windus, 2007).

Identities

The question of identity in Britain is a very difficult one. What does 'being British' actually mean? There are lots of complex elements to consider. The basic response is that 'British = English, Scots, Welsh or Northern Irish', but this isn't a good enough answer. It leaves out too much about people's attitudes to Britishness.

The history of Britain is one of migration - of both immigration (people coming into the country) and emigration (people moving out). Since the Stone Age, people have been coming to these islands, liking what was here and staying - the Celts, the Romans, the Angles and Saxons and Vikings and Normans all did it.

Britain has fierce loyalties within its regions. The Scots and Welsh hate to be mistaken for 'English', and some might not even think of themselves as 'British'. They are proud of their Celtic roots and their history of resisting English invasion.

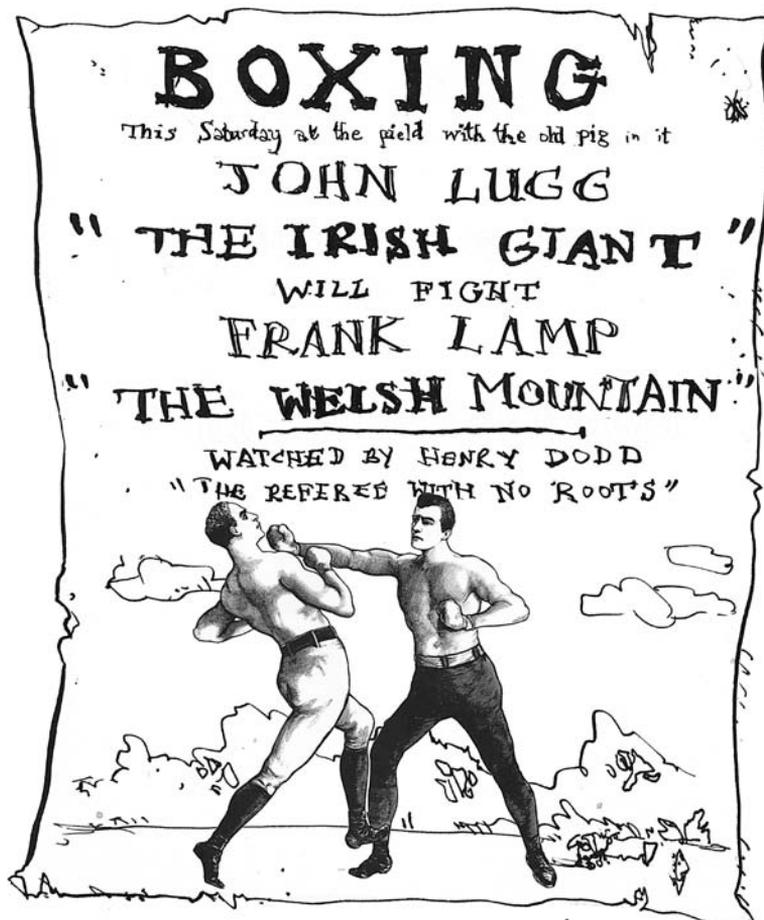
Even in England there are regional identities that are very strong - some are loyal to their county (think Yorkshire or Cornwall), whilst others are loyal to their city (eg 'Scousers' in Liverpool, or 'Geordies' in Newcastle).

In some parts of the UK religion has a large part to play in identity - for example, in Northern Ireland communities are divided between Catholics and Protestants. Traditionally

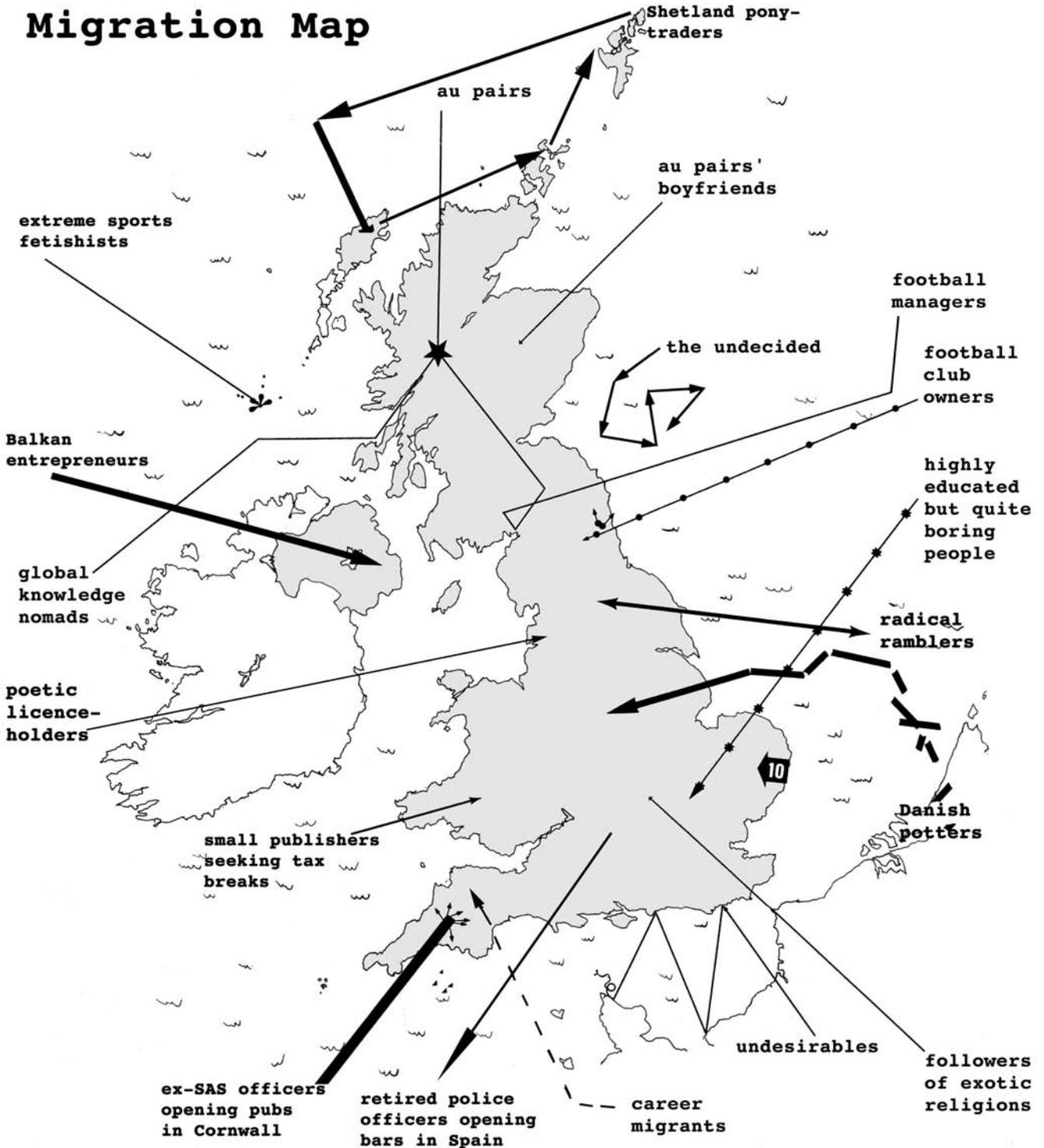
Catholics are loyal to the Irish Republic, whilst Protestants are fiercely proud of being 'British'.

And for the growing number of Muslim people living in Britain, religion is probably the most important element of their identity, although their pride at being Muslim in no way threatens their pride in being British.

Over recent years lots of different groups have put down roots in Britain - Afro-Caribbeans, Chinese, Bangladeshis, Ugandans, West Africans, Pakistanis and



Migration Map

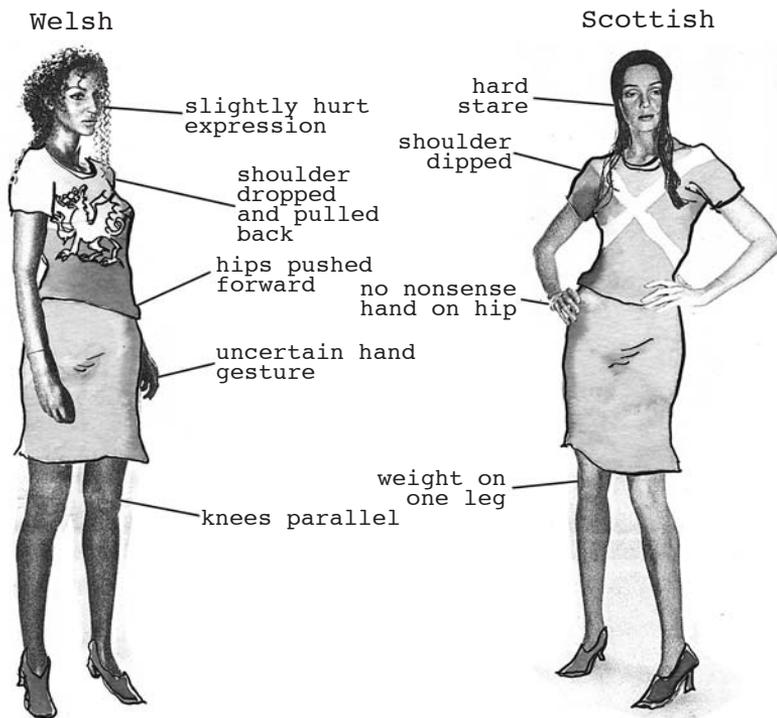


Indians, to name but a few. They have all established strong communities in the country. But as you can imagine, it must have been hard for them, balancing their cultural identity with 'fitting in' to their new country.

This balancing act of 'traditional' and 'new country' cultures is easier for younger people, who are either 'second' or 'third generation' (this means either that their parents moved here so they were schooled in the UK; or that they were born here). For them it is often quite a natural blending of old and new, or perhaps of 'home life' and 'the real world'*.

***Reading tip:**
Read **White Teeth** by Zadie Smith, a great novel with fascinating descriptions of life growing up as a black teenager in a multicultural UK.

British Body Languages



What is Britishness?

So what is 'Britishness'? The most honest answer is that it means different things to different people in Britain.

Here are five undeniable things about Britain: it's an island nation, set apart from the rest of Europe; it includes the English, Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish, though it's becoming more multicultural; citizenship gives you a British passport; its national flag is the 'Union Jack'; and English is its 'national language'.

But there's more. Some people look to Britain's achievements, past and present, as a way of defining Britishness. How you view these depends on who you are. White English people, for example, are often proud of the colonial British Empire of previous centuries; but for black or ethnic British people, Britain's colonial past is a very negative thing. It speaks to them of 'exploitation'.

Most would agree, though, that Britain is a small country 'punching above its weight' in the world. This brings a sense of pride, as does the thought of Britain's many sporting and cultural achievements over the years. (The vibrant British music scene probably plays a part in young Britons' sense of identity - once they get over that embarrassing phrase 'Cool Britannia'.)

>> "Some cultural habits are 'very British', such as queueing and conversations about the weather."

Britain has certain positive values which connect with its identity: it values democracy and freedom, and tolerance and respect for others, and the rule of law and good government. British people are generally seen as fair-minded, compassionate, hard-working and 'good' people. These values may not be exclusively British, but thinking of them can make Brits proud of their Britishness.

Britishness has other values too. There's the 'British reserve' – being polite, avoiding conflict, keeping a 'stiff upper lip'. Some (the British, for example) see this as a good thing; others (eg the rest of the world) see it as being cold and two-faced. And the British fondness for alcoholism, binge-drinking, hooliganism and general yobbishness is also not a big plus point. Even the Brits have to agree on this.

There are some cultural habits that also seem 'very British' – queueing (as we mentioned); conversations about the weather; a love of sports – especially football, rugby and cricket; a fondness for fish and chips, curries and Sunday roasts; driving on the wrong (or right) side of the road; hating to measure things metrically; being bad at tipping waiters and waitresses...

Add all of these things together, throw in a 'sense of place' (for the English that's 'rolling countryside'; for the Scots 'mountains and lochs'; for the Welsh 'hills and valleys'), and you might get a vague idea of what 'Britishness' includes.



Well, we warned you it was a difficult question.

Identity Word Search

Find 13 'identity' words hidden in the grid. Words can go across, down and diagonally, forwards and backwards.

Clues:

- People of England
- People of Wales
- People of Scotland
- People of Great Britain
- Britain's flag
- Britain's identity card
- Political system in Britain
- What the British talk a lot about
- A popular British food
- Another popular British food
- A popular place for a day out
- Britain's 'favourite sport'
- A popular summer sport

S	U	N	I	O	N	J	A	C	K	Y	S
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S	A	R	R	H	J	G	C	H	S	U	H
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U	L	I	S	R	R	G	T	M	D	R	I
D	E	M	O	C	R	A	C	Y	E	Y	F

Solution on p. 94