

Four Nations In One

The UK, or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to give it its full name, is a union between four countries each with its own characteristics and national identity.

England

England makes up more than half of the area of the United Kingdom, has 8 out of 10 of the UK's largest cities and nearly 85% of its population. More people live in London than in all of Scotland. London is the political centre of the country as well as a global city and economic powerhouse. It is also a diverse city which attracts people from all around the world either to visit or to work and settle. Away from London, some of the other English regions have suffered due to the decline of traditional industries such as mining or fishing. On the other hand, some of these areas boast great natural beauty. England has rolling countryside rising to hills and mountains in the north such as in the Lake District and the Pennines. It has a long coastline with many beaches, cliffs and fishing villages.

Wales

Wales may be small but it has a strong national identity and has kept Welsh as a national language alongside English. Cardiff, the capital city, gained its wealth from mining in the surrounding valleys. However, when the mining industry went into decline, these areas suffered from unemployment. The natural landscape has however led to a growing tourism industry. Visitors seek out the national parks and the stunning coasts. Wales has its own parliament giving it autonomy in some areas.

Scotland

To the north of England lies Scotland. Scotland has the second highest population but the lowest population density of all of the four nations. That means that there are relatively few inhabitants relative to its size. The capital of Scotland is Edinburgh, a stunning historic city built on a dormant volcano. However, the largest city is Glasgow, which grew as a centre of shipbuilding. Scotland though is most famous for its wild places. From rugged, remote mountainsides to heather-clad moors and picturesque islands with white sandy beaches, Scotland has it all (if not always the weather).



Since 1999, Scotland has had its own parliament and the right to set some of its own laws. Though this has allowed greater independence, there are some who wish it went even further.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland, with Belfast as its capital, was created when Ireland was partitioned in 1921 and is the smallest of the four nations in both population and area. The Northern part, which was mainly protestant and unionist (in favour of the union with the rest of the UK) stayed as part of the UK whilst the rest of Ireland became a free state and later the Republic of Ireland. This partition involved lots of unrest. This went on for many years resulting in a conflict known as 'The Troubles'. Northern Ireland's fortunes improved with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 marking an end to the worst of the fighting and its rich culture and arts scene has been able to flourish.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What does the phrase 'economic powerhouse' mean?
2. Which word in the section on Wales means 'freedom to make decisions'?
3. Find a word that means distant or faraway from everything else.
4. What does rugged mean?
5. What does 'unrest' tell us about what happened when Ireland was split in two?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

What is the largest city in Scotland?

R

When did Scotland get its own parliament?

E

What is the writer's opinion of Scotland? How do you know?

R

What was the name of the agreement that ended the violence in Northern Ireland?

S

Put the four nations in order of population size from biggest to smallest.