**The weird and wonderful world of British culture**

by Adrian J O Smith

**Can you guess where I’m from?**

One of the first questions I ask a new group of students is “Can you guess where I’m from”? There’s usually a confident individual who shouts out “Yes, America!” So, I look around the room for other suggestions. A moment of confusion follows. Then – a few second later – someone will realise there’s something a bit different about my accent to other native English speakers they’ve probably been taught by. The tentative but correct guesses start to follow…

That’s right guys, I’m from the weird and wonderful United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland! It sounds complicated right? Well, you’re not alone. Many British people don’t actually know the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom so I’ll let you in on a little secret. Great Britain consists of three countries - England Scotland and Wales. The United Kingdom includes these three plus one more - Northern Ireland. So, there you go, you’re now an expert!

**What comes into your mind?**

Take a few moments to think about this question… “What’s the first thing you think of when someone says England, Great Britain or the UK?” I bet I know what you’re thinking… London, Big Ben, the Royal Family or tea with milk. Am I right? Let’s start with the important things. British people LOVE a cup of black tea with milk. If you go to any café or restaurant there, it would actually be strange if you weren’t offered milk with your tea. In Ukraine it’s a bit different of course. I usually get some strange looks when I ask for milk with my tea, but I think it’s just so tasty. Try it if you don’t believe me! Also, do you know our national cuisine? We love battered fish and chips with mushy peas, especially when we visit the seaside. But, you may be surprised to know that one of our most popular dishes is Chicken Balti. Yes, we absolutely love Indian food and we’re not afraid of it spicy either. I come from a small town called Richmond in North Yorkshire. The population is less than 10,000 but there are probably as many Indian restaurants there as there are in the whole of Kyiv!

**The Loch Ness Monster and other Royals**

You may have heard about the Loch Ness monster (incidentally Loch is the Scottish word for Lake). I haven’t seen the monster personally but I like to keep an open mind, so I’ll pass on Ukraine’s regards if I meet him. You may know something about our Royal Family too? I’m always impressed when students can name some of them, for example Queen Elizabeth II, Price William, Prince Harry and their respective wives, Kate and Meghan. Back in the 17th century things were a bit different and one of our most famous Kings – Henry VIII – had six wives. No, not at the same time, but he did chop the heads off two of them when he found out they were having affairs.

Perhaps you’ve read the Harry Potter books? Remember, that’s Harry with an ‘H’ and not a ‘G’. I often hear people in Ukraine say ‘Gary Potter’, which makes him sound a bit less magical! Anyway, if you visit London then can you visit Platform nine and three quarters at Kings Cross station or even go on the Harry Potter Studio Tour. Britain has also produced many famous musicians and bands, from The Beatles to Oasis, and from David Bowie to Amy Winehouse. Do I sound old?! For art lovers among you, then you may have heard of Banksy – a famous graffiti artist who likes to keep his identity secret.

**Excuse me, I’m sorry!**

So, what about British people? Well, we tend to be very polite. That’s right, we often apologise even if something isn’t our fault and we don’t like to offend people. Personally I’ve noticed a difference in behaviour between British and Ukrainian drivers. In Britain a car driver will often stop their car to let another car go past them on a narrow road. The problem is, both drivers stop and then nobody moves because they’re both too polite to go! Would that happen in Ukraine? Hmm, maybe not!

Anyway, there you have it. A very quick introduction to the weird and wonderful world of Britain. Or Great Britain. Or the United Kingdom. Or whatever it’s called?!