



Safety first

Making sure your
visit to the UK is safe
and enjoyable


'It's important to integrate into the local community. I've made lots of friends locally and it's helped me understand local behaviours.'



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A photograph of two young women walking through a crowd. The woman on the left is wearing a black coat and glasses, smiling. The woman on the right is wearing a bright red puffer jacket and glasses, also smiling. They are surrounded by other people in a public setting, possibly an airport or a public event. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the two women in the foreground.

We hope that the time you spend visiting the UK will be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, but, here as with anywhere, it pays to be aware of your personal safety. What follows is a simple everyday guide to looking after yourself and staying safe and secure.

Welcome to the UK

For many of you this will be your first time living away from home in an unfamiliar country. This guide is designed to help you prepare for your stay here and give you practical advice about living (and perhaps working) in the UK.

It highlights some of the safety and security issues you will need to be aware of, offers sensible advice and lists organisations to contact if you need help. Issues regarding your personal safety and security will require a great deal of attention, not just in the early stages of your visit but for the duration of your time in the UK.

By international standards the UK is a safe country, with low levels of violence and street crime. The suggestions in this guide can help you adopt sensible strategies to help minimise the possibility of you being exposed to a number of risks. It will help you to anticipate and recognise these risks and to take the appropriate actions to remove or avoid them.

In a recent British Council student insight survey (October 2012), the UK was recognised as having a very multicultural society, which was seen as having the largest contribution to the country's overall safety. This factor was followed by an awareness that, for the most part, people in the UK do not carry guns and that the country has good medical care. Also mentioned were the low crime rate, shared language and a high police presence.

A lot of the advice we offer may seem to be common sense, but it can make a real difference in keeping you (and your family, if they are here with you), your accommodation and your belongings safe and secure.

We want you to feel comfortable and fully integrated into your new community, and everyone involved – the British Council, and the police – are working together to help protect you and other visitors against crime. International visitors have indicated to us how important their integration into the community has helped them enhance their overall perception of the UK.

They say it has helped them to learn local behaviours and how to be more vigilant about their new surroundings ensuring a better sense of self awareness.

By taking note of the suggestions offered in this booklet and by reading and re-reading this guide throughout your stay, we hope that you will stay safe and feel free to enjoy your time in the UK.

Helen Clews
British Council



Arriving in the UK

In the excitement of arriving in a new country it can be easy to get distracted and misplace things, especially when you are getting on and off planes, trains and coaches. Here are some practical reminders to help you when you first arrive in the UK.

- Take special care of your passport, travel documents and tickets and keep them with you in a safe place. Before you travel, take a photocopy of all the pages of your passport (including the front and back covers), showing your details (name, photograph, passport number and its date and place of issue) and all the pages that have any entry clearances or immigration stamps on them, and pack this separately from your passport. If you lose your passport contact the police and your embassy immediately and give them your passport details.
- Bring enough cash to cover your immediate needs (about £250). Bring a credit card, if you have one, to pay for things such as rail tickets and hotel bills. If possible, your cash should include some coins so that you can use public telephones and ticket machines, and some small denomination bank notes (£5 and £10).
- Cash, credit cards and travellers' cheques should be carried in a safe place, such as an inside pocket, a money belt or a zipped bag. Make a note of the serial numbers of your travellers' cheques and pack this separately from the cheques themselves. Keep your travellers' cheques separate from your passport. If you lose your travellers' cheques or credit card report the loss to the police and the issuing organisation immediately.
- Label your luggage clearly so that it can be forwarded to you if it gets separated from you during your journey. If you do lose your luggage, report the loss immediately to officials of the airline or shipping line. At airports or seaports, check the lost property office to see whether it has been handed in there.
- If you need to leave your luggage somewhere while you change money or make telephone calls, use an official left luggage office (available at airports and major rail and coach stations). Then, for a small fee, you will be able to leave your luggage in a safe and supervised area. The attendant will give you a receipt so that you can collect your items later.

- If you are using a taxi, always make sure that you use a licensed one. Before you get in, you can check whether the taxi is licensed by looking at the back of it to ensure an official licence plate is attached. You should never agree to travel in an unlicensed taxi with an unlicensed driver.
- From airports, you can travel safely in one of the UK's famous 'black cabs'. Never agree to travel with someone who approaches you inside the terminal building, unless you have made a specific arrangement to be met by a 'minicab' company.



Meet the police

Registering your stay

Some visitors will need to register their stay with the police within seven days of arrival in the UK. The stamp in your passport will tell you whether or not you should register but usually applies to visitors coming to the UK for more than six months and from particular countries.

The police in the UK are friendly and helpful. They have a duty to protect everyone and can always be safely approached. A police officer from Greater Manchester Police Force answers some questions in an interview available from www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-immigration.htm

Crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales fell by 8.4 per cent and the number of crimes recorded by the police fell by 11 per cent between September 2011 and September 2012 according to the latest crime statistics www.crime-statistics.co.uk

In the unlikely event that you have anything stolen, or are assaulted, followed or threatened, you can contact the police who will always encourage you to report the incident. You should always report a crime even if you feel there is nothing the police can do. If you have lost money or property you will be given a crime reference number, which you will need in order to make any insurance claim. Do not worry about language difficulties, as the police will find someone, free of charge, who speaks your language.

Your local police station will provide helpful advice about crime prevention and a home security assessment, if required. They will also provide a certificate if you need to make an insurance claim for a theft.

In an emergency

In an emergency, where there is a danger to life or a crime is in progress, you can contact the police, fire brigade or ambulance service by dialling 999 from any telephone. This call is free of charge, but should be used only in an emergency.

How to report a crime

If you witness a crime, or are a victim yourself, it is very important to report it. By reporting a crime you will make sure you get the appropriate support and you will be helping the police to tackle crime and make your local area safer.

To report a non-emergency minor crime, just call your local police station – you can find their number in the telephone directory – or, as we mentioned before, you can ask someone you know and trust to make the call for you.

The charity Crimestoppers operates a service which allows people to anonymously pass on information about crimes or criminals. You can call them on +44 (0)800 555 111.

Just tell them what you know, not who you are.





Protecting your identity

Your identity and personal information are valuable. If criminals find out your personal details, they can use them to open bank accounts and obtain credit cards, loans and documents, such as passports, in your name.

The website www.identitytheft.org.uk can help you to protect yourself against this happening. It advises you what to do if it does happen and suggests where to get further help.

Action Fraud also provides anti-fraud guidance and is the first point of contact for individuals reporting fraud. Call +44 (0)300 123 2040.

Visitors are also risking being burgled by giving away their whereabouts on social networking sites. These sites and the easy availability of addresses on the internet can be used to create a list of targets.

Millions of us are now checking bank balances and retransferring funds on smart phones and tablets every day. Some banking applications (apps) have no extra security for customers who make payments using their phones – meaning a phone is a potential cash point for a clever thief.

Check if your mobile banking provider provides a pin number before you transfer money. If not, this may not be a safe way to check balances or transfer funds.

Taking out insurance

- It is essential that you take out insurance when you arrive in the UK to cover your belongings against theft or accidental damage.
- It may also be advisable to take out medical insurance.
- If you are thinking of driving in the UK you must insure a car before you drive it.

For general advice on insurance and a full list of insurance brokers, contact the Association of British Insurers at www.abi.org.uk

Looking after your belongings

- When moving into new accommodation, don't leave luggage or belongings outside or in the open trunk/boot of a car or taxi.
- Using an ultraviolet pen to mark your valuables with your name, phone number, house number and postcode will enable the police to return any items to you if they are stolen and recovered.
- Keeping your windows and curtains or blinds closed at night and making sure your laptop, television, DVD player and other valuables aren't visible through a window will lessen the risk of your home being targeted. Also, you should never leave cash or credit cards lying around.
- Making use of inexpensive light timers will give the impression of occupancy.
- Consider making a list of your possessions (including model and serial numbers) for reference, and ideally keep receipts and keep photographic records of your valuables as these can help progress any insurance claim.
- If you go away on holiday, remember to cancel any newspaper or milk subscriptions, and try to leave your valuables in storage or with a trusted friend.
- If you have a bicycle, make sure you always lock it up when you're not using it, by connecting its frame and wheel to a fixed object with a good-quality 'D' lock (available from www.soldsecure.com). Mark it with your postcode and house number so the police can return it if it is stolen and recovered.
- Try not to use a computer case when carrying a laptop. Use a less obvious bag to carry it in and think carefully before you use your laptop in crowded places. Always back up your work and keep it separate from your laptop.
- Avoid displaying other expensive items, such as watches, jewellery, iPod earphones or mobile phones in busy public places.
- Register your most valued possessions including your mobile phone, bicycles and laptops, free of charge, with Immobilise Phone Crime (www.immobilise.com). If an item is stolen, call +44 (0)8701 123 123. You will need to have your IMEI number (15-digit serial number) when reporting a stolen mobile phone – this can be found by dialling *#06# on most mobiles or by looking behind the phone battery. You should keep a note of your IMEI number in a safe place in case it is required.
- Never leave your mobile phone unattended as mobile phone theft is on the rise. Insure your mobile phone where possible.

Taking care of your money – gambling

It was once the case that gambling only took place behind closed doors – you had to be brave enough to go into a bookmakers or a casino if you wanted to place a bet. Now, however, it is possible to gamble online from the comfort of your own home – you can even gamble using your mobile phone or tablet. As a visitor to the UK you may be responsible for large sums of money – money that is supposed to cover the cost of your stay in the UK, and it is worth being aware of the dangers that gambling can pose. Some visitors have got carried away with the excitement and adrenaline rush of an early win, and have gone on to lose large sums – or even all their funds – gambling, either online or in casinos. This can lead to debts and other associated problems, including not being able to complete your stay in the UK.

If you do decide to gamble, always remember to set a spending limit before you begin, and never gamble more money than you can afford to lose. If you think your gambling is out of control there are organisations which can help you: www.gambleaware.co.uk

A Casino Manager from Grosvenor Casinos answers some questions in an interview available at this link www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-immigration.htm

Finding private accommodation

It is important for you to have safe and suitable accommodation while you are in the UK. Start making arrangements as soon as you know you are travelling to the UK. This is especially important if you are planning to bring your family with you.

Make sure that you arrange some form of accommodation before you arrive in the UK, even if it is only temporary. If you contact your embassy or high commission before you leave your home country they may be able to give you advice and information.

Here are some tips to help you find safe private accommodation:

- You should check whether the accommodation you are going to see is in a safe area before you go. Write to or email your local police and ask them if there have been any police visits, disturbances or anti-social behaviour orders issued in the area you are looking at. You can also ask if the property you are viewing has ever been burgled.
- You can find out about crime statistics in the area in which you are planning to live or visit on www.crime-statistics.co.uk you can use the website if you are planning to visit other areas during your stay, or if you are planning on staying in temporary accommodation such as a hotel in a new area. See also www.zoopla.co.uk and www.homecheck.com

- The world's first nationwide street-by-street crime maps went online in February 2010. These maps show what crimes have been committed each month on every street in England and Wales. Research published by the National Policing Improvement Agency shows that web-based crime maps do not fuel the fear of crime. The maps, which are accessible by typing a postcode into the www.police.uk website, also provide contact details for neighbourhood policing teams, CCTV footage of local incidents, and in some cases even a Twitter feed from beat officers.
- If possible, take someone with you when viewing prospective accommodation. If you are alone, leave the address you are going to and your expected time of return with a friend or colleague. Consider how far you will have to walk to and from public transport or your own private transport. View the neighbourhood both by day and by night.
- Find out exactly who might have access to the accommodation apart from yourself, and check if the windows and doors have good locks and bolts and an alarm system.
- Be businesslike in your dealings with prospective landlords or landladies. You have different rights depending on what kind of tenancy agreement you have. It is worth asking the landlord or landlady about any disputes and what the neighbours are like. The website www.primelocation.com has buying, selling and rating guides.
- If you feel uncomfortable with anyone who is showing you accommodation, mention that friends know where you are and are expecting your return at a certain time.






Safety at home

Approximately 26 per cent of burglars don't have to force entry and access is usually gained through an open door or window. Burglary rates rise approximately 23 per cent during the winter months. Deterring would-be criminals is one of the most effective forms of crime prevention.

- You can speak to the crime prevention officer at your local police station. He or she will come to your accommodation and advise you on how to make it more secure.
- If you move into a new home you should change the front and back door locks immediately. If you lose your keys, or if they were stolen, replace the locks as a safety precaution.
- Hardware and DIY shops sell inexpensive key-operated locks to fit most kinds of windows. Remember to lock all outside windows and doors even when you are at home. Consider using or purchasing a safety chain, spy hole or intercom system for your front door.
- If leaving windows open at night you should fit a window limiter to prevent it being opened further.
- If you are female and live in a flat with a door-entry system do not put 'Miss', 'Mrs', or 'Ms' in front of your name; just use your family name. If in doubt about a visitor, do not let him or her in.

- Check the identity of any unknown caller by calling the company they say they are from. If you are not sure who is at your door don't open it.
- If you live in a flat or a house with an outside light and/or a burglar alarm, make sure you use them. If the alarm can be set to cover zoned areas, set the alarm downstairs when you go to bed.
- Every home should have at least one smoke alarm (preferably two), which should be tested regularly. You can buy inexpensive smoke alarms from hardware shops and other high street retailers.
- If you have a telephone-answering machine, don't record a message saying: 'I am not available', as this reveals to the caller that you are a single occupant. It is better to say: 'No one is available to take your call.'
- If you ever receive obscene or threatening telephone calls or notes, tell the police.
- If you live in a shared house, don't assume there is someone else in who will make it secure when you go out. Discuss security rules and make sure you all agree to leave the house secure at all times.
- Try to make access around the back of the house difficult for unwanted visitors and keep bins and ladders out of sight as these can be used to gain access to the property. Try to keep the front of the house clear and visible, so unwanted visitors don't have somewhere to hide.
- If you are going away, tell someone you trust where you are going and when you will be back.
- Don't leave spare keys outside or in a garage or shed for burglars to find. Garages and sheds are often targets for burglars looking for tools, so make sure they are locked. Make sure there is no access to tools that could be used to force entry into your home. Keep house and car keys separate and out of sight in the house.
- Leave keys in a safe place where you can find them easily, in case you need to leave in a hurry, but don't keep them in sight near doors or windows.
- If you are leaving the house empty, ask a friend or neighbour to open and close your curtains or blinds in the mornings and evenings. Using a time-switch for your lights and radios makes it seem that the house is occupied. These can be bought from hardware shops and other high street retailers.

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- If you keep your keys in a pocket rather than a bag you can still get into your house if your bag is stolen. Avoid having your keys and your address in your bag at the same time.
 - Ideally, if you have lost a key or just moved into a new property, change the locks. Check your insurance policy as new locks may be covered. Using window stickers, highlight the fact that your possessions are security-marked and registered to immobilise.
 - Good security will reduce the likelihood of your home being burgled. But, just in case it happens, think about how you would deal with the situation. Many people now have a telephone in their bedroom, but even if you do, take your mobile to bed with you. In the unlikely event that someone breaks in, you can use it to dial 999 even if your normal phone is too far away or has been disconnected by the intruder.
 - If you arrive home and see signs of a break-in – smashed windows or open doors – don't go in. Go to a friend or neighbour's house and call the police. Do not touch anything when you do go back in, as you could destroy valuable evidence.

Electric and gas fires, heaters and cookers

- If you have gas cookers, fires and/or heaters in your accommodation, you should get an audible carbon monoxide alarm which complies with BS EN 50291. These can be bought in hardware DIY shops. Make sure gas appliances are checked every year by an engineer

who is registered with the Gas Safe Register (formerly CORGI). More advice can be found at www.hse.gov.uk/gas/gas-safe-register-campaign.htm

- If you live in rented accommodation, ask your landlord or landlady to have the cookers, fires and heaters checked. They are required by law to show you the most recent safety certificate.
- Whenever you go out, make sure you turn off gas and electrical appliances, such as the cooker, television and iron (but not the refrigerator).

Fire safety in the home

The Fire and Rescue Service is not only there for cases of emergency, they also offer support and advice to help prevent fires from happening in the first place. If you would like more advice visit or call your local fire station.

- Plan your easiest escape route. Make sure everyone is familiar with that route and always have a back-up route just in case the first one is blocked.
- It is important to fit a smoke alarm and test it regularly. Smoke alarms save lives: they alert you to the danger of fire, giving you time to escape. They are cheap, easy to find and easy to fit. You should have at least one on each floor, particularly in the kitchen, and perhaps above electrical appliances.

- Fires in the home are often caused by household appliances, so it's important to check for any signs that they have become a potential hazard. The use of correct fuses prevents overheating, which can also be caused by overloading adaptors. Keep appliances clean and replace any worn or old cables. Unplugging appliances while you are sleeping at night or when you leave the house can reduce the risk of fire. Make sure all your furniture carries the fire-resistant label.
- Close all internal doors, especially at night or when you are out.
- Take extra care around your home. Most fires are preventable. The most common causes of fire in the home include: not cooking safely; smoking and cigarette accidents; appliances setting alight; careless use of candles, portable heaters and electric blankets. Tips on how to avoid these causes of fire in the home are available at www.fireservice.co.uk/safety

In the event of fire:

- Close all doors to prevent fire spreading. A closed door can stop a fire spreading and give you extra time to get out.
- If you can, leave the house and call 999 at the first sign of fire. Stay out of the house. Remember to keep calm, act quickly and follow your escape route. If your home is filled with smoke, remember to stay low where the air is clearer. Before you open any doors, check to see if they

feel warm. If any door feels warm, do not enter as the fire could be burning behind it. Leave it closed and exit another way.

- If you cannot get out, move into a room with a window and close the door. Try to take your phone with you and call 999. Use anything in the room to block the smoke from coming under the door. Open the window and shout 'Help, fire!' Fire crews will then be able to rescue you.
- If your clothes catch on fire, remember – stop, drop and roll. Do not run about – just keep still, lie down and roll to put the flames out. Remember, you can call your local fire station and ask them to visit your home and give you a free Home Safety Assessment. The Fire and Rescue Service is committed to helping people to be more aware of the steps they can take to avoid the risk of fire.

How to report a gas leak

If you smell gas anywhere, either in the house or in the street, call the freephone National Gas Service Emergency Line on +44 (0)800 111 999. If it is in your own house and it is safe to do so, turn off the gas supply and open the windows and doors.





Safety on the streets

Recent research suggests it is generally safe to walk on the streets in the UK, although you should always be aware of your surroundings and use your common sense wherever you are. The suggestions that follow are not intended to alarm but to remind you to always be alert on the streets of the UK as you would in your own country.

Pay attention to your surroundings (especially if you travel to new areas on trips or vacations) and plan your stay before you travel. Hotels can order taxis for you and can advise you about the local areas. It is always advisable to avoid high-risk situations such as walking late at night in an unfamiliar area.

- When you first move into your accommodation, find suitable and safe routes to petrol stations, shops and public telephones. Try to find routes that are well lit and busy.
- Walk confidently on the pavement, facing oncoming traffic. When crossing the road, remember that vehicles drive on the left in the UK, so they will be coming towards you from the right.
- If you are travelling late at night, walk in a group or, preferably, use public transport or a taxi. Avoid putting yourself at risk: don't take shortcuts through dark alleyways, waterways (canals or rivers), or parks, for example.
- Don't carry large amounts of cash with you when you are out.
- Always keep your bag and coat or jacket with you, and don't leave them on a chair or out of sight.
- Make sure you carry a mobile phone with you or take enough change or a telephone card so you can make a phone call or call a taxi, should you need one.
- A new text service that transforms your mobile phone into a personal safety alarm is available from as little as £1.99 a month. Users can also choose a pay-as-you-go option. The system allows users to alert friends or family if they get into trouble. Text alarms can be set in advance – for example, if a person fails to get home at a particular time. Users can also speed dial the number to trigger an alarm if they get into trouble. Once the alarm is triggered, Text You Home obtains the location of the user from network triangulation to pinpoint the mobile. The location is then texted to emergency contacts, such as family or friends, along with any journey details sent by the user beforehand. More details are available on www.textyouhome.com
- Be alert and be brief when using a mobile phone. Be discreet and try to conceal it. Don't wander along with your earphones on or follow a smartphone's satellite navigation system as this could indicate to others that you have expensive personal possessions with you, you are not alert or even familiar with your surroundings.

- It is possible to download a free application called FindmyiPhone which enables your mobile phone to be tracked via GPS. Other phones can be set up in a similar way. The police advise owners of smartphones to download applications to help you locate your phone if you have mislaid it. If your phone has been stolen the police are able to track it; this in turn helps them solve more crimes.
- Facing outwards when using a public telephone allows you to see what is going on around you.
- If you feel that you are being followed, cross the street (more than once if necessary), and if you are still concerned, move as quickly as possible to a public area, such as a restaurant or bar, and telephone for help. It is not necessarily the best idea to use the first telephone that you see if it is in an isolated spot.
- You should never accept drinks from strangers or leave your drink unattended in public places as drinks being 'spiked' with drugs or alcohol is on the increase. Read an interview with a door supervisor and tips about how international students and visitors can keep safe in clubs, bars or other venues www.britishcouncil.org/eumd-immigration.htm
- Think about buying a personal attack alarm and carrying it in your hand when walking at night, in case you need it quickly.
- Avoid confrontation – it's better and safer to walk away if you are being provoked or hassled.
- Be aware of others around you at cash point machines and try not to use cash machines at night or in poorly lit areas. If you must use one, go with a friend and leave as soon as you have your money.
- Always memorise your PIN (personal identification number) to access your money from a cash machine. Never write down your PIN or give it to anyone else.
- Have your keys ready well before you reach the door of your car or house.
- Carry your bag close to you with the clasp facing inwards or strap it over your shoulder. If someone grabs your bag, let it go; your safety is more important.
- If you live in shared accommodation, make sure no strangers follow you when you walk through the main entrance. This is important for your safety, as well as others living there.



Using public transport

Public transport in the UK is reliable, relatively inexpensive and convenient to use. Here are some tips on using it safely:

- If travelling by bus, try not to wait at bus stops alone. When you are on the bus, sit downstairs if you are on a double-decker, where the driver and other passengers can see you. Arrange for someone to meet you at the bus stop if you are travelling late and have a long way to walk.
- If you can, take a taxi rather than walk the streets with a smartphone's satellite navigation system or a road map and/or your luggage.
- If you travel by train or the Underground (the 'Tube'), try not to sit in an empty carriage. Try to sit near groups of people in a well-lit area.
- When you are on the train, store your luggage as close to your seat as possible or where you can easily see it. If you use a luggage rack, check your belongings regularly, especially when a train stops at a station.
- If you are travelling a long way by train, make sure someone knows which train you are travelling on and when you are due to arrive.
- Check the time of the last train, bus, tube or tram home to avoid being stranded at night. Think about texting a message about your travel arrangements to a friend.
- Always have cash on you and a back-up plan if you are separated from the people you are travelling with.
- If you are lost or in need of assistance when travelling by train, find a member of staff or telephone the British Transport Police on +44 (0)800 40 50 40.
- Do not open the doors until your transport home has completely stopped.
- Try to avoid walking alone after getting off a train, bus, tube or tram. If you can, walk close to a group of people or arrange for someone to meet you.
- Never walk across or touch railway lines – it is very dangerous and you could be badly injured or even killed.
- To remain safe and alert, don't use your headphones, smartphone satellite navigation systems or have long conversations on mobile phones while you are walking, especially late at night.

Using taxis

There will probably be times when you need to take a taxi during your stay in the UK – for instance, before or after a night out. If you don't feel safe walking, especially late at night, use a taxi. Even if you are with a group of friends, it makes more sense to use a taxi and share the cost.

However, you do need to be aware of some basic safety guidelines about using them. Here are some helpful tips:

- If you need to use a taxi, ask your educational institution, the hotel you are staying in, or your friends to recommend a taxi company. Keep the telephone number handy, and remember, never use an unlicensed company.
- Check the back of the taxi to ensure there is an official licence plate displayed before you get in. If you are still not sure, ask to see the driver's identification.
- Be aware that some 'minicabs' that stop in the street may be cheaper, but are not licensed and are therefore not as safe as taxis or minicabs that you arrange by telephone. You must pre-book private hire taxis otherwise you are not insured to be in the vehicle.
- If the taxi does not have a meter, agree the fare with the driver before you get into the taxi in order to avoid misunderstandings when you get to your destination.
- Sit in the back of a taxi and directly behind the driver, whenever possible.
- It is quite acceptable to chat with the driver, but do not give away any personal information.
- Have your cash ready and leave the cab before you pay the driver.
- If you want, you can ask your taxi driver to wait until you have entered your house safely, before he or she drives away.





Driving in the UK

As an international visitor, you must make sure you fulfil the legal requirements and be aware of the correct procedures before you drive in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

You must have a valid licence that allows you to drive in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales). There are different arrangements in Northern Ireland.

If you wish to drive you must find out if you can use your existing licence, which will depend on where it was issued. Information can be found at www.gov.uk/non-gb-driving-licence


For visitors from outside the EEA: during the first year of your stay in the UK you can drive with a valid driving licence from your own country or an International Driving Permit, **but after one year you must take out a provisional UK licence and put 'L' plates on your car. You must then arrange to sit a full UK driving test.** Until you pass your test, a person who holds a full UK driving licence must sit at your side whenever you are driving and you cannot drive on a motorway.

The car must also be covered by insurance, registered and taxed and if it is over three years old, it must have an MOT Certificate. GB licences are issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). If you have a driving licence that was issued in your home country, you must find out if you can use it to drive in Great Britain and for how long it is valid.

The Highway Code is a government publication that provides a summary of UK traffic law and has pictures of all the road signs in use in the UK (many of which are also used throughout the European Union). You can buy this at most good bookshops, or read it online at www.gov.uk/browse/driving/highway-code

While driving in the UK there are legal requirements that you must adhere to:

- If you are caught driving without insurance, road tax, or a valid licence you will face prosecution and be fined.
- You must drive on the left-hand side of the road and overtake on the right.
- If you are riding a motorbike or moped you must wear a crash helmet.
- The driver and front seat passengers must wear seat belts; rear seat passengers must wear seat belts where they are fitted.
- You must not drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- You must observe all speed limits (30 miles per hour is usually the maximum speed limit in built-up areas).
- If you are caught speeding by a police officer or speed camera you will be fined and have points put on your licence.
- You will be barred from driving if you accumulate 12 points.
- You must observe the minimum age limits; the minimum age for driving a car or riding a motorcycle is 17.
- It is illegal to use a hand-held mobile phone or send or read text messages while driving.
- Remember, pedestrians have the right of way when on pedestrian crossings.
- More detailed information on these requirements can be found in *The Highway Code*.



Here are a few more tips to help you drive safely in the UK:

- If you are going on a long journey, plan your route using main roads, and telephone ahead to let someone know roughly when to expect you.
- Before you set off, check your tyres and fuel and oil levels. Tyre weld/automatic latex puncture aerosol is useful in case of a flat tyre in a remote area, as it will mend a punctured tyre for long enough for you to reach a garage.
- Always keep a blanket, warm clothes, a pair of boots and a good torch in the car, and check the batteries regularly.
- Handbags or briefcases are safer if placed on the floor or behind seats rather than on the passenger seat.
- Don't leave valuables on open display in the car – if you have to leave them in the car, lock them in the boot or trunk so they are out of sight. Try to park your vehicle away from secluded areas, in a well-lit place if possible. Lock your car while parked in a petrol station.
- If you are travelling in a car alone, lock all the doors and keep the windows closed while you are driving.
- Make sure you are a member of a breakdown organisation. All breakdown organisations give priority to lone females.

Cycling in the UK

The following advice is intended to help international visitors with the transition between cycling in your home country and the UK.

Once you have purchased a bicycle, find out if there are any local cycle shops where they will service your bike and show you how to give it regular safety checks. Fit your bike with a bell and purchase a secure lock.

NOTE: It is vital that you purchase a cycle helmet that meets the British standard. Use lights if possible at all times and wear fluorescent and reflective jackets. Don't listen to music or use your mobile phone while on your bike as it will distract you.

In many cities there will be cycle lanes so ask your institution if they provide cycle maps. Some cycle lanes can be shared with buses or pedestrians and these need to be used with extra care. Look before moving off or stopping and always indicate when turning. Be aware of car doors opening, pedestrians stepping out and emergency vehicles. Buses have limited visibility so cyclists should stay behind a bus and in full view of the mirrors, where the bus driver can see you clearly. Manoeuvres around a bus make a cyclist very vulnerable as a bus driver can only see behind by using mirrors.

All traffic signs and traffic lights should be obeyed and are available to view at www.gov.uk/highway-code

Complicated junctions require great experience and confidence in road cycling. Practical training or cycling with an experienced friend will help build confidence during the transition period. Alternatively, it may be advisable to consider using Google Maps to find an alternative route or use a local map in conjunction with a cycle map to plan a safer route. This is a useful activity for new visitors to help find your way around your new locality.



Laws in the UK

The laws in the UK may be different from those in your home country. This especially applies to the use of tobacco, alcohol and self-defence sprays.

- You must not carry illegal drugs or substances with you of any kind (unless prescribed by a doctor), or use or supply any illegal drugs, including cannabis, ecstasy, LSD and amphetamines.
- It is illegal to carry any sort of weapon including knives, self-defence CS gas sprays, guns and stun guns.
- You must be 18 and over to buy tobacco.
- It is an illegal offence for anyone under the age of 18 to purchase alcohol or to have alcohol purchased for them.
- Never buy property that you think might be stolen, no matter how tempting a bargain it might seem.

You can find an essential guide to the law in the UK at www.gov.uk/browse/justice

Powers of arrest

The police help to protect people in the community but are also there to ensure laws are followed. Police officers in the UK have the power to arrest people who are suspected of having committed an offence. Arrests can also be made if you fail to pay a fine, fail to appear in court when asked to do so, or if you refuse to give your name and address to a police officer when asked.

Where offences are considered minor, you will be issued with a summons to appear in a magistrate's court. If you do not respond to this a police officer may arrest you.

If you are stopped in the street by a police officer, you have the right to ask why you have been stopped. However, remember that the police may search you if they believe you are in possession of a controlled drug, an offensive or sharp object, or stolen goods.

If you are arrested you will be officially cautioned. You do not have to say anything to the police, but if you are later charged with a crime and you have not mentioned, when questioned, something that you later rely on in court, then this may be taken into account when deciding if you are guilty or not. Anything you do say can later be used against you.

If you are arrested and taken to a police station, you are under no obligation to say anything until you have spoken to a solicitor. It is your right to see a solicitor and this service is free of charge. However, if you have been arrested following any alcohol-related offence and the police wish to breathalyse you, this can be done before you speak to a solicitor. Your solicitor may be present when you are questioned.

The police can only keep you at a police station for a certain amount of time, usually 24 hours, unless, depending on the offence, they ask a magistrate for an extension.

If you are arrested and you need legal assistance, there are a number of organisations that can help you:

- Community Legal Service Direct offers access to free legal information and advice. Find out more at www.gov.uk/legal-aid or telephone +44 (0)845 345 4345.
- You can also contact the Citizens Advice Bureau at www.citizensadvice.org.uk – they provide free, confidential and independent advice in their offices, at colleges, and at other institutions across the UK. Advice is available face-to-face and by telephone on issues such as debt problems, legal difficulties, discrimination and housing.



Racial discrimination and harassment

The population of the UK is increasingly diverse and a great many religions and ethnic groups are represented here. Britain is a tolerant society that believes in respecting the rights of minority groups. This belief is supported by law: the Race Relations Act is one of the most comprehensive laws of its kind in the world and works towards the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equal opportunity between people of different racial groups.

If you are subjected to any form of racial discrimination or harassment, report it to the police. They will assist individuals who feel they have been discriminated against. You can also report it to your local branch of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The Commission will provide information and advice to anyone who thinks they have been the victim of racial discrimination or harassment.

You can contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission on their helplines:

England +44 (0)845 604 6610

Wales +44 (0)845 604 8810

Scotland +44 (0)845 604 5510

or find out more from their website at
www.equalityhumanrights.com



Hate crime

A hate crime is defined as any incident constituting a criminal offence, which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate.

Hatred is a strong term that goes beyond simply causing offence or hostility. A hate crime is any criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated by the offender's hatred of someone because of their:

- race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins
- religion
- gender or gender identity
- sexual orientation
- disability.

A hate crime can take many forms including:

- Physical attacks – such as physical assault, damage to property, offensive graffiti, neighbour disputes and arson.
- Threat of attack – including offensive letters, abusive or obscene telephone calls, groups gathering to intimidate you and your family, and unfounded, malicious complaints.
- Verbal abuse or insults – offensive leaflets and posters, abusive gestures, dumping of rubbish outside homes or through letterboxes, bullying at school or in the workplace.
- A hate crime can occur at home or close to home. It can take place in public, such as on the street, in public toilets, on a bus or in a library; it can even occur while at school, college, university or in the workplace.

By reporting any crime the incident can be investigated fully and you can get the service you deserve and the support you need. The police will: deal with incidents and complaints promptly and sensitively; respect your views and treat them professionally; inform and work with the Community and Diversity Officer during the investigation, and keep you informed of any progress and the outcome of a complaint.



Useful helplines and websites

The following helplines and websites offer impartial information and support by telephone and on the internet. Information and advice in most cases is free and confidential. Remember, these organisations are there to help you, so do not hesitate to contact them if you need assistance.

Association of British Insurers

www.abi.org.uk

British Insurance Brokers' Association

Information about insurance and insurance providers in the UK.

www.biba.org.uk

British Transport Police

Provides a policing service on the railways throughout Great Britain, the London Underground, the Docklands Light Railway, the Midland Metro tram system and the Croydon Tramlink.

www.btp.police.uk

Childalert

Comprehensive advice and personal safety guidance for parents.

www.childalert.co.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The CAB service helps people resolve their financial, legal and other problems by providing information and advice.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Advice guide (CAB)

www.adviceguide.org.uk

Community Legal Service Direct

Access to free legal information and advice.

www.gov.uk/legal-aid

Telephone +44 (0)845 345 4345

Crime statistics

You can use this website to find out about crime statistics in an area in which you are planning to live or to visit.

www.crime-statistics.co.uk

The world's first nationwide street-by-street crime maps are now available in England and Wales.

www.police.uk

Crimestoppers

The charity Crimestoppers runs the 0800 555 111 number, allowing people to telephone anonymously with information about crimes or criminals. The information is then passed on to the police. Just tell them what you know, not who you are.

www.crimestoppers-uk.org

Directgov

This website contains lots of useful safety advice and tips regarding crime prevention and self-defence.

www.gov.uk/browse/justice

Drink Aware

For the facts about alcohol.

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Drinkline

Advice on sensible drinking and alcohol misuse.

www.patient.co.uk/support/Drinkline.htm

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Offers support and advice in cases of racial discrimination or harassment.

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Telephone +44 (0)20 7939 0000

Gamble Aware

Promotes responsible gambling only and supports initiatives that help prevent gambling from becoming a problem and minimise gambling-related harm. Gamble Aware is administered by the Responsible Gambling Trust.

www.gambleaware.co.uk

Get safe Online

Advice on how to keep yourself safe online.

www.getsafeonline.org

Highway Code

Advice on traffic law in the UK.

www.gov.uk/browse/driving/highway-code

Home Office

The Home Office has a website giving practical advice on protecting yourself against identity theft.

www.actionfraud.police.uk

Home Office Crime Reduction

Useful information and resources relating to crime prevention.

www.gov.uk/government/policies/reducing-and-preventing-crime--2

Immobilise Crime

To register your mobile phone, bicycle or laptop, and for advice on what to do if they are stolen. Immobilise also sell property marking kits, electronic tags for bikes, luggage tags and tracker key tags and recovery services, security tags and stickers, window stickers, hologram security stickers and laptop insurance.

www.immobilise.com

Telephone +44 (0)8701 123 123

National Domestic Violence Helpline

Free telephone support for women experiencing domestic violence.

Telephone +44 (0)808 2000 247

For men experiencing domestic violence:

www.mensadviceline.org.uk/mens_advice.php

National Drugs Helpline

A free 24-hour confidential service offering advice and information to individuals concerned about drugs.

www.urban75.com/drugs/helpline.html

Telephone +44 (0)800 77 6600

National Lesbian and Gay Switchboard

Information, support and referral service for homosexual men and women.

Telephone +44 (0)20 7837 7324

NHS Direct

NHS Direct offers confidential health advice and information, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

Telephone +44 (0)845 4647

Rape Crisis Federation for England and Wales

Help for women who have suffered rape, sexual abuse, attack or harassment.

www.rapecrisis.co.uk

Refuge

For women and children facing domestic abuse.

www.refuge.org.uk

Free 24-Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline.

Telephone +44 (0)808 2000 247

Samaritans (24 hours)

The Samaritans provide confidential support to individuals in emotional distress.

www.samaritans.org.uk

Telephone +44 (0)845 790 9090

Stonewall

A political lobbying group working for the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

www.stonewall.org.uk

Telephone +44 (0)20 7881 9440

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

A national charity offering advice on how to stay safe.

www.suzylamplugh.org

Telephone +44 (0)20 8876 0305

Terrence Higgins Trust

The Terrence Higgins Trust delivers health promotion campaigns and provides national and local services to people with or affected by HIV/AIDS.

www.tht.org.uk

Telephone +44 (0)845 1221 200

Text You Home

A text service that transforms your mobile phone into a personal safety alarm.

www.textyouhome.com

Victim Support

An independent charity that helps people cope with the effects of crime. They provide free and confidential support and information to help individuals deal with their experiences.

www.victimsupport.org.uk

Telephone +44 (0)845 30 30 900

Women's Aid

Offers support and a place of safety to abused women and children.

www.womensaid.org.uk

Telephone +44 (0)808 2000 247

Notes:



The UK means the United Kingdom and consists of England, Scotland, Wales (Great Britain) and Northern Ireland.

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