

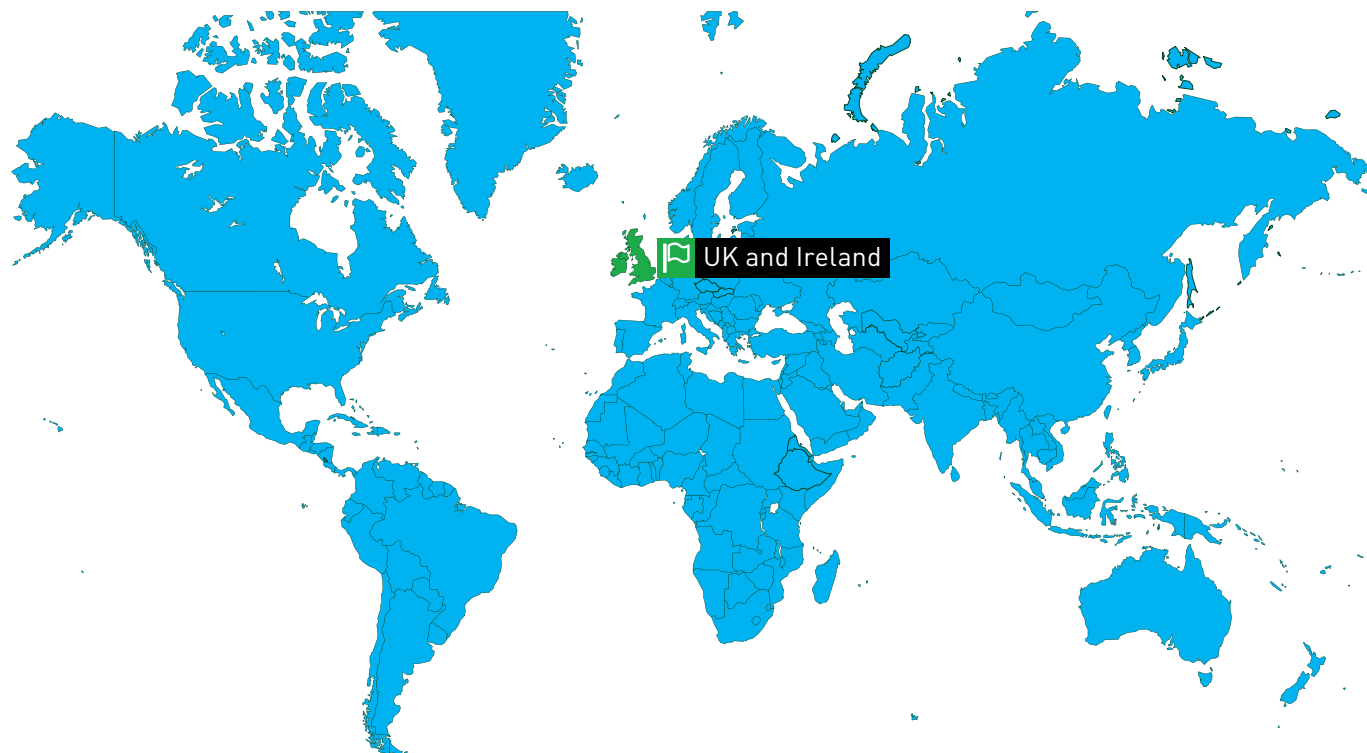


choice
TRAVEL

Destination Guide: UK and Ireland

What to know before you go
Essential preparation and planning tips
Accommodation and transport

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Who is CHOICE? Set up by consumers for consumers, **CHOICE** is the [consumer advocate](#) that provides Australians with information and advice, free from commercial bias.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

OVERVIEW

Best time to go, culture, language, health, safety, laws, watchouts, scams, emergency contacts and more.

Travel-size tips

- › Most Australian tourists do not need a [visa](#) to visit the UK or Ireland.
- › You won't need an international [driving](#) permit if you have an Australian licence.
- › Prices and availability can be affected by half-term school holidays as well as holidays between terms.
- › London has five [airports](#), four of them are a long way from the CBD.
- › Long-distance [train travel](#) is best booked in advance, particularly at peak times.

Best time to go

The UK and Ireland aren't exactly known for lovely weather. Summer (June-August) is by far the most popular time of year to visit. The temperatures will be milder, but there's no guarantee a British summer won't look just like a British winter; be prepared for the possibility of grey skies and drizzle no matter what

the season. But hey, you're visiting for the culture, not the weather!

- › When the sun does shine, summers can be absolutely glorious. Expect to pay higher prices for accommodation in summer, and book in advance if you're travelling during school holidays.
- › Schools have three terms broken up by summer, Christmas and Easter holidays, but they also have a week-long half-term break when bookings are likely to soar – particularly since the UK government introduced fines for parents who take their kids on holiday during term time.
- › Spring and autumn can be beautiful times to visit, the temperatures are still mild and the prices are likely to be cheaper.
- › Winter is not as bitter as you may think. Temperatures rarely go below 0°C and snowfall is usually minimal, except in parts of Scotland. The biggest drawback with travelling in winter is the limited daylight hours for sightseeing – around eight hours a day in the south and seven in the north during December-January.

- As in Australia, Christmas and New Year are busy times, and accommodation and transport should be booked well in advance.

Culture

British and Irish culture and language is similar to Australia's, but there are a few minor differences.

- Tipping is not customary, but it's always appreciated.
- There are a few minor language differences, for example, you 'top up' rather than buy credit for your 'pay-as-you-go' phone (rather than your pre-paid phone), and it helps to know the difference between 'pants' and 'trousers'!
- Thongs are a type of underwear – they should not be worn on your feet! (You wear flip-flops on your feet.)
- The UK still largely operates on the imperial measurement system. You can use [an app](#), if needed, to translate miles into kilometres and pounds into kilograms. Ireland has mostly switched to metric. Both countries sell petrol by the litre.

Health and safety

The UK and Ireland have [reciprocal health care agreements](#) with Australia, meaning that Australian travellers can access the national health services in both countries. This doesn't mean you won't pay for treatment or

medication, and it isn't a replacement for [travel insurance](#), which is always a necessity.

Remember to take your Medicare card with you – you'll need it, along with your passport, to prove that you're eligible.

- Australians can access the national health care services in both countries, but you may still have to pay for medication and some treatments.
- The reciprocal health care agreement with Ireland allows Australians to access emergency care in Irish hospitals, but it does not allow for ongoing treatment.
- The reciprocal agreement with the UK gives Australians access to GPs as well as emergency treatment.
- Tap water is safe to drink in the UK and Ireland and the standard of hygiene and food safety is high.

For the latest advice on risks including terrorism, natural disasters and potential outbreaks of disease visit [smartraveller.gov.au](https://www.smartraveller.gov.au)



Tip: Have you registered your travel plans with smartraveller.gov.au and checked for the latest safety advice on the region you're travelling to?

[Do I need vaccinations to travel to the UK? > Page 6](#)

Laws and watchouts

Laws

- 18 is the legal drinking age in the UK and Ireland.
- Drugs, including marijuana, are illegal.
- The blood alcohol limit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is .08%, in Scotland and Ireland it's .05%.

For road rules, see [Driving in the UK > Page 15](#)

Watchouts

The UK and Ireland is generally a safe part of the world to visit, but risks can vary depending on where you are and what you're doing.

- Keep your belongings close, as pickpockets and bag-snatchers may operate in crowded areas.
- Certain areas of cities may be best avoided at night. Ask a local for advice.
- Bank card skimming and credit card fraud is a problem in the UK, as it is in Australia. Keep an eye on your statement and let the bank know if you see any unexplained transactions.
- Be careful using free Wi-Fi hotspots. Follow [Stay Smart Online](#) tips to keep your device safe from hackers, and avoid doing internet banking on untrusted connections.



See our list of [tourist traps](#) for more advice on avoiding common scams while on holiday.

Making a complaint

UK

- To complain about a UK business, product or service, follow the [Citizen's Advice Bureau](#) (note that the advice differs for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland).
- If your gripe is with a UK travel agent or tour operator, contact the Association of British Travel Agents (abta.com).
- If your gripe is with an airline, see the Civil Aviation Authority's advice at caa.co.uk.
- You can also seek advice from CHOICE's sister organisation Which? which.co.uk.

Ireland

- If you have a dispute with an Irish business, product or service, see consumerhelp.ie for advice about making a complaint or seeking compensation.

- If your gripe is with an airline, see aviationreg.ie.
- If you are a victim of a crime, contact the police on 999 or 112. If you need further assistance you can ask for help from the Irish Tourist Assistance Service (ITAS): itas.ie / info@itas.ie / 1890 365 700.

If your gripe is with an Australian or international tour operator, airline, or booking site, check choice.com.au for the [usual procedures](#) for making a complaint or seeking compensation.

Emergency contacts

Emergency number: 999 (or 112 from a mobile)

Non-urgent health enquiries (UK): 111

Vehicle breakdowns:

- If driving a rental, use the contact details given to you by the company
- AA: 0800 88 77 66

- RAC: 0800 82 82 82 / 0333 2000 999 (mobile) / 07855 828282 (SMS)

Australian High Commission (embassy) in the UK

uk.embassy.gov.au

Australia House, Strand, London WC2B 4LA

+44 20 7379 4334 (from outside the UK)

020 7887 5776 (from inside the UK)

Consular Emergency Centre: 0500 890 165 (24 hours, free call)

Australian Embassy in Ireland

ireland.embassy.gov.au

7th Floor, Fitzwilton House, Wilton Terrace, Dublin 2

+353 1 664 5300

Out-of-hours emergency: 1800 556 197 (24 hours, free call)

Twitter: [@AusEmblre](https://twitter.com/AusEmblre)

Facebook: [Australia in Ireland](https://www.facebook.com/AustraliaInIreland)

24-hour Australian Consular Emergency Centre: +61 2 6261 3305 or 1300 555 135 or SMS +61 421 269 080

Visas and passports



WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Visas, vaccinations, phone roaming, SIM cards, internet, power adapters, money, travel insurance, handy apps and more.

Australian passport holders can visit the UK without a visa for up to 180 days, and Ireland for up to 90 days. If you're visiting for any reason other than tourism, or if you have concerns (for example, if you have a criminal record or you've been denied entry to the country before), check the rules at gov.uk/check-uk-visa or dfa.ie/travel/visas/.

Vaccinations

Specific vaccinations are generally unnecessary for travel to the UK and Ireland, but The Travel Doctor recommends you make sure your [routine vaccinations](#) are up to date. The risk of contracting a dangerous disease in the UK is comparable to the risk in Australia.

More about [health and safety in the UK and Ireland > Page 3](#).

Phone and internet

Global roaming and coverage

Australian mobile phones are compatible with Britain and Ireland's GSM networks, so they'll work by pairing up with local carriers, but if you use your phone a lot you run the risk of receiving some frightening bills. Check with your telco for roaming prices:

› [Telstra](#)

› [Vodafone](#)

› [Optus](#)

› [Virgin](#)

Tip: Switch off data roaming on your phone before you leave Australia. Likewise, switch off your voicemail and ask friends and family to text you rather than calling (you'll be charged if you answer incoming calls).

Local SIM

Buying a local SIM is a better option if you're planning to use your phone for more than just the odd text message. Pre-paid SIMs (called 'pay-as-you-go') can be purchased in phone shops or at airports, or even online before you leave Australia.

Remember: Your phone will need to be unlocked to accept a SIM from another network.

Tip: If you travel to Ireland with a UK SIM, or to the UK with an Irish SIM, you are likely to be charged international roaming rates.

Travel SIM

Pre-paid travel SIMs can be bought from some Australian travel stores, phone stores and post offices, or ordered online before you leave the country. Rates won't be as good as a local SIM, but they can be a smart option if you're travelling to multiple countries and don't want to buy a local SIM every time.

[Beat global roaming bill shock](#) – our guide to unlocking your phone and changing your global roaming settings.

Wi-Fi

Wi-Fi should be easy to find in cafes, hotels, airports and even on some public transport. McDonald's, Starbucks, Pret A Manger and Coffee Republic all offer free Wi-Fi. To search for other free hotspots, try [myhotspots.co.uk](#) or [wificafespots.com](#), or download an app such as [WeFi](#) (Android or PC) or Wi-Fi Finder ([Apple](#) or [Android](#)). [The Cloud](#) is a widely available pay-as-you-go Wi-Fi provider.

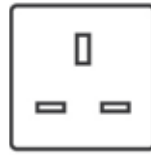
Power plugs

Standard voltage: 230V

Frequency: 50Hz

The UK and Ireland run on the same voltage and frequency as Australia, so your appliances will work fine without getting fried.

Power sockets:



type G

The type G power sockets and plugs are different to Australia's type I, so you'll need an adaptor.

Money

UK currency: Pound sterling (£)

Irish currency: Euro (€)

Check [xe.com](#) for the latest exchange rates.

Tips:

➤ You won't be able to use British pounds in Ireland or euros in the UK, except in some hotels and tourist shops.

➤ Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own pound sterling bank notes. These are worth the same as notes printed in the rest of Britain, but some shopkeepers in England and Wales may [refuse to accept them](#).



Important: Tell your bank about your travel plans two weeks before you leave. Card activity in a foreign country could be mistaken for fraud and you could find your account frozen.

Credit cards and ATMs

ATMs are very common across the UK and Ireland. If you use an Australian card, remember that you'll be

charged a foreign exchange fee and a withdrawal fee for every transaction.

Tip: Westpac customers can avoid the \$5 withdrawal fee by using Barclay's Bank ATMs.

Credit cards are widely accepted, but again, you'll be charged a conversion fee of 2–3% every time you make a purchase. Ask your bank about a traveller's card with no, or low, fees.

Money changers

You can buy euros and pounds from an Australian bank before you leave, or you can change Australian dollars at currency exchange outlets or at some UK or Irish banks. Avoid changing money at the airport – it's unlikely you'll get the best rate.

Travellers' cheques

Travellers' cheques aren't so common these days, but some UK banks and retailers will still cash them. If you're concerned about money security you could take a pre-paid [travel money card](#), which works in a similar way to travellers' cheques but can also be used like a debit or credit card (there will be fees, of course).

Tip: Carry at least two cards and more than one currency (Australian dollars, pounds, euros). Split your money and cards between separate bags. That way if you lose one, you have a back-up.

VAT (Value Added Tax) is applied to many goods and services in the UK and Ireland. Unlike in some other countries, this will almost always be included in the advertised price, so you won't get any nasty surprises. You may

be eligible for a VAT refund on some goods when you leave [the UK](#) or [Ireland](#).

For more advice, see our [travel money guide](#).

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is essential. Buy your insurance at the same time as you book your trip, that way you'll be covered if you have to cancel for some reason before you go.

The good news is that insurance for the UK and Ireland is slightly cheaper than for many other destinations, thanks to lower risks and a reciprocal health care deal with both countries.

For more information read our [buying guide](#) and to choose the best cover, see CHOICE's [travel insurance reviews and comparisons](#).

If you're planning on driving during your holiday, make sure your insurance covers it. You should also be aware that anything that happens to you while



under the influence of drugs or alcohol is unlikely to be covered by insurance, so go easy on the lagers.

Tips:

- Keep a print out of your travel insurance details with you at all times while on your trip.
- Share your insurance details with family or friends before you leave.

Handy links and apps

Consider adding these links and apps to your phone, tablet or laptop before you go.

Tip: If possible, choose apps that work offline so they won't chew up your mobile data or stop working when you're in remote places.

- City guides for London, Manchester, Dublin and Edinburgh include maps and self-guided tours of popular destinations. The apps work offline, so they won't chew up your mobile data. Search around for recommended travel guide apps for other destinations on your itinerary.
- Currency conversion apps help you work out costs in Australian dollars.
- Unit conversion apps translate imperial measurements into metric.

Tip: To save a map onto your mobile device for offline use, select the area on Google Maps then select 'Save



offline map' from the menu and follow the directions on the screen. Your GPS positioning will still work on the saved map, even when you don't have access to the internet. Alternatively, go to 'Offline maps' in the menu and select a city.

Websites

- visitbritain.com (the UK's official tourism website)
- ireland.com (Ireland's official tourism website)
- smartraveller.gov.au for the Australian government's latest advice on the safety of the region you're travelling in.
- xe.com for the latest currency exchange rates.
- wikitravel.org/en/Britain_and_Ireland for crowd-sourced information on culture, travel tips and more (may not always be accurate).
- Manchester: tfgm.com

Flights

ACCOMMODATION AND TRANSPORT

GETTING THERE AND AROUND

Flights to UK and Ireland, airport guides, key destinations, transport, car hire, accommodation, tours and more.

Flight time from Australia: 19.5+ hours

There are no direct flights between Australia and the UK; the distance is too great. Flights usually connect in Asia or the Middle East. The route is serviced by many airlines, including Qantas, British Airways, Virgin, Singapore Airlines, KLM, Garuda Indonesia, China Southern and Philippine Airlines.

Most international flights arrive at London Heathrow or London Gatwick, both these airports are quite a long way from central London. It's worth looking around for a flight that gets you closest to where you're staying, as the cost of a taxi could outweigh the money you save on a cheaper flight.

Warning: If you are flying via the UAE, Singapore, Brunei or any other country with strict drug laws, be sure to check that any medication you're carrying (such as strong painkillers, cold and flu tablets and ADHD medication) aren't illegal. In rare cases, airline passengers have been jailed when caught with medications that were classed as narcotics. If you're concerned, check with your airline or with the embassy of the country you'll be transiting through.

Air Passenger Duty is included in the cost of flights to and from the UK, and because the tax is calculated by flight distance, it can be as high as £194 (around \$380) for Australian flights. There is no duty on flights in and out of Ireland.

At the airport

Most Australians won't need a visa to enter the UK or Ireland as a tourist, but depending on when you arrive you may experience long queues at immigration, especially at Heathrow. You may be quizzed about the purpose of your visit, or you may simply be waved through.

London Heathrow Airport (LHR)

- 32km west of CBD.
- The [Heathrow Express](#) is the fastest way into central London. Departing from Terminals 1, 2, 3 and 5 (shuttle available from terminal 4), trains run every 15 minutes and take 15 minutes to reach Paddington station.

➤ [Heathrow Connect](#) is a cheaper but slower train service departing from Terminals 1, 2 and 3 every 30 minutes and taking 25 minutes to reach Paddington.

➤ The [London Underground](#) (or 'tube') is cheaper and slower still. Trains leave every ten minutes and take up to an hour to reach central London via the Piccadilly line. There are stations at Terminals 4 and 5, and a combined stations for Terminals 1, 2 and 3.

➤ [Buses and coaches](#) run to central London, other airports, some hotels, and stations on the national rail network.

➤ Taxis leave from outside every terminal. Minicabs or private drivers can be pre-booked via [minicabit.com](#) or [greentomatocars.com](#)

➤ [Car hire](#) companies Hertz, Avis, Europcar, National, Alamo, Enterprise, Budget and Sixt all operate out of Heathrow.

➤ Airport website: [heathrowairport.com](#)

London Gatwick Airport (LGW)

➤ 45km south of CBD.

➤ Trains leave from the South Terminal and can be reached from the North Terminal by free shuttle.

➤ The [Gatwick Express](#) is the fastest way into central



London. It leaves every 15 minutes and takes 30 minutes to reach Victoria station.

➤ [Thameslink](#) runs to London Bridge, St Pancras International and Luton Airport.

➤ [Southern](#) runs to London Victoria via Clapham Junction and East Croydon.

➤ [Other train services](#) can take you to destinations outside of London, including Brighton, Southampton and Reading.

➤ Most buses leave from the South Terminal forecourt. Some also pick up passengers at the North Terminal.

➤ [Easybus](#) runs to Earls Court/West Brompton, London Victoria coach station and Waterloo train station.

➤ [National Express](#) runs to many locations including central London, Heathrow and Brighton.

➤ Taxis are available from both terminals. [Drivers](#) can

be booked in advance.

- Car hire companies operating out of Gatwick include Hertz, Avis, Europcar, Sixt, National, Alamo, Enterprise and Budget.
- Airport website: gatwickairport.com

Key destinations and their airports

England	
Airport	Distance from city
London Heathrow (LHR)	32km west of central London
London Gatwick (LGW)	45km south of central London
London Luton (LTN)	56km north-west of central London
London Stansted (STN)	64km north-east of central London
London City Airport (LCY)	9km east of central London
Manchester Airport (MAN)	15km south of CBD
Birmingham Airport (BHX)	15km south-east of CBD
Bristol Airport (BRS)	12km south-west of CBD
Newcastle Airport (NCL)	10km south-east of CBD
Scotland	
Airport	Distance from city
Edinburgh Airport (EDI)	15km west of CBD
Glasgow Airport (GLA)	15km west of CBD
Aberdeen Airport (ABZ)	8km north-west of CBD
Wales	
Airport	Distance from city
Cardiff Airport (CWL)	20km west of CBD

Ireland	
Airport	Distance from city
Belfast Airport (Northern Ireland) (BFS)	19km north-west of CBD
Dublin Airport (DUB)	9km north of CBD
Cork Airport (ORK)	6.5km south of CBD
Shannon Airport (SNN)	24km north of Ennis, 25km west of Limerick, 85km south of Galway

Getting around

Tip: Check if you need to pre-book any tickets.

Trains

Britain's train services are run by more than 20 different private companies. Check nationalrail.co.uk for all timetables and fares, or once you know which company operates your train, check their website for a better price (hint: they don't charge booking fees). You can also compare rates at thetrainline.com/farefinder.



The National Rail website is integrated with Ireland's rail and ferry network, so you can book a full journey from London to Dublin, for example, on the one ticket. For train fares within Ireland, go to irishrail.ie. Trains and buses in Northern Ireland are operated by translink.co.uk.

Ireland's [ticket types](#) are fairly straightforward, but [UK fares](#) fluctuate greatly with different rates for fixed 'advance' tickets, semi-flexible 'off-peak' tickets, and fully flexible 'anytime' tickets, as well as first or second class seats. Generally, the earlier you book, the better price you'll get.

If you're planning on doing a lot of rail travel, consider

a [BritRail](#) pass. It's only available to tourists, so must be purchased before you arrive in the UK.

Tips: If you're in the UK for a while, a Railcard can save you 34% on most train tickets. The cards are available for over-60s, under-25s, families with children, people travelling in pairs and people with disabilities. They can be bought online at railcard.co.uk, but you must have a UK address for the card to be mailed to. Alternatively, they're available at stations, some UK travel agents, and Gatwick, Stansted, Luton and Manchester Airports.

For trains from London to Paris and mainland Europe, book at eurostar.com.

Check seat61.com for more tips on finding cheap fares, as well as other rail and ferry travel advice.

Buses

Buses and coaches are generally cheaper than trains, but they're also slower. National Express (nationalexpress.com) is the main UK operator, offering [Brit Xplorer](#) passes for travellers as well as discount [Coachcards](#) for under-26s, over-60s, families and people with disabilities. Megabus (megabus.com) is another major operator with budget fares, and there are

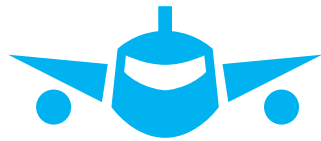


plenty of smaller local companies. Bus Éireann (buseireann.ie) is Ireland's main operator. It has a range of passes available for travellers, including rail-bus combos.

Tip: During busy periods a bus may be a better option than a train. Buses can't oversell tickets, so you'll always be guaranteed a seat.

Domestic flights

Flying is an option if you have limited time for longer trips like London to Edinburgh or Dublin. Carriers include British Airways, Virgin, EasyJet, RyanAir and more. You can book via their websites, or compare fares and book using sites like skyscanner.com and kayak.com. See our tips on using [airline booking websites](#).



Ferries

Ferries connect the UK with Ireland and continental Europe (including France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway and Sweden). Ticket prices can often be drastically cheaper than flying. ferrybooker.com is the best place to search.



Transport tip: rome2rio.com is a great resource for working out how to get from A to B by any means of transport, anywhere in the world.

Getting around towns and cities is easily done on public transport or on foot. Congestion and limited parking can make driving unappealing in major cities, particularly London. Metered taxis are common in all towns and cities. Go to taxi.uk.cabnumbers.com to find the number in your area.

Card payments are not as widely accepted in British or Irish taxis as they are in Australia. Ask your driver

first, or use an app such as [Uber](#) or [Hailo](#) to book and pay for your cab.

Public transport trip-planners by city

- London: tfl.gov.uk
- Manchester: tfgm.com
- Liverpool: merseytravel.gov.uk
- Edinburgh (and all of Scotland): travelinescotland.com
- Dublin (and all of Ireland): transportforireland.ie
- Cardiff (and all of Wales): traveline-cymru.info

Car hire

Hiring a car is a great way to see the region, particularly if you're planning to visit rural areas where public transport may not be convenient. Driving in London is not recommended as parking is scarce and traffic moves at a snail's pace, plus you'll be charged a [congestion toll](#) for entering the city.



There's no need to get an international driving permit, you can drive on your Australian licence.

Many well-known companies operate in the UK and Ireland, including Avis, Thrifty, Hertz and Europcar. A consumer survey by CHOICE's UK sister organisation [Which?](#) rates Enterprise and Alamo as two of the best. To get the best rate and avoid unnecessary charges, check these [car hire tips](#) from Which?

Tip: It is possible to take a hire car by ferry between the UK and Ireland, but most companies will charge a substantial premium. It's usually cheaper to hire two separate cars.

Driving in the UK and Ireland

- › Vehicles drive on the left-hand side of the road.
- › Mobile phones can only be used hands-free.
- › Where seat belts are fitted, they must be worn.
- › Car horns are banned in residential areas between 11:30pm and 7:00am.
- › Priority is marked at most junctions – there is no general rule as to who should give way.
- › In the UK, children under 12 years' old, or under 135cm, must use an appropriate child seat.
- › Ireland has [different rules](#) regarding child seats, in accordance with the EU's child safety protection laws.
- › The blood alcohol limit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is .08%.
- › The blood alcohol limit in Scotland and Ireland is .05%.

Tip: Country roads can be very narrow in places. Drive slowly and be prepared to compromise with other drivers and back up if necessary.

Accommodation and tours

The UK is the land of bed and breakfasts (try [bedandbreakfasts.co.uk](#) for bookings or [bedandbreakfastnationwide.com](#) for reviews), but if B&Bs aren't your thing, other options range from ordinary hotel rooms to [renting your own castle](#), [canal boat](#) or [holiday home](#). The rates are similar to here in Australia, if not a little cheaper, depending on the location and the exchange rate.

Bookings can be made through international sites such as expedia and lastminute, or local sites such as [hotels.uk.com](#) or [irelandhotels.com](#). Check Tripadvisor for customer reviews before booking. If you're looking for a homestay or apartment rental, airbnb is widely used in the UK and Ireland.

Tip: Have you booked accommodation for at least the first night?

Tours and self-drive holidays can be booked through a travel agent or online (try [trafalgar.com/uk](#) or [contiki.com](#) or look for recommended tours on Tripadvisor). For the easiest option of all, consider a package deal from a travel agent such as Flight Centre, which includes flights, transport, accommodation and sometimes even meals. ■

