

The UK: The Ultimate Homeschool Family Travel Adventure

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If you are looking for a treasured family memory, a spectacular educational field trip, or a truly special gift for your homeschool graduating senior, then a journey to the United Kingdom could be the perfect solution. Of course, such a journey is not within everyone's family budget. But for those who can afford it, the opportunity to experience the rich roots of our own culture can provide immeasurable benefits. And the trip may be more affordable than you think.

Taking a trip to the United Kingdom is an excellent way to help develop a historical sense of the wide world around us without having to deal with the hassles of learning a foreign language or getting vaccinations. Though a passport is required, you do not need a visa if you go on a short trip as a tourist. Both young people and parents are likely to benefit from this exposure to other cultures and experiences. Below are some items that you may want to consider if you decide to explore the wonderful world of the United Kingdom as a family.

Planning Your Visit

First, you need to decide what you would like to see in the UK. Do you want to concentrate your visit on the larger cities, such as London and Edinburgh? Are you more interested in the natural beauties, great houses, and distant castles? Careful research through the Internet, travel books, and AAA can be of value in helping you make the most of the trip.

Be aware that many attractions in the UK carry a charge to visit, so you may want to be prepared. British Rail offers a variety of passes that may help defray the cost if you plan to visit a number of sites. If you plan to travel widely in the UK, one of the best values is the English Heritage Overseas Visitors Pass, which gives a family of six entrance to over 120 different sites for \$69 and up. Passes are also available for sites in the London area, though family rates are not offered.

Travel to the UK

Travel to the United Kingdom is often cheaper during the off-peak months from November to the beginning of April. Hotels often are less expensive then as well. But be aware that some attractions and sites are not open to the public during off-peak months. If you have certain locations you are dying to see, check current website listings first to make sure that your visit will be timed correctly.

Travel within the UK

If you are planning to stay only in the London area, you will mainly need transportation from the airport (which can be pricey) and metro tickets to traverse the excellent underground system. However, trips away from London will require travel by train, bus, or car. The train system in the UK is generally quite efficient and allows you to view the countryside as you travel. British Rail offers passes that allow you to travel a certain number of days while in the UK. Some passes also

allow children ages 5-15 to travel free with an adult. You can purchase either standard or first-class accommodations, which are less crowded and may make it easier for the family to stay together. However, both options are quite comfortable.

Bus travel will allow you to get to smaller towns and may be necessary if you plan to visit sites off the beaten track. Many of the manor houses and castles will still require a car to visit, which may mean hiring a cab from the nearest town, or renting a car on your own. Car rentals are generally expensive (as is gas). Most cars have manual transmission and are smaller than cars in the US. If you do drive, remember that you will be driving on the “wrong” side of the road and will need to learn to navigate “roundabouts.” If you want to plan your car trip, www.multimap.com is the best site to use.

Finding Family Accommodations

Hotels in the UK do not generally cater to family travel as well as they do in the US. Rooms are generally sold as a single, double, triple, or quad. If you have a large family and plan to stay in one place for a while, you may be better off renting a “self-catering” cottage (which means you provide your own meals and clean your own rooms). Also note that unless the rooms are designated “en suite,” they generally do not have their own bathroom facilities.

Finances

The United Kingdom primarily utilizes the British pound for transactions. Prices for many items in the UK are very similar to ours, but the exchange rate means that you will be paying roughly double for everything.

Dining

While in the UK, don’t miss out on the chance to try local favorites such as fish and chips (served with mushy peas), roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and curry. Restaurants rarely offer child specials or coupons for special deals, and they usually charge for refills on beverages. Hot tea is a staple and is generally served with milk and no sugar unless you request otherwise. Also, “pudding” in the UK refers to any dessert, so check out the great “pudding” menus. In larger and well-traveled areas, you can find familiar restaurants such as McDonalds and KFC, and these are often the most affordable.

While traveling in the UK might be one of the most expensive family vacations you take, it is also one of the most rewarding. You and your family will experience historical and cultural enrichment that will prove valuable in the coming years. In addition, you and your family will likely learn to appreciate both the United Kingdom and your own country even more.

Biographical Information

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