

Great Britain Travel Tips

By Jill Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: Our school is taking a group of fifth and sixth grade students to England and Wales. Can you help us with some specific travel etiquette tips for our tour of these countries?

A: You can begin with a simple geography lesson - England, Scotland and Wales are part of the main island called "Great Britain." "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" or the "U.K.," is the official name of the countries of England, Scotland, Wales, and the Province of North Ireland. A visitor traveling from country to country should be aware that they can cause offense when they don't distinguish the people by their nationality such as English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish.

Anytime you are in a public place you need to not only be aware of your own behavior, but to respect those around you. The English embrace a no touching culture so it is important to know not to crowd or touch other people. Additionally, there is a hand gesture known to Americans as the "victory" sign but is considered vulgar to the British. It is best to avoid hand gestures altogether.

Waiting in line, whether at a museum, library or other public attraction is a never-ending occurrence in Great Britain. This is called "queuing" and the British are famous for forming lines or queues even at intersections. Keep alert and always go to the end of the line and wait quietly.

All traffic movement on sidewalks and streets is the opposite of the United States. Everyone drives and walks on the left side. One exception to this rule is when using an escalator. Just as in the U.S., escalator etiquette requires that you always stand to the right and allow others to pass on the left side of the steps.

The "Continental Style" of dining is used in the United Kingdom. This starts out the same as the "American Style" - the fork in the left hand and the knife in the right hand. However, in the U.K. they do not lay the knife down and switch the fork to the right hand to eat. They continue eating with the fork in the left hand, tines turned down, while the knife remains in the right hand.

American and British English often have different meanings. For example, a tourist should know that an elevator is a lift, a restroom is a loo, a trash can is a dustbin, a drug store is a chemist, cookies are biscuits, French fries are chips, potato chips are crisps, sausages are bangers and the closest thing to an English muffin is a crumpet.

Finally, there's an old saying in England that there's no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes! To be well prepared, be sure to have plenty of rain gear on hand for your trip including umbrellas, affectionately known "across the pond" as "brollies."

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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