



Voted One of Britain's Coolest Brands

Visitors get a Rough ride from cynical Brits

The disunited kingdom overcharges visitors for its heritage sites, confuses them with its public transport, disappoints them with its hotels and serves them inedible food, says the new Rough Guide to Britain. Do we do anything right? Yes, plenty – but not always in the most obvious places.

The Rough Guide to Britain, which covers hundreds of tourist attractions, comments: “Heritage is big business, with everyone from the Queen in Buckingham Palace to seedy tourist shops in John O’Groats cashing in on whatever assets are available”. Buckingham Palace is described as a “graceless colossus” and “a palace that’s as bland as it’s possible to be”, which visitors “pay through the nose” to see.

Between the brickbats, the Rough Guide to Britain, which weighs in at more than 1200 pages, also has positive views of the country and its inhabitants. Tate Modern is described as a “masterful conversion”, Shakespeare’s Globe as “amazing”, Birmingham as having “excellent museums” and “one of Britain’s best club scenes”, and the Valleys as “one of the most interesting and distinctive corners of Wales”. Unexpectedly, perhaps, a night on the “toon” in Newcastle is rated the country’s top attraction, while surfing in Newquay, a stay among Oxford’s colleges, trawling London’s many outdoor markets and whale-watching in the Cromarty Firth make up the rest of the unusual top five.

But the Rough Guide is tough on Britain’s transport, hotels and restaurants. “The rail network,” says the guide, “does not compare favourably with other European systems either in efficiency or cost. . .with byzantine restrictions and arcane rules”, while “car-parking can be a nightmare”. The Rough Guide advises visitors to choose their accommodation carefully: “the standard of many middle-market hotels, more especially in England than in Scotland and Wales, can be very disappointing.” And the guide is equally outspoken about restaurants, saying “visitors may still encounter more than their fair share of overpriced, over-rated or inedible meals”. But it does say things are improving: “For every dismal meal served, there’s a local café or restaurant providing excellent food at reasonable prices”.

The publishers of the new guide, part of Penguin Books, angered tourism chiefs last month with comments about “overweight and sex-obsessed TV addicts” in the Rough Guide to England.

The Britain guide makes similar claims, and comments that “multiple homes are the rule for some and squalid homelessness the norm for others”.

The Rough Guide has praise for the British press, saying “Britain has the most dynamic media in the world”, but goes on to say “journalists are brazenly provocative – to the point where cynicism has become the entry price for intelligent conversation”.

On the nation’s identity, the guide comments: “If you were planning a country from scratch, you would never force England, Scotland and Wales together into a single United Kingdom”. Wales, claims the Rough Guide, is “resentful of English dominance” while Scotland is “happiest as far away from both as possible”. According to the guide, “Nobody can agree on what it means to be British”.

The guide recommends a list of 35 top attractions, with Newcastle’s nightlife at No.1 and Tate St Ives at No. 35.

Rough Guide to Britain Top 35

- 1 A night on the town, Newcastle upon Tyne
- 2 Surfing, Newquay
- 3 Oxford
- 4 London’s markets
- 5 Whale- and dolphin-watching
- 6 Castle Howard, Yorkshire
- 7 Kinloch Castle, Rùm
- 8 Snowdonia
- 9 Edinburgh
- 10 Coasteering (a combination of rock scrambling, cliff-jumping and swimming)
- 11 Whisky
- 12 The British Museum
- 13 Iona
- 14 West Highland Railway
- 15 A pint down the pub
- 16 Glasgow School of Art
- 17 Punting on the Cam
- 18 Portmeirion
- 19 Bath
- 20 Whitby music festivals
- 21 Shopping in Leeds
- 22 Harlech
- 23 Cairngorms National Park
- 24 Hill-walking
- 25 National Museum of Wales
- 26 Hadrian’s Wall
- 27 Ullswater
- 28 York Minster
- 29 Eden Project, Cornwall
- 30 Melrose Abbey
- 31 Loch Shiel
- 32 Tobermory
- 33 Avebury
- 34 St David’s Cathedral
- 35 Tate St Ives, Cornwall

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Rough Guide to Britain, 6th edition, £16.99
The Rough Guide to Wales, 5th edition, £11.99

There are 300 Rough Guide travel titles and 60 Rough Guide reference books.

Also published by Rough Guides is a new edition of The Rough Guide to Wales. Coverage ranges from “loud and lairy” Newport to “breezy and resurgent” Swansea and the “crowning glory” of North Wales – Snowdonia. The guide warns visitors: “The worst thing you can possibly do is call a Welsh person English”. The guide also warns of “vast and ugly caravan parks”, town centre hotels which are “often just rooms above a noisy bar,” and unappetising Welsh food, with the warning: “Never underestimate the potential for gastronomic disappointments.” Nevertheless, the guide claims Wales is “the most beguiling part of the British Isles” and lists the country’s top 30 attractions, ranging from The Valleys at No.1 to St David’s Cathedral at No. 30.

Rough Guide to Wales Top 30

- 1 The Valleys
- 2 Pistyll Rhaeadr waterfall, mid-Wales
- 3 Transporter Bridge, Newport
- 4 National Waterfront Museum, Swansea
- 5 Soar-y-Mynydd chapel, Powys
- 6 Portmeirion
- 7 Aberglasney, Tywi Valley
- 8 Castell Carreg Cennen, Carmarthenshire
- 9 Oak woods, sacred to Druids
- 10 Laverbread
- 11 Rugby
- 12 Ffestiniog Railway
- 13 Conwy
- 14 Pembrokeshire coast
- 15 Tryfan, Snowdonia
- 16 Aberystwyth
- 17 Cadair Idris
- 18 Brains beer
- 19 National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff
- 20 St Fagans National History Museum
- 21 Llandudno
- 22 Dyfryn Arms (Bessies’s), Pontfaen
- 23 Llechwedd Slate Caverns
- 24 Mawddach Bridge, Barmouth
- 25 Cardiff Bay architecture
- 26 Nightlife in Swansea
- 27 Harlech Castle
- 28 Male voice choirs
- 29 Machynlleth market
- 30 St David’s Cathedral