

United Kingdom Business Guide

Compiled by:

Swiss Business Hub UK & Ireland

London, January 2019

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Since the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons between Switzerland and the EU came into force, Swiss nationals have the same rights as EU nationals when entering and staying in the UK. A valid identity card or passport must be used to enter and leave the UK. For further information about entry conditions, please contact <http://www.eda.admin.ch/london> or see <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk>.

LANGUAGES USED FOR BUSINESS

The language used for business in the UK is British English. However, regional accents in the UK are noticeable and with some accents and colloquialisms bordering upon dialects, it can be difficult for outsiders to understand what is being said.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

For UK bank holidays please see <https://www.gov.uk/bank-holidays>.

HEALTH AND INOCULATIONS

Healthcare is one of the areas covered by devolution, meaning that NHS trusts are run independently resulting in an NHS England, NHS Northern Ireland, NHS Scotland and NHS Wales. For NHS England please see: <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSServices/uk-visitors/Pages/accessing-nhs-services.aspx>

For other NHS services please see:

- [NHS in Wales](#)
- [NHS in Northern Ireland](#)
- [NHS in Scotland](#)
- [The Isle of Man Government](#)
- [States of Guernsey Government](#)
- [States of Jersey Government](#)

Please note that not every NHS treatment in England is free of charge. You may for instance be charged for dental treatment and prescriptions. Non-UK residents have to pay for hospital treatments. Overseas visitors to the UK may be charged for some treatments and, depending on the urgency, they usually have to make an advance payment. Rules may vary for visitors from the EEA (European Economic Area). Detailed information can be found here:

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSServices/uk-visitors/Pages/visitors-from-the-eu-eea.aspx>

Information about the most common services provided by the NHS in England and advice on how to access the services can be found here:

<http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSServices/Pages/NHSServices.aspx>

TIME ZONES

UK Time is same as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) less than half of the year. During Summer Daylight Saving Time, London Time is GMT+1, also known as British Summer Time (BST).

TIME DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SWITZERLAND AND THE UK

The UK is always one hour behind Switzerland. Changes from Winter Time to Summer Daylight Saving Time occur at the same time as in Switzerland.

ELECTRICITY SUPPLY

While the UK uses the same voltage (230 V) and frequency (50 Hz) as Switzerland to provide electrical power, it uses a different plug and socket type. The UK uses type G plugs and sockets, therefore, adaptors are necessary.

METHODS OF PAYMENT

The national currency is the British Pound Sterling (symbol: £; ISO code: GBP). Credit and Debit Cards are widely accepted and a chip and pin system is generally used.

TRANSPORTATION

The UK has an extensive public, rail, boat and road transport system. To find the best transportation mode for your needs, please see: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/>

BY AIR

The UK has a number of major and regional airports including but not limited to London Heathrow Airport, London Gatwick Airport, London City Airport, London Luton Airport, London Stansted Airport, Birmingham International Airport, Manchester Airport, Liverpool Airport, Edinburgh Airport, Aberdeen Airport, Glasgow Airport, Cardiff Airport, Belfast Airport, etc. For more information please see: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/Getting-to-Britain/Flight-and-airport-information.htm>

BY SEA

The UK can be reached by sea and major ports include but are not limited to Southampton, Portsmouth, Liverpool, Aberdeen, Dover, etc. For more information please see: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/Getting-to-Britain/Ferries-to-Britain.htm>

BY ROAD

The UK has an extensive road network. Please note that it is important to familiarise yourself with the driving regulations prior to driving in the UK. The regulations can be found here: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/Getting-around-Britain/Driving-regulations-in-Britain.htm>

Please follow the links for more information on:

- [Coaches](#)
- [Renting a car](#)
- [Taxis](#)

BY RAIL

The UK has an extensive rail network operated by different companies for different regions. General information about the rail network can be found at: <http://www.nationalrail.co.uk>

Additional information can be found here: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Transport/Getting-around-Britain/Rail-and-Train.htm>

HOTELS

For hotels and other accommodations please see: <http://www.visitbritain.com/en/Accommodation/>

COMMUNICATION

The country code to telephone the UK from abroad is 0044 and to call Switzerland 0041.

CELL PHONES

There are a large number of UK cell phone companies each with varying service packages on offer. Swiss cell phones can be used in the UK but may incur roaming charges set by the Swiss provider. Please check with your provider prior to your visit to the UK.

BUSINESS HOURS

Business hours vary depending on industry sector but one can expect the following working hours as a general rule: 9am to 6pm.

ADDRESSES AND OPENING HOURS OF THE EMBASSY OF THE COUNTRY IN SWITZERLAND

British Embassy Berne

Thunstrasse 50

3005 Berne

Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0)31 359 77 00

Email: info.berne@fco.gov.uk

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/world/organisations/british-embassy-berne/office/british-embassy>

Opening hours

Monday to Friday, 9:00 to 12:30 and 13:30 to 16:30

Consular hours

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 12:00pm

ADDRESSES OF THE SWISS EMBASSY AND CONSULATES

Embassy of Switzerland in the UK

16-18 Montagu Place

London W1H 2BQ

Tel: +44 (0)20 7616 6000

Email: lon.vertretung@eda.admin.ch

URL: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/london>

Opening hours

Monday to Friday, 9:00 to 12:00 and 14:00 to 16:30

Consular hours

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 12:00pm

The Embassy is closed during Swiss and British Bank Holidays.

TIPS FOR INITIATING BUSINESS CONTACTS

On the whole, business methods in the UK are similar to those in Switzerland and exporters are unlikely to encounter any unfamiliar situations with regard to business practice. There is a significant amount of literature available regarding business etiquette and should questions arise, we would recommend consulting such resources.

The following points should be kept in mind when doing business in the UK:

- **Official definition of the UK**

The official definition of the United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) is England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not the Isle of Man or the Channel Islands. When referring to the citizens of the UK, it is better to refer to them as the 'British' rather than the 'English', a common mistake which can cause upset amongst the citizens of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

- **Forms of Greeting**

Shaking someone's hand upon meeting for the first time is customary and considered important but for those that meet regularly it is not necessary.

Men should introduce themselves as Mr 'So-and-So' (with or without first name) and women by Mrs or Miss dependant on their marital status. If the marital status is unknown, Ms often used in order to avoid embarrassment. Please note that people who have been knighted or are members of the House of Lords must be addressed appropriately. Please see below for more information.

Contrary to the custom in Switzerland, Doctor is generally only used by medical doctors, and academic titles are often not used unless within the academic arena.

The use of first names amongst all ranks is becoming increasingly common.

One should be aware of forms of addressing Royalty and members of the House of Lords:

- [How to address a member of the Royal family](#)
- [How to address a member of the House of Lords](#)

In addition, there are a number of different honours that can be awarded and forms of addressing individuals who have been awarded honours can differ. For more information about the process, the honours that exist and how to address a recipient of an honour can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/honours/overview>

- **Business relationships**

The business community is reasonably formal, at least in the initial stages of a business relationship. However, the British are not as formal as many foreigners would believe them to be.

- **Dress Code**

During business hours it is customary for men to wear suits with a shirt and tie rather than sports jacket and tie. For women either a suit or smart skirt/trousers and jacket with a blouse are acceptable. In some industries the dress code can be less formal. Dress codes can be given for some professional environment and depend on company policy.

Socially the dress code tends to be more relaxed although it is advisable for men to wear a jacket and possibly a tie when dining out as many restaurants stipulate formal attire (people wearing jeans or sneakers could be refused entry). There are certain social customs and dress codes in British society that should be strictly adhered to and guest will typically be informed of the dress code in the invitation. Formal attire is not necessarily only used in high-society but on festive occasions such as gala dinners or balls etc. Please note there are distinctions between the various formal dress codes (e.g. Black Tie vs. White Tie).

- **Invitations**

Invitations for functions should be sent out well in advance and the dress code stipulated to avoid any embarrassment on the part of the guest.

- **Punctuality**

Business people are expected to arrive punctually for meetings although this is not always possible due to the constraints of the transport system. It is therefore important to allow plenty of time for travel, especially in urban areas and during the 'rush hour'. If you are running very late for a meeting, it is courteous to telephone and advise your business contact.

- **Business Cards**

In business circles, business cards are generally expected but not always a necessity.

- **Gifts**

Business people in the UK do not expect to receive gifts from business associates. Indeed some organisations, especially those in the public sector and government bodies, actively discourage the acceptance of gifts. Smaller items such as pens, diaries, alcohol are nonetheless generally well received as thank-you gifts.

If you are invited to a business associate's home, a gift of flowers, chocolates or wine although not expected is still common practice.

In all cases, and most importantly, the gift should never seem inappropriately expensive.

- **Thank-you Cards**

After attending a social engagement at a friend or colleague's invitation, it is customary to send a thank-you card to the hosts.

- **Tipping**

In the UK tipping is very much at your own discretion and the amount depends on the level of service received. However, hotels and restaurants typically add 10-15% service charge to your bill. Taxi drivers, hair salon staff etc. can be tipped at your own discretion. It is worth being aware

that although restaurants are legally obliged to indicate whether or not service is included in the bill many do not make this clear. This can lead to payment being made twice or even three times (already included in the total; adding on to a credit-card slip; paying cash with the bill).

- **Disputes / complaints**

In the event of disputes or when making complaints it is advisable to keep a civil tone and to avoid raising the voice or using strong language. A friendly but firm approach usually yields better results.

Date: 8th January 2019
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