

# CULTURAL TIPS

## for life in the UK

The Welcoming Association supports New Scots in learning about and engaging with the local cultures and traditions of the UK and Scotland as part of settling into life here. In this information sheet, we will concentrate on a few aspects of the UK, Scottish and Edinburgh cultures and traditions.

### Social etiquette

#### Politeness matters!

British people tend to be very polite and use phrases like "please" and "thank you" frequently.

#### Queuing (lining up)

It's considered very rude to jump the queue.

#### Personal space

Respecting personal space is appreciated.

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### British identity and humour

#### British humour - Don't take it too seriously!

British humour is a bit tricky. It is often dry and we use ironic language. Be prepared to read between the lines!

Example: "I was going to sail around the globe in the world's smallest ship, but I bottled it."

#### National identity and regional differences

Be aware that different parts of the UK (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland) have distinct cultural styles, words and accents.

### Language use

#### Be conscious of indirect language

Scottish people often say things in a softer way to avoid offending, but it is not always clear what they mean....

e.g. "I'm not sure if I agree with you..." instead of "You are wrong."

This takes time to get used to and can be confusing!

### Personal questions

#### How are you?

When we say hello in the UK we will ask "how are you?" to be polite. It is an extension of the way we say hello. The usual reply is, "fine thanks, you?"

#### Personal questions

Try to avoid asking too many personal questions to people outside of your family. People might find it too awkward if the question is about things like age, salary or relationship status.

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### Everyday Scots words

Scots words are used informally in everyday speech.

#### Aye/Naw [aɪ]/[nɔ:]

English meaning:  
Yes/No

#### Pal [pal]

English meaning: Friend

#### Ah ken [Aa kɛn]

English meaning: I know

#### Wee [wi:]

English meaning: Small

#### Cheers [tʃɪəz]

English meaning: Thanks

### If You Don't Understand Something

It's completely okay to ask someone to repeat or explain something - people will usually be happy to help.

You can say, "Sorry, I didn't catch that. Could you say it again, please?"

It's polite to smile and thank the person for their help. Don't worry - asking questions is a normal part of conversation!





## Meal times and hospitality

### When do people eat?

In Scotland, the main meal is in the evening. Lunch is usually between 11:30 am and 1:30 pm and dinner between 5 pm and 7 pm, most restaurants will not serve dinner after 9 pm.

If you visit someone's house, don't expect to be served food. It's not common to cook a meal for unexpected visitors.

In the workplace, lunch is often eaten individually and people either eat at their desk or go to a designated staff break area.



## Respecting the time

### Being on time is important

Being on time is generally appreciated in Scotland, whether for social plans, appointments, or work. It can be seen as rude if you arrive late, or they might turn you away.

You might lose your appointment – e.g. if you do not go on time when visiting your doctor you will have to make another appointment.



## Cash etiquette

### Paying with cash

If you are paying for something with cash, hand the cash to the person. Don't put it down on the desk or in front of them. We always give cash directly to people in their hands – that's normal for us.

Most payments are also made electronically with bank cards or contactless.

## Dressing for the weather

### Scottish weather is unpredictable, so layer your clothes!

A waterproof jacket, sturdy shoes, and an umbrella are essentials year-round. We are famous for having lots of rain!

We say we have two seasons – even in summer, it's wise to carry an extra layer, as the temperature can change quickly.

## Buses in Edinburgh

### Always line up for the bus

Scottish people like to join a queue (or line up) for buses. They let all of the passengers off first before they get on the bus. If this is not done it can be seen as rude. It may sound ridiculous, but it's true!

Another thing people do in Scotland is say thank you to the bus driver when you get off the bus.

**Buying tickets:** You buy your ticket on the bus – you can pay with exact money or with a bank card.

## Traditions and holidays

Important holidays in Scotland and the UK include Christmas, Easter and Hogmanay (New Year). We often have family gatherings to celebrate these holidays.

Another important day is Burns Night, where we celebrate our national poet Robert Burns in January with Scotland's national dish – haggis, turnip and potatoes.

We also celebrate Halloween at the end of October. Children often dress up in costumes, carve pumpkins, and go "guising" – visiting houses for sweets and performing a song or joke.



Made in collaboration with members of The Welcoming Association.