

## QUESTION TIME

### Weather in the UK

**The weather.** It's always a talking-point in Britain. Why is that? Is it something odd about British people? Well it's nice to think that a lot of British people are eccentric, I mean, the place is famous for it. But really, it's the weather that's the point of note. The UK has some of the most interesting weather in the world.

*"Britain does not have a CLIMATE. It just has WEATHER"*

In hot countries, most of the indoor places that need to be comfortable are air-conditioned, and in cold countries most of the places that need to be comfortable are properly heated and insulated. The UK is the exception, since the weather is often very variable and no-one really takes heat and cold seriously. So although the weather can be very cold, very hot, very wet, or just wildly chaotic, it always takes people by surprise.

When it gets to winter and there is actually some SNOW, it always takes the people by surprise. It is front-page news, and even a few inches of nice fluffy white stuff brings the country to a standstill. But then, what happens next is even more surprising and catches the folk off-guard completely. And who could possibly have predicted it?! IT MELTS! Flooding! What a surprise!

Then in the summer, it gets very hot. If it had been Thailand or Australia, there'd be no problem. It is supposed to be hot, so there is air conditioning. But in the UK, just total bafflement at the sudden hot weather. Shock, health problems, and despite the fact that the country (especially Manchester) has the reputation of lots of rain, summertime brings drought! But do people have cisterns and reserve water tanks? Wouldn't it make sense for people to collect rainwater in case of drought? Of course it would, but it is a dependency-culture where people have been trained to be dependent on the state, which then means that, in emergency, people are stuck!

**Why is the British weather so changeable?** It is something to do with the combination of an almost Arctic latitude (Manchester is the same latitude as Moscow) combined with being an island and having the Gulf Stream bringing warm weather from the tropics on an intermittent basis.

**...British weather is greatly influenced by the seas around us...**

Britain has a temperate climate, which is characterised by rainfall all year round, and a relatively small fluctuation in temperatures. The British Isles are in a maritime temperate zone, that is to say our weather is greatly influenced by the seas around us, which keep Summer temperatures relatively cool but at the same time prevent very cold weather in winter.

This is because, unlike the land, the sea takes a comparatively long time to heat up and cool down. So after a Summer of warm weather, the seas around the British Isles retain warmth throughout much of the winter, which helps to temper the impact of cold winds and cold air masses approaching us.

On the other hand, when spring and early summer arrive, the sea has cooled down and thus can be quite cold in May and June, even though the weather may be warm and sunny. So any breezes coming off the sea will have a correspondingly cooling effect on the temperatures we feel.

**...areas well away from the coast will be noticeably warmer than those on the coast.**

This is particularly true on the east coast of Great Britain, with the waters of the cool, shallow North Sea. On a warm summer's day, the air over the land is warmed, causing it to rise. To replace it, the colder air over the sea moves in - the start of a sea breeze - which has the effect of reducing the temperature. However, this sea breeze is unlikely to extend right inland, so areas well away from the coast will be noticeably warmer than those on the coast.

Another unseen factor on our temperatures, especially in winter, is **the Gulf Stream** (or North Atlantic Drift) which brings warm waters across the ocean. These waters bathe our west coasts, keeping temperatures higher and reducing the chances of frost in winter for these coastal areas. It is significant that some of our coldest waters during winter are off the coast of Norfolk, which does not benefit from the effects of the Gulf Stream. Some of the warmest waters are off the coast of Cornwall where the sea might be a respectable 10°C (50°F) in winter, only 6°C (11°F) below the Summer average.

All in all the seas around us, as well as being a useful protection against would-be invaders, are a good natural defence against extremes of very cold weather. Despite this, and even in a small area like the British Isles, there can still be quite large variations in climate. For example, on average Cambridge has something like a dozen days a year when the temperature will reach 25°C (77°F), whereas Lerwick in the Shetland Isles can sometimes go a full 12 months without registering as high as 18°C (64°F).

### Expressions used to describe the weather

<i>Hot</i>	boiling	roasting
<i>Cold</i>	freezing	chilly
<i>Rain</i>	It's pouring down	raining cats and dogs
<i>Wind</i>	it's blowing a gale	Howling gale
<i>Snow</i>	A blanket of snow	Snowballs
<i>Fog</i>	Misty	A pea-souper
<i>Storms</i>	<i>Thunder and lightning</i>	

### Weather expressions used in every day conversation (slang)

Since British folk are used to talking about the weather a lot, many weather expressions have become slang used in everyday conversation.

<i>Rain</i>	I feel as right as rain.	Come rain or shine.	A drop in the ocean
<i>Wind</i>	Taking the wind out of someone's sails. someone.	Throw caution to the wind.	A second wind. Something in the wind. To put the wind up Long-winded.
<i>Snow/ice</i>	To be snowed under. Ice breakers.	That cuts no ice with me. The tip of the iceberg.	Break the ice.
<i>Fog</i>	I haven't the foggiest.	A voice like a foghorn.	
<i>Storms</i>	The calm before the storm A storm in a teacup	To take by storm	To ride the storm
<i>Thunder</i>	To steal someone's thunder		

**Weather words**

The words in column 1 below are all n \_ \_ \_ s.

In column 2, fill in the adjectives that go with these words.

In column 3, fill in the comparative words.

Cloud	cloudy	_____
Cold	_____	_____
Heat	_____	hotter
Rain	_____	_____
Snow	_____	_____
Sun	_____	_____
Wind	_____	_____