

BRITISH CURRENCY

One of the things that unites The United Kingdom is its common currency. Well, that and a dislike for the French. The four nations of the United Kingdom all use the Pound Sterling (£), which in turn is divided into one hundred “pennies,” or “pence.” The “Sterling” part of the name derives from the fact that it was once represented by a pound in weight of sterling silver (silver, with some copper added to strengthen it); now it’s unanimously known simply as the “pound.” The coins come in the denominations of one and two pence (copper-coloured), five, ten, twenty and fifty pence (silver), one pound (gold) and two pounds, which is a silver coin inset into a larger gold disc. All of these have the Queen’s head on one side, and some sort of other design on the other. Not her real head, just a picture of it. The design on the other side could be one of quite a few things — different ones are often used to symbolise seminal events or as a nod towards each of the various “nations” in the U.K. These nods are usually in the form of a lion for England, a leek for Wales, a thistle for Scotland and “flax” for Northern Ireland. Whatever the fuck that is. The notes come in denominations of five, ten, twenty and fifty pounds. In everyday speech, you’re as likely to hear the word “quid” as you are “pound” – this is the British equivalent of the American “buck”.

While Scotland and Northern Ireland aren’t allowed to have their own currency, some of their regional banks are allowed to print their own banknotes. These notes are technically not legal tender in England, but will normally be accepted without a problem. It’s worth trying to generally stick to English notes if you’re travelling around a lot.

The occasional store in the U.K. will take euros but it’s normally to make a political point more than anything, and on the whole you’re unlikely to get very far with them within Britain.