

## *Free Time and Sport*

Britain's most common leisure time activities are home-based, and watching television is by far the most popular pastime.

Two television channels in Britain (BBC1 and BBC2) are publicly funded; the others – ITV and Channel Four – are private. Britain's weekly 'soap operas' such as *East Enders* and *Coronation Street* have more viewers than any other programme.

In recent years the so-called 'reality TV' – programmes that put ordinary people or celebrities on the spot in front of millions of viewers – has become a real craze. The most popular live show is *Big Brother*, in which a number of people are selected to live together in a house and are gradually voted out of the house by the viewing public. The remaining tenant wins fame and a lot of money. The British read more daily newspapers than other citizens in most developed countries. There are seven national daily newspapers and a vast range of periodicals catering for virtually all interests. There are two kinds of papers: broadsheets and tabloids, each reflecting a difference in terms of content. The former are considered "quality" newspapers, while the tabloids are more popular, addressing a less sophisticated public.

Despite the growing number of people using the vast information resources of the Web, the British are still very fond of books, judging from the record number of books published every year in Britain.

The most common free-time activity amongst over-eighteens is a visit to the pub.

Other pastimes include visits to the theatre or the cinema.

Britain's most famous theatre company, the Royal Shakespeare Company, performs at Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace.

Of all sporting activities, walking is by far the most popular for men and women of all ages.

In Britain you are never far from a stretch of countryside where you can take a walk or ride a bicycle. For tougher people, there are innumerable long-distance footpaths, as well as opportunities for more adventurous disciplines such as rock climbing, canoeing, rafting, hang-gliding. On the coast and on many of the inland lakes there

are many opportunities for sailing and windsurfing, and there are plenty of fine beaches for less structured open-air activities.

Britain is also the original home of many major international sports, including rugby, football (soccer), cricket and tennis which are widely practiced at school alongside activities such as rounders, netball and swimming. Fishing (mostly trout and salmon) attracts over three million people and is one of the country's favourite sports.

## **Football**

English football is still the most passionately supported sport in the country. The season runs from mid-August to early May. By far the team with the biggest following is Manchester United, whose supremacy is challenged most regularly by other northern clubs – Liverpool, Leeds and Newcastle. In the Midlands, Coventry and Birmingham's Aston Villa are the strongest clubs, while in London the contest is between Arsenal, Chelsea and Tottenham.

## **Rugby**

Rugby gets its name from Rugby public school, where the game mutated from football (soccer) in the nineteenth century. A rugby match may at times look like a bunch of weightlifters grappling each other in the mud – as the old joke goes, “rugby is a hooligan's game played by gentlemen, while football is a gentleman's game played by hooligans” – but is in reality a highly tactical and athletic game. What's more, England's rugby teams have represented the country with rather more success in the last few years than the cricket and football teams.

### **Read the texts. Are the statements true (T) or false (F)?**

1. The British enjoy staying at home. T F
2. Big Brother is a soap opera. T F
3. Tabloid readers are more sophisticated than broadsheet T F
4. The Internet has outclassed books in Britain. T F
5. The British are very fond of walking. T F

6. The strongest football clubs are in London.

T F

7. Rugby supporters are mainly hooligans.