

Independence and identity

A self-guided walk around Castletown on the Isle of Man



Explore the former capital of the Isle of Man
Discover a long history and proud independence
Find out about the many advantages of the island's separate status
See how the Manx people express and celebrate their unique identity

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Cover image: The Three Legs of Man © Martin Haslett

Independence and identity

Explore Castletown and discover how the Isle of Man is different from the United Kingdom

Most people are aware that the Isle of Man is somehow a little bit different. On this walk you will discover just how great the difference actually is.

Despite invaders and colonisers over the centuries, and its current status as a British Crown Dependency, the Isle of Man has clung resolutely to its independence and distinctiveness.



The island is neither part of the United Kingdom nor the European Union. Find out how the island reinforces its unique identity through everything from passports to postage stamps, from taxes to teaching, and from language to licence plates.



Discover how the national and local government is structured and where responsibilities lie.

This walk explores Castletown on the south coast, the Ancient Capital of Mann.

It's a picturesque small town with a wealth of heritage attractions and a pretty harbour.

Image credits: Castle Rushen across the harbour / Looking up Castle Street to Market Square
© Martin Haslett

Route overview



Start: Swingbridge over harbour

Finish: Lighthouse at end of harbour wall

Practical information

Location	Castletown, Isle of Man
Start point	Swingbridge over harbour
Finish point	Lighthouse at end of harbour wall
Getting there	<p>Car – Castletown is in the south of the island, about 10 miles from the capital, Douglas. There is plenty of parking in the town centre including by the Old Grammar School (accessed from Market Square), off Farrants Way, and off Hope Street by inner harbour.</p> <p>Train – Castletown is on the Isle of Man Steam Railway which runs between Douglas and Port Erin. The service does not run every day so check website for details (www.gov.im/publictransport/Rail/Steam). It is about ½ mile from the station to the start point.</p> <p>Bus – Castletown is served by buses running between Douglas and Port Erin / Port St Mary. There is a regular service of 3 buses an hour during daytimes. See website for timetables (www.gov.im/publictransport/Bus)</p>
Directions from railway station to start	Exit the station and walk between the two pubs. Turn right onto Victoria Road. At the mini-roundabout bear left, continuing along Victoria Road. Where the road crosses Thirtle Bridge over the harbour continue straight along Bridge Street with the harbour on your right. The swingbridge is on the right at the seaward end of the harbour.
Directions from bus stop to start	Alight from buses in Market Square. Walk down Castle Street with the castle on your left. At the corner turn right opposite the castle gateway. The swingbridge is on the left.
Walk distance	2 miles
Level	Gentle – An easy walk on the level around the town centre and harbour
Terrain	Pavements, narrow lanes and quayside

Suitable for **Families** – Children will enjoy the castle and old grammar school

Wheelchairs and pushchairs – An entirely step free route

Dogs – Should be kept on a lead around the town centre

Refreshments - A few cafes and sandwich shops in the area around the Market Square (Stops 5-12)

- A few pubs in the town centre – The George Hotel (Stop 8) is especially recommended

- Bowling Green Café (Stop 16)

Toilets - Inside Town Hall during opening hours (Stop 7)

- In car park behind Town Hall (Stop 7)

- Bowling Green (Stop 16)

- Railway station when open (Stop 19)

- End of Thirtle Bridge (Stop 21)

Places to visit There are four Manx National Heritage sites in the town and one just a few miles away, all of which are well worth a visit

- Castle Rushen

- Old Grammar School (free)

- Old House of Keys

- Nautical Museum

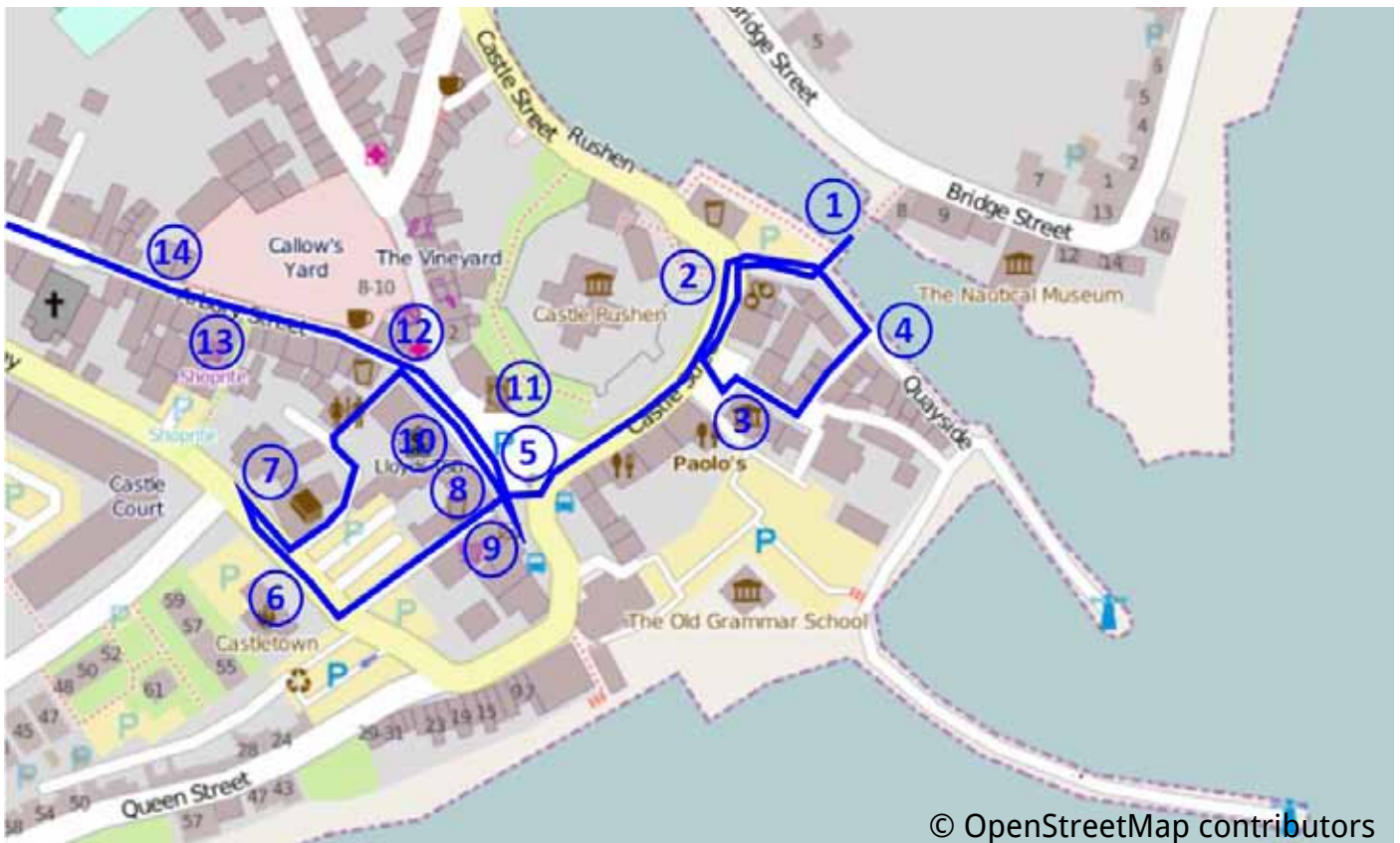
- Rushen Abbey

See website for details (www.manxnationalheritage.im/explore-the-island/places-to-visit/historic-attractions)

Tourist information Tourist leaflets and enquiry desk located inside Castletown Civic Centre on Farrants Way. Open from Monday to Saturday all year. Telephone 01624 825005.

Tourist information also available at Castle Rushen and the Old Grammar School.

Detail of first part of route



Stopping points

- S** Swingbridge over Castletown Harbour
- 2.** Castle Rushen, Castle Street
- 3.** Old House of Keys, Parliament Square
- 4.** Quayside at bottom of Quay Lane
- 5.** Smelt Monument, Market Square
- 6.** Fire Station, Farrants Way
- 7.** Town Hall, Farrants Way
- 8.** George Hotel, Market Square
- 9.** The Cooperative, Market Square
- 10.** Isle of Man Bank, Market Square
- 11.** Market Square
- 12.** Lloyds Pharmacy, Market Square
- 13.** Shoprite, Arbory Street
- 14.** Curry Club, 20 Arbory Street

Detail of middle part of route



Stopping points

- 15.** Junction of Arbory Street, Arbory Road and The Crofts
- 16.** Bowling green, The Crofts
- 17.** Paradise Court, Mill Street
- 18.** Canada Life building, Alexandra Road
- 19.** Castletown railway station
- 20.** Victoria Road School, Victoria Road
- 21.** Church of St Mary's on the Harbour, corner of Castle Street and Hope Street

Detail of last part of route



© OpenStreetMap contributors

Stopping points

- 22.** Police station, corner of Castle Street and Quayside
- 23.** Old Grammar School
- 24.** Harbour Commissioners building, The Quay
- F** Lighthouse at end of harbour wall

1. Welcome to Castletown

Swingbridge over harbour

Many of us live in large towns and cities surrounded by all the bright lights that they bring so it's interesting to see how people adapt to a way of life that is quite different.

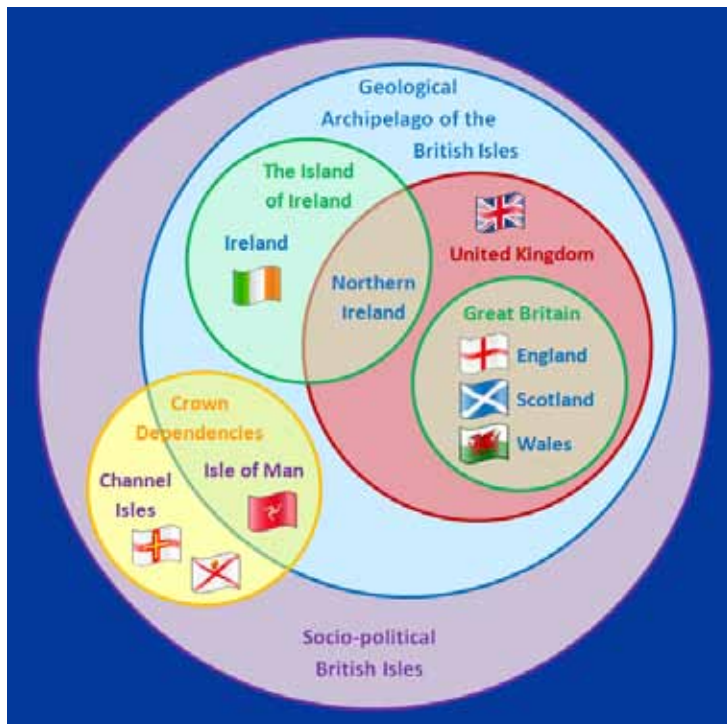
Life on the Isle of Man is definitely different, not only due to the physical separation as an island but also because of its history of independence and strong sense of identity.

The Isle of Man is in the middle of the Irish Sea, almost equidistant from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. It's in the midst of the United Kingdom but also outside the United Kingdom.



Map of the Irish Sea showing routes operated by the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company © Trex2001, Wikimedia (CCL)

On this walk we will explore the relationship between the Isle of Man and the UK. Most British people are probably vaguely aware that the Isle of Man has some form of independence but the precise extent of it is not usually appreciated. At the very beginning we need be clear about the terms that we use and there are three in particular that are often confused and misused.



Venn diagram of British Isles © Wdcf, Wikimedia (CCL)

First, 'Great Britain' comprises England, Scotland and Wales.

Second, the UK – or 'The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland' to give it its full name – comprises England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Third, the term 'British Isles' refers to the group of islands off the northwest coast of mainland Europe comprising two large islands (Great Britain and Ireland) and about 6,000 small islands.

In addition to the two sovereign states located on these islands (the UK and the Republic of Ireland), there are three dependencies of the British Crown: the Isle of Man and the Bailiwick of Jersey and the Bailiwick of Guernsey in the Channel Islands.

Thus the Isle of Man is part of the British Isles but not part of Great Britain or the United Kingdom. It is this identity that we shall explore on this walk around Castletown.

Castletown had traditionally been the capital of the Isle of Man, but as population and trade became more centred in Douglas, the capital was moved there.

We will look for evidence in buildings and shops, signs and vehicles to uncover the history of the Isle of Man's independence and identity.

This walk is also a chance to explore one of the most picturesque and interesting towns on the island. It has been created by Martin Haslett who enjoys exploring Britain, especially its islands and more remote parts.



Low tide in Castletown harbour
© Martin Haslett



Signs and symbols of independence
© Martin Haslett

Directions 1

Walk away from the bridge towards the gatehouse of the castle.

2. Invaders and colonisers

Castle Rushen, Castle Street

Castle Rushen has featured strongly throughout the history of the Isle of Man. The island was originally Celtic but was raided by Vikings and in 1079 became a Norse colony.

The Castle was founded by the Norse kings in 1265 when the island, along with most of the Western Isles of Scotland and the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland, were under Norse control.

This didn't last long as the Isle of Man, together with the Western Isles, came under Scottish control a few years later.



Gateway to Castle Rushen
© Martin Haslett

There followed a confused period when Scotland and England fought for sovereignty of the Isle until England finally took control in 1346. Castle Rushen played an important part in this story as it was one of the most strongly fortified places on the Isle.

As we have already heard, the Isle of Man is a Crown Dependency, meaning that the British Monarch is the Head of State. Her Majesty the Queen's official title here is the 'Lord of Mann', a name that has been used for centuries for the ruler.

The British National Anthem of 'God Save The Queen' is used on formal occasions but is referred to here as the 'Loyal Anthem'. The Isle of Man has its own National Anthem which extols the beauty of the isle and its independence. This is the first verse:

O Land of our Birth
O Gem of God's earth
O Island so strong and so fair
Built firm as Barrule
Thy throne of Home Rule
Makes us free as thy sweet mountain air

Directions 2

From the castle gatehouse walk up Castle Street with the castle on your right. After about 25 metres is a small square on the left (Parliament Square). Stand in front of the building that has a columned porch and flagpole.

3. Ancient democracy

Old House of Keys, Parliament Square

This is the Old House of Keys, the lower house of Tynwald, which is the oldest continuous parliamentary body in the world (the Icelandic parliament is older but had an interrupted existence).

The Vikings might have a blood-thirsty reputation but they made a significant contribution to modern representative democracy. Originally, representatives of all parts of the Island met in the open air to make laws. This was a common form of democracy throughout Viking-settled lands including Norway, Denmark, the Faroes and Iceland.



The Old House of Keys from the castle walls
© Martin Haslett



Tynwald Hill at St John's
© Martin Haslett

This building was the seat of the House of Keys from 1821 to 1874 after which it moved to Douglas.

The modern Tynwald continues the Norse tradition of open-air assembly by holding one meeting each year outdoors at St John's, at the centre of the Isle where, following tradition, new laws are read aloud both in English and Manx Gaelic.

As the Isle of Man is a Crown Dependency rather than part of the UK, it does not elect Members of Parliament to sit in Westminster but has its own system of government.

The Isle of Man's independence goes even further than its separateness from the UK; it is not a member of the European Union either. However, part of the UK's Treaty of Accession to the EU permits trade for Manx goods without tariffs throughout the EU, without the Isle being a full member. These facts make the Isle of Man much more independent than most people think!

Directions 3

Facing the front of the Old House of Keys go along the left side of the building (Parliament Lane). Take the first left down a narrow lane (Quay Lane). Stop at the bottom on the quay-side looking across to the buildings on the other side.

4. Seafaring people

Quayside at bottom of Quay Lane

The building across the harbour with the flagpole is the Nautical Museum. It's really no surprise that this small town has a museum dedicated to seafaring.

Its island location surrounded by the sea is probably the most significant factor that has made the Isle of Man fiercely guard its independence.

There was a plan in the early 1800s by the English to make the Isle of Man part of the old English county of Cumberland but the Manx people were having none of it. One reason they objected was that they would have to pay British taxes.



Entrance to the harbour
© Chris Gunns, Geograph (CCL)

At the time, the Isle of Man levied its own taxes, which were usually at lower rates than in the UK. This lower tax regime led to a considerable amount of smuggling.



One of the Nautical Museum's treasures:
the 18th century yacht, Peggy,
that was involved in coastal trading
© Martin Haslett

Large cargoes would be brought here from the British colonies and Isle of Man tax was paid. The goods would then be reduced into smaller lots and sent on to British ports.

In the Manx view this was a perfectly legitimate trade arrangement. However, once the goods were landed in Britain and no duty paid on them they were accused of smuggling.

Here was born the beginnings of the financial separateness that has become so important to the island's economy today.

Directions 4

Return to the castle gatehouse and turn left up Castle Street again. Follow the road up to Market Square. Take care as this road can be busy with traffic. Stand looking at the column in the square.

5. A popular Governor

Smelt Monument, Market Square

As we have already discovered, the British Monarch is the Head of State in the Isle of Man. The Monarch's official representative here is the Lieutenant Governor whose role is to take the place of the Queen in all matters relating to the Isle of Man.

This person is appointed by the Sovereign, on the advice of the British government and with the concurrence of the Manx Government. He or she takes their oath of office at Castle Rushen.



Flag of the Governor of the Isle of Man
Wikimedia (CCL)

Perhaps rather surprisingly, no Manx-born person has ever been appointed as Lieutenant Governor. The current Lieutenant Governor came to the Isle after a career in the diplomatic service.



Smelt Monument
© Martin Haslett

The column in the centre of the Market Square is the Smelt Monument which was erected by public subscription in memory of Colonel Cornelius Smelt, a popular Lieutenant Governor who died in 1832.

The Lieutenant Governor has constitutional, ceremonial and community roles, just as Her Majesty the Queen does in the UK. The constitutional role of the Governor includes appointing the Isle of Man Judiciary and granting Royal Assent to legislation dealing with domestic matters.

In his ceremonial role, the Governor represents HM the Queen at public ceremonies including presiding during the annual Tynwald Ceremony that we have already heard about, attending the National Remembrance Service and holding Honours Investitures.

Many of the Lieutenant Governor's community functions also have a ceremonial dimension such as attendance at the official openings of buildings, speaking at conferences or the launching of events and appeals. Other community functions include sending birthday wishes to all residents who celebrate their 90th or 100th birthdays!

Directions 5

Go down the passage directly behind the Smelt Monument which goes between the George Hotel and the Co-op. At the end turn right onto Farrants Way and stop immediately opposite the fire station.

6. National responsibilities

Fire Station, Farrants Way

Unlike in England, Wales and Scotland, fire and rescue services here are a 'national government' responsibility rather than a local or regional one.

Given the small size of the Island that is not surprising but some of the other responsibilities of the national government are remarkable.

The Isle of Man Government is responsible for the courts, controls immigration, manages the social security system and hospitals, gives support to industry and employment, runs the Arts Council and is responsible for health and safety. The Isle also has its own shipping and aviation registers.



Fire station
© Martin Haslett



Crest of the Isle of Man Government
© FXXX, Wikimedia (CCL)

Most importantly, the Isle of Man raises its own taxes and the tax regime is very different from that in the UK. Taxation rates are generally lower, personal allowances are higher and, for a very wealthy person, there is a maximum amount of income tax which cannot be exceeded.

Furthermore, for individuals there is no capital gains tax or inheritance tax and for Manx companies, zero corporation tax.

These differences are some of the most important aspects of independence and have made the Island a very important offshore centre.

Directions 6

Continue a few steps further along Farrants Way. Stop outside the Town Hall on the right side. There are some benches outside if you wish to sit down.

7. Ancient parishes

Town Hall, Farrants Way

This is the Town Hall where the local government for Castletown is based. Local government is arranged very differently here on the Isle of Man.

In the UK local government is organised into counties and districts with some unitary authorities (mostly in densely populated areas). In recent years there have been moves to amalgamate local councils to create larger (and supposedly more efficient) authorities. This means that there are now comparatively few local authorities in the UK with a population below 100,000.

How different things are on the Isle of Man! The whole island has a total population of just 84,000 which is the size of a very small English district.

Local government is based on ancient parishes which are remarkably small compared to the UK. The capital, Douglas, with a population of 27,000, is run by a Borough Council. The rest of the island – comprising town districts, village districts and parish districts – each have bodies of ‘Commissioners’. Castletown, with its population of just over 3,000, is a town district and is run by the Castletown Commissioners.

The main responsibilities of the Castletown Commissioners are refuse collection, environmental health, parks, housing and car parking. Many functions which would be the responsibility of local government in the UK are the responsibility of the ‘national government’ here.

Although there have been moves to reform local government on the Isle of Man these have never been brought to fruition and the traditional arrangements continue.



Map of the island's Shedings and Parishes
© Semhur, Wikimedia (CCL)

Directions 7

Go up the right side of the Town Hall beside the library. Pass through the car park at the rear which takes you back into Market Square. Turn right past the banks and stand outside the George Hotel.

8. Fancy a pint?

George Hotel, Market Square

Licensing is another responsibility of the Isle of Man Government. For many years licensing laws were similar to those that we used to have in the UK – pubs were open for restricted hours during the morning and evening but closed at other times.

It is often the case that changes to Isle of Man law follow the UK example but licensing is one example where the island led the way.

The Isle of Man liberalised its licensing laws in 2001 allowing pubs, bars, nightclubs and off-licences to open for up to 24 hours a day (it was not until 2005 that similar liberalised licensing laws came into effect in England and Wales).



The George Hotel
© Martin Haslett



Okells Beers logo
© Martin Haslett

In practice most have opted for comparatively restricted hours but the change was, nevertheless, a big one. There was a concern that Douglas might attract English stag parties, as had been a problem in Dublin, but these fears proved unfounded.

Licensing is not the only example of Manx far-sightedness. In 1881, the Isle of Man was the first country in the world to introduce votes for women - nearly 50 years ahead of the UK.

The island also attempted to abolish the death penalty much earlier than the UK but the British government intervened to prevent this happening in a rare example of its independence being thwarted.

Before we leave this spot, you might like to know that the Isle of Man has several breweries, Okells in Douglas being the largest. The George is a good chance to try the Okells beer!

Directions 8

Continue a few steps further and stand outside The Co-operative next door to the George Hotel.

9. Postcards and postcodes

The Cooperative, Market Square

The Castletown Co-op is run by the Manx Co-operative Society and, although independent, is part of the wider co-operative movement.

However, there's another reason for stopping here. Look at the sign and you will see that Castletown Post Office is located inside. Just as in the UK, financial pressures have led to post offices being brought into shops for cost saving and efficiencies.



Post Office van
© Martin Haslett

Control of postal services passed over from the UK as recently as 1973 but the Isle of Man Post Office is an important symbol of independence.

The Isle of Man issues its own stamps – and don't be tempted to use your UK stamps to send a postcard home because they won't be accepted! Addresses on the island have postcodes starting with the letters IM. Although postcodes follow a similar format to the UK they are entirely separate and were only introduced as recently as 1993.



Manx Telecom logo
© Martin Haslett

The telephone network is also independent. If you make a call on your mobile phone it will be connected to the Manx Telecom system and you will have to pay overseas rates to reach the UK. For landlines, the island uses the British dialling code system so, strangely, a call from the UK to the Isle is charged at UK national rates!

Have a look at the number plates on the cars parked in Market Square. Vehicle registration numbers were initially part of the UK system but became progressively different with the Manx flag and country designation (GBM) being added in 2004.



Vehicle licence plate
© Martin Haslett

Directions 9

Turn around and go back past the George Hotel. Stand outside the Isle of Man Bank on the other side.

10. An offshore economy

Isle of Man Bank, Market Square

At this end of Market Square you can see branches of most of the main British banks but there's also the Isle of Man Bank.

The Isle of Man Government issues its own notes through the Isle of Man Bank. Notes from the Bank of England, Scottish and Northern Ireland banks are generally accepted here but Manx notes and coins are not generally accepted in the UK so try to spend all your money before you leave!

Having its own bank and currency is not only a symbolic way of the island demonstrating its independence but also allows the government to shape economic policy without outside interference.



Bank notes
© Martin Haslett

Traditionally, agriculture and mining were the mainstays of the Manx economy. From mid-Victorian times, tourism started to take over as the main source of income for the island but the opportunity to go on cheap foreign package holidays saw tourist numbers decline sharply from the 1960s.

With the main source of income drying-up, the Manx government faced some difficult decisions since all the public services still needed to be paid for. They decided to create a lower tax regime with the hope of attracting very wealthy individuals to become residents of the island; by living here these people would inject additional money into the economy.

However, this strategy of trying to entice rich people had the almost accidental effect of creating attractive offshore financial opportunities for banking, insurance and investment. The Isle of Man, like the Channel Islands, has now become one of the world's major offshore centres with the attraction of remaining an integral part of the Sterling area whilst outside the control of the UK government.

Today, the banking and financial services sector accounts for around one third of the Manx economy. Later we shall see a clear demonstration of the wealth this brings to the local economy.

Directions 10

Remain in Market Square.

11. Robot invasion

Market Square

Another significant contributor to the Isle of Man economy is film-making. The Isle of Man has architecture ranging from medieval castles to fishing villages, from stately homes to thatched cottages and from Victorian houses to newly-built business parks and offices.

There's also plenty of natural scenery that can resemble the Home Counties, Cornwall, Ireland or the Yorkshire Moors. There's even a purpose-built film studio in the north of the Island.

In fact, over 100 feature films and TV dramas have been produced here making it one of the busiest areas of film production in the British Isles.

There's a unit within the national government dedicated to promoting the Isle as a filming location and supporting crews when they arrive. The ancillary services including accommodation, catering, equipment supplies and technical crew all boost the island's economy.

If you stay too long in Market Square you might see some strange extra-terrestrial activity. In summer 2013 part of the science fiction film 'Our Robot Overlords' was filmed here by Pinewood Studios. It stars Oscar winner, Sir Ben Kingsley, and X Files star, Gillian Anderson.



Coastal landscape near Bradda Head featured in the opening scenes of the film 'Waking Ned'
© Kevin Rothwell, Geograph (CCL)



Filming the BBC movie 'Legend of the Tamworth Two' in Castletown in 2003
© Joseph Mischysyn, Geograph (CCL)

The plot sees Earth conquered by robots from another galaxy with human survivors forced to stay in their homes or risk incineration. Castletown Commissioners gave full support to the film and welcomed it taking place in the town.

Meanwhile the film's location manager asked Manx National Heritage if they would allow the grass around the castle to grow long to create the right background for filming! Look out for the film and see how much of Castletown you can recognise!

Directions 11

Continue a few steps further to Lloyds Pharmacy at the end of Market Square on the corner between Arbory Street and Malew Street.

12. Keeping healthy

Lloyds Pharmacy, Market Square

Lloyds Pharmacy looks just like it does in the UK but people collecting their prescriptions here are being treated under the Isle of Man National Health Service.

The arrangements are much the same as in the UK although prescriptions are much cheaper here. The Isle of Man government also runs the dental service, community health service and ambulance service.

There are two hospitals on the island which can deal with most conditions but patients needing very specialist treatment – about 8,000 each year – are transferred to the UK, usually to hospitals in northwest England.

The Isle of Man NHS has to pay the British NHS for this treatment. It also arranges and pays for the travel to the UK for the patient and an escort if needed. The travel costs of visitors to the patient can also be met from public funds.



Lloyds Pharmacy
© Martin Haslett



Noble's Hospital in Douglas
© Andy Stephenson, Geograph (CCL)

For people here on holiday who need health treatment, the Isle of Man and the UK have reciprocal arrangements.

There have been some threats to these arrangements over the past few years so before travelling you need to check the present position.

It is also important to note that whilst emergency treatment is covered for travellers to the island this does not cover repatriation so travel insurance is advised.

Directions 12

Go along Arbory Street to the left of Lloyds Pharmacy. Stop outside Shoprite about 60 metres on the left.

13. Manx to the Max

Shoprite, Arbory Street

Shops are often a good way to see how local people live, what they buy and what they eat.

Now we come to a Manx shop – Shoprite. This supermarket chain has just a dozen stores.

Its slogan is 'Manx to the Max' and it aims to promote Isle of Man products, support local communities and return profits to the island. They claim to sell more Manx products than all the other island supermarkets put together.

This doesn't mean that other products are not available, indeed, quite the reverse. Shoprite sells products from several UK shops – in this store you will find quite a few Waitrose products.



Shoprite carrier bag
© Martin Haslett



Strand Street in Douglas, the island's main shopping street where there is a mix of independent local shops and chain stores

© Kevin Rothwell, Geograph (CCL)

Other Shoprite stores include products or outlets for Iceland, Wilkinson and Peacocks, amongst others.

If you go to Douglas you will also find some famous British high street stores but across most of the rest of the island they are absent.

Just as in the UK there are pressures for out-of-town shopping, particularly in Douglas. Investment outside of established shopping centres threatens the vitality of town centres and is generally resisted.

Directions 13

Continue a few steps along Arbory Street. Stop outside a restaurant called Curry Club, a couple of doorways further on the right.

14. Passports and permits

Curry Club, 20 Arbory Street

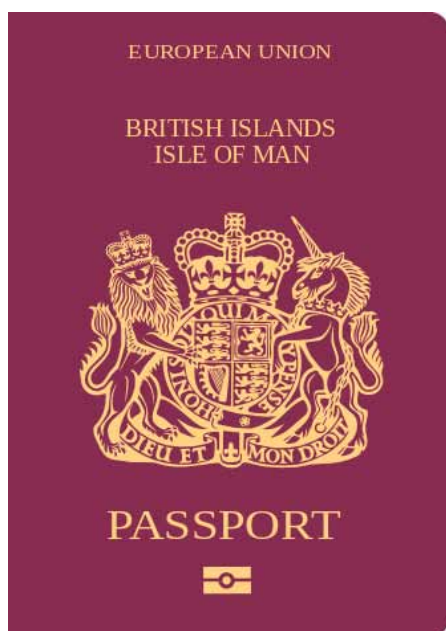
The owner of this restaurant comes from Bangladesh and he has established quite a reputation for excellent cuisine. Ethnic food outlets usually result from immigration but settling on the Isle of Man is subject to certain regulations.

British people are entitled to live on the Isle of Man but they need a work permit if they want to start working or are self-employed.

Citizens of the European Economic Area are entitled to travel to the island but can only take up residency if they are able to support themselves without assistance from public funds. They also need a work permit if they intend to work.



Curry Club
© Martin Haslett



Isle of Man passport cover
© Geordie Bosanko, Wikimedia (CCL)

Residents of all other countries are subject to immigration controls, similar to those for entering the UK.

Manx natives are entitled to their own version of a British passport issued by the Isle of Man Government.

Immigrants can become naturalised British Citizens on the Isle of Man by meeting the requirements of the UK Border Agency with additional tests about life on the Isle of Man.

Directions 14

Continue along Arbory Street for about 150 metres. Shortly after the Methodist Church on the left, the pedestrianised section ends. Stop at the first junction where Arbory Street becomes Arbory Road and where The Crofts goes off to the right.

15. It's all in a name

Junction of Arbory St, Arbory Rd and The Crofts

Look on the houses that face up The Crofts and you will see two street signs. The older one on the right is in English but the newer one on the left is in Manx and English. The use of Manx is becoming more common.



Street sign in English and Manx
© Martin Haslett

Manx is a Gaelic language closely related to Irish and Scots Gaelic. In earlier centuries its use would have been universal across the island; few people would have spoken English.

As late as 1874 it was estimated that 30 per cent of the population spoke Manx as their first language but by 1921 this figure had dropped to one per cent. During the twentieth century, as native speakers died out, it became little used and the last native speaker died in 1974. The only continuity in Manx was in the annual meeting of Tynwald.

However, there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the language and the culture that goes with it – another assertion of the proud sense of identity that Manx people have. Manx Radio has some programmes in Manx; government departments have Manx as well as English names; and school children have the chance to take Manx lessons. In the 2011 census just over two per cent of the population claimed to speak Manx. See what other Manx signs you can spot as you walk around the town.



Various signs in Manx
© Martin Haslett

Directions 15

Walk along The Crofts for about 150 metres. Stop by the gates of the bowling green on the right.

16. Sporting prowess

Bowling green, The Crofts

One of the most high-profile sportspeople from the island is British cyclist, Mark Cavendish. He is a world-class sprinter and is nicknamed the Manx Missile!

At the London 2012 Olympic Games Cavendish competed for Team GB. In the Olympics the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and UK Overseas Territories come under the umbrella of the British Olympic Association. However, in the Commonwealth Games these islands and territories - including Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands - proudly compete under their own flags.



Mark Cavendish competing in the 2011 Tour of Britain
© gumdropgas, Wikimedia (CCL)

In 1985, as part of the Isle of Man International Year of Sport, there was an Inter-Island Games held here involving athletes from the islands surrounding the UK as well as Iceland, Malta, the Faroes and a few others. This one-off event was so successful that it is now a biennial event.

In summer 2013 the Games were held in Bermuda; in 2015 they will be in Jersey. It gives small islands and territories an opportunity to compete on a more equal footing in an international competition and for athletes to proudly compete for their home areas.

In other sports, the Isle of Man Football Association is a member of the English Football Association and has the status of a County Football Association but the two divisions are run independently of the English football league. However, as the Isle of Man Football Association is not a member of either UEFA or FIFA, the national team is not eligible to compete internationally.

On the other hand, the Isle of Man cricket team broke their affiliation with the Lancashire Cricket Board in 2004 to become affiliate members of the International Cricket Council and competed as a national team in their own right since 2005.

Directions 16

Continue along The Crofts to the junction with Malew Street and turn left. After about 100 metres look for a narrow unmarked passage on the right between house number 106 and 110 (there is no Number 108) and opposite an arched entrance. Follow the passageway (Paradise Lane) between stone walls. At the end turn to the right and look at the residential block called Paradise Court.

17. Planning and protection

Paradise Court, Mill Street

This residential development was built in 1995. Of course, all new buildings need planning permission. Unlike the UK where it is a local authority matter, here on the island town planning is a national issue – the responsibility of the Infrastructure Department of the Isle of Man Government.

Isle of Man planning legislation closely follows that in the UK (although the planning systems in the various constituent parts of the UK also vary considerably). The planning system seeks to combine the protection of the historic environment as well as enabling new development.

In the UK buildings of architectural or historic interest are protected by making them 'listed'. The process here is similar except that they are known as Registered Buildings.

As in the UK, the island also has designated Conservation Areas. The central part of Castletown is a conservation area with many registered buildings.



Two new residential developments in Castletown:
Paradise Court (top) and Witches Mill (bottom)
© Martin Haslett

There are some things that you can do without planning permission. For example, on the Isle of Man you don't need permission to erect a flagpole in your front garden and fly a flag, something that would need permission in many other places. It's a right which has been exercised by many locals and you will see Manx flags flying in front of many people's homes. It's yet another assertion of their strong sense of identity and independence!

Directions 17

With your back to Paradise Court, pass the end of the passageway and go straight along Milner Terrace. At the end turn right onto the main road (Alexandra Road). After just over 100 metres (just before the bridge) stop by the Canada Life building on the left.

18. A boost to the economy

Canada Life building, Alexandra Road

The financial services sector became an important part of the Manx economy after the creation of a low tax economy in the 1960s.

This is one of two offices in Castletown of Canada Life International, an insurance company. Elsewhere in the town is a purpose-built office development called Royal Court, home to Friends Provident, an investment company which employs about 250 people.

To see what a major contribution financial services make to the overall Manx economy you really need to go to Douglas.



Canada Life offices
© Martin Haslett

All the British banks have large branches there, together with representation from most major European banks. Many banks in Douglas have impressive buildings which would not look out of place in London; it's quite remarkable for a town of under 30,000 people.

In Castletown, too, these major financial services employers are equally unexpected in a small town so remote from major centres of population.



Friends Provident offices at Royal Court
© Martin Haslett

Jobs in this sector are especially welcome as they are usually well-paid.

They also make a major contribution to the town's economy as employees pay their taxes and spend money in local shops and on local services.

In fact, the unemployment rate across the island is much lower than in the UK.

Directions 18

Continue along Alexandra Road over the bridge. Bear left at the mini-roundabout into Victoria Road. Just before the petrol station turn left into the cul-de-sac of Station Road. Go between two pubs to the railway station. If the gate is open, go up to the station building and onto the platform.

19. A very remarkable railway

Castletown railway station

Castletown Station is on the Isle of Man Steam Railway, a narrow gauge railway opened in 1874 connecting Douglas on the east coast to Port Erin in the southwest.

It is a mixture of a commercial railway operation and a preserved historic railway run by both paid employees and volunteers.

In the UK a narrow gauge steam railway like this would probably have been closed in the 1960s under the recommendations of the Beeching Report which shut down unprofitable lines.



Steam train at Castletown station
© Martin Haslett

Needless to say, Dr Beeching's famous axe did not apply here because the Isle of Man government controls public transport.



Bench on the platform at Castletown station
© Martin Haslett

Nevertheless, the economics of running a railway are no different to the UK. The Steam Railway actually runs at a loss but it is considered to make such a contribution to tourism and to the needs of locals that it has been kept open. Many people in Britain would wish that such far-sighted ideas could have applied there as well!

Do take the opportunity to go onto the platform and look inside the station buildings which include a lovingly-restored waiting room. If they are shut you can peep through the window.

Directions 19

Retrace your steps past the pubs and turn right onto Victoria Road. At the mini-roundabout, bear left, continuing along Victoria Road. Stop just before the bus stop by the wall overlooking the playground of Victoria Road School.

20. School time!

Victoria Road School, Victoria Road

This is Victoria Road School, one of 34 primary schools on the island. There are also five secondary schools.

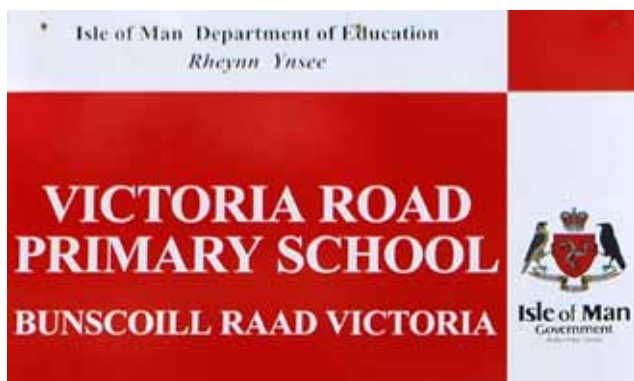
Although parts of the education system mirror those offered in the UK, the Isle of Man has its own curriculum.

This requires schools to focus not only on academic achievement but also on developing children's social and interpersonal skills and the ability to be "resilient, reflective and resourceful learners".



Victoria Road School
© Martin Haslett

In schools, the Manx language is available on an optional basis from age eight and there is one school where children can be educated totally in the Manx language.



School sign
© Martin Haslett

Students take the same exams as in the UK and then can go on to university in the UK or study at the Isle of Man College of Further and Higher Education (or Colleish Ellan Vannin son Ynsagh Sodjey as Syrjey) where a wide range of subjects, particularly vocational ones, are on offer.

There are also opportunities at the college to study to degree level with qualifications awarded by the University of Chester, University of Liverpool and Liverpool John Moores University.

Directions 20

Continue along Victoria Road. After just under 150 metres, take the footbridge on the right across the river. Walk round the left edge of the car park beside the boat parking area then down the lane (Back Hope Street) with the harbour on your left. When you meet the road at the end of Thirtle Bridge turn right. Stop after a few steps at the junction on the right with Hope Street outside the church of St Mary's on the Harbour.

21. Calling the faithful

Church of St Mary's on the Harbour, corner of Castle Street and Hope Street

This building was formerly a school but is now the church of St Mary's on the Harbour, Castletown's Parish Church.

Contrary to what we have seen around the town, this church is one aspect of life on the island that is connected to the UK! Look at the sign and you will see that it belongs to the Church of England and is administered from England.

The Church of England has its own diocese for the Isle of Man called the Diocese of Sodor and Man.



St Mary's on the Harbour from the castle walls
© Martin Haslett

This name reflects the ancient connection between the Isle of Man and the islands of Scotland that were once under Norse rule as we discovered earlier.

The diocese used to include four groups of islands off the western coast of Scotland – Skye, Lewis, Mull and Islay – but now is just the Isle of Man. It is the smallest of all the dioceses in the Church of England yet still has its own bishop.



St Mary's Church sign
© Martin Haslett

Several other Christian denominations and faith groups have places of worship on the Isle although the administration varies. For example, Catholic churches on the island belong to the Diocese of Liverpool and Baptist churches are grouped under the North Western Baptist Association but the Methodist Church has assigned the island as its own District within their system.

Directions 21

Follow Castle Street round towards the castle keeping the harbour on your left. Pass the Castle Arms hotel and stop on the corner opposite the castle gateway looking at the police station.

22. A low rate of crime

Police station, corner of Castle Street and Quayside

This is an especially fine police station building, designed by a famous English architect of Scottish descent, who loved the Isle of Man so much that he made it his home.

The Isle of Man first established a police force in 1777. By 1790, the capital of Castletown had five constables.

In the early 1800s there was so much crime on the island that local traders offered large rewards for people giving information leading to the conviction of offenders who were stealing from their warehouses. This seems hard to believe today when the Isle of Man has such a low rate of crime!



The unusual police station
© Martin Haslett

The Isle of Man Police have always been quite separate from the UK police, although if you look at the leaflets on display you will see that many of the initiatives run in the UK are reflected here, such as Crimestoppers and Neighbourhood Watch.



Front bonnet of a police car
© Martin Haslett

The uniform for the police on the Isle of Man is very similar to that in the UK but white helmets are still worn here.

However, road traffic rules are just a little different from those in the UK. There is no overall 70 miles per hour limit on the island (although there are plenty of speed limits in towns) and there are no speed cameras at all!

Directions 22

From the police station go up Castle Street once more and turn left into Parliament Square. Take the lane down the right side of the Old House of Keys. Go across the car park to the small white building with a chimney which stands alone.

23. New types of visitor

Old Grammar School

This is the Old Grammar School, the fourth Manx National Heritage site in Castletown that we have seen on this walk (the others are the Castle, the Old House of Keys and the Nautical Museum).

These make Castletown a major tourist destination on the island with more historic properties than anywhere else.

Although the traditional tourist industry went into decline in the 1960s, tourism remains a significant part of the economy today.



The Old Grammar School
© Martin Haslett

The annual TT motorcycle races are a major event but visitors are also drawn for special interest holidays such as bird watching or art. The Isle of Man also has some very good walking, there are the vintage railways and the archaeology is of outstanding importance. All these interests have meant that tourism still makes a contribution to the economy, even though the family 'bucket and spade' holiday to Douglas is largely a thing of the past.



Although Manx National Heritage manages a number of buildings and sites relating to Manx independence, the organisation has reciprocal arrangements with some British heritage organisations. For example, members of the National Trust can visit Manx National Heritage sites for free.

Manx National Heritage not only operates heritage sites but also protects natural heritage, runs the National Library and Archives, publishes books and organises the National Photographic, Film and Sound Archive.

Directions 23

The Old Grammar School is free to visit so do pop inside if it is open. Facing the entrance to the Old Grammar School, look left across the car park to a small passage leading between two (white) painted houses. Go through the passage to the small square and then turn right down Parliament Lane. At the bottom, look at the white building on the left which is the Harbour Commissioners building.

24. Territorial waters

Harbour Commissioners building, The Quay

The independent territory of the Isle of Man does not end here at the coast.

The Isle of Man Government purchased its Territorial Seas from the United Kingdom in 1991 for the grand sum of £800,000.

This jurisdiction extends for 12 miles from the coast and includes hydrocarbons prospecting, rights to lay pipelines and cables, and to build wind farms.

With these rights come responsibilities including keeping the waters free from pollution and debris.



Harbour Commissioners building
© Martin Haslett

However, if there was a very major incident – such as a spillage from an oil tanker or a shipwreck – then there is an agreement with the UK Government for assistance.



Notice of fishing regulations on the quay
© Martin Haslett

Another important responsibility is the protection of fishing. There is a large notice at the end of the landward side of the quay which sets out Manx fishing policy.

We tend to hear a lot about the problems of the EU in dealing with fishing but none of that applies here as we are outside the EU.

Look out for a notice on the quay showing strict rules for taking fish that are below the permitted sizes and encouraging members of the public to report transgressions.

Directions 24

Walk along the quay past the Old Lifeboat House to the lighthouse at the end of the harbour wall.

25. A story of independence and difference

Lighthouse at end of harbour wall

The quay is a good place to end this walk, looking out to the sea that has played such an important role in keeping this island separate and distinct.

We started our walk with the knowledge that the Isle of Man was a little bit different from the UK but along the way we have discovered just how great that difference actually is.

Despite invaders and colonisers over the centuries, and the current status as a British Crown Dependency, the Isle of Man has clung resolutely to its independence.



Manx flag atop Castle Rushen
© Martin Haslett

In so many ways it is a separate country. The sense of distinct identity is reinforced through everything from passports to postage stamps, from taxes to teaching, and from language to licence plates. There are many other interesting aspects of independence that we have not been able to cover in this walk from mapping to bank holidays!

The island's isolation does not seem to have led to limitations or restrictions. Quite the opposite, in fact. There is a sense of great positivity here.



The strapline of the Isle of Man Government is 'Giving you Freedom to Flourish' and their 'promise' is that 'The Isle of Man is a land of possibility where people and business will find the right environment in which to reach their full potential, whatever they feel that might be.'

Hopefully you have enjoyed exploring Castletown and finding out more about the Isle of Man and its strong sense of identity and independence.

Directions 25

This is the end of the walk. You are just a short distance from where the walk started and from the Market Square. There are many places to visit in Castletown so do take time to explore more.

Further information

Visit Isle of Man

www.visitisleofman.com

Manx National Heritage

www.manxnationalheritage.im/explore-the-island/places-to-visit/historic-attractions

Manx Language

www.manxnationalheritage.im/explore-the-island/about-the-isle-of-man/manx-language

Tynwald

www.tynwald.org.im

Castletown Commissioners

www.castletown.gov.im

Registered Building and Conservation Areas

www.gov.im/categories/planning-and-building-control/registered-building-and-conservation-areas

Isle of Man Steam Railway

www.gov.im/publictransport/Rail/Steam

Manx Films

www.iomguide.com/manxfilms

Shoprite

www.manxshoprite.com

The George Hotel

www.georgehotel.im

Manx Curry Club

www.manxcurryclub.co.uk

Diocese of Sodor and Man

www.sodorandman.im

Isle of Man Commonwealth Games Team

www.cga.im

Credits

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