



Flags of the World



European Union

The foremost property of flags is that each one immediately identifies a particular nation or territory, without the need for explanation. The colours, shapes, sizes and devices of each flag are often linked to the political evolution of a country, and incorporate heraldic codes or strongly held ideals.



United Nations

The flags of the nations (at the last count 189) are proudly displayed in front of the United Nations HQ in New York. Because of political upheavals in recent times (e.g. in the former USSR and Yugoslavia), new nation states have emerged with new flags. Everyone will be familiar with the image of a new country achieving independence by means of a flag-hoisting ceremony.

If you are interested in the study of flags (vexillology), there are reference books available through libraries.

This leaflet describes some of the better known flags. First, however, the links are explored between Scotland's flag, the St Andrew's Cross, and other flags which incorporate the saltire.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SALTIRE



As part of the Union Flag, the *St Andrew's Cross of Scotland* appears on the flags of Commonwealth countries too numerous to mention.

The only flag which appears to have been directly derived from the St Andrew's Cross is the provincial flag of *Nova Scotia*. This depicts a blue saltire on a white field, with a small shield of the Scottish Royal Arms in the centre.

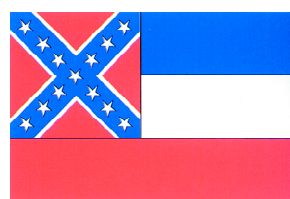


There are thought to be two principal lines of descent of the saltire in flags. First, in the 15th century, the Duke of Burgundy, having received from Constantinople a supposed fragment of St Andrew, began to use the saltire. By 1516 the Hapsburgs had inherited the thrones of both Burgundy and Spain, and the saltire began to appear there on military colours and naval flags. This may account for the subsequent use of flags based on the saltire by the Basques, Paraguay, Belgium, and Burundi.

A second line of descent relates to reforms introduced by Tsar Peter the Great of Russia following visits to Western Europe in the 1690s. He designed a naval flag with a blue saltire on a white background, and this became the Russian Imperial naval ensign up to 1917. This in turn gave rise to the use of other naval flags based on the saltire, e.g. in Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia.

Could there be a Scottish line of descent? It is not impossible that the Burgundians, having adopted St Andrew as their patron, got the idea of the saltire flag from that already established in Scotland. Three centuries later, Peter the Great, on his visit to the Netherlands, might easily have seen a Spanish naval ensign based on the saltire. If such conjectures could be substantiated, the flag of Scotland might turn out to be the remote ancestor of most of the other saltire flags used throughout history!

More recently and quite independently, some saltire flags have appeared elsewhere. The flag of *Jamaica* has a yellow saltire on a field of green and black. Black symbolises past hardships; gold, natural wealth; and green, hope. The saltire is apparently inspired by the arms of the capital, the official name of which is Kingston and St Andrew.



The battle flag of the Confederate States of America, from 1861 to 1865, also incorporated a saltire, in this case a blue cross on a red field, with 13 white stars representing the states. Today,

this flag forms part of the state flags of *Georgia* and *Mississippi*.

SOME WELL KNOWN FLAGS



Canada, prior to 1965 used the British Red Ensign with the Canadian arms, though this was unpopular with the French Canadians. The country's new flag

breaks all previous links. The maple leaf is the traditional emblem of Canada, the white represents the vast snowy areas in the north, and the two red stripes represent the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans.

The flag of the *United States of America*, the 'Stars and Stripes', is one of the most recognisable flags in the world. It was first adopted in 1777



during the War of Independence.

The stars on the blue canton represent the 50 states, and the red and white stripes represent the 13 original colonies which declared independence from Britain.

The flag of *China* was introduced in 1949 when the People's Republic was declared. Red and yellow are the traditional colours



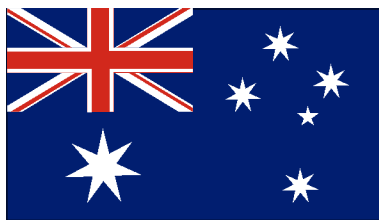
of China. Red is also the colour of Communism, with the larger star representing the guiding light of Communism. The smaller stars represent the peasantry, the workers, the bourgeoisie, and those capitalists who would participate in the revolution.



The flag of *Saudi Arabia* dates from 1906, and is based on the country's Muslim religion. The green field commemorates the Prophet Mohammed, and the inscription means

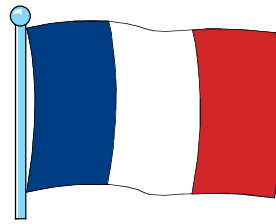
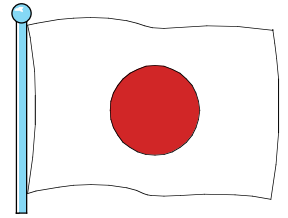
"There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah".

The flag of *Australia* was adopted in 1901, the result of a winning entry in a competition! The flag features the blue ensign to show the country's links with Britain. The



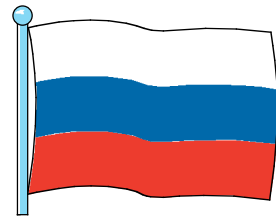
stars represent the constellation of the Southern Cross, and the 7-point star, known as the Commonwealth Star, symbolises the seven states and territories.

The name *Japan* means "The Land of the Rising Sun" and this is represented in the flag. The redness of the disc denotes passion and sincerity and the whiteness represents honesty and purity.



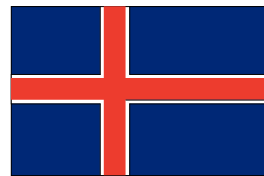
Another of the most famous flags in the world is the flag of *France*, which dates back to the revolution of 1789. The tricolour, comprising three vertical stripes, is said to represent liberty, equality and fraternity - the basis of the republican ideal.

The flag of *Germany*, as with many European flags, is based on three horizontal stripes. The red, black and gold colours date from the days of the Holy Roman Empire.



In December 1991, the flag of the Soviet Union (hammer and sickle on red) was replaced by the *Russian Federation* flag, which dates back to the 17th century.

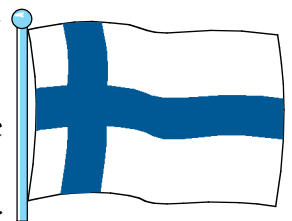
Note that the blue, white and red colours later became the 'pan-Slavic' colours used in the flags of many Eastern European states.



Off-centre crosses are typical of all the Scandinavian flags. For example, the flag of *Iceland* became official in 1944, following a referendum in which 97% of Icelanders voted

for independence from Denmark.

The flag of *Finland* too was adopted after independence in 1917 following the collapse of the Russian Empire. The colours symbolise Finland's lakes and snow.



The flag of the *Republic of Ireland* dates back to 1848 but was only officially adopted after independence in 1921. The green represents the Roman Catholic

Church, the orange the Protestants, and the white symbolises the desire for peace.

For more information about the Trust, about the Athelstaneford T-shirts, or for an application form to become a 'Friend', write to The Scottish Flag Trust, P.O.Box 84, Edinburgh, Scotland.