

HOW THE UK WELCOMED TAYLOR SWIFT

Even if you weren't one of the 1.2 million golden ticket holders, you were, undoubtedly still aware of Taylor Swift's presence this summer. It was impossible not to be. The nation went Eras-Tour mad and brands and celebs flocked to get a slice of the action. Alim Kheraj has the full round up of how the UK welcomed Taylor Swift.



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Fans went armed with friendship bracelets to swap with fellow 'Swifties'



Photo: Claire Pollard



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Fans hold a knitted mural of Taylor Swift outside Wembley Stadium in London

It'd been a long time coming, but June finally saw Taylor Swift's record-breaking Eras Tour touch down in the UK. It was a moment that British and Irish Swifties had been waiting for since the scramble to buy tickets last summer and it followed over a year's worth of dates in the US, South America and Australia – as well as a blockbuster concert film – that helped elevate the tour from your standard pop show to an unparalleled global phenomenon.

In that time, the Eras Tour has perhaps become one of the most well-documented cultural events in history, generating millions of posts on social media, countless articles and media reports, and bootleg fan live-streams viewed by thousands of people each night. Meanwhile during its run, Swift landed on Forbes' billionaires list, becoming the only artist to do so via music, songwriting and performances alone. Last year, she usurped Bad Bunny to become Spotify's most-streamed artist globally, with 26.1 billion streams in 2023, while the release of her latest album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, broke numerous chart records around the world. There's no doubting that Swift is, as *Deadline* said, 'the Monarch of All Media'.

Of course, Swift's staggering success is only possible because of her fans: the Swifties. And with the Eras Tour's arrival in the UK, those fans have gone into overdrive, with those lucky

enough to bag tickets travelling the length and breadth of the country to attend shows.

Even ahead of the tour, fans were preparing, designing outfits that either mirrored the dazzling costumes worn by Swift on stage or that represent the different musical eras Swift travels through during the show.

Then there are the friendship bracelets. Inspired by a lyric from Swift's song 'You're on Your Own, Kid' from her album *Midnights*, fans have spent hours crafting colourful keepsakes referencing song titles, albums and Swiftian memes, all to be traded at concerts with other fans. The craze has proved so popular that, according to *The Guardian*, eBay has reported a 15,200% increase in sales for friendship bracelets, with some fans even selling their creations on Etsy and Instagram.

The appetite for Swift-centred merchandise is also apparent in the snaking queues lining up outside the various stands at stadiums, all selling

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London Transport's tribute to the songs of Taylor Swift at Wembley tube station, June 2024

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official Eras Tour merch. For the singer's first run of shows in Wembley – she'll return to play five more concerts at the venue in August – the stadium transformed the ground floor of a nearby car park into an Eras Tour merchandise megastore. Opening ahead of the shows, fans with tickets (and even those without) queued up to snag tour-branded hoodies, t-shirts, posters, tote bags and even a gemstone bracelet, with some fans spending upwards of £300 on merch. Outside the stadium near the Tube station, meanwhile, unofficial sellers set up shop to flog bedazzled-pink cowboy hats and garish coloured scarves.

These traders weren't the only ones loitering outside the stadiums. For each show, fans themselves arrived at the crack of dawn to queue in order to secure a coveted spot near the barriers of the stage (unlike Swift's concerts in the US, the shows in Europe sold pitch standing tickets). Even those without tickets arrived to listen to the concert outside, a tradition known as Taygating (a play on the American phrase tailgate party, where people gather for parties around the boots of trucks and cars, usually ahead of a public event like a football game).

Swift's star power drew other famous faces, too. On social media, images circulated of stars such as Jamie Dornan, Nicola Coughlan, Andrew Scott, Phoebe Waller-Bridge and, of course, Swift's boyfriend Travis Kelce all enjoying the show. Actor Hugh Grant posted on X about doing

Photo: Vicki Harris



Photo: Amy Edwards

tequila shots with Kelce, while videos online show musical legend Sir Paul McCartney dancing with fans in the stadium as Swift performed her song 'But Daddy I Love Him'. Even the Royal Family were in attendance: Swift herself posted a backstage selfie of herself, Prince William, and his eldest two children, George and Charlotte, on her Instagram account, in which she wished the Prince of Wales a happy birthday.

The impact of the Eras Tour extended beyond celebrities and fans, though. Brands were also keen to get in on the action. For example, athletic apparel outfitters Gymshark shared a capsule collection referencing the Swift's music, including a t-shirt available to buy from their Regent Street flagship store, while also running a competition on their social channels offering fans the opportunity to win VIP tickets. Ride-hailing taxi company, Uber, likewise partnered with Etsy sellers in cities where Swift was performing to share a limited number of friendship bracelets with fans who used the service.

Ahead of the Eras Tour shows in Edinburgh, the singer was welcomed with bagpipe covers of her famous songs, and Scottish iteration of radio station Heart renamed Loch Tay 'Loch Tay Tay' after the singer. Likewise in Liverpool, where Swift played one show, the city was rebranded 'Taylor Town', while banners were erected declaring: 'Liverpool Loves Taylor Swift.' Fans in the city could embark on the 'Taylor Town Trial', which involved 11 art installations located around the city, all of which made reference to Swift's music.

For Swift's shows in the capital, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, unveiled a spray-painted

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mural on the steps leading up to Wembley Stadium. The city's transport network, TFL, also shared an updated Tube map dubbed 'London (Taylor's Version)'; the name taking the format of the re-recorded iterations of Swift's albums. On this new map, not only were the various Tube lines renamed after Swift's albums, but TFL also highlighted significant Swiftie hotspots, many of which she lists in her song 'London Boy'.

Beyond the fan excitement, celeb spotting and brand activations, the sheer magnitude of the Eras Tour has had a seismic impact on the economy, too, as fans spend money on hotels, travel, merchandise and at local hospitality venues. Of course, the tour's positive impact on local economies is a trend that has followed the Eras Tour throughout its run. It's become so significant that it even has its own name: Swiftonomics. For example, according to Bloomberg Economics, the Eras Tour contributed



\$4.3 billion to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the US in 2023.

This is likely to be replicated in the UK. Even before she swooped into the country, analysts at Barclays forecast that Swift could bring about a £1 billion boost to the British economy. While that figure is yet to be verified, the Greater London authority suggested that Swift's arrival in London, which is hosting the greatest number of Eras Tour shows than any other city in the world, would inject over £300 million into the capital.

Such figures offer up a quantifiable measurement of Swift's global cultural influence. But when it comes to the Eras Tour, the facts and figures are only part of the story. For Swifties, the tour's significance isn't reliant on how much money it injects into the economy or the famous faces that they might spot. It's in the connections with their fellow fans, the friendship bracelets traded, and the memories made as they sing along with their musical hero. Successes come and go, but that, as Swift herself once sang, will never go out of style.

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Close to greatness: fans finally get to see Taylor Swift live after years of waiting

from the MM vaults

Written and Directed by Taylor Swift – Charlie Winward, *MM84*

The Theory Drop: Jenkins and Fandom – Mark Dixon, *MM73*

I Can't Even: Speaking Fannish – Kirsty Worrow, *MM55*

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