

The Definite Article and Country Names

Lesson Plan: C1+ / Cambridge Advanced & Proficiency, Business English

Level: C1-C2

Time: 60-75 minutes

Focus: Article use with place names

Skills: Speaking, accuracy, exam transformations

1. Warmer (5-7 minutes)

In pairs, students introduce themselves as if meeting a new international client for the first time, stating where they are based and where their company operates. Listen for article errors with country names ('I work in Philippines' / 'our office in the Malta') without correcting yet, and note them for later.

Discussion question: 'Can you think of any country names that always take 'the' in English? Why might that be?' Take guesses, but don't confirm or correct at this stage.

2. Presentation (10-12 minutes)

Most country names take no article at all: **Taiwan, France, China, Japan, Kenya, Malta**. A smaller set always takes **'the'**, and it falls into three reliable categories.

Category	Examples
Plural in form (island groups, archipelagos)	the Bahamas, the Philippines, the Netherlands, the Maldives, the Seychelles
Contains 'United', 'Republic of', 'Kingdom of'	the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, the Republic of Ireland, the Czech Republic
A small set of historical exceptions	the Gambia, the Congo (both increasingly optional in modern usage)

One live exception worth flagging: **Ukraine** is now standard without the article. 'The Ukraine' was common until relatively recently but is now avoided, since it implied a region rather than a sovereign nation. Usage does shift, and this is a good moment to note that a small number of cases are genuinely judgement calls rather than fixed rules.

3. Controlled Practice (10 minutes)

Insert 'the' where necessary. Leave the space blank if no article is needed.

- 1. Our new distributor is based in ____ Philippines.
- 2. She grew up in ____ Malta but studied in ____ United Kingdom.
- 3. ____ Japan remains our largest market in Asia.
- 4. The conference will be held in ____ Bahamas this year.
- 5. He negotiated the contract with a firm in ____ Netherlands.
- 6. ____ Taiwan announced new trade regulations last month.
- 7. Our regional office covers both ____ Kenya and ____ United Arab Emirates.

- 8. ____ Ukraine has significantly expanded its tech sector.
- 9. The delegation travelled from ____ China to ____ Republic of Ireland.
- 10. Their headquarters moved from ____ France to ____ Maldives last year.

4. Freer Practice (12-15 minutes)

Speaking task, pairs or small groups. Each student prepares a 60-90 second mock introduction for a new international team, describing where they and at least three colleagues or offices are based, using at least one country name from each category above. Partners listen and note any article slips without interrupting, then give feedback afterwards.

Extension: ask students to describe a real or invented international project, naming the countries involved and briefly explaining what each location contributes.

5. Exam-Style Task (10 minutes)

Find and correct the article error in each sentence. One sentence is already correct.

- 1. The company relocated its European headquarters to Netherlands.
- 2. We are opening a new branch in the Malta next spring.
- 3. Our supplier network now includes the United Kingdom and Japan.
- 4. The report was drafted by a consultant based in the Taiwan.
- 5. Delegates arrived from the Philippines, Kenya, and the France.
- 6. The merger was finalised in the United Arab Emirates.

Answer Key

Controlled Practice

1. the Philippines 2. Malta / the United Kingdom 3. Japan 4. the Bahamas 5. the Netherlands
6. Taiwan 7. Kenya / the United Arab Emirates 8. Ukraine 9. China / the Republic of Ireland 10.
France / the Maldives

Exam-Style Task

- 1. ...relocated its European headquarters to **the** Netherlands.
- 2. We are opening a new branch in **[no 'the']** Malta next spring.
- 3. Correct as written.
- 4. The report was drafted by a consultant based in **[no 'the']** Taiwan.
- 5. Delegates arrived from the Philippines, Kenya, and **[no 'the']** France.
- 6. Correct as written.