

Welcome to Cambridge, the emerging science capital of Europe

As one third of the UK's "golden triangle" – a cluster of innovation with Oxford and London – Cambridge has a long legacy as one of the UK's most important cities in terms of education, innovation and trade.

Best known for its prestigious universities – the University of Cambridge consistently ranked in the top three best universities in the world – Cambridge has produced some of the best startup and talent of the past three decades. The University of Cambridge alone is credited with contributing £30B to the UK economy and it's been a cradle for 194 spinouts. Meanwhile Cambridge alumni have founded more than 3,300 startups.

It's also part of New Palo Alto, a supercluster of European ecosystems and research hubs that all sit within a four-hour train ride of London. Each of these hubs is home to the world's best universities, diverse talent pools, innovative startups and networks.

Over the past five years, Cambridge businesses have received more than £4.5B (€5.2B) in funding, making it one of the UK's leading destinations for investors. Innovation parks situated across the region invest an average of £2.4B annually in research and development (R&D), accounting for 44% of the £5.4B corporate R&D spending in the entire East of England.

As of 2023, a total of 23 Cambridge-born companies have hit unicorn status

and this has seen the region named as the unicorn capital of Europe. In particular, the opportunities for investment and academic research in Cambridge were instrumental in the birth of British semiconductor and software design giant, ARM. ARM hit the NYSE at a \$54.5B valuation and is largely considered the UK's most successful tech company, with a portfolio of clients including Samsung, Google and Apple.

Other notable Cambridge-born unicorns include Darktrace, named Europe's number one super-scale up, and CMR Surgical, the fastest growing surgical robotics company on the market and recipient of this year's King's Award for Enterprise for Innovation. Not one to rest on its laurels either, the region recently revealed plans to double the number of unicorns based in Cambridge by 2035 and turn the city into the science capital of Europe.

It's no wonder the city was recently named the best city in the UK to start a business in 2023, and how this mix of talent, networks, investment opportunities and research has led to the emergence of what's known as the Cambridge Phenomenon – a term first coined by the Financial Times in 1980 and which refers to the rapid growth and success of technology, life sciences, and other knowledge-intensive industries in the region.

This phenomenon has transformed Cambridge into a global hub, making it an increasingly attractive and lucrative region for international investors. Here's why.

Access to Capital

A recent Dealroom report named Cambridge the leading regional tech city in the UK thanks to its combination of high levels of VC funding, venture capital rounds, advertised tech salaries, number of unicorns and futurecorns. This long-standing and impressive prominence makes it an attractive destination for investors and startups alike.

Amadeus Capital Partners: Amadeus Capital Partners has been investing in technology-enabled products and services for almost three decades. Founded by Anne Glover and Hermann Hauser in 1997, the VC has backed 190+ companies and raised over \$1B.

Cambridge Angels: Cambridge Angels is a leading UK business angel network providing “smart capital from entrepreneurs to entrepreneurs.” It's made up of more than 60 high-net-worth members who mentor and invest in early-stage companies across Cambridge, London, Oxford and across the UK.

Cambridge Innovation Capital: Cambridge Innovation Capital is a VC firm that specialises in early-stage technology and healthcare investments across the

Cambridge ecosystem. It's supported more than 100 founders across 40 companies over the past decade.

Cambridge Enterprise: In 2006, the University of Cambridge set up Cambridge Enterprise to help commercialise the research coming out of the university. Cambridge Enterprise Ventures Partners followed in 2011.

Founders at the University of Cambridge: Another extension of Cambridge Enterprise, Founders at the University of Cambridge helps accelerate tech companies in the region. Its Start Accelerator offers mentorship and support from a pool of more than 100 entrepreneurs and investors, plus funding via Parkwalk Advisors.

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Access to networks

Cambridge is a hive of collaboration powered by strong and deep networks, not just locally but through its innovative neighbours.

Cambridge Network: Cambridge Network is not-for-profit membership organisation that brings together business and academic leaders, facilitating partnerships and knowledge sharing.

Cambridge Business and Professional Club: The Cambridge Business and Professional Club has been running networking events for its 140+ members since 1950.

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce: The Cambridgeshire chambers offer local, national and even international networking opportunities in more than 75 markets worldwide. It offers practical benefits to help your businesses set up, scale up and grow.

InterNations: With InterNations, French expats in Cambridge can join the "Cantab" Members Network and attend both local and national events with fellow Francophiles.

Beyond individual network groups, the city is home to Silicon Fen, also known

as the Cambridge Cluster. This is a 5,000-strong collection of tech firms that generate an annual turnover of more than £18B and employ more than 60,000 people alone.

Access to talent

Home to some of the world's most prestigious universities, Cambridge is a hub offering a rich pool of skilled graduates and professionals.

According to the 2023 QS World University Rankings by Subject list, the University of Cambridge is in the top 10 globally for an impressive 38 subject areas. It's particularly renowned and revered for archaeology and modern languages but is in the top five for materials science, mathematics, engineering (chemical, mechanical, aeronautical, manufacturing, electrical and electronic) as well as law and legal studies, social policy, geophysics, medicine and many more. This provides a steady and impressive stream of highly-skilled graduates. The university also offers the Global Talent Visa which is open to anyone who is internationally recognised as leaders or potential leaders in the fields of science and the arts.

And with such a concentration of both high-tech businesses, especially in software, electronics, and biotechnology around Silicon Fen, and Cambridge's unicorn legacy, the city is teeming with skilled and experienced operators and entrepreneurs. Across the region's science parks there are 2,400 companies providing employment to more than 50,000 people. Notably, twenty parks with a strong focus on Knowledge Intensive sectors account for 65% of the total employment across all science parks.

Work

Cambridge's entrepreneurial spirit means its home to a range of co-working spaces where you can work, collaborate and network. One of three ideaSpace offices across Cambridge, ideaSpace City is a 24-hour co-working space located opposite Queens College with views of the River Cam.

The Bradfield Centre near Milton Country Park in the heart of Cambridge Science Park is ideal for people working in the tech and science sector, while Incubyte offers entrepreneurs and early-stage companies a variety of co-working options, from hot desking to meeting rooms.

If you want something closer to the city centre, Mantle Space is near the train station in Cambridge's business district and is well-connected to neighbouring hubs. Alternatively if you want a more peaceful yet connected workspace, with networking events and training seminars on site, try the Future Business

Centre Cambridge.

Play

Due to the fact Cambridge is a city rich in history and culture, it's full of things to do when you're not working. You can explore the colleges of the University of Cambridge, each one with its own history and architecture. There is also an annual event called Open Cambridge where many of the University's colleges and buildings open their doors to the public.

Fitzwilliam Museum houses a large collection of art and antiquities spanning centuries and cultures, while the Cambridge University Botanic Garden is a beautiful and tranquil place to walk around.

Punting along the river provides a unique view of the University colleges and the beautiful Backs – the rear of the Cambridge colleges that back onto the river, and both the Cambridge Corn Exchange and Cambridge Arts Theatre offer everything from plays, concerts, comedy shows and more.

During the summer, Cambridge becomes home to one of the UK's best music events dedicated to folk, blues, jazz, and world music, called the Cambridge Folk Festival, or the annual Cambridge Science Festival features a range of scientific talks, workshops, and activities.

Life in Cambridge

Cambridge offers a mix of urban and rural living, with average property prices of around £500,000. It's known for its low crime rates and high quality of life. The city is well-connected, with London just an hour away by train.

Cambridge is also a bike-friendly city, and cycling is a great way to explore its narrow, picturesque streets. Plus, in order to be named the best city for building a startup, it also had to score high for internet quality, high street recovery rate, employment rate and innovation.

There are few places in the UK, Europe and even worldwide that offer the power of Cambridge's well-established and highly ambitious startup ecosystem. From renewed investment from both national and international investors, to doubling down on its strengths in life sciences and tech, and pushing to be the science capital of Europe with twice the number of unicorns to date, Cambridge punches well above its weight on a global scale.

It has everything international investors and startups need in terms of talent, capital, experience and infrastructure, and all set alongside the beautiful rivers

and green spaces of the East Anglia countryside.

The Commercial Department of the British Embassy in Paris provides support to French companies wishing to set up in the UK. Click [here](#) to find out more.

Read also

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Article by MADDYNESS, WITH THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN PARIS