

## D. Important Rivers of the World

The source of a river is the point where it begins—often in highland areas. The source of the Mississippi River is Lake Itasca, Minnesota, 1,463 feet above sea level. One of the sources of the Nile River is the Luvironza River above Lake Victoria (Victoria Nyanza) in Burundi. The Nile itself begins as water exits Lake Victoria near Ripon Falls.

The mouth of a river is the point where it empties into a larger body of water. The mouth of the Amazon River empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Note also the term estuary, which is where the fresh water of a river meets the salt water of the sea.

A tributary is a river that flows into another river. The Mississippi River has more than 250 tributaries. Its main tributaries are the Missouri and Ohio Rivers.

A drainage basin is the area through which a major river and its tributaries (a river system) flow. The Amazon River has hundreds of tributaries, and together the river system drains 40% of South America, most of it through rainforest. The Mississippi River basin is some 1.2 million square miles of fertile farmland that stretches from the Appalachians to the Rockies.

### Asian Rivers

#### Ob River

Origin: Russia (Siberia)

Empties Into: Estuary on the Arctic Ocean

Important Facts:

- World's fourth-longest river

- Chief tributary: Irtysh River
- Frozen for half the year
- Major transportation route
- Major port: Novosibirsk

### **Yellow River (Huang He)**

Origin: China (Kunlun Mountains in Tibet region) and flows east through China

Empties Into: Bo Hai, an arm of the Yellow Sea

Important Facts:

- Area of early Chinese civilization
- Historically, an important agricultural area
- Known as “China’s Sorrow” because of the destruction caused by its flooding
- Named because of the fertile yellow silt it carries as it flows east
- Created a delta known as the Great China Plain
- 50-year dam project begun in 1955 to harness water for electric power

### **Yangtze (Ch’ang)**

Origin: China (southwest)

Empties Into: East China Sea

Important Facts:

- Longest river in Asia
- Third-longest river in the world
- Once the Three Gorges Dam is complete, it will be the world’s largest dam and will provide more hydroelectricity than any other facility.
- Major route for commerce between east and west China
- Source of 40% of China’s electrical power
- Drains about 25% of China’s arable land

### **Ganges River**

Origin: Himalayas

Empties Into: Joins Brahmaputra in Bangladesh and empties into Bay of Bengal

Important Facts:

- Flows through Gangetic Plain in India and Ganges Delta in Bangladesh
- Holy river to Hindus
- Considered reincarnation of Hindu deity, Ganga
- Important irrigation source for India and Bangladesh

### **Indus River**

Origin: Tibet region of China

Empties Into: Joins five smaller rivers and empties into the Arabian Sea

Important Facts:

- Site of early Indus Valley civilization
- Flows through infertile delta of clay and mud
- Navigable only for small ships
- Used for irrigation and hydroelectric power

## African Rivers

**Nile River**

Origin: Luvironza River in Burundi

Empties Into: Mediterranean Sea

Important Facts:

- Site of ancient Egyptian civilization
- World's longest river
- Flows north
- White Nile and Blue Nile become the Nile proper at Khartoum, Sudan
- Creates huge delta at river mouth
- Used to flood annually; now dammed; Aswan Dam created huge lake in southern Egypt

**Niger River**

Origin: Central Guinea

Empties Into: Gulf of Guinea

Important Facts:

- Long, winding river
- Forms part of Niger's southwest border with Benin
- Benue River, chief tributary
- Forms delta at mouth
- Interrupted by series of rapids, in places

**Congo River**

Origin: Chambezi River, Zambia

Empties Into: Atlantic Ocean

Important Facts:

- Named after early African kingdom of Kongo
- World's second-largest river in volume of water
- Long, winding river
- Important transportation route
- Setting of Joseph Conrad's famous short story "Heart of Darkness"

## South American Rivers

**Amazon River**

Origin: Junction of Ucayali and Marañón Rivers in northern Peru

Empties Into: Atlantic Ocean

Important Facts:

- Second-longest river in the world
- Hundreds of tributaries
- Largest volume of river water in the world
- Drainage basin for more than 40% of South America
- No waterfalls: navigable almost entire length
- Flows through world's largest rainforest
- Empties through delta in northern Brazil

### Paraná River

Origin: Junction of Paranaíba and Rio Grande Rivers in southeast Brazil

Empties Into: Atlantic Ocean

Important Facts:

- Meets the Uruguay River to form, with other rivers, the Rio de la Plata estuary
- Paraguay River, largest tributary
- Major transportation route
- Source of hydroelectric power
- Second-largest drainage basin in South America

### Orinoco River

Origin: Mt. Délégado Chalbaud in Guiana Highlands

Empties Into: Atlantic Ocean

Important Facts:

- Connected to Amazon River through a natural canal
- Navigability depends on seasonal rains
- Flows through large marshy delta

## North American Rivers

### Mississippi River

Origin: Lake Itasca in Minnesota

Empties Into: Gulf of Mexico

Important Facts:

- With the Missouri, world's third-longest river
- Tributaries: Minnesota, Missouri, Arkansas, Illinois, Ohio
- Drains plains between Rocky and Appalachian Mountains
- Highly destructive floods
- Forms a bird's-foot-shaped delta of mixed salt marshes and forested swamp
- Memorably described in Mark Twain's works, e.g., *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi*

### **Mackenzie River**

Origin: Great Slave Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada

Empties Into: Beaufort Sea (in the Arctic Ocean)

Important Facts:

- Navigable only June through October because of ice
- Flows through a largely uninhabited region
- Drains northern part of Great Plains
- Delta

### **Yukon River**

Origin: Atlin Lake in British Columbia

Empties Into: Bering Sea

Important Facts:

- Flows through Canada and Alaska
- Navigable only July through September because of ice
- Potential for hydroelectric power
- Delta
- Gold was discovered on a tributary of the Yukon in 1896, leading to the Klondike Gold Rush. Many prospectors traveled hundreds of miles down the Yukon River in primitive boats.

## **Australian Rivers**

### **Murray River**

Origin: Australian Alps near Mt. Kosciusko

Empties Into: Indian Ocean

Important Facts:

- Tributaries: Darling, Murrumbidgee, Mitta Mitta
- With tributaries, drains 14% of continent
- Source of electric power and irrigation

### **Darling River**

Origin: Eastern highlands; formed by Dumaresq and Macintyre Rivers

Empties Into: Indian Ocean after merging with the Murray River

Important Facts:

- Longest river in Australia
- Tributaries: Gwydir, Namoi, Castlereagh
- Source of irrigation

## **European Rivers**

### **Volga River**

Origin: Valday Hills near Moscow, Russia

Empties Into: Caspian Sea

### Important Facts:

- Longest river in Europe
- Known as “Mother Volga”
- Immortalized in Igor Stravinsky’s “Song of the Volga Boatmen” and Ilya Repin’s painting of the Volga boatmen
- Shores dotted with old monasteries and churches
- Principal water transportation route in Russia
- Linked by canals to other rivers
- Source of hydroelectric power and irrigation
- Delta

### Danube River

Origin: Formed by Brege and Brigach Rivers in Black Forest in southwest Germany

Empties Into: Black Sea

### Important Facts:

- Important transportation route
- Flows through Budapest, Hungary
- Part of Rhine-Main-Danube Canal
- Linked by canals to other rivers
- Swampy delta
- Subject of a famous waltz by Johann Strauss, “Blue Danube”

### Rhine River

Origin: Rheinwaldhorn glacier in the Swiss Alps

Empties Into: North Sea

### Important Facts:

- Important commercial route
- German industrial cities along river include Bonn, Düsseldorf, and Cologne
- Flows past many old castles
- Linked by canals to other rivers
- Forms delta in the Netherlands