

River Ganga

Ganga is one of the most important and sacred of all rivers in India.

The river is the most sacred river of Hindu India. Its tributaries begin in the Himalayas and it flows through India and Bangladesh into the Bay of Bengal.

The river is 2511 kilometres long and has the world's largest delta which covers 25% of India's total territory and supports 300,000,000 people.

The Ganga plain is one of the most fertile regions of India.

There are many myths concerning the origins of this river. One of the oldest and most popular myths talks of the river having its source in heaven. King Sagara had 60,000 sons who were dull-witted and impetuous. Once, while searching for their father's sacrificial horse, they disturbed the meditations of an important sage, **Kapila**. Greatly angered, the sage destroyed the king's sons with fire, reducing them to ashes. King Sagara's great-great-great grandson, **Bhagiratha** underwent great trials and austerities for several centuries in order to atone for the sons' behaviour. Pleased with his perseverance, the goddess Ganga appeared before him to grant him a boon, as reward. She promised to descend to earth as a river but would need someone to break her mighty fall; otherwise she might destroy the earth. Shiva was persuaded to receive Ganga on his head, so her great fall was softened by Shiva's massive tangle of hair. In his hair, she became divided into several streams, each of which flowed to a different region of the world and sanctified it. Her principal artery emerged from Shiva's head and came to India. Under Bhagiratha's guidance it cut a channel where the ashes of Sagara's sons were purified and freed to undertake their journey to heaven.

As a sacred river, the Ganga is believed to purify anyone who bathes in it.

Hindus undertake a journey to bathe themselves in the river at least once in their lifetime in order to purify themselves before going to heaven.

