

The first civilizations arose near rivers. These first people used the water in the rivers and from rainfall for drinking, washing, and watering crops. Rare was the large city that was far away from a water source (most often a river).

People also found food--mainly fish--in the rivers.

Rivers were also means of transportation. People could sail in boats and ships up and down rivers, looking for new opportunities to expand their civilization. These opportunities usually took four forms:

- lands for new colonies
- lands for growing new crops
- lands containing people with which to trade
- lands to conquer



You can probably think of several ancient civilizations that grew up on rivers: [Egypt](#), [China](#), [India](#), the [Middle East](#). These people depended on the Nile River, the Yangtze (YAWN'tse) River, the Indus (IN'dus) River, and the Tigris (TIE'gris) and Euphrates (YOU'fray-teez) Rivers for survival.

Some things haven't changed.

A good example of a modern civilization that depends on a river is the Okavango Delta. The Delta is thousands of miles of rivers, wetlands, swamps, islands, and wildlife in the Kalahari (cal-a-HA-REE) Desert region of Botswana (Bot-swa-na).



The Okavango (Oh-ca-VAIN-GO) River is the main river running through the Delta, but other rivers can be found there, too, including the Boro (bor'RO), the Nghabe (NAH'be), and the Boteti (BO-teh-TE). People live here, in the middle of the desert, because they can depend on the rivers to bring them water and goods.

And because the river is so large, it supports many kinds of animals not usually found in the desert, including crocodiles, hippopotamuses, and more than 80 species of fish.

Rivers today still bring much-needed water to people in all civilizations. Many agriculture areas now have canals and other methods of irrigation designed to transport water from place to place. Rainwater is collected and stored, and river water is stored in dams and reservoirs.

Rivers today continue to bring goods and communication from other people.