



The Tigris River forms the eastern boundary of Mesopotamia (meaning, in Greek, “between the rivers”), which is part of the “Fertile Crescent.”

What are some key facts about the Tigris?

- It’s not as long as the river with which it is usually paired—the Euphrates—which measures 1,740 miles (2,800 kilometers). The Tigris is about 1,150 miles (1,850 kilometers) long.
- The word Tigris is based on an “Old Persian” word—*Tigra*—which means “fast” or “arrow-like.”
- The river rises in the eastern Taurus mountains, in southern Turkey, and flows from its headwaters, at Lake Hazar, south toward the Persian Gulf.
- On its way, it skirts the northeastern tip of Syria (forming the border between that country and Turkey), then passes through Iraq.
- In the southern part of Iraq, the Tigris merges with the Euphrates to form the Shatt al Arab which flows into the Persian Gulf. A portion of the Shatt al Arab forms part of the border between Iraq and Iran.
- Many civilizations have thrived along the banks of the Tigris, including during ancient times. One of its most-notable civilizations was the Mesopotamian Empire.
- The Tigris’ drainage basin covers around 144,788 square miles (375,000 square km). Its waters come from melting snow and winter rains. During the spring melt, the river’s flood waters can be extremely fast-moving.
- In addition to melting snow and winter rains, the Tigris also gets waters from four strong tributaries: the Great Zab, Little Zab, ‘Uzaym (Adhaim) and Diyala rivers.
- Because the Tigris’ flooding can be very unpredictable, not many great cities have been built along its banks. The ancient capitals of Assyria (Ninevah and Calah, on the east bank, and Ashur, on the west) together with Opis (located somewhere near Baghdad) are notable exceptions.
- Flooding of the Tigris usually occurs about a month before flooding of the Euphrates. This is due to the shorter length of the Tigris.
- Baghdad, the capital of today’s Iraq, is located on both banks of the Tigris while Mosul, the site of Iraq’s

largest dam, is principally located on the west bank. (Mosul is opposite the remains of ancient Ninevah.)

- Not all of the Tigris River is navigable by shallow-draft vessels. Upstream, during ancient times, people used rafts to reach the city of Ninevah. Today people still use rafts to reach the city of Mosul.
- The last time anyone saw a lion along the Tigris River was in 1926.
- Around 55 fish species live in the Tigris. Although fishing was once very important to people living along the river's banks, pollution and wars have harmed the fishing industry.

The Tigris, like the Euphrates, has seen its share of battles from ancient history until the 21st century.

Credits:

Map image, depicting location of the Tigris River, online via Indiana State University.

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