



Major Rivers in Africa

The four major rivers of Africa are the Nile (4,160 miles), the Congo (2,900 miles), the Niger (2,590 miles), and the Zambesi (1,700 miles). The Nile River is the longest river in the world. It is formed by the confluence of the Blue Nile River, which rises in the highlands of Ethiopia, and the White Nile River, which begins in the headwaters of Lake Victoria. They join at Khartoum, Sudan, before draining northward to the Mediterranean Sea. The Nile provides water for drinking and irrigation for a large part of Egypt's population. The Congo River originates in the highlands of East Africa, draining a large basin with its numerous tributaries. The river flows north before looping to the west. The Niger River originates in the hills of Guinea, but flows to the north and east through Mali before looping south and west through Niger and Nigeria. The Zambesi River rises in Central Africa, but flows south and east to empty into the Indian Ocean. The Nile River is navigable upstream by ocean-going vessels until they reach the Aswan Dam in southern Egypt. The other three rivers are not navigable from their outlets to the sea because they become swift-moving rapids near the coast as they descend from the African Plateau. Once on the plateau, however, the rivers are important avenues of trade and travel for much of their lengths.

MAP: Question 1

What bodies of water do the four major rivers empty into?

Question 2

How does the Nile River differ from the three other rivers?

Question 3

How can the rivers contribute to the economic development of the nations of Africa?