

GREAT RIVERS

of the World



Introduction

The great rivers of the world not only shape the countryside and the nature of riverbanks, they also affect people's lives. Since the earliest times, they have determined political and cultural borders, facilitated trade routes and even played an important role in religious life. Let's go on the ultimate river cruise! We'll explore 18 legendary rivers across all five continents. The journey begins with the Rhine in the middle of Europe, leads us on to the Danube, Thames, Volga, Lena, Ganges, Yangtze, Mekong, Congo, Nile, St. Lawrence, Mississippi, Colorado, Rio Grande, Orinoco, Amazon and Paraná, and goes right through to the Murray in Australia. We'll marvel at the diverse life and famous sights to be discovered in and around these river wonders.



ARCTIC OCEAN

ASIA

INDIAN OCEAN

ANTARCTICA

NEW ZEALAND

Bering Sea

Sea of Okhotsk

East China Sea

PACIFIC OCEAN

Lena

Volga

Rhine

Danube

Mediterranean

Nile

Congo

Victoria

Cape of Good Hope

Arabian Sea

Ganges

Bay of Bengal

Mekong

Yangtze

Murray

AUSTRALIA

Murray

Seaports and inland harbours

Along the banks of the Rhine. Tankers and freighters that supply local industries with raw materials travel to the German cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen. Duisburg, Germany has the largest inland port in the world, but even these facilities are not the greatest on the Rhine. That title goes to the Dutch seaport of Rotterdam, which is the gateway to products and goods from all over the world. They arrive here by high-sea cargo ships, are loaded onto barges and then reach the whole of central Europe via the Rhine.

As the river bordering France and Germany, the Rhine was once a bone of contention between the two countries, with each one claiming it as their own. Germans considered the river a symbol of their culture, especially in 1871, when German states united into a single German Empire. France and Germany would later fight each other in several wars during the 19th and 20th centuries, but the two nations are now friends. The dispute over the Rhine is a thing of the past.

Carnival time

is all part of life on the Rhine. Inhabitants along the river are believed to have what is called a 'happy Rhenish nature'. In Basel, they celebrate the craziest carnival night in the whole of Switzerland with the shrill sounds of 'Guggen' marching music. In Mainz, Cologne and Düsseldorf, masked balls take place for a whole week, with carnival speeches, dancing and music. The high point of the carnival is on Shrove Monday (similar to Mardi Gras on Fat Tuesday), featuring miles-long processions with fun, decorated parade floats. In addition, most of the revelers are dressed up head-to-toe in fancy costumes.



Romantic fever

started in the 19th century as industrialization and pollution increased in Europe's cities. Many people longed for wild, untouched nature. German and French poets of the age, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Clemens Brentano, Friedrich Hölderlin and Victor Hugo, fell in love with the rocky landscape of the Middle Rhine area. With their so-called 'Rhine Romanticism', they wrote about fertile vineyards and mysterious castle ruins.



❖ Old Father Europe ❖

From the Alps to the North Sea, 'Father Rhine' is geographically, economically and culturally a European river spectacle. It begins its 765 mile (1,231 km) journey as a gushing mountain stream in the Saint-Gotthard Massif region of Switzerland. Early in its journey, after leaving the Alps, the Rhine calms down a bit and sluggishly drifts forward. It takes a break at Lake Constance, between Germany, Austria and Switzerland, and then gains power. The Rhine Falls at Schaffhausen, Switzerland is one of the mightiest waterfalls of Europe. The Rhine Knee in Basel then bends the river northwards. From here on, it forms the border between France and Germany and can be navigated by large ships. There are chemical works near Basel that have polluted the river. Fortunately, however, new laws protect the environment and prevent further contamination. As a result, the Rhine's waters are now clean again and the fish are returning. However, the Rhine remains a busy place, as there are now even more ships cruising further down the river. As it moves on, the Rhine serves up some remarkable sights. At Wiesbaden, Germany, it bends to the west and flows through the best-known German wine-growing region, the Rheingau. After another turn, this time northwards, the Middle Rhine valley emerges. This winding stretch through the Rhenish Slate Mountains boasts vineyards, castles and ruins of castles, which all make for a popular tourist destination. Next, the Rhine becomes an industrial region. At the delta of the Rhine and Meuse rivers, the Rhine splits up into many branches before finally reaching the North Sea. Cities along its banks, such as Cologne, Düsseldorf and Rotterdam, have grown into major European metropolises.

The Nibelung treasure

is said to have lain at the bottom of the Rhine at Worms, Germany for centuries. Many searched for it, but no one was successful – which is not surprising, because this treasure is actually a part of *The Song of the Nibelungs*, a poem from the Middle Ages. According to this heroic saga, a dragon slayer named Siegfried owned the treasure. He was killed by his rival, Hagen, who then dropped the treasure into the Rhine so that nobody could find it. A bloody massacre ensued, which none of the heroes or heroines survived. The treasure still remains undiscovered.



ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

* From Inland Lake to Atlantic Ocean *

Is this the way to China? French explorer, Jacques Cartier, asked this question in 1535. He had sailed into the St. Lawrence River from the Atlantic Ocean. But Cartier could not have known he was actually on a river and not in a sea bay – as the St. Lawrence's estuary is a little over 60 miles (96 km) wide. Cartier's ships continued to travel down the river until they reached the giant rapids near modern-day Montreal. Soon, it became clear that the St. Lawrence did not lead to Asia, but instead went deep into the American continent. The river only becomes the St. Lawrence once it has flowed out from Lake Ontario. Up to that point, the watery connections between the five great lakes carry different names, which are the Niagara, Detroit, St. Clair and St. Mary rivers. It is difficult to say exactly where the true source of the river begins beyond the lakes.

The source of the North River is the furthest away from the estuary of the St. Lawrence, a distance of 1,820 miles (2,929 km). It flows through the St. Louis River into the upper part of Lake Ontario. In Cartier's time, natural barriers such as rapids and the Niagara Falls blocked any possibility of ship access beyond Lake Ontario. It was not until 1958 that a complex system of locks connected the Great Lakes with the St. Lawrence. The St. Lawrence Seaway makes it possible for even the largest ocean going vessels to access the interior of the country by many thousands of miles or kilometers, even as far as Duluth, Minnesota at the western side of Lake Superior. Therefore, what was once a dead-end has been transformed into a continuous waterway, one of the most important in North America.



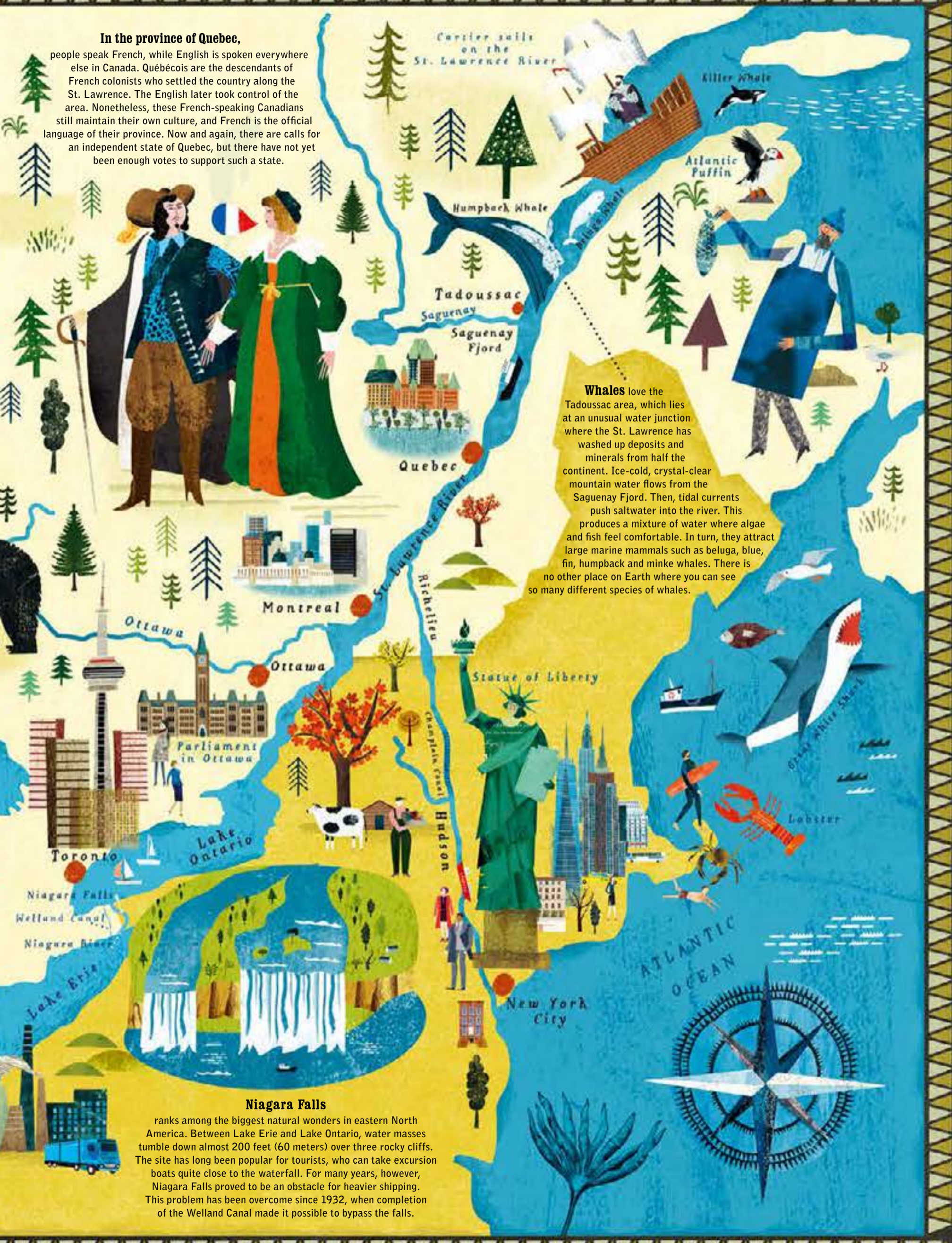
In the province of Quebec,

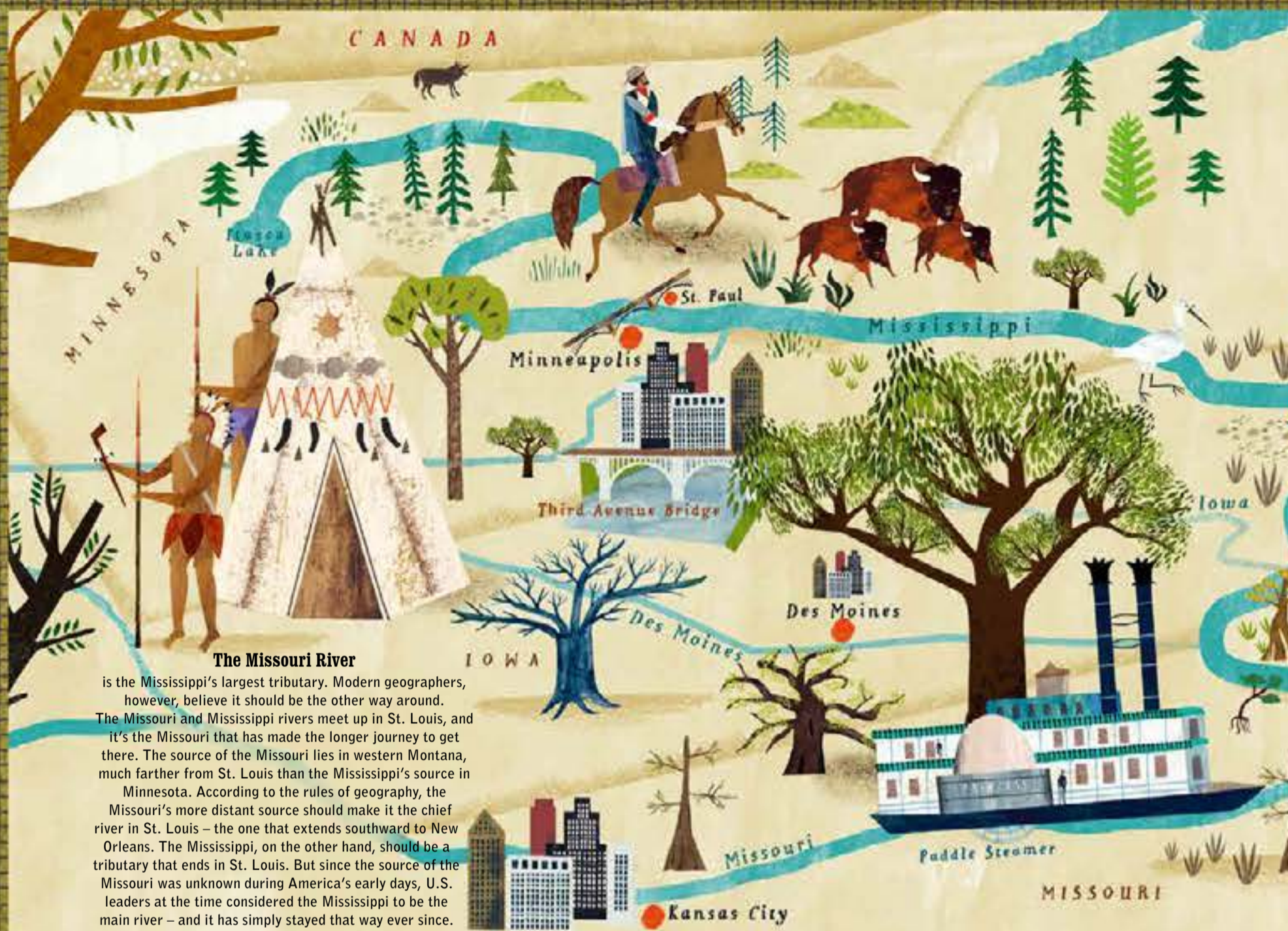
people speak French, while English is spoken everywhere else in Canada. Québécois are the descendants of French colonists who settled the country along the St. Lawrence. The English later took control of the area. Nonetheless, these French-speaking Canadians still maintain their own culture, and French is the official language of their province. Now and again, there are calls for an independent state of Quebec, but there have not yet been enough votes to support such a state.

Whales love the Tadoussac area, which lies at an unusual water junction where the St. Lawrence has washed up deposits and minerals from half the continent. Ice-cold, crystal-clear mountain water flows from the Saguenay Fjord. Then, tidal currents push saltwater into the river. This produces a mixture of water where algae and fish feel comfortable. In turn, they attract large marine mammals such as beluga, blue, fin, humpback and minke whales. There is no other place on Earth where you can see so many different species of whales.

Niagara Falls

ranks among the biggest natural wonders in eastern North America. Between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, water masses tumble down almost 200 feet (60 meters) over three rocky cliffs. The site has long been popular for tourists, who can take excursion boats quite close to the waterfall. For many years, however, Niagara Falls proved to be an obstacle for heavier shipping. This problem has been overcome since 1932, when completion of the Welland Canal made it possible to bypass the falls.





The Missouri River

is the Mississippi's largest tributary. Modern geographers, however, believe it should be the other way around. The Missouri and Mississippi rivers meet up in St. Louis, and it's the Missouri that has made the longer journey to get there. The source of the Missouri lies in western Montana, much farther from St. Louis than the Mississippi's source in Minnesota. According to the rules of geography, the Missouri's more distant source should make it the chief river in St. Louis – the one that extends southward to New Orleans. The Mississippi, on the other hand, should be a tributary that ends in St. Louis. But since the source of the Missouri was unknown during America's early days, U.S. leaders at the time considered the Mississippi to be the main river – and it has simply stayed that way ever since.



MISSISSIPPI



»» American Legend ««

Americans know the Mississippi as 'Old Man River'. It flows 2,248 miles (3,618 km) through flat land almost everywhere along its journey, and it's often hidden by high dikes on both banks. So what makes the Mississippi so special? For one thing, it divides America into two parts: east and west. No less than ten American states lie on its banks: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana and the state of Mississippi.

Additionally, the Mississippi has a glorious history. It was once considered the border to the wilderness, where hunters, adventurers and gunslingers dared to roam. Beyond it lay the grasslands of the prairie with its Native American tribes and millions of bison. As more and more American

settlers moved west, they drove out the native peoples and killed off herds of bison. They began to cultivate the land and created the 'bread basket' of the Midwest, whose corn and wheat fields help feed the nation to this day.

At a time when waterways were much quicker and more comfortable to travel on than the dusty and muddy trails for horses and coaches, the Mississippi was the most important transportation route into America's interior. It has long given up this role to railroads, highways and airplanes. However, huge barges are still steaming up and down the river. The legendary paddle steamers, which the famous writer Mark Twain worked on as a pilot, are only a sideshow nowadays, either as tourist boats or casino ferries.

ARKANSAS





Huckleberry Finn

is the name of the young runaway in Mark Twain's book, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He runs away from home on a raft with a black slave called Jim, and the two encounter one danger after another on the river. The novel helped make the Mississippi famous with children and adults all over the world.

Along the hot and humid southern banks of the Mississippi, **music** is in the air – music that has made a triumphal march right around the world. Jazz was born in New Orleans. Louis Armstrong with his trumpet and gravelly voice was its most famous performer. African-American plantation workers, such as Robert Johnson, brought sad blues songs into the bars of Clarksdale, Mississippi and West Memphis, Arkansas. In addition, the 'King of Rock and Roll', Elvis Presley, lived in Memphis, Tennessee.

St. Louis

was at one time a truly global city – an important starting and supply point for the conquest and settlement of the American West. 19th-century settlers travelled west from the city on ox carts using two main routes, the California and the Oregon Trails. In more recent times, St. Louis has become less important.

New Orleans

is the most fun-loving place in the USA. French immigrants founded the city in the delta of the Mississippi River's estuary, and their influence can still be seen in the town's French Quarter, with its world-famous culture and cooking. This zest for life and energy helped New Orleans survive Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which flooded large parts of the city and caused massive destruction.