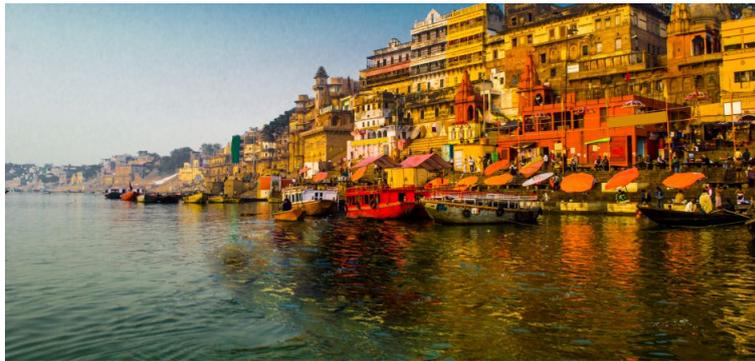


# The River Ganges



The Ganges is the longest river in India and the third largest in the world in terms of the amount of water it carries. It rises in the Himalayas and flows for fifteen hundred miles to the Bay of Bengal, where it empties into the sea, forming the largest river delta in the world. The waters of the river are provided by a combination of melting Himalayan snows between April and June, the hot season, and rains brought by monsoon winds between July and October, the monsoon season.

For the first hundred and fifty miles of its course, the Ganges flows rapidly through narrow Himalayan valleys. After this, it turns into a broad river, winding its way slowly across flat plains. The lands either side form one of the most fertile and densely-populated regions in the world, with numerous cities dotted along the riverbanks.

The Ganges is the most sacred river in the world to Hindus, being worshipped in the form of Ganga, the river goddess. Every section of the river as it flows through India and into Bangladesh is considered to be sacred.

Hindu pilgrims visit the Ganges, bathing in its waters, which are some of the most polluted in the world, in order to wash away their sins. Whilst

standing in the water, Hindus cup their hands, lift up the water and allow it to pour through their fingers back into the river, at the same time as worshipping either their ancestors or their gods.

Worshippers float flowers and lighted oil lamps on the surface of the river, as well as scattering the ashes of dead relatives into its waters. When pilgrims leave, they fill small containers with sacred river water which they use to help them worship back at home.

#### **Day 4 – Questions**

1. Where does the water in the Ganges come from?
2. How and why does the river change?
3. Who is the River sacred to? And why is it considered so sacred?
4. Why do you think the Ganges plain is so densely populated?
5. Why do Hindus bathe in the waters of the Ganges and what do they do as they bathe?
6. What might you see if you stood on the banks of the river?
7. What do the pilgrims take home with them? What do they do with this at home?