**Saint Lawrence River**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[Coordinates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system):

Click the blue globe to open an interactive map.

[49°30′N 64°30′W﻿ / ﻿49.5°N 64.5°W﻿ / 49.5; -64.5](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Saint_Lawrence_River&params=49_30_N_64_30_W_type:river_region:CA-ON)

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| --- |
| **Saint Lawrence River** |
| ***Fleuve Saint-Laurent*** |
| St. Lawrence River near [Alexandria Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria_Bay%2C_New_York) |
| **Countries** | [Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada), [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) |
| **State/Provinces** | [Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontario), [Quebec](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec), [New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York) |
|  |
|  |
| **Source** | [Lake Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Ontario) |
| - location | [Kingston, Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston%2C_Ontario) / [Cape Vincent, New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Vincent%2C_New_York) |
| - elevation | 74.7 m (245 ft) |
| - coordinates | [44°06′N 76°24′W﻿ / ﻿44.1°N 76.4°W﻿ / 44.1; -76.4](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Saint_Lawrence_River&params=44_06_N_76_24_W_type:river_region:CA-ON) |
| **Mouth** | [Gulf of Saint Lawrence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Saint_Lawrence) / [Atlantic Ocean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean) |
| - elevation | 0 m (0 ft) |
| - coordinates | [49°30′N 64°30′W﻿ / ﻿49.5°N 64.5°W﻿ / 49.5; -64.5](http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Saint_Lawrence_River&params=49_30_N_64_30_W_type:river_region:CA-ON) |
|  |
| **Length** | 1,197 km (744 mi) |
| **Basin** | 1,344,200 km2 (519,000 sq mi)  |
| **Discharge** | for below the [Saguenay River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saguenay_River) |
| - average | 16,800 m3/s (590,000 cu ft/s)  |
|  |
| Map of the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes Watershed |

The **Saint Lawrence** ([French](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language): *fleuve Saint-Laurent*; [Tuscarora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuscarora_language): *Kahnawáʼkye*; [Mohawk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohawk_language): *Kaniatarowanenneh*, meaning "big waterway") is a large [river](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River) flowing approximately from southwest to northeast in the middle latitudes of [North America](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_America), connecting the [Great Lakes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes) with the [Atlantic Ocean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean). It is the primary drainage conveyor of the [Great Lakes Basin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Lakes_Basin). The river traverses the [Canadian provinces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_and_territories_of_Canada) of [Quebec](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec) and [Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontario) and forms part of the [international boundary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canada_%E2%80%93_United_States_border) between Ontario and [New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York) in the [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States).

**Geography**

The Saint Lawrence River originates at the outflow of [Lake Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Ontario) between [Kingston, Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston%2C_Ontario), on the north bank, [Wolfe Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfe_Island_%28Ontario%29) in mid-stream, and [Cape Vincent, New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Vincent%2C_New_York). From there, it passes [Gananoque](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gananoque%2C_Ontario), [Brockville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brockville), [Ogdensburg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ogdensburg%2C_New_York), [Massena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massena_%28village%29%2C_New_York), [Cornwall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornwall%2C_Ontario), [Montreal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreal), [Trois-Rivières](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trois-Rivi%C3%A8res), and [Quebec City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_City) before draining into the [Gulf of Saint Lawrence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Saint_Lawrence), one of the largest [estuaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estuary) in the world. The estuary portion begins at the eastern tip of [Île d'Orléans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_d%27Orl%C3%A9ans), just downstream from Quebec City. The river becomes tidal in the vicinity of Quebec City.

Downstream from Quebec City, the St. Lawrence widens into a huge [estuary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estuary).

The river runs 3,058 [km](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilometre) (1,900 [mi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mile)) from the farthest headwater to the mouth and 1,197 km (743.8 mi) from the outflow of Lake Ontario. The farthest headwater is the [North River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_River_%28Minnesota%29) in the [Mesabi Range](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesabi_Range) at [Hibbing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hibbing), [Minnesota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota). Its drainage area, which includes the Great Lakes and hence the world's largest system of fresh water lakes, has a size of 1,344,200 km2 (519,000 sq mi), of which 839,200 km2 (324,000 sq mi) is in Canada and 505,000 km2 (195,000 sq mi) is in the United States. The basin covers parts of the provinces of Ontario and Quebec, and the states of [Illinois](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illinois), [Indiana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana), [Michigan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michigan), [Minnesota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota), [New York](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York), [Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio), [Pennsylvania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania), [Vermont](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermont), and [Wisconsin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wisconsin). The average discharge below the [Saguenay River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saguenay_River) is 16,800 m3/s (590,000 cu ft/s). At Quebec City, it is 12,101 m3/s (427,300 cu ft/s). The average discharge at the river's source, the outflow of Lake Ontario, is 7,410 m3/s (262,000 cu ft/s).

The river includes [Lake Saint-Louis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Saint-Louis) south of Montreal, [Lake Saint Francis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Saint_Francis_%28Canada%29) at [Salaberry-de-Valleyfield](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salaberry-de-Valleyfield) and [Lac Saint-Pierre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lac_Saint-Pierre) east of Montreal. It encompasses four [archipelagoes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archipelago): the [Thousand Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thousand_Islands) chain near [Kingston, Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingston%2C_Ontario); the [Hochelaga Archipelago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hochelaga_Archipelago), including the [Island of Montreal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Island_of_Montreal) and [Île Jésus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_J%C3%A9sus) ([Laval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laval%2C_Quebec)); the Lake St. Pierre Archipelago (Classified biosphere world reserve by the UNESCO in 2000) and the smaller [Mingan Archipelago](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mingan_Archipelago). Other islands include [Île d'Orléans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_d%27Orl%C3%A9ans) near Quebec City, and [Anticosti Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anticosti_Island) north of the [Gaspé](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gasp%C3%A9_Peninsula). It is the second longest river in Canada.

[Lake Champlain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Champlain) and the [Ottawa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottawa_River), [Richelieu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richelieu_River), [Saguenay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saguenay_River) and [Saint-François](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-Fran%C3%A7ois_River) rivers drain into the St. Lawrence.

The Saint Lawrence River is in a seismically active zone where [fault](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fault_%28geology%29) reactivation is believed to occur along late [Proterozoic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proterozoic) to early [Palaeozoic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palaeozoic) normal faults related to the opening of [Iapetus Ocean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iapetus_Ocean). The faults in the area are [rift](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rift) related, which is called the [Saint Lawrence rift system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Lawrence_rift_system).

The Saint Lawrence Valley is a [physiographic province](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physiographic_regions_of_the_world) of the larger [Appalachian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appalachian_Mountains) division, containing the [Champlain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champlain_Valley) and Northern physiographic section.

**History**

Though European mariners, such as [John Cabot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cabot) and [Alonso Sanchez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alonso_Sanchez) in the 15th Century and the [Norse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norse_colonization_of_the_Americas) 500 years still earlier, explored the Gulf of St. Lawrence the first European explorer known to have sailed up the St. Lawrence River itself was [Jacques Cartier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Cartier), during his second trip to Canada in 1535, with the help of Iroquoian chief Donnacona's two sons. As he arrived in the estuary on [St. Lawrence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence)'s feast day, Cartier accordingly named it the **Gulf of St. Lawrence**. The land along the river was inhabited at the time by the [St. Lawrence Iroquoians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence_Iroquoians). The St. Lawrence River is partly within the U.S. and as such is that country's sixth oldest surviving European place-name.

Map of 1543 showing Cartier's discoveries.

Until the early 17th century, the French used the name *Rivière du Canada* to designate the Saint Lawrence upstream to Montreal and the Ottawa River after Montreal. The Saint Lawrence River served as the main route for European exploration of the North American interior, first pioneered by French explorer [Samuel de Champlain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_de_Champlain).

Control of the river was crucial to [British strategy to capture New France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Britain_in_the_Seven_Years_War) in the [Seven Years' War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Years%27_War). Having [captured Louisbourg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Louisbourg_%281758%29) in 1758, the British sailed up to Quebec the following year thanks to charts drawn up by [James Cook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Cook). British troops were ferried via the St. Lawrence to attack the city from the west, which they successfully did at the [Battle of the Plains of Abraham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Plains_of_Abraham).

Because of the virtually impassable [Lachine Rapids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachine_Rapids), the St. Lawrence was once continuously navigable only as far as Montreal. Opened in 1825, the [Lachine Canal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachine_Canal) was the first to allow ships to pass the rapids. An extensive system of canals and locks, known as the [Saint Lawrence Seaway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Lawrence_Seaway), was officially opened on 26 June 1959 by [Queen Elizabeth II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Elizabeth_II) (representing Canada) and President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_D._Eisenhower) (representing the United States). The Seaway now permits ocean-going vessels to pass all the way to [Lake Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Superior).

During the [Second World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II), the [Battle of the St. Lawrence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_St._Lawrence) involved a number of submarine and anti-submarine actions throughout the lower St. Lawrence River and the entire [Gulf of Saint Lawrence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Saint_Lawrence), [Strait of Belle Isle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait_of_Belle_Isle) and [Cabot Strait](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cabot_Strait) from May to October 1942, September 1943, and again in October and November 1944. During this time, German [U-boats](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U-boat) sank a number of merchant marine ships and three Canadian warships.

In the late 1970s, the river was the subject of a successful ecological campaign (called "Save the River"), originally responding to planned development by the [United States Army Corps of Engineers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Corps_of_Engineers). The campaign was organized, among others, by [Abbie Hoffman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbie_Hoffman).

**Names**

The source of the North River in the [Mesabi Range](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesabi_Range) in [Minnesota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minnesota) (Seven Beaver Lake) is considered to be the source of the Saint Lawrence River. Because it crosses so many lakes, the water system frequently changes its name. From source to mouth, the names are:

* [North River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_River_%28Minnesota%29)
* [Saint Louis River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Louis_River)
* [Lake Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Superior)
* [Saint Marys River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Marys_River_%28Michigan-Ontario%29)
* [Lake Huron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Huron)
* [Saint Clair River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Clair_River)
* [Lake Saint Clair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Saint_Clair_%28North_America%29)
* [Detroit River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Detroit_River)
* [Lake Erie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Erie)
* [Niagara River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niagara_River)
* [Lake Ontario](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Ontario)
* [Thousand Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thousand_Islands)
* Saint Lawrence River

The Saint Lawrence also passes through [Lake Saint-Louis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Saint-Louis) and [Lac Saint-Pierre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lac_Saint-Pierre) in Quebec.

Saint Lawrence River between [Quebec City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quebec_City) (seen at left) and [Lévis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%A9vis) (seen at right). The [Île d'Orléans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%8Ele_d%27Orl%C3%A9ans) appears further in the center.

**Works**

The St. Lawrence River is at the heart of many Quebec novels ([Anne Hébert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_H%C3%A9bert)'s [Kamouraska](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamouraska_%28novel%29), [Réjean Ducharme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9jean_Ducharme)'s [L'avalée des avalés](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=L%27aval%C3%A9e_des_aval%C3%A9s&action=edit&redlink=1)), poems (in works of [Pierre Morency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Morency), [Bernard Pozier](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bernard_Pozier&action=edit&redlink=1)), and songs ([Leonard Cohen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Cohen)'s [*Suzanne*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzanne_%28Leonard_Cohen_song%29), Michel Rivard's *L'oubli*, [Joe Dassin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Dassin)'s *Dans les yeux d'Emilie*), and [Andre Gagnon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andre_Gagnon)'s *Le Saint-Laurent*). The river has also been portrayed in paintings, notably by the [Group of Seven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_of_Seven_%28artists%29). In addition, the river is the namesake of [Saint-Laurent Herald](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint-Laurent_Herald) at the [Canadian Heraldic Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Heraldic_Authority).

In 1980, [Jacques Cousteau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Cousteau) traveled to Canada to make two films on the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes, *Cries from the Deep* and *St. Lawrence: Stairway to the Sea*.

**See also**

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| * [NEPCO 140 Oil Spill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NEPCO_140_Oil_Spill)
* [Boldt Castle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boldt_Castle)
* [Grindstone Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grindstone_Island)
* [Jorstadt Castle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jorstadt_Castle)
* [Wellesley Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellesley_Island)
* [List of longest rivers of the United States (by main stem)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_longest_rivers_of_the_United_States_%28by_main_stem%29)
* [List of longest rivers of Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_longest_rivers_of_Canada)
* [List of Quebec rivers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Quebec_rivers#Saint_Lawrence_River.2FGulf_of_Saint_Lawrence_watershed)
* [List of Ontario rivers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Ontario_rivers#Atlantic_Ocean_watershed)
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|  | [***Geography of Canada portal***](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal%3AGeography_of_Canada) |

* [List of New York rivers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_York_rivers#St._Lawrence_River_Basin)
* [List of crossings of the Saint Lawrence River](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_crossings_of_the_Saint_Lawrence_River)
* [Lac Saint-Pierre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lac_Saint-Pierre)
* [Lachine Rapids](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lachine_Rapids)
* [RMS *Empress of Ireland*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Empress_of_Ireland_%281906%29)
* [Saint Lawrence Seaway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Lawrence_Seaway)
* [Steamboats in Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steamboats_in_Canada)
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