



National Geographic, regional partners launch comprehensive website on Mississippi River geotourism

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Travel website and mapguide to connect global and domestic tourists to cultural, historic and natural assets of Mississippi River

ALTON — Local community leaders, regional and state tourism managers, federal partners, and Mississippi River businesses and residents today launched the Mississippi River Geotourism MapGuide website in partnership with National Geographic Maps.

The landmark project has taken two and a half years to plan and execute and it is a historically significant digital asset for everyone who visits or lives in the 10 states along the Mississippi River.

The Geotourism MapGuide highlights the unique and authentic landscapes and resilient people of the Mississippi River that is the lifeblood of the economies along its banks and a unique melting pot of experiences not found anywhere else in the United States or across the world. It is designed to showcase to national and international audiences the diverse natural, cultural and historic attractions that define the many communities along the Mississippi River.

“National Geographic is pleased to have the opportunity to spotlight this fascinating and diverse region and, in doing so, support and sustain it as one of the prized places on the globe,” said Frank Biasi, director of digital development and travel programs for National Geographic Maps. “The website celebrates the Mississippi River’s abundant natural, cultural and historical attributes from the unique vantage point of those who live there, providing travelers a unique insiders guide to the region.”

From New Orleans and Natchez in the River’s Delta region to Lake Itasca, Minnesota, at the headwaters, locals submitted nearly 2,000 nominations of their favorite points of interest; historic, cultural and natural landmarks; events and local festivals; music experiences; artisans and attractions, which capture the region’s unique character, heritage and beauty. The website may be viewed and used to plan trips at mississippiriver.natgeotourism.com. Residents and visitors alike may continue to nominate new sites, events and special places to the website, which will be dynamic and constantly growing.

The Mississippi River Geotourism MapGuide:

- Is one of only 20 Geotourism MapGuide websites worldwide to date;
- Showcases more than 1,300 sites and travel experiences nominated by locals;
- Is a resource designed to improve local, rural economic development;
- Provides access to a niche national market of 65 million “geotravelers”;
- Will grow with the ongoing addition of hundreds of more sites and events over the years;
- Highlights the resources and unique geotourism assets of the Mississippi River region that stretches from the headwaters in Minnesota to the mouth of the River in Louisiana; and
- Provides a long-term resource for promoting the communities, nature and culture along the Mississippi River to the nation and the world.

National Geographic's acclaimed mapmaking and sustainable tourism expertise helped produce the MapGuide with the Mississippi River Connections Collaborative, a partnership between the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Delta Regional Authority, the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, Mississippi River Trail, state agencies and regional organizations. Funding for the project was provided by the Delta Regional Authority, a federal-state partnership that invests in the economic and community development of the Mississippi River Delta and Alabama Black Belt region, and private donors who recognize the importance of preserving and promoting the Mississippi River and its unique natural and cultural heritage.

"The Mississippi River flows through the heart of our country and enriches so many communities, including the one in which I grew up. I am pleased that the collaborative has come together to share all the greatness of this natural and cultural resource," said Michael Bean, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for fish and wildlife and parks at the U.S. Department of Interior.

"The Mississippi River is the lifeblood and economic driver for the many communities that exist along its banks and derive their culture and history from the river. Investing in geotourism and strengthening the numerous activities and businesses that make the Delta region so unique are important strategies for economic development and regional growth to keep our communities vibrant and successful. This website will further brand the Mississippi River and the Delta region as a great place to visit and also to live and work," said Chris Masingill, federal co-chairman of the Delta Regional Authority.

"For more than 75 years, we have proudly shared the cultural, historical and natural assets of the Mississippi River region with travelers from across the country and the world, and we are thrilled to partner with these national, regional and local organizations to help spread our message even further," said Karl Samp, pilot of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, which oversees the 10-state Great River Road National Scenic Byway.

The city of Natchez, Mississippi, which hosted the launch event, is currently celebrating its tricentennial this year and is a great example of the region's sense of place and the historic and cultural experiences that are available to those traveling along the Mississippi River.

National Geographic has worked with community-based alliances to develop similar Geotourism MapGuides in other regions around the world including Greater Yellowstone (Wyoming, Montana and Idaho), Crown of the Continent (Montana, Alberta and British Columbia), Scenic, Wild Delaware River (Pennsylvania, New York,

New Jersey), Mississippi River (counties along the river from Minnesota to Louisiana), Sedona Verde Valley (Arizona), US Gulf Coast States (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida), Heart of the Continent (Minnesota, Ontario), Sierra Nevada (California), Lakes to Locks Passage (New York, Quebec), East Tennessee River Valley (Tennessee), Four Corners (Colorado, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico), Bahamas, Eastern Sri Lanka, Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), Tequila Mexico, Caribbean Honduras, and Caribbean Colombia (San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina islands). For more information about the MapGuide program visit nationalgeographic.com/geotourism

National Geographic Maps was established as the first division of National Geographic Society in 1915 and has been producing maps for National Geographic magazine, custom clients and retail outlets for over a century. National Geographic Maps publishes the world's largest collection of wall maps, travel maps, outdoor recreation maps, atlases and globes. For more information on National Geographic Maps, visit www.natgeomaps.com