The Great River Road... National Scenic Byway of the Mississippi River

The Great River Road in Minnesota travels 545 miles following the legendary Mississippi River on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. It is a network of roadways that offers a bounty of river experience, from the pristine Mississippi headwaters in Itasca State Park through lush forest and the central lakes region, rich farmland and the metropolitan battle of the Twin Cities, to the awe-inspiring bluffs in southeastern Minnesota.

Nature lovers will find ample opportunity to view wildlife along the byway and unique geological features throughout the 11 Great River Road State Parks and numerous scenic areas that border its course. Visit interpretive centers and historic sites to learn about the history and ecology of the state and the role of the mighty river. Take a hike on a woodland trail, float down river in a steamboat or canoe, bike the Mississippi River Trail or catch breathtaking views from the Mississippi bluffs, all while pausing at one of America’s favorite pastimes: The Pleasure Drive.

As you navigate the Great River Road, look for the green pilot’s wheel logo with the steamboat in the center. Like the Mississippi River, the Great River Road has many twists and turns.

Catch the Sensation of each Destination

Six distinct regions or destination areas—with unique travel experiences have been identified along the Minnesota Great River Road. "anchored" on either end by larger cities that offer a variety of lodging, dining, entertainment and transportation options. The “destination area” concept for the byway is designed to help travelers navigate shorter, more focused trips. For the adventurous traveler, with a week or more to travel, the wonders of the entire byway await! The destination area descriptions that follow to create the Mississippi River experience that’s just right for you. Enjoy the ride!

Mississippi Headwaters
Itasca State Park to Bemidji
(Approx. 30 miles)

Come to loop the 15 stones that cross the humble source of the awesome Mississippi River, one of the world’s greatest and longest waterways. Stay to experience the forested wonders of Itasca State Park—Minnesota’s first, established in 1891 to conserve its giant pines from logging. Head north to Bemidji, “first city on the Mississippi,” where you won’t want to miss a photo opportunity with legendary lumberjack Paul Bunyan and his faithful friend, Babe the Blue Ox. Home of Bemidji State University and the famous Concordia Language Villages, Bemidji also offers fine shopping, dining and theater. Lake Bemidji offers lovely views and recreation for all seasons. Great River Road State Parks: Itasca State Park Lake Bemidji State Park, Bemidji State Forests: Mississippi Headwaters State Forest Paul Bunyan State Forest Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers: Headwaters of the Mississippi River, Itasca State Park Jacob V. Brower Visitor Center, Itasca State Park Mary Gibbs Mississippi Headwaters Center, Itasca State Park Fireplace of States, Bemidji Beltrami County History Center/James J. Hill Depot National Great River Road Interpretive Center Destination Area Highlights: Antiquing Shopping Bemidji Woolen Mills Factory Camping Dorothy’s Art Walk, Bemidji Historic Landmark Statue of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, Bemidji Lake Country Scenic Byway, Park Rapids Northern Continental Divide. Lake Jula (15 miles north of Bemidji) Resort Vacationing & Fishing (400 fishing lakes within 25 mile radius of Bemidji) Towering Pines at Preacher’s Grove in Itasca State Park Veterans’ Memorial, Bemidji Wilderness Drive—Scenic Driving, Biking or Hiking Path Within Itasca State Park Wildlife Watching

Mississippi Northwoods
Bemidji to Grand Rapids
(Approx. 95 miles)

Three of Minnesota’s largest lakes are located along this stretch of the Great River Road, Cass, Leech and Winnibigoshish. The Mississippi actually flows through the heart of Cass and Winnibigoshish and 666,000 acres of forest within the surrounding Chippewa National Forest. The Cass Lake Chain of Lakes was part of the famous Concordia Language Villages, Bemidji also offers fine shopping, dining and theater. Lake Bemidji offers lovely views and recreation for all seasons. Great River Road State Parks: Itasca State Park Lake Bemidji State Park, Bemidji State Forests: Mississippi Headwaters State Forest Paul Bunyan State Forest Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers: Headwaters of the Mississippi River, Itasca State Park Jacob V. Brower Visitor Center, Itasca State Park Mary Gibbs Mississippi Headwaters Center, Itasca State Park Fireplace of States, Bemidji Beltrami County History Center/James J. Hill Depot National Great River Road Interpretive Center Destination Area Highlights: Antiquing Shopping Bemidji Woolen Mills Factory Camping Dorothy’s Art Walk, Bemidji Historic Landmark Statue of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, Bemidji Lake Country Scenic Byway, Park Rapids Northern Continental Divide. Lake Jula (15 miles north of Bemidji) Resort Vacationing & Fishing (400 fishing lakes within 25 mile radius of Bemidji) Towering Pines at Preacher’s Grove in Itasca State Park Veterans’ Memorial, Bemidji Wilderness Drive—Scenic Driving, Biking or Hiking Path Within Itasca State Park Wildlife Watching

For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com
**Mississippi Bluffs**

**Hastings to the Iowa Border** (Approx. 140 miles)

The Mississippi Bluffs destination area is dotted with charming river towns, replete with historic mansions and marked with river vistas. Plan a delightful day trip or a relaxing weekend getaway. Come to shop for antiques, woolens, pottery and more. Come to picnic and enjoy a concert along the Mississippi. Come to experience the river by boat. Cozy up in a quiet bed & breakfast. Get out and enjoy the many recreational opportunities this region offers: fishing, boating, biking or hiking. Bask in the beauty of the unspoiled river experience. Parks and gardens, complete with fountains and fountains, dot the riverbanks and surrounding area. The Great River Road is the main street district, offering architectural beauty and a variety of shopping and dining experiences for travelers.

**Great River Road State Parks:**
- Frontenac State Park, Frontenac
- Great River Bluffs State Park, south of Winona
- Great River Bluffs State Park, north of Winona

**Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers:**
- Bunnell House, Winona
- Goodhue County Museum, Red Wing
- Le Sueur Historic Estate, Hastings
- Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona
- National Eagle Center, Wabasha
- Olaf Frontenac, Frontenac
- Pickwick Mill, Winona
- Polish Cultural Institute, Winona
- Wabasha County Museum, Reads Landing
- Watkins Heritage Center, Winona
- Winona County Historical Museum, Winona
- Winona Historic Downtown Hastings

**National Great River Road Interpretive Center**

**Destination Area Highlights:**
- Apple Orchards, La Crescent
- Birster Points: Prominent Eagle Watching Area
- Falls, Hope & Charity Bluffs, between Wabasha & Winona
- Corn Hill Heights Park, Winona
- Historic Downtown Hastings
- Historic St. James Hotel, Red Wing
- Lake Pepin Marina, Lake City
- Lark Toy Company, Kellogg
- Levee & Jaycees Park, Hastings
- Levee Park & Milwaukee Isthmus, Red Wing
- Mississippi River Lock & Dam #2, upstream of Hastings

**For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com**

---

**Mississippi Crossings**

**Grand Rapids to Little Falls** (Approx. 145 miles)

The Mississippi Crossings area of the Great River Road is named for its history as a crossroads of transportation by river, rail and road; first for the voyageurs and fur traders, then the loggers, and today, for the thousands of vacationers that flock to this region each summer. The river was the main highway of the Native peoples of Minnesota and later served as a major transportation route for the booming fur trade and logging economies during the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, many of the 25 steamboat landings once located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation flourished in the early 1870s when access to the Mississippi was established by rail from Duluth. Both Atkin and Brainerd served as Northern Pacific Railroad sites. Between Atkin and Brainerd, just south of the Mississippi, lies the Cuyuna Iron Range, which produced over 100 million tons of high-manganese ore during WWI and WWII. From humble beginnings, area farmers, former loggers and railroad employees who owned good lake sites throughout the area in the early 1900s, created what was to become the booming lake resort communities of today. Providing good home-cooked meals and a piece of land to pitch a tent, these early “resorters” treated guests to a true wilderness experience. Today, visitors still enjoy the local hospitality, fishing, swimming, boating and now golfing, that are plentiful and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites. Commerce in river transportation located between Aitkin and Grand Rapids are water access and camping sites.

**Great River Road State Parks:**
- Charles A. Lindbergh State Park, Little Falls
- Crow Wing State Park, Brainerd
- Savanna Portage State Park, north of Palisade

**Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers:**
- Crow Wing County Historical Society Museum, Brainerd
- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley
- Northern Pacific Depot, Aitkin

**For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com**

---

**Metro Mississippi**

**Elk River to Hastings** (Approx. 75 miles)

From the serene north woods, the Mississippi meanders its way into the heart of the bustling metro area of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Here, amidst fine dining, an outstanding theater scene, museums of all varieties, and world-class shopping, the 72 miles of Mississippi riverfront have been designated a National River and Recreation Area by the National Park Service, offering 54,000 acres of parks; open space and historic sites along the river. Visit this Great River Road destination area for a big-city experience, but also to be inspired by nature on the fringe of commerce. Learn how the Mississippi River played a role in the creation of this tale of two cities.

**Great River Road State Park:**
- Fort Snelling State Park, St. Paul

**Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers:**
- Alexander Ramsey House, St. Paul
- Arl Guthrie House, Minneapolis
- Carl Koenen Interpretive Center, Minneapolis

**National Great River Road Interpretive Centers**
- Historic Fort Snelling, St. Paul
- James J. Hill House, St. Paul
- Minnesota Marine Art Museum, Winona
- Minnesota History Center, St. Paul
- National Park Service – Minnesota National River & Recreation Area Visitor Center, St. Paul
- Oliver H. Kelley Farm, Elk River
- Science Museum of Minnesota Mississippi River Gallery, St. Paul
- Sidney House, St. Paul
- St. Anthony Falls Heritage Trail / Stone Arch Bridge, Minneapolis
- National Great River Road Interpretive Centers

**Destination Area Highlights:**
- Boom Island, Minneapolis Riverfront
- Cathedral of St. Paul, St. Paul
- Coon Rapids Dam Regional Park, Coon Rapids
- Downtown Shopping, Dining & Entertainment, Minneapolis & St. Paul
- Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis Riverfront
- Grand Rounds National Scenic Byway, Minneapolis
- Harriet Island, St. Paul Riverfront

**For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com**

---

**Scenic Mississippi**

**Little Falls to Elk River** (Approx. 560 miles)

The Scenic Mississippi Destination Area offers visitors an unspoiled river experience. Parks and gardens, complete with fountains and fountains, dot the riverbanks and surrounding area in the region. Both Little Falls and St. Cloud boast historic main street districts, offering architectural beauty and a variety of shopping and dining experiences for travelers. Little Falls gained international fame as home to Charles Lindbergh, pilot of the first solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean. As its names implies, Little Falls was once the location of a natural waterfall on the river.

Today, visitors find both a serene and exciting experience as they watch the water pass at the gates of a dam—first built at the falls site in the mid-1800s—then force its way through the man-made chutes, bubbling and spraying as it tumbles to the bed of slate below. Home to many businesses and St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud offers travelers a wide range of amenities and entertainment including the riverside Clemens and Munsinger Gardens. Travelling onward to Elk River, the Mississippi winds through lush farm and open prairie land as it journeys through Monticello and into Elk River on the northwestern fringe of the Twin Cities metropolitan area.

**Great River Road State Parks:**
- Charles A. Lindbergh State Park, Little Falls
- Lake Maria State Park, Monticello

**Historic Sites & Interpretive Centers:**
- Charles A. Lindbergh Historic Site, Little Falls
- Charles A. Lindbergh Memorial Museum, Little Falls
- The Stearns History Museum, St. Cloud

**National Great River Road Interpretive Center**

**Destination Area Highlights:**
- Antique & Craft Shopping
- Clemens & Munsinger Gardens, St. Cloud
- Hiking, Biking, Birding & Camping
- Minnesota Fishing Museum, Little Falls
- Mississippi River Dam, Little Falls
- River Fishing and Canoeing

**For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com**

---

**For directions go to www.MnMississippiRiver.com**