

Why do people settle by rivers?

Since people began living together in civilised societies, settlements next to rivers have been popular for many reasons.

Fresh water

Fresh water is important for daily living. People need fresh water to drink, and to wash their bodies and clothes. The fresh water also attracts animals, such as fish and birds, which people can catch or hunt for food.



Farming

The soil next to rivers is rich and fertile, making the land perfect for farming. Crops can be grown in the floodplains next to rivers, which can be harvested and used for food or other purposes.



Industry

Water-powered machines use the flow of rivers to help power factories so they can make goods. Waterwheels were commonly used during the 18th and 19th centuries to mill flour and grind wood into pulp.



Trade

Rivers can be used as a route to travel to other settlements for trade. Boats can carry goods up and down rivers to where they are needed.

Defence

Settlements built next to rivers have added protection. A wide, deep river is better than a wooden wall for keeping invaders out, which makes defending a settlement easier. Iron Age hill forts and medieval castles were built next to rivers for this reason.

