

ABOUT ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia-land of endless mysteries

Ethiopia is truly a land of contrasts and extremes; a land of remote and wild places. Some of the highest and most stunning places on the African continent are found here, such as the jaggedly carved Simien Mountains, one of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites - and some of the lowest, such as the hot but fascinating Danakil Depression, with its sulphur fumaroles and lunar-like landscape. Ethiopia is old; old beyond all imaginations. As Abyssinia, its culture and traditions date back over 3,000 years. And far earlier than that lived "Lucy" or Dinkenes, meaning 'thoughts are wonderful', as she is known to the Ethiopians, whose remains were found in a corner of this country of mystery and contrasts.

Many people visit Ethiopia - or hope to do so one day - because of the remarkable manner in which ancient historical traditions have been preserved. And, indeed, the ceremonies and rituals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church open a window on the authentic world of the Old Testament. In no other country is it possible to find yourself so dramatically transported back in time or to participate with such freedom in the sacred rituals of an archaic faith.

That According to Washington Post's David Brown put it, "the new research further shows genetic diversity declines readily the farther one's ancestors travelled from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia". (1) Lucy, discovered in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia's Afar region, is considered the world's second oldest, but most complete, and best-preserved adult Australopithecine fossil. Lucy's species is named *Australopithecus afarensis*, which means 'southern ape of Afar', after the Ethiopian region where the discovery was made. Lucy is estimated to have lived in Ethiopia 3.2 million years ago.

History

Ethiopia, the oldest independent nation in Africa, has a heritage dating back to the first century AD. Traders from Greece, Rome, Persia and Egypt knew of the riches of what is now Ethiopia, and by the first century AD, Axum was the capital of a great empire.

This realm became one of the first Christian lands of Africa. Late in the 10th Century, Axum declined and a new Zagwe dynasty, centered in what is now Lalibela, ruled the land.

Ethiopia has a proud and long history extending to the known beginnings of human kind. The Axumite kingdom was one of the great civilizations of the ancient world and has left behind the mystery of the great Stelae found at Axum. In the late middle Ages great religious civilizations flourished in many parts of the country, particularly at Lalibela where churches hand carved out of massive monolithic red rock testify not only to great

faith but also to great architectural skills. And in the former capital of Gondar many significant castles speak of the same.

Culture

Ethiopia, an old country beyond all imaginations, has culture and traditions dating back over 3000 years. With over 80 different Ethnic groups with their own language, culture and traditions. The strong religious setting, celebrations and festivals play an important part in every ones daily life. Church ceremonies are a major feature of Ethiopian life.

The events are impressive and unique. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has its own head, follows its own customs, and is extremely proud of its fourth century origins.

The Lower Omo is home to a remarkable mix of small, contrasting ethnic groups not only the Bume and Konso, but also the Gelebe, the Bodi, the Mursi, the Surma, the Arbore, and the Hamar, to name but a few. Lifestyles are as varied as the tribes themselves. Lacking any material, culture and artifacts common to other cultures, these tribes find unique ways in which to express their artistic impulses. Both the Surma and the Karo, for example, are experts at body painting, using clays and locally available vegetable pigments to trace fantastic patterns on each other's faces, chests, arms, and legs. These designs are created purely for fun and aesthetic effect, each artist vying to outdo his fellows.

Nature

Ethiopia is well endowed with a wide variety of experiences in natural spheres to explore. The country boasts some of the world's most breathtaking scenery, and features an extraordinary variety of wildlife species, as well as a spectacular variety of plants.

Ethiopia is truly a tourist paradise- beautiful, secretive, mysterious and extraordinary. With diverse landscape, fauna & flora, and welcoming people, it offers nature tourism. Ethiopia enjoys an amazing scenic beauty. It is rich in mountains, rivers, lakes, wildlife, plants, birds, water falls including the famous Blue Nile Falls, and many more. The country has nine national parks and 36 game reserve areas. For instance, the Semien and Bale mountains are the most spectacular and magnificent adventure sites.

Ethiopia is a land of rugged mountains (some are over 4000 meters high) broad savannah, lakes and rivers. The unique Rift Valley is a remarkable region of volcanic lakes, with their famous collections of birdlife, great escarpments and stunning vistas. Tisisat, the Blue Nile falls, must rank as one of the greatest natural spectacles in Africa today. With 14 major wildlife reserves, Ethiopia provides a microcosm of the entire sub-Saharan eco-system. Birdlife abounds and indigenous animals from the rare Walia Ibex to the shy wild ass roam free just as nature intended. Ethiopia, after the rains, is a land

decked with flowers and with many more native plants than most countries in Africa. Among the many natural tourist attractions, only the principal ones are briefly given below.

The Simien Mountains

This is a vast highland plateau with altitudes ranging between 1900m and 4543 at its peak, Ras-Dejen. It is located 850km from Addis Abeba and 130 km from Gondar, the gateway to the park being the town of Debark.

The dramatic scenery of gigantic cliffs, towering battlements of flat-topped ambas, dog-tooth towers and great escarpments is a scenic wonder. A haven to many endemic species of wildlife and flora, including the Gelada baboon and Walia Ibex, the Simien National Park has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1978.





Flora

A botanical marvel with some unique indigenous species, you will enjoy

- Giant lobelia (*lobelia Rhynchpetalum*)
- Red hot poker (*Knifolia foliosa*)
- Meskel flower (*Biden macro petra*)
- St John's Wort (*Hypericum quertinium*)
- Giant heather (*Erica arborea*)
- Juniper procera (*lustanica*)
- Abyssinian wild rose
- and hundreds of other species of flowering plants and shrubs

On the Wildlife side there's:

- Walia ibex (*Capra walie*)
- Ethiopian wolf (*Cannis simensis*)
- Gelada baboon (*Theropithecus gelada*)
- Antelope
- Duicker
- Spotted hyena
- Mnilick bushback
- Colobus monkey
- and many more

Major Sites



The Main Attractions In Northern Part of Ethiopia BAHIR DAR

is located on the southern shores of Lake Tana from where excursions by boat can be made to the lake's islands and peninsulas and to the "Tissisat Falls", (the most spectacular waterfalls of the country). The fascinating Blue Nile Falls are situated 35 km southeast of Bahar Dar. The Blue Nile draws its strength from the large reservoir, Lake Tana. Set at 1,830 m. above sea level. The lake includes more than 30 islands and peninsulas, most of which shield ancient monasteries, decorated with wonderful wall paintings from the 12th to the 20th century.

GONDAR

surrounded by the lower hills of the Southern Semien Mountains, lies at 2,200 m. above sea level. "The City of the Castles" is one of Ethiopia's most fascinating cities, founded by Emperor Fasilidas in 1632. At this time, Gondar became the royal capital city of the country in subsequent years; several castles were built, each unique in size and architecture. Gondar is a city rich in fabulous history and ancient monuments. For many centuries it was the center of fine arts, music, science, religion, commerce and administration. The most interesting church of Gondar is "Debre Berehan Selassie". This Trinity-Church is built in a rectangular shape, its ceilings are decorated with beautiful winged angels, and its walls with impressive scenes depicting biblical events



LALIBELA

set at 2,600 m. above sea level in the rugged mountains in the northern end of Wollo, is the most exciting attraction of the country. From here the Zagwe Dynasty ruled the country for several centuries. Formerly known as Roha, the town of Lalibela bears the name of its most famous king: "Lalibela" (1181-1221 AC). He was the one who gave orders to carve the churches out of solid rock. There are in total 11 amazing churches, some of which are monolithic, architecturally unique buildings, finely carved, some decorated with beautiful paintings. There is nothing that could be more attractive than the fascinating and impressive churches with their ancient architecture and carvings. The churches of Lalibela are considered to be the Eighth Wonder of the World...

AXUM

is one of the most important archaeological sites of Ethiopia. It is well known for its ruins of the palace of the legendary Queen of Sheba who reigned around 1000 BC. The greatest mystery of all, however, is that the son of the Queen of Sheba, Menelik I, first king of the Solomonic Dynasty, brought with him the Ark of the Covenant from the Temple of Jerusalem to Axum. The Ark of the Covenant is believed still to be kept in the Church of St. Mary of Zion erected on the original location of the oldest church of Ethiopia. The Axumite Kingdom's conversion to Christianity in the 4th century makes Ethiopia, after Armenia and Georgia, the third oldest Christian country. The site of the country's most ancient city shields and shelters a great number of priceless relics. Other ancient sites are the 3,000 years old stelae, (some are even much older), which are made from single blocks of granite carved to represent multistory houses.

Afar Denakile Depression



Afar Denakile Depression There is very little rain. The Danakil Depression in Afar is one of the driest on the planet. And the hottest. The average temperature is 34-35C. And much of it is below sea level dipping to 116m below. So why go?

This area of desert and volcanic activity is the last place on earth anyone would want to live. But just to visit, people are in awe of the wonderful and strange geology that gives this area its allure.

The Danakil is ground zero for tectonic activity in Africa, a junction where the African, Arabian, and Somali plates merge. One-quarter of Africa's active and dormant volcanoes are found here. The Erta Ale volcano range, which consists of seven active peaks is the most visited, and the Erta Ale peak is the most active volcano in Africa. It has been in a state of continuous eruption for more than 40 years and has a permanent lava lake.



Its low-lying areas were once fully submerged by an inland ocean. Lakes Asale and AfDera are what remain and the Afar people make a living slicing up the surface salt from dry lake beds. Camel caravans then transport the salt blocks to market in Mekelle and beyond.

Travelers make camp at Ahamedilla, the provincial capital of the Afar. Security in the area is tight. Groups travel in the Danakil Depression with a guide and one or two security officers. And in Ahamedilla, the Ethiopia military has a small base. The area near the border with Eritrea was considered dangerous during the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia and several years ago a British couple were kidnapped and later released. There have not been further incidences, but unlike the rest of Ethiopia which is very safe, you must exercise precaution in the Danakil.

Bird Watching In Ethiopia



No other aspect of Ethiopians biology typifies its unique situation more than does its bird fauna. Ethiopians position, an extensive highland-island surrounded by arid lands, has enabled the evolution of many birds in the region into unique forms and species, Ethiopia hosts 862 known bird species, of which 23 are considered Endemic, limited within the confines of the Ethiopian borders. Ethiopia benefits from the incredible variety and abundance of African bird life as well as the presence of species which have migrated from Europe.

Broadly speaking Ethiopia can be divided into a number of habitats with respect to bird life the Rift Valley lakes, the highland massifs, the lowlands, and the arid semi- deserts. Each of these is in turn a complex mosaic of terrain, soils, vegetation, and human use, all of which govern the avifauna found there.

Many of the endemic species present on the western and south- eastern highland plateau are common and surprisingly easy to see, even in the environs of a city. Endemic species include

the Heavy- Headed Thick- Billed Raven the Wattled Ibis, with its raucous call and unsightly habit of clasping its partners wattles and pulling ; the Black- Winged Lovebird , which whirrs through the sky like a miniature helicopter; and the White- Collared Pigeon, a delicate-gray bird with a neat white collar and white wing patches. Songs of the forests



The highland forests are home to birds less easily seen. Their song is usually the first sign of their presence. The Abyssinian Catbird has one of the most beautiful calls, the male and female performing a duet in the seclusion of thick bush. The Black- Headed Forest Oriole has a distinctive call and its yellow color shows clearly in the upper storey of the tall trees it favors. Two endemics are found in the southern edge of the plateau, in the Yabello area. These are the White- Tailed Swallow, and the colorful Prince Ruspolis Turaco. The last is on the endangered species list.

When to come to Ethiopia

- **This can depend on where you are going. In most of the country, the main rainy season runs from June to the end of September, with short rains in March.**
- **In the Omo and Mago parks however, in Southern Ethiopia, the seasons are different with the main rains from March to June and shorter rains in November.**
- **With the upgrading of the airports along the historic route (Axum, Lalibela, Gondar and Bahir Dar), it is now possible to visit the north even in the rainy Season.**
- **For travelers who do not mind waiting out a downpour (usually followed by brilliant sunshine) there are certain rewards-a green countryside full of crops and flowers and the sites largely to your selves.**

Climate and Clothing

- **Because of elevation, temperature rarely exceed 25c in most of the country, although in some of the lower lying areas (Awash, Omo and Mago parks) it can get considerably hotter.**

- Pack light clothes for the daytime and jacket or sweater for the evenings, and a good pair of walking shoes even if you are not going trekking-path ways around historic sites is usually uneven and stony.
- Trekkers in the Simian and Bale Mountains will need warm clothes, waterproofs and 3-4 season's sleeping bags.
- *A cultural note:* Ethiopians are generally modest dressers and visitors should be sensitive about going underdressed into places of worship. Shoes must always be removed before entering churches and mosques-for getting around sites like Lalibela with its many churches airline socks are very useful.

Health and Medical

- All visitors should be in possession of valid yellow fever vaccination certificate. Immunization for Hepatitis A and B, Typhoid and Polio is recommended.
- Malaria: in many sites malaria is not a problem because of the elevation - this is true of Axum, Gondar and Lalibela for example, but it can occur in Bahir Dar at the end of the rainy season and after unseasonable rains. Chloroquine resistant strains have been identified in some areas so you should consult your doctor about the prescription. Alternatively, you can keep mosquitoes and other insects at bay with repellent creams and sprays. (Climatic changes and phenomena such as el-Nino has meant the appearance of Malaria at unseasonable times, and its spread to areas previously malaria free)
- Visitors should take a simple first aid pack, which would include: different size plasters, antiseptic cream, anti-histamine cream and/or tablets for insect bites, sun barrier cream (while temperatures are moderate the sun is strong) and anti diarrhea tablets such as Imodium for emergencies (they will not cure the problem but will control the symptoms). Generally, visitors should take out standard holiday health insurance in their home countries.
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