

**Tour Name** Omo River Cultural Expedition  
**Arrival P/U** Bole Airport, Addis Ababa  
**Departure D/O** Bole Airport, Addis Ababa

### Itinerary at a glance

Day	Location	Accommodation	MealPlan
1	Omo River Valley	Omo River Valley Fly Camp	DBBL
2	Omo River Valley	Omo River Valley Fly Camp	DBBL
3	Omo River Valley	Omo River Valley Fly Camp	DBBL
4	Turmi	Buska Lodge	DBBL
5	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	Sheraton Hotel	LDBB

L-Lunch, D-Dinner, BB-Bed and breakfast, LDBB-Lunch, dinner, bed and breakfast. Game drives & activities at the discretion of guide.

### Day by Day Itinerary

#### Day 1 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Omo River Valley

A two hour private charter flight to the remote tribal lands of the south. We land at Murulle on the banks of the Omo River. From here it is a one hour boat ride to the Kara settlement of Dus and our camp for the next few days.

**Omo River Valley Fly Camp DBBL**

#### Day 2 Omo River Valley

Full day on the banks of the Omo River, visiting nearby Kara (or Karo) and Nyangatom (or Bume) villages. The Omo is nothing less than the last great tribal land left in the world today, a real kaleidoscope of vanishing cultures.

**Omo River Valley Fly Camp DBBL**

#### Day 3 Omo River Valley

Full day on the banks of the Omo River, visiting nearby Kara (or Karo) and Nyangatom (or Bume) villages. The Omo is nothing less than the last great tribal land left in the world today, a real kaleidoscope of vanishing cultures.

**Omo River Valley Fly Camp DBBL**

#### Day 4 Omo River Valley - Turmi and The Buska Mountains

It's a half day drive along difficult roads from the Omo River to the edge of the Buska Mountains and the market town of Turmi. We will stop enroute to visit nearby Hamar settlements.

**Buska Lodge-Standard room DBBL**

#### Day 5 Turmi and The Buska Mountains - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

After breakfast drive for one hour to the administrative settlement of Omo Rate where we board our 2.5 hour charter flight back to Addis Ababa. Arrive early afternoon in time for lunch, sightseeing and dinner.

**Sheraton Hotel-Executive room LDBB**

### Accommodation Information

#### Buska Lodge

Situated in the heart of Southern Ethiopia in the Omo Valley, Buska Lodge is an unpretentious eco-lodge offering travellers the best accommodation and meal service in this region. However please do not have high expectations. Covering a total of 30,000 sq. meters area, 20 spacious rooms with indoor private clean bathroom facilities. All beds are very comfortable with mosquito nets.

The Lodge is well constructed, but utilitarian: with grass thatched roofs in traditional Ethiopian style - not the "rustic luxury safari" style of East and Southern Africa. The service is slow and guests are advised to order food well in advance and not to expect gourmet-style food. Buska Lodge in Turmi settlement of the Hamar people, located at 778KM from Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia.



## Sheraton Hotel

Situated in a central location on a hilltop overlooking the city, Sheraton Addis represents African elegance. The hotel stands opposite the National Palace and is only seven kilometres from Bole International Airport. Renowned for impeccable service and luxurious surroundings, Sheraton is the first African hotel to join The Luxury Collection.

With over 1,500 square meters of meeting space, the hotel provides the largest and most prestigious banquet and conference facilities in Ethiopia. Discover ageless beauty and relaxation at The Aqva Club with its attentive service and outdoor swimming pool featuring underwater music and sauna.

Ethiopia's African elegance extends beyond the hotel lobby and into the well-appointed guest rooms. Fine linens, deluxe bath amenities, and 24-hour room service complement all of the 293 deluxe guest rooms & suites. Travellers experience timeless African elegance with mahogany-coloured furnishings and attention to details at the Sheraton Addis. The 293 deluxe guest rooms - include 33 suites, 20 classic suites, nine junior suites, and four luxurious executive suites. For added convenience, each room features a private safe and 24-hour room service. Designed to cater to the most demanding requirements, the Sheraton Addis offers a complete selection of services and facilities.

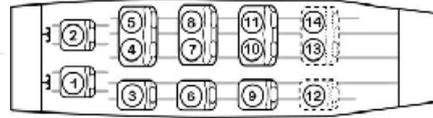
The state-of-the-art business center provides unrivalled service and a dedicated, professional staff. Wide ranges of recreational facilities are also available, as well as many exclusive personal services. With one of the world's most unique and celebrated addresses, the spectacular setting lends itself to rich and memorable travel experiences. The hotel offers an extensive array of dining specialties, including distinct restaurants serving International, Italian and French cuisine. Guests can enjoy the chic nightclub or any of the other six bars and lounges. A vast open-air cocktail and reception area offers breathtaking views, with the Entoto Mountains in the background.



## Flights and Other Information

### Private charter flight Cessna C208B Grand Caravan

The Cessna Grand Caravan C208B, is a Twelve-seat, single engine Cessna, which through determined efforts to improve safety result in peace of mind and confidence when you take to the skies. Durable landing gear means you can count on smooth landings. The main gear is a massive steel tube linked directly to the fuselage. Its flexible design is perfect for grass, gravel and even unimproved airstrips. The nose gear is engineered to absorb both vertical and lateral force by transmitting it to the fuselage. And large, rough-field tires contribute further to the Caravan's rugged flexibility. The Garmin G1000 glass cockpit integrates all primary flight, engine and sensor data to provide intuitive, at-a-glance situational awareness, in a paperless cockpit.



### Tribal visit - The Hamar Koke

The Hamar are a large agro-pastoralist tribe with a population of around 30,000. They dwell in the south of the province of Gemu Gofa, between Lake Stephanie and Turkana: a region of broad savannah and low mountains covered with acacias, cacti and giant termite nests, some more than 30 ft high.

The main source of their subsistence is the cultivation of sorghum, millet, vegetables, tobacco, cotton and the herding of cattle, sheep and goat. They also gather wild honey and are fine potters.

They are extremely superstitious and believe that evil and bad luck exist in certain unholy or impure things. The intestines of a goat or cow are read at the birth of each child to determine its fate. In addition, a child born out of wedlock is given away or left to die and one of the mother's front upper teeth are removed. Otherwise the family would risk crop failure, drought or ill health.

The social structure of the Hamar villages is that of the clans, with each one respecting its own taboos concerning food, sexuality and religion. The tasks of daily life are also assigned according to the clan. One is responsible for general administration, another for magic, a third for festivities and ceremonies, another for the settlement of disputes. There is not a single chief but a council of clan chiefs, which makes all decisions. The shamans or witch doctors all have equal authority. They know how to make it rain on certain dates, how to cure diseases caused by evil forces and how to heal wounds and appease hostile genies.

Men and women share the work in the fields, depending on ritual considerations. The women prepare the soil by digging and weeding, while the men are responsible for planting seeds, sowing the soil according to sexual symbolism. On the other hand, the harvest is considered to be the birth of the children of the earth and man (the woman playing a kind of midwife role) and it is the work of the entire community, men and women alike.

**Cow Jumping Ceremony:** The Hamar have an elaborate age-set system marking the periodic rites of passage from one age grade to another. Hairstyles are used to mark the stages. The most important ceremony is the "bullah" or "jumping of the bulls" when a boy becomes engaged and is about to pass into adulthood. This is a complicated ceremony in which the "maz" or recently initiated men participate, several hundred guests are invited, and he must take a running leap onto the back of the first bull, then run across the backs of some 30 more lined up in a row, without falling, back and forth, 4 times. While he is running, his young female cousins and sisters are ritualistically whipped to encourage him. Successfully done, he is then allowed to join the maz. If he falls, he is considered completely unworthy and the embarrassment of failure will stay with him for the rest of his life.

The jumping of the bulls - eye witness account.

Dozens of Hamar girls sat beneath the shade of large trees while others, ornamented in their beaded skins, jumped in unison, creating a myriad of metallic sounds as their bracelets clinked together. These girls, breasts bouncing freely in unison with their heads and shoulders, would jump up to a few chosen men, marked by feathers behind either ear. In great ceremony, they handed the men a green stick and while continuing to jump, the men would whip them, drawing blood. As the blows reined, the girls, without flinching, would bow their heads and jump away only to return in a matter of moments with another green stick, to repeat the whole procedure.

The girls were friends of an adolescent boy who, as the focus of the gathering, was to jump over cows. In the Hamar tradition, a boy can only become a man and therefore be eligible for marriage, by running over eight cows three times. In order to show their happiness for the boy, who is to become a man, they perform the whipping ceremony. To the Hamar girls, the scars they receive from these whippings are beautiful, and something they are proud of.'

The whipping ceremony came to a close as the ceremonial group moved on to the focus: cattle jumping. Up to fifty cows were rounded up in a circle. A group of men stood in the centre of the great beasts,

surrounding a naked teenage boy. A large group of women surrounded the cattle, jumping and dancing in unison. The cows tramped, dust filled the air and the women kept with their dancing and singing.

There was a cry, and a few of the biggest bulls were lined up side to side. The boy jumped up, and lithely ran across the backs of the cattle, three times. Back and forth he went, and became a man.

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### Tribal visit - The Mursi

The Mursi live in one of the least accessible areas of Ethiopia. When a British anthropologist visited them for the first time in the early 1970s, they had never heard of the country of Ethiopia where they lived.

The Mursi are survivors whose isolated geographic location, combined with the crises of drought, famine, war, migration, and epidemic diseases, has shaped their identity. Cattle raids and civil instability between bordering ethnic groups is merely a means of survival. Every aspect of daily life revolves around cattle and crops: when they trade in the market, crops and cattle are exchanged as money. Mursi men do not work in the fields, a task reserved for women. Men guard the flocks and are, above all, warriors. They are very superstitious. If one asks a Mursi how many head of cattle he possesses, he invariably replies, "more than ten". According to an ancient tribal superstition, knowing the exact number of one's herd brings disaster to it. When not tending their livestock and crops or hunting game they pass their time playing gadaba, an ancient game of chance also known by its Arabic name of mangala. Warriors as well as herdsmen, there is a high degree of hostility among the various tribes living throughout the Lower Omo Valley and the Mursi are frequently in conflict with the neighboring Hamar, Bana and Bodi, generally due to a dispute over stolen cattle, violated pasture rights, or in retaliation for an evil spell believed to have been cast over the herd. Within each tribe however things remain calm, due primarily to the age-set system and to important ritualized dueling within an age-set in which killing is strictly forbidden.

Among the Mursi who live on the banks of the Omo, a single-combat sport of physical skill, known as "Donga" or stick fighting, has evolved into something of an art form that allows young men to take part in competitions of strength and masculinity, earn honour among their peers and win the hands of girls in marriage without serious risk of death. Often as many as 50 unmarried men will compete from 2 age sets between 16 and 32 years old. The ultimate winner is born away on a platform of poles to a group of girls who will decide among themselves, which one of them will ask for his hand in marriage. Donga stick fights take place at the end of the rainy season and continue for a 3-month period. Each week, chosen villages come together and the top fighters from each village challenge each other.

When a young Mursi girl reaches the age of 15 or 16, her lower lip is pierced so she can wear a lip plate. The larger the lip plate she can tolerate, the more cattle her bride price will bring for her father. Made famous by anthropologists, old photos and recent *National Geographic* magazines, the custom of wearing lip plates is one of the distinct features of the women of the Surma and Mursi tribes in southern Ethiopia. At an early age, a small incision is made into the girl's bottom lip, using a small knife, the front teeth of the lower jaw are removed, and a disc of locally-derived baked clay is inserted into the incision. As the girl ages, and the bottom lip stretches with the weight of the plate, the smaller discs are removed and replaced with ever-larger discs, further stretching the lip until it becomes so distended that, as observed in some Surma women, the lip (with the plate removed) can sometimes be pulled right over the head. The discs are removed at mealtimes to allow for eating and drinking.

Various anthropological studies have been made to determine the cultural significance of the lip plates, and while several suggestions have been made, including the idea that the lip plate prevents the entry of evil spirits into the body via the mouth, and the idea that the practice was instituted to mar the appearance and hence put off slave traders looking for unblemished girls. However, the prevalent philosophy is that the size of the lip plate is representative of the wearer's family's wealth, and thus is indicative of her bride price; often those girls with particularly large plates bring in bride prices of over fifty head of cattle.



## Tribal visit - The Nyangatom

Also known as the Nyangatom or the Bume, the Bumi live south of Omo National Park on the west bank of the Omo River and occasionally migrate north into the lower regions of the park when water or grazing is scarce.

Numbering around 30,000 in population, the Bumi speak one of the eastern Nilotic group languages. They are agro-pastoralists: cattle herding and crop harvesting (mainly sorghum) on the Omo and Kibish Rivers. They are also keen honey gatherers. The Bumi homestead is a small family of a man with her multiple wives and their children. Each community is made up of 20-30 homesteads scattered about 500 apart. There is usually a small community of about 500 traditional Bume living on the west bank opposite Lumale Camp - only a 15 minute boatride from camp and a 20 minute walk inland from the river.

The Bumi are known to be great warriors and, quite frequently, active warmongers: they are often at war with the neighbouring tribes including the Hamar, the Karo, Mursi and the Surma. All Bumi men are heavily armed with semi automatic weapons and generally have a belt of bullets around their waist. The men readily display their military talents, and were greatly prized fighting forces by the colonial governments of Kenya and Sudan in the 19th century.

Like many Omo tribes, body adornment is a fundamental part of their culture and way of life: both men and women use dots to highlight their eyes and cheekbones and the women also put designs on their torsos. Known as scarification or cicatrization, this is an ancient, revered custom for the male and female members of the southern Ethiopian Omo tribes, including, most notably, the Bumi. With men, scarification is used to convey the warrior status of the wearer; in fact, men are not allowed to scarify themselves until they have overcome an enemy or a feared animal. The scarification of women is an aesthetic practice said to increase the wearer's attractiveness. The process of scarification involves making many tiny little cuts in the surface of the skin, and then rubbing in some ash. The ash rubbed into the wounds causes the rising of the flesh and achieves the raised, bumpy appearance that is deemed highly desirable. The cuts are made in lots of different patterns and designs; the Bumi pierce the skin of their eyelids and cheekbones with little dots and show off larger patterns on their ribcages.



## Guidelines to culturally sensitive tourism

Nowhere in the world is as well endowed with traditional and tribal cultures than the horn of Africa. Our typical cultural expedition takes you into this remote region of the African continent where you will be immersed into an array of tribal lifestyles and biblical like living museums, where we will enjoy 'street level culture', with a fascinating blend of cafes, bars, sidewalk musicians, small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators. So, why not join Origins on the most amazing cultural expedition of your life, to see people and lifestyles totally unaffected by the western world that you will feel nothing but sheer privilege at being able to travel amongst them. HOWEVER, If you are inconvenienced by spartan accommodations or are apprehensive in unfamiliar situations, then this expedition is not for you !

If you have a week or more to spend, then The Omo River of south western Ethiopia is nothing less than the last great tribal land left in the world today, a real kaleidoscope of vanishing cultures. If only one or two days, then a flying visit to the desert areas of Northern Kenya and Turkana live up to the same reputation. Here in northern Kenya remote villages of Samburu, Rendille, Turkana, Gabbra can be found. With the Samburu we will, with Rendille, Reith

The reasons and beliefs are too many and complex to discuss here, but they will all create much interesting campfire debate for your guides to interpret to you.

## Courtesy...

Origins Safaris and our partners have taken great care, where possible, to research and develop relationships within each village that we visit. We actively help finance some community development projects and seek to avoid confrontation or exploitative encounters by observing the important courtesies, spending time being one of the most significant matters of local courtesy. At certain times the ceremonies are private and you may not be able to take all the photographs you want. Likewise some individuals do not want to be photographed, at other times the sheer warmth and delight at displaying their traditional dress and rituals is

almost overwhelming. You will experience a variety of emotions and bring back amazing memories and images to dwell on for a long time to come.

### **Ethical tourism:**

We seek to do more than photograph these people – our role is to introduce you to their ways, customs and villages as sensitively as possible - we encourage you to ask as many questions of us as possible in advance and part of this journey experience is the debates we have nightly over each day's experience and the ethics of this kind of relationship between wealthy tourists and remote tribes living, in our eyes, a romantic but still often poverty-ridden existence. Here in the south, most photo opportunities, rightly, will need to be paid for - in Ethiopian Bir or Kenya Shillings. This is not a reflection of how things have changed, but more an example of how important trade is in these communities. Your guides will also carry large amounts of small cash for you to exchange for this purpose. You may wish to bring other gifts with you - we strongly recommend that you advise us in advance and let us buy appropriate trading gifts on your behalf, instead of your bringing inappropriate western items. We have found most tribes far prefer strings of cowrie shells and trading beads as they are much prized and holding significant value for the people with whom we will spend time. Ethical cultural tourism is a sensitive subject, many articles have been written for and against this type of trip, We will discuss on this safari: Do the financial benefits outweigh the inevitable erosion of 'pristine' culture? Would these people be better 'left alone' untouched by the outside world? What is social development and prosperity in terms of these cultures? Who are the agents of change?

### **Key points to observe:**

- \* Arrive & greet the villagers Spend some time shaking hands with the elders.
- \* Listen to your trip leader's advice on how to greet people, observe any cultural barriers between men and women.
- \* Keep your cameras in their bags until we all agree the time is right. Ask before shooting!
- \* Seek out one of our interpreters and ask questions
- \* Spend time seeking understanding or the meaning behind dress/body adornment. These are an important social distinction.
- \* Allow your guide to negotiate with the elders and their selected representatives.
- \* Once entry to the village is agreed, you will then need to pay individuals directly for whatever photographs you take.
- \* Accept that photography is a commercial transaction - they understand that and are not ashamed of it.
- \* Be open minded about what you see and encourage a connection before capturing the moment on film.
- \* We may not all be able to photograph some rituals or ceremonies.
- \* In some cases the tribal experience will not be so 'pristine' in our own pre-conceived notions of "tribal"
- \* Modern life and changes are inevitable facts of life, we encourage you to embrace the good and the indifferent
- \* We are the last generation to observe a life carved by the centuries, now entering a new phase of 'development'.
- \* The goal of these trips is to learn and expand our own horizons.
- \* Return home with a rich treasure of mental as well as photographic images that stimulate debate, conscience and wonder.
- \* Let us hope these cultures survive for our grandchildren to see.



### **Tribal visit - The Kara**

The Karo tribe living along the borders of the Lower Omo River incorporate rich, cultural symbolism into their rituals by using ornate body art, intricate headdresses, and body scarification to express beauty and significance within their community. This lively tribe of around 2000 people is the main sedentary agriculturalist group in the Lower Omo Valley area of southern Ethiopia.

Many of their traditional rituals might have originated with another much larger tribe: the Hamar, which is of the same lineage but numbers approximately 30,000. These two groups speak nearly identical, Omotic languages and much of the symbolism found in both groups' ceremonies suggest a rich, cultural history

together. The Karo people differentiate themselves from many of the neighbouring tribes by excelling specifically in body and face painting. They paint themselves daily with coloured ochre, white chalk, yellow mineral rock, charcoal, and pulverized iron ore, all natural resources local to the area. The specific designs drawn on their bodies can change daily and vary in content, ranging from simple stars or lines to animal motifs, such as guinea fowl plumage, or to the most popular - a myriad of handprints covering the torso and legs. Both the Karo and the Hamar men use clay to construct elaborate hairstyles and headdresses for themselves, signifying status, beauty, and bravery.

The Karo male hairstyle is very elaborate. A part is made from one ear to the other. The front portion is made into braids, which frame the forehead. The rest of the hair is drawn back into a thick chignon and held firmly by a colorful cap of glazed earth. Sometimes pieces of bark are glued onto the cap and holes are made in the bark to attach ostrich feathers. Or, it is painted in red, white and black...three colors of mystical and legendary significance. A man wearing a grey and red-ochre clay hair bun with an Ostrich feather indicates that he has bravely killed an enemy from another tribe or a dangerous animal, such as a lion or a leopard. This clay hair bun often takes up to three days to construct. It is usually remade every three to six months, and can be worn for a period of up to one year after the kill. Large beads worn around the neck of a man also signify a big game kill. The Karo men cover their body and face with ashes mixed with fat, a symbol of virility for important festivities and the ritual combats between the clans, which take place after the harvest. (Cinders also protect them from mosquitoes and tsetse fly). These ceremonial combats are of great importance because they enable the men to exhibit their beauty and courage and thus, perhaps to attract a woman. The scars and lacerations, particularly those on the chest, are highly esteemed marks of valor.

Karo women usually wear only a skin loincloth, decorated with beads and cowries. Their hair is greased with red clay and cut into a short skullcap. The Karo's artistic practices in their daily lives are for self-pleasure and pride, respect and symbolic recognition within their society, and as a means of attracting the opposite sex during rituals. Courtship dances are frequently held and oftentimes the outcome of these frenzied, impassioned dances result in future marriages. Specific rituals occur regularly within the tribal communities, and sometimes neighbouring villagers will travel all night to witness these rites of passages and participate in the celebrations. Body scarification conveys either significant symbolism or aesthetic beauty, depending upon the sex of the individual. The scarification of the man's chest indicates that he has killed enemies from other tribes, and he is highly respected within his community. Each line on his chest represents one killing, and complete chest scarification is not rare. The Karo women are considered particularly sensual and attractive if cuts are made deep into their chests and torsos and ash is rubbed in, creating a raised effect over time and thereby enhancing sexual beauty.

The Karo, like the Hamar, perform the Bula or Pilla initiation rite, which signifies the coming of age for young men. The initiate must demonstrate that he is ready to "become a man" by leaping over rows of cattle six times consecutively without falling. If successful, the boy will become eligible for marriage (as long as his older brothers are already married) and he will be allowed to appear publicly with the elders in sacred areas.



### **Tribal visit - The Dassenech**

The Omo Delta is the home of the Dassenechs, an Omotic tribe with their own unique language. Dassanech men raise cattle, around which many social systems are built, and women grow grain on the banks of River Kibish and River Omo. Their agricultural productivity is so eye-catching that early travellers describe them as uniquely hospitable people with plenty of food.

The Omo river serves as a resource of drinking water as well as for the cultivation of fields along its shore. The Dassanech build their houses from alang branches, using leather and iron sheets as cover. Close to the houses one finds high sturdy platforms as sorghum stores, keeping the grain off the ground, protecting it from mice and rats.

The men share the tidy colorful and tightly wound mud hairstyle akin to Kenya's neighboring Turkana. Many of the Dassanech men are scarified depicting the numbers of enemy killed in battle. This creates enormous prestige within the tribe. Dassanech women are noticeably less beaded than the Bumi/Nyagatom, whose beading has a predominance of blue and white.

Known for their very colourful dowry ceremony, the Dassanech men wear ceremonial cheetah and leopard skins with Ostrich plume headdress, The ceremony culminates with an evocative dance and the fine dust of the delta wells up above the village, goats and sheep are handed over in part payment of the bride dowry. Uniquely in the Omo valley, both men and women of the Dassanech are circumcised after the annual ceremony known as 'Dimi'.



## Reserve and Park Information

### Omo River Valley

Ethiopia is often referred to as the 'water tower' of eastern Africa because of the many rivers that pour off its high tableland, and a visit to this part of the Rift Valley, studded with lakes, volcanoes and savannah grassland, offers the visitor a true safari experience.

The Omo River tumbles its 350-kilometre way through a steep inaccessible valley before slowing its pace as it nears the lowlands and then meanders through flat, semi-desert bush, eventually running into Lake Turkana. Since 1973, the river has proved a major attraction for white-water rafters. The season for rafting is between September and October, when the river is still high from the June to September rains but the weather is drier.

The river passes varied scenery, including an open gallery forest of tamarinds and figs, alive with colobus monkeys. Under the canopy along the riverbanks may be seen many colorful birds. Goliath herons, blue-breasted kingfishers, white-cheeked turacos, emerald-spotted wood doves and red-fronted bee-eaters are all rewarding sights, while monitor lizards may be glimpsed scuttling into the undergrowth. Beyond the forest, hippos graze on the savannah slopes against the mountain walls, and waterbuck, bushbuck and Abyssinian ground hornbills are sometimes to be seen. Abundant wildlife, spirited rapids, innumerable side creeks and waterfalls, sheer inner canyons and hot springs all combine to make the Omo one of the world's classic river adventures.

East of the Omo River and stretching south towards the Chew Bahir basin lies the Mago National Park, rich in wildlife and with few human inhabitants. The vegetation is mainly savannah grassland and bush, extending across an area of 2,160 square kilometers. Mammal species total 81, including hartebeest, giraffe, roan antelope, elephant, lion, leopard and perhaps even a rare black rhino.

Far to the southwest lies Omo National Park, the largest in the country, with an area of 4,068 square kilometres. It is a vast expanse of true wilderness, adjacent to the Omo River, which flows southwards into Lake Turkana and is one of the richest and least-visited wildlife sanctuaries in eastern Africa. Eland, Oryx, Burchell's zebra, Lelwel hartebeest, buffalo, giraffe, elephant, waterbuck, kudu, lion, leopard and cheetah roam within the park's boundaries.

The Omo Valley is virtually free of human habitation but is rich in palaeo-anthro-pological remains. Much of Africa's volcanic activity is concentrated along the immense 5,000-kilometre crack in the earth's surface known as the Rift Valley. It is the result of two roughly parallel faults, between which, in distant geological time, the crust was weakened and the land subsided. The valley walls - daunting blue-grey ridges of volcanic basalt and granite - rise sheer on either side to towering heights of 4,000 meters. The valley floor, 50 kilometres or more across, encompasses some of the world's last true wildernesses.

The tectonic movements which formed the Great Rift Valley were the perfect environment for preserving fossil bones - as violent subterranean movement convulsed Africa's floor over thousands of years, new lakes were formed then eroded building sedimentary layers, compressing the skeletons and remains of early mammals in each layer of calcium carbonate. Extensive archeological expeditions have proved that Africa is indeed the Cradle of Mankind: here, in the Omo Delta, at Ileret and Koobi Fora new pre-historic finds constantly occur, where the remains of early man date back some three million years, stone tools almost two million years, while sediments laid down in the Plio-Pleistocene date back some four million years.

While passing through the Omo Delta region you will see some 300 meters of accumulated sediments in several large areas revealed the discovery of "Homo Habilis" in 1972 dating back 2.3 million years and fossilised footprints of "Homo erectus" have been dated as some 1.5 million years old. Here the fossils over

time have literally been thrown to the surface - Richard Leakey talks of finding the first Australopithecus fossil at Koobi Fora: "there on the sand 20 feet ahead, in full view beside a thorny bush, lay a domed grayish-white object.... The nearly complete skull of an early hominid". In the last 15 years more than 160 fossil remains of early hominids and more than 4,000 mammal fossils have been recovered here (as a result of which 75 extinct species were identified) along with many stone-age artefacts

Fact file:

- \* Location: Southern Ethiopia
- \* Omo River: 350 kms long passing through varied scenery, abundant wildlife, canyons & hot springs
- \* Colourful birds
- \* Time zone: GMT +3hours.
- \* Calendar: the Julian calendar
- \* More than 80 ethnic groups: Including Muguji, Karo, Mursi, Hamar, Nyangatom
- \* Omo National Park – the largest in the country (4068 sq kms) & Mago National Park
- \* Palaeo-anthro-pological remains more than four million years
- \* The Rift Valley

