

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

#### **Itinerary at a glance**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>MealPlan</b>
1	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	Sheraton Hotel	LDBB
2	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	Sheraton Hotel	LDBB
3	Lalibela	Tukul Village	LDBB
4	Lalibela	Tukul Village	LDBB
5	Simien Mountains NPark	Simien Lodge	L-DBBL
6	Simien Mountains NPark	Simien Lodge	DBBL
7	Bahir Dar / Lake Tana	Kuriftu Resort & Spa	DBBL
8	Bahir Dar / Lake Tana	Kuriftu Resort & Spa	DBBL
9	Addis Ababa, Ethiopia		

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**

Met at Bole airport and transferred by private vehicle

**Sheraton Hotel-Executive room LDBB**

##### **Day 2 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Full day in Addis. Sightseeing is available should time permit. The rich culture of Ethiopia, and its international links, has endowed the city with many fine restaurants and street side cafe's. Nightlife, including many cinemas, traditional dancing houses, casino's and bars provide entertainment until the early hours.

We start out day by driving north up to Mount Entoto. In 1881 Emperor Menelik II made his permanent camp there, after remains of an old town (believed to have been the capital of 16th century monarch Lebna Dengel) were discovered, which Menelik took was a divine and auspicious sign. Addis Ababa at between 2300 - 2500 meters is the third highest capital in the world and Entoto is a few hundred meters higher - as we drive up the hill there is an appreciable drop in temperature and the air is filled with the scent of the Eucalyptus trees which line the road. From the top, there is a panoramic view of the capital and surrounding countryside. Our guide will point out the city's major landmarks. Entoto is an important watershed; to the north, water flows to the Blue Nile and the Mediterranean Sea, to the south, to the Awash River and on to Djibouti. Two important structures remain within the old imperial compound on Entoto, the churches of Mariam and the Archangel Raguel. It was in the church of Mariam that Menelik was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia in 1889, and in the small museum in the compound there are various clothes, court and household implements and weapons dating from the period. Leaving the churches we descend to Addis Ababa, stopping off at the National Archaeological Museum. Here visitors can see exhibits ranging from the 3.5 million-year-old bones of Lucy, from the Axumite and Gondarene periods through to the period of the monarchs Tewodros and Menelik II.

**Sheraton Hotel-Executive room LDBB**

##### **Day 3 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - Lalibela**

Transferred to Bole airport to connect with onward flight.

Fly Ethiopian Airlines scheduled service (approx 0730/0930 hrs Addis to Lalibela). A two hour flight northwards over the central highlands of Ethiopia. Met on arrival at the Lalibela airport and transferred by road 40 minutes up the mountainside to the town centre. On market day (Saturday), the road is a spectacle of traders walking to and from market. At the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th centuries King Lalibela of the Zaghe dynasty built a series of rock hewn churches – the New Jerusalem as he called it – now rightly acknowledged to be one of the wonders of the world. There are 11 churches in the town named after him, with others in the surrounding countryside. All are still in use today. (The churches are divided into two groups, the division being the River Yordanos or River Jordan.) It is estimated that the churches took 25 years

to construct – for the Kingdom based on Roha (later renamed Lalibela) to have kept a large work force engaged in economically unproductive labour for such a long period means that it disposed of a large economic surplus and was very wealthy. The area then was clearly fertile and agriculturally productive, whereas now deforestation and population pressures on the land have reduced its productivity. After checking into the hotel we will start our tour of the first group of churches, returning to the hotel for lunch, and continuing the tour in the afternoon.

#### **Tukul Village-Cottage LDBB**

#### **Day 4 Lalibela**

Full day visiting the rockhewn churches of Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage site. After breakfast we set off by car to the cave church of Yemrehane Christos, built by the king of the same name before the reign of King Lalibela. The church is constructed inside a cave, in Axumite style, similar to the 7th century monastery at Debre Damo in Tigray, with alternating levels of wood and stone. A 40 km trip from Lalibela followed by a 10 minute hike brings you to this beautiful church, the finest example of its kind in Ethiopia. After dinner we can visit one of the tej bait (local bars) in town, which are alive with cultural music and dancing.

#### **Tukul Village-Cottage LDBB**

#### **Day 5 Lalibela - Simien Mountains National Park**

After breakfast transfer down the mountainside to the Lalibela Airport in time for your mid morning Ethiopian Airlines scheduled flight (approx 1 hour) to Gondar, which in the 16th Century was the second largest city on the African continent, and the centre of the Abyssinian empire.

Gondar was the imperial capital from the 17th to mid 19th centuries, and today visitors can see the imperial compound, with castles still in good condition (some recently restored) and the bath of King Fasilides, where at Timkat (Ethiopian Epiphany) a nearby river is diverted to fill an area the size of a small swimming pool. Worshippers plunge into the cold water in a re-enactment of the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan. Although many of Gondar's churches were destroyed during the Mahdist invasion from Sudan in the 1880s, one very fine example, Debre Berhan Selassie, was saved, according to the legend, by a swarm of bees. The walls and ceiling are completely covered with murals. We end our tour with a visit to the ruined palace of Queen Mentowab, and the church of Qusquam. We will visit the former Felasha (Ethiopian jews) village at Wolleka, to buy some of the characteristic pottery sold there. Most of the Felasha or Bait Israel as they prefer to be called, were taken to Israel in the 1980s.

From Gondar it's a three hour drive north to the Simien Mountains National Park. We stop at the town of Debarke to complete National Park registration formalities and to collect a scout and local guide before continuing onwards.

#### **LimaLimo or Simien Lodge-Standard room L-DBBL**

#### **Day 6 Simien Mountains National Park**

A full day in the Simien Mountains National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since the late 1960s, the park presents perhaps the most dramatic scenery in Africa – great volcanic plugs, formed some 40 million years ago and eroded over the aeons into fantastic crags, pinnacles and flat topped mountains, “the chess pieces of the Gods”, as one writer described them, tower over precipitous gorges, river valleys and plains stretching all the way to Eritrea. There are many peaks over 4000 metres, and Ras Dashen at 4620 metres is the highest in the country and the fourth highest in Africa. The day shall be spent searching for the endemic Gelada or bleeding heart baboon, the Walia Ibex, the Simien Wolf (the rarest canid in the world) and rock hyrax, and endemic birds such as the Thick billed Raven, Black headed Siskin, White Collared Pigeon, Wattle Ibis, White billed Starling, Spot breasted Plover and White backed Black Tit and spectacular Lammergeyers with 3meter wingspans. The Afro-Alpine flora, meadows and grasslands punctuated by Giant Lobelia and flowering Red Hot Pokers with truly breathtaking.

#### **LimaLimo or Simien Lodge-Standard room DBBL**

#### **Day 7 Simien Mountains National Park - Bahir Dar / Lake Tana**

A full day on the road, departing Simien early, you stop for lunch and sightseeing in Gondar, before continuing onto Bahir Dar.

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After lunch we continue onto Bahir Dar, a distance of about 180 km or 3 hours' drive, there is attractive

scenery en route as the road skirts the lake. Bahir Dar is an attractive town, well laid out with tree lined avenues and with the blue of the lake in the background. On arrival we check into the Kuriftu Lodge, situated on the shores of Lake Tana. 68 km wide and 73 km long, Tana is Ethiopia's largest lake and is dotted with islands, on many of which are found churches and monasteries. Bahir Dar has several clubs and bars where visitors can see traditional and modern Ethiopian music and dancing, and is also quite safe for wandering around at night.

**Kuriftu Resort & Spa Bahir Dar-Standard room DBBL**

**Day 8 Bahir Dar / Lake Tana**

Full day exploring the source of The Blue Nile, and the spectacular 16th Century Churches on Lake Tana and The Zeghe Peninsular.

**Kuriftu Resort & Spa Bahir Dar-Standard room DBBL**

**Day 9 Bahir Dar / Lake Tana - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

A one hour flight back to Addis.

**Accommodation Information**

**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.

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Mountains in the background



### **Tukul Village**

Tukul Village Hotel is located in the picturesque and historic city of Lalibela. From its elevated vantage point and proximity to the famous rock-hewn churches of Lalibela there are amazing views. Tukul Village is a hotel with attractive views of Lalibela and its surroundings. It is in fact not a hotel but a small village. It is within walking distance of many of the ancient churches - the attraction of Lalibela - such as the Church of St. George.

The rooms are large and completely independent with their own private balconies and spacious modern bathrooms - clean, tiled and boast modern and reliably hot showers - located in a modern version of the traditional African thatched huts.

There is an attractive restaurant serving both European and Ethiopian meals, also a cafe/bar. Internet, fax and a printer are at your disposal and there is also a small second-hand bookshop on the premises. The hotel now has free Wi-Fi.

The living spaces are simple, well-kept and spacious, with comfortable beds and plenty of natural light pouring through the floor-to-ceiling windows on one side. All have their own balconies, with views towards St. George's Church and the local market. There are currently six split-level tukul huts in the village offering 12 rooms and a further 12 are currently under construction.

The hotel is fully equipped for arranging all tours in and about Lalibela. It provides specialist tours and supplies guides who speak English, French and German. The hotel is close to the ancient rock-hewn churches such as that of St. George, making it a great base to explore them. There are 11 rock churches in Lalibela and 800 Priests and Deacons to witness. Mules can be used to reach the more inaccessible churches. There is also a museum nearby and a local school which can be visited.

For those who love bird-watching there are many species to witness flying above the hotel such as kites, ravens, falcons and the Lammergayer (bearded vulture).



### **Simien Lodge**

Fantastically located amongst the crags and peaks of the Simiens – the ideal base for exploring this incredible eco-system. There are twenty main rooms, which are about 60 metres from the main restaurant area so as to provide total peace and tranquillity. There are two rooms with double queen-sized beds and all the other rooms have 2 large single beds. The single beds are one metre wide for a good nights sleep. The beds all have duvets but extra blankets are provided for those who feel the cold.

It is sometimes forgotten that the Simiens are high and at night it is cold. So we do our best to take the chill off the rooms with an underfloor heating system, which works by solar energy. During the day, hot water is pumped underfloor and stored in the thick concrete floor. This raises the temperature by about ten degrees during the day. Guests often say that they cannot feel the heat. This is because it is not like a steel radiator, which warms up and gives off its heat quickly. With a concrete floor it is an inertia system and the calories of

heat are given off over a 24-hour period. The safari suites have all the facilities of the main rooms but with an extra lounge. This lounge can be converted into an extra bedroom for families. The main bedroom has a queen-sized bed. The lounge has two twin beds.

The restaurant is a spacious area with a log fire centrepiece. The kitchen is essentially Swiss made, hygienic and ergonomic. In the evening we generally serve a set meal, which is prepared by our master chef Teschome. This is normally international fare but we accommodate for vegetarian and other religious foods. All day long we serve an "A la carte" menu of Ethiopian and European food. Weddings are sometimes held at the lodge and they are very colourful affairs.

The Simiens are without doubt the most spectacular mountains scenery in Africa. Trekking in the Simiens is a must for anyone who likes spectacular views. Some of the cliffs drop vertically for over a mile, justifying the description of Africa's Grand Canyon.

Fact file:

- \* Ideal base for exploring the incredible eco-system
- \* 20 main rooms (2 double rooms & 18 twin rooms)
- \* Underfloor heating system
- \* Trekking in the Simiens
- \* Climbing to the summit of Ras Dashen (4620m)
- \* Magnificent views
- \* Mountain biking



### **Kuriftu Resort & Spa Bahir Dar**

Located on the shores of Ethiopia's largest lake just 10 minutes from Bahir Dar Airport, Kuriftu Resort and Spa - Lake Tana, offers the best accommodation and hospitality of the land. Designed with a clever blend of native Ethiopian architecture and décor, this Lakeside resort boasts 28 guest rooms in individual bungalows facing either the expanse of Lake Tana or set among some of the loveliest tropical gardens. All the rooms tend to be larger than your average guest rooms and are furnished in Ethiopian style with traditional yet modern beds and furniture that affords a level of luxury you would expect.

Delight in your own private view of Lake Tana in the luxury of our guest rooms. All are handsomely appointed with every modern comfort, including flat-screen TV. Refreshment centers are amply stocked. But at the end of the day, it's about a good night's sleep. So slip in between the sheets of one of our sumptuously comfortable beds to ease your path to dreamland.

Tantalize the senses at the waterfront restaurant and bar with outdoor patio, a perfect place to enjoy a meal or sample the bar's drink menu featuring a wide variety of local and international wines. Bold flavors are matched by breathtaking views of Lake Tana. Savor the superb regional and international cuisine and toast your good fortune with a fine vintage from our wine cellar. Or enjoy a quiet night in, and allow room service to bring the best of our variety international and local cuisine to you.

At our specially designed Spa your limbs relax, your mind unwinds and cares melt away. And just when you think your bliss is complete, the view of Lake Tana sends you into a state of deep serenity.

At Kuriftu Resort and Spa - Lake Tana, you'll find endless ways to fill your day. As soon as you step in to your suite or room you will feel the care and attention to detail that went into the construction of the Resort. If you can overcome the temptation to stay in your room, a variety of tour packages await you; be it to your choice of the 30 islands on the lake endowed with ancient monasteries and history or on land. Visit the first stone bridge constructed in Ethiopia under the commands of Emperor Susenyos in 1626 or the thunderous Blue Nile Falls situated on the upper course of the river only 37 Kilometers downstream from the town of Bahir Dar and Lake Tana. The falls are estimated to be between 37 and 45 meters high, consisting of four streams that originally varied from a trickle in the dry season to over 400 meters wide in the peak of the rainy season.

Whether you choose to explore the surrounding or simply relax in the comfort of your luxury suite, you will love the large outdoor swimming pool and our world class Spa Centre. Be spoiled, indulged and beautified as



you feel the stress float away from your body. Offering a variety of treatments, the Spa at Kuriftu will allow you to relax, rejuvenate and renew your body & soul.

The real historic interest of the islands lies in their treasury, which includes numerous piles of brightly ceremonial robes and the mummified remains of several of the former emperors of Ethiopia including Yukon Amlak, the restorer of the so-called Solomonic Dynasty to the throne in 1270, Dawit, Zara Yaqob, Zadenghel and Fasiladas.

But our lakeside resort is also the gateway for your trips into the Historic Northern Route of Ethiopia. From here you can venture out to the Fasiladas Castles in Gondar, the Simien Mountains National Park, rock hewn churches of Lalibela and many other wonders of northern Ethiopia.



## Flights and Other Information

### Lunch & City Tour in Gondar

The city of Gondar, Ethiopia, is located 500 kilometers north of Addis Ababa, 35 kilometers from Lake Tana, and in the foothills of the Simien mountains. The city itself dates to the 17th century AD, when it was part of the Abyssinian empire, a capital city founded in 1634 by Emperor Fasilidas. Gondar is probably best known for its numerous beautiful castles with architecture derived in part from medieval Spanish and Portuguese traditions. Gondar is now a tourist hot-spot, called "the Camelot of Africa." Although many of Gondar's churches were destroyed during the Mahdist invasion from Sudan in the 1880s, one very fine example, Debre Berhan Selassie, was saved, according to the legend, by a swarm of bees, which routed the invaders. The walls and ceiling are completely covered with murals - the angels' faces on the ceiling have become a common motif in Ethiopian design. The tour ends with a visit to the ruined palace of Queen Mentowab, and the church of Qusquam. The Mini Fogera is also worth visiting in the evening for cultural music (asmari) and national food.



## Reserve and Park Information

### Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Addis Ababa, the Capital of modern Ethiopia, and gateway for most tourists, is the political and commercial heart of the Country, now a city of 4 million people; Emperor Menelik founded it in 1887.

This big, sprawling, hospitable city is more than 2,200 meters high in the foothills of Mount Entoto. Modern buildings and wide open boulevards stand side by side with historic churches, palaces and monuments as well as simple country style huts. The air is filled with the scent of flowers and eucalyptus trees, and the rich vibrancy of a city that is home to so many cultures. Modern Addis Ababa also plays host to many international organizations, including the OAU, the Economic Commission for Africa, and other multi-national bodies, who all have their headquarters here. As a major international city, Addis Ababa offers a wide range of excellent hotel facilities, from luxury international hotels to a good number of mid-priced and budget accommodations. State-of-the-art conference facilities attract numerous international meetings to Ethiopia. The rich culture of Ethiopia, and its international links, has endowed the city with many fine restaurants and street-side cafes. Nightlife, including many cinemas, theatres, casinos and bars, provides entertainment until the early hours.

Today, Addis Ababa is an up to date thriving city. Served by a modern airport at Bole, just 8 kilometres from the center, the city is linked by Ethiopian Airlines, and a large number of regional and international carriers, to Africa and the world.

Originally Menelik chose Entoto as the site for the capital city however, great Emperor though he was, over this he was overruled: Taitu, his wife, soon found Entoto too wet and windy. She was attracted to the warmer, more fertile hills and plains below, where natural hot springs at Finfine, the Oromo name for the area, provided bathing opportunities and a softer environment for court life. So the capital was moved and Taitu named the city: Addis Ababa the New Flower. When the court moved down from Entoto the Emperor and his immediate entourage occupied the most prominent hill, his retainers, with their mules and cattle, settling on its slopes. In due course he built the palace and banqueting hall where thousands of his soldiers could feast at one sitting. The area, known as the Old Ghibbe, is now the seat of Government. The chiefs built their houses on other hilltops, and these picturesque structures, with their wooden balconies and occasional turrets, can still be spotted among the more modern buildings of the town. Addis Ababa did not develop according to modern town planning concepts, rather it grew organically. During a city tour one may see modern buildings next to buildings that were constructed in the Italian style in the 19th and 20th century, open markets next to shopping centres, palaces next to modern hotels, Ethiopian churches next to large parks. Addis has never been known to bore a visitor! Interesting places for a visit in the city are the Ethnographic Museum housed on the University Campus with a fascinating wealth of information and exhibits relating to Ethiopia cultural and ethnographic heritage.

The Menelik Mausoleum: built in 1911, in the old Baata church, it serves as a tomb for emperors, princes and martyrs of freedom. Built to house the tomb of Emperor Menelik II it also includes the graves of members of his family and the Emperor Haile Selassie. St. George's Cathedral: built in 1896 in the traditional octagonal shape by the Emperor Menelik II to commemorate his victory at Adwa, it is dedicated to the national saint of Ethiopia. The museum houses a wide collection of important religious paintings, crosses of many designs, historic books and parchments, and beautiful handicrafts. There are also fine examples of modern paintings by the famous Ethiopian artist Afewerke Tekle. Trinity Cathedral: built in 1941, to a European design, in commemoration of Ethiopia's liberation from Italian occupation. The Jubilee Palace: on Menelik II Avenue, this modern palace was completed to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

#### Climate

Altitude and proximity to the Indian Ocean affect Ethiopia climate. The temperatures on the higher plateaux are pleasant year round but in certain seasons the temperature rises to 28 Centigrade in the lowlands and drops to Zero on the high mountain peaks. The rainy season is from June to October whilst the rest of the year is dry. The end of the rainy season is one of the most appropriate times to visit the remote tribes, when the River Awash floods along the Omo Delta making some of the more remote villages accessible. This is traditionally a time for ceremonies and thanksgiving.

#### Language

Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia, while English, French and Italian are widely spoken, especially in the business & academic circles. There are 80 different languages with 200 dialects broken down into 4 main groups: Semitic, Hametic, Omotic and Nilo Saharan. The Semitic languages are related to both Hebrew & Arabic and are mostly spoken in the Northern & Central areas. The principal Semitic language is Amharic. The Hametic languages are found mainly in the East, West & South. Oromiffa is the predominant language in these areas. The Omotic group of languages are spoken in the Southwest, generally in the area of the Omo River. The Nilo Saharan languages are spoken in a wide area along the Sudanese frontier. Some of the written languages use the Ge'ez alphabet the language of the ancient Axumite kingdom (the only indigenous written language in all of Africa). Today some of the written languages in Ethiopia still use the Latin alphabet.

#### Traditions:

Ethiopians tend to be conservative in their own country. A handshake greeting is normal with a pleasant discussion on personal matters before getting down to business. Time is not that important and patience is much needed at times. The longer the greeting, the closer the friends. The coffee ceremony is a sacred tradition in Ethiopia (where the beverage originated) and is an integral part of everyday life. The coffee ceremony takes place 3 times a day: morning, noon & evening, prepared in a special pot and poured into a special cup.



## Lalibela

During the reign of Saint Gebre Mesqel Lalibela (a member of the Zagwe Dynasty, who ruled Ethiopia in the late 12th century and early 13th century) the current town of Lalibela was known as Roha. The saintly king was given this name due to a swarm of bees said to have surrounded him at his birth, which his mother took as a sign of his future reign as Emperor of Ethiopia. The names of several places in the modern town and the general layout of the monolithic churches themselves are said to mimic names and patterns observed by Lalibela during the time he spent in Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a youth. Lalibela is said to have seen Jerusalem and then attempted to build a New Jerusalem as his capital in response to the capture of old Jerusalem by Muslims in 1187. As such, many features have Biblical names - even the town's river is known as the River Jordan. It remained the capital of Ethiopia from the late 12th century and into the 13th century.

The first European to see these churches was the Portuguese explorer Pêro da Covilhã (1460 - 1526). Portuguese priest Francisco Álvares (1465 - 1540), who accompanied the Portuguese Ambassador on his visit to Lebna Dengel in the 1520s. His description of these structures concludes: "I weary of writing more about these buildings, because it seems to me that I shall not be believed if I write more ... I swear by God, in Whose power I am, that all I have written is the truth".

Lalibela is a town in northern Ethiopia. It is one of Ethiopia's holiest cities, second only to Aksum, and is a center of pilgrimage for much of the country. Unlike Aksum, the population of Lalibela is almost completely Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. Lalibela was intended to be a New Jerusalem in response to the capture of Jerusalem by Muslims, and many of its historic buildings take their name and layout from buildings in Jerusalem. There exist ancient rock edifices in Korea, Jordan and no doubt, in many other places around the world. In Ethiopia itself, there are over 50 different regions where rock Churches can be found - stretching as far south as Goba (Bale) and as far west as Bonga (Keffa). In Tigray region alone there are over 100 rock Churches.

Lalibela has the highest concentration of Churches of such architectural elegance and overall engineering sophisticated in one spot. Their lighting systems, channels, water works, network of interconnected subterranean passageways and the sheer magnitude of the whole project are mind boggling - just the excavated material is estimated to be enough to make ten of the Great Pyramid of Egypt. The Churches are attributed to King Lalibela (ca 1200 AD) who was later canonized by the Ethiopian Church and is referred to by Europeans as the legendary Prester John. Their impact is so great that the first European to see them, the Portuguese Priest Father Francisco Alvarez, despaired of being believed by his compatriots and cut short his report.

Anointed king under the throne name Gebre Meskel (servant of the cross), King Lalibela is said to have taken 24 years to construct these Churches. To have kept a large work force engaged in economically unproductive labour for such a long period means that it disposed of a large economic surplus and was very wealthy. The area then was clearly fertile and agriculturally productive, whereas now deforestation and other forms of ecological degradation have reduced its productivity and made it prone to drought.

There are three different types of churches:

**Built-up cave Churches** - ordinary structures built inside a natural cave. Makina Medhane Alem and Yemrehanna Kristos near Lalibela are good examples.

**Rock-hewn cave Churches** - carved inwards from cliff face and sometimes making use of and widening an already existing cave. Aba Lbanos, Bete Meskel and Bete Denagil in Lalibela belong to this group.

**Rock-hewn monolithic Churches** - hollowed in the ground, cut out in one piece from the rock and separated from it all round by a trench except at their base. Bete Medhane Alem, Bete Mariam, Bete Emmanuel and the cruciform Bete Giorgis are Lalibela's outstanding monolithic masterpieces.

**Lalibela Priests:** Of Lalibela's 8-10,000 people, over 1,000 are priests. Religious ritual is central to the life of the town, with regular processions, extensive fasts, and crowds of singing and dancing priests. This, combined with its extraordinary religious architecture and simplicity of life, gives the city of Lalibela a distinctively timeless, almost biblical atmosphere.

**Climate:** Ethiopia although almost on the equator, experiences temperate climate and sometimes



temperatures below freezing (in the Simien Mountains) due to its high altitude. Throughout the highlands, the climate is moderate and daytime temperatures rarely exceed 25c. Particularly in December and January, the temperature drops at night to around 10c. The hottest months are April and May, just before the main rains. Despite the moderate climate, the sun's rays beat directly down and are not effectively filtered, hence its rays are quite vicious and there is the likelihood of sunburn and sunglasses are advisable. Although Ethiopia has its famous slogan of "Thirteen Months of Sunshine" a year - referring to the thirteen months of the Julian calendar - there are two rainy seasons a year: the irregular short rains from late January to early March and the long rains that stretch from June until mid September. In the highlands, especially on the escarpment, you must also be prepared for quite strong winds. One of the most ideal times to visit Ethiopia is between October and January, when the rains have ceased and most of the plants are green from having received a large amount of moisture.

Fact file:

- \* Location: Northern Ethiopia,
- \* Population almost completely Ethiopian Orthodox Christian  
3 different types of churches:
- \* Built-up cave churches, Rock-hewn cave churches, Rock-hewn monolithic churches



### **Simien Mountains**

The Simien Mountain massif is one of the major highlands of Africa, rising to the highest point in Ethiopia, Ras Dashen (4620m), which is the fourth highest peak in the continent. Although in Africa and not too far from the equator, snow and ice appear on the highest points and night temperatures often fall below zero.

The Simiens consist of a high plateau, which ends abruptly in deep escarpments up to 2000m deep from which there are vistas of up to 100km over the surrounding lowland valleys. The Northern escarpment offers the most dramatic scenery with wonderful views to numerous deep canyons, dramatic ridges, and isolated monoliths and spires. The dramatic landscape of the Simien Mountains is the result of massive seismic activity in the area about 40 million years ago. Molten lava poured out of the Earth's core reaching a thickness of 3000m. Subsequent erosion over the millennia has left behind the jagged landscape of the Simien Mountains: the gorges, chasms and precipices. The famous pinnacles - the sharp spires that rise abruptly from the surrounding land - are volcanic necks: the solidified lava and last remnant of ancient volcanoes.

**Simien National Park:** 150 kilometres north-east of Gondar, the Simien Mountains National Park covers 179 square kilometres of highland area at an average elevation of 3,300 metres. Ethiopia's highest peak stands adjacent to the park. The scenery is spectacular. The vegetation is principally Afro-alpine, montane savannah and heather. The national park has three general botanical regions. The lower slopes have been cultivated and grazed, while the alpine regions (up to 3600m) were forested, although much has now disappeared. The higher lands are mountain grasslands with fescue grasses as well as heathers, splendid Red Hot Pokers and Giant Lobelia.

The park was created primarily to protect the Walia Ibex, a type of wild goat, and over 1000 are said to live in the park. Also in the park are families of the Gelada Baboon and the rare Simien Wolf. The Simien Wolf although named after the mountains is rarely seen by the visitor. Over 50 species of birds have been reported in the Simien Mountains, including the impressive Bearded Vulture, or Lammergeyer, with its 10-foot (3m) wingspan.

**Climate:** Ethiopia although almost on the equator, experiences temperate climate and sometimes temperatures below freezing (in the Simien Mountains) due to its high altitude. Throughout the highlands, the climate is moderate and daytime temperatures rarely exceed 25c. Particularly in December and January, the temperature drops at night to around 10c. The hottest months are April and May, just before the main rains. Despite the moderate climate, the sun's rays beat directly down and are not effectively filtered, hence its rays are quite vicious and there is the likelihood of sunburn and sunglasses are advisable.

One of the most ideal times to visit Ethiopia is between September and March, when the rains have ceased and most of the plants are green from having received a large amount of moisture.

**Gelada** live only in the high mountain meadows of Ethiopia - an environment very unlike those of their forest or savanna-dwelling primate relatives. This high-altitude homeland is replete with steep, rocky cliffs, to which geladas have adapted. At night, the animals drop over precipice edges to sleep huddled together on ledges. These baboon-size animals are the world's most terrestrial primates - except for humans. As grass-eaters, they are the last surviving species of ancient grazing primates that were once numerous. Geladas spend most of their day sitting down, plucking and munching on grasses. They have fatty rear ends, much like human buttocks, which seem well adapted to this activity. They live in small family units of one male and three to six females. Though males are larger and more colorful, females dominate gelada societies. When an aging male begins to decline, the females in his family decide when he will be replaced by a younger rival though the male will do all he can to drive off such competition. Gelada family units often combine to form large foraging bands of 30 to 350 animals. When food is abundant as many as 670 geladas have been seen together.

**Walia Ibex**, a member of the goat family, weighs 80 - 125 kg (180 - 280 lb). It dwells on steep cliffs between 2500 - 4500 m (8200 - 14,750') in regions characterized by rocky mountains, gorges, outcrops and loose stony screes. It depends on undisturbed juniper and other mountain forest, subalpine grasslands and scrub, and a year-round supply of water. As far as is known, the walia ibex has always had a restricted range in Ethiopia. It has been found only in the Simien Mountains in northern Ethiopia in recent times. It formerly was distributed throughout these mountains, but it underwent a significant decline between 1920 and 1970. The greatest concentration now occurs within the Simien Mountains National Park, mainly along 25 km (16 mi) of the northern escarpment. Its inaccessible habitat provided protection until the advent of modern firearms, which led to a significant reduction in the population. In addition, habitat loss due to increasing use of land for cultivation and development has occurred. With the creation of the Simien Mountains National Park around 1970, poaching appeared to be brought under control. A major conservation problem is that the remaining natural habitat is extremely limited.

**Lammergeryer** simply nowhere in the world offers such amazing viewing of this formidable bird.

#### Fact file

- \* Established in 1969 , World Heritage Site by UNESCO 1978
- \* One of major highlands of Africa, Highest point (Ras Dashen) 4620 m
- \* Area: 179 sq kms, 150 kms north east of Gondar
- \* Endemic wildlife: Gelada Baboon, Walia Ibex, Simien Wolf and the Lammergeyer Vulture
- \* 3 general botanical regions



#### **Bahir Dar / Lake Tana**

**Bahir Dar** is a city in north-western Ethiopia, and the capital of the Amhara Region. Administratively, Bahir Dar is considered a Special Zone, placing it midway between Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, which are organized as chartered cities whereas cities like Mekele and Dessie, which are organized as Woredas (administrative division equivalent to a district).

Bahir Dar is one of the leading tourist destinations in Ethiopia with a variety of attractions in the nearby Lake Tana and Blue Nile River. The city is distinctly known for its wide avenues lined with palm trees and a variety of colourful flowers. It is also considered as one of the most beautiful, well planned, and safest cities by many standards, and in 2002 it was awarded UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize for managing to address the challenges of rapid urbanization. Situated on the southern shore of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile (or Abay), in what was previously the Gojjan province. The city is located approximately 578 km north-northwest of Addis Ababa, having a latitude and longitude of 11°36' N 37°23' E and an elevation of 1,840m above sea level. The city is equipped with an airport with paved runways, identified by the ICAO code HABD and IATA BJR; Ethiopian Airlines operates scheduled flights between Bahir Dar and the capital as well as with Gondar to the northwest. The city is also connected through roads (and bus lines) to these cities.

Bahir Dar grew around a Jesuit settlement, founded in the sixteenth or seventeenth century; a building from this period and associated with Pedro P·ez can be seen standing near the central square. The next mention of Bahir Dar is from the mid-19th century, as the camping spot for the army of Emperor Tewodros II. Here his army suffered from cholera, forcing the Emperor to move his troops to Begemder. Despite the loss of life on

the journey, by the time they reached Begemder, the army was free of the illness. During the Italian invasion, an Italian column moved from Gondar on 23 April 1937 and after a rapid march, occupied Bahir Dar. The city was bombed by the Royal Air Force on 21<sup>st</sup> 22 October 1940, and although the action made little damage it was a boost to Arbegnoch morale. After months of skirmishing with the British advance, the Italian garrison under the command of Colonel Torelli was recalled to Gondar by General Guglielmo Nasi, and began to evacuate the city on 27 April 1941. One of Emperor Haile Selassie's palaces was located near the city, and the Emperor considered moving the national capital to the town. On 15 June 1961 the Emperor inaugurated the new 226 metres long highway bridge over the Abay, situated at about 3 km from Bahir Dar. The city offers a small daily market and a very extensive weekly market. There are some music clubs in the city. The city is home to Bahir Dar University. The Blue Nile Falls (Tis Issat) are located about 30 km to the south.

**Lake Tana:** the largest lake in Ethiopia, situated north of the beautiful town of Bahir Dar is the source from where the famous Blue Nile starts its long journey to Khartoum, and on to the Mediterranean. The 37 mysterious islands that are scattered about the surface of the lake, give shelter to well hidden churches and monasteries of immense historical and cultural interest; decorated with beautiful paintings and housing innumerable treasures. Along the lakeshore bird life, both local and migratory visitors, make the site an ideal place for birdwatchers. The whole of the Lake Tana region and the Blue Nile gorge host a wide variety of birds both endemic and migratory visitors. The variety of habitats, from rocky crags to riverside forests and important wetlands, ensure that many other different species are spotted. Restorative work explains the Gondarene character of some of the paintings found in the remarkable monasteries and churches on the islands of Lake Tana. Kebran Gabriel, for example, originally established in the fourteenth century, was later renovated and rebuilt during the reign of Emperor Iyasu I (1682-1706). Narga Selassie, built in the eighteenth century by Empress Mentewab, is also Gondarene in character. Other churches are influenced by different periods. For instance, although Ura Kidane Mehret on the Zegie Peninsula is a fourteenth-century building, its most powerful murals notably around the holy of holies - were painted in Gondarene times. On the other hand, the centerpiece of Daga Istafanos is a Madonna painted during the reign of Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-68). Although medieval by date, this work has the flowing lines, realism, beauty and tension of much later styles.

The thirty-seven islands of Lake Tana shelter twenty monasteries - surviving remnants of an old, contemplative tradition. Because of their isolation they were used to store art treasures and religious relics from all parts of the country. Tradition says the Ark of the Covenant was kept on one of these islands when Axum was endangered, and the remains of five Emperors - including Fasilidas - are to be found at Daga Istafanos. Monks at Ura Kidane Mehret say that more than forty tabots from churches destroyed by Ahmed Gragn were hidden in their monastery during the sixteenth century. Covering more than 3,600 square kilometres, Tana is Ethiopia's largest lake. Known to the ancient Greeks as Pseboa, its sometimes-stormy waters are traversed by papyrus reed boats, called tankwas, which differ little from those found in the tombs of the Pharaohs. A boat trip on Lake Tana is one of the most pleasant excursions for visitors. Those islands and peninsulas of Lake Tana are most conveniently approached by boat.

#### Fact file:

- \* Location: North-western Ethiopia
- \* Distance: 578 km north-west of Addis Ababa
- \* Altitude: 1,840 m above sea level
- \* Population: 167,261 people
- \* Awarded UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize in 2002

#### Lake Tana:

- \* Largest lake in Ethiopia
- \* Source of the Blue Nile
- \* 37 Islands which shelter 20 monasteries
- \* Surface area: 3,600 sq km
- \* Blue Nile Falls (Tis Issat)



## **Country Information**

### **Ethiopia, a Kaleidoscope of Culture**

Nowhere in the world is as well endowed with traditional and tribal cultures than Ethiopia. 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 !

In Addis Ababa we will explore this historic city and experience the delicious national food dishes. Gondar which in the 16th Century was the second largest city in Africa ! In the daytime we seek out the endemic wildlife of the Simien Mountains, and at night in Bahir Dar enjoy the Amharic singing and dancing of the Mini Fogera. Lalibela the "The New Jerusalem" were as a "fly on the wall" you will experience the living museums in the heart of the Ethiopian coptic church.

A step back in time...

A journey through Ethiopia's historic route is a trip back in time. From the reign of King Solomon, Ethiopia, then known as Abyssinia, was the epicenter of religious mystique and the supposed resting place for the Arc of the Covenant. Rumours and mystery are interwoven with history and heritage: the Knights Templar, the so-called Crusaders, came here in search of their Holy Grail. From Scottish explorer James Bruce to Hollywood movie mogul Steven Spielberg (Raiders of the Lost Ark) Ethiopia has a story all of its own and a magnetic attraction that crosses all cultures and boundaries.

A visual feast...

Although Ethiopia's rich cultural history may be the primary focus - the sheer breathtaking beauty of this country's scenery overwhelms your senses and embeds itself in your mind's eye. Every journey is a visual feast. The spectacular highlands are a haven for endemic and endangered species such as the Simien Wolf, the Walia Ibex, the Gelada Baboon and the Lammergeyer Vulture. Your journey becomes a quest to absorb and understand the myths and religious crusades that have dominated this land: from the incredible rock-hewn underground churches of Lalibela 'A prayer in Stone' to the dizzying heights of the Simien Mountain Range described by one writer as 'the chess pieces of the Gods' - the experience is multi-dimensional and intense.

Cultural Crossroads...

Ethiopia lies at the northeastern corner of the African continent in an area known as 'the Horn of Africa'. Its intriguing blend of African and Eastern tribal civilizations and tangible aura of religious worship make it a cultural crossroads and spiritual meeting point. This is truly a multi-ethnic state: many distinctions have been blurred by intermarriage but many also remain - an astonishing 83 languages are spoken - falling into 4 main language groups: Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic and Nilo-Saharan (and there are 200 different dialects!). There are many festivals and ceremonies: religious, and ancestral and traditional attire is displayed to match.

Visas

A valid passport is required by all visitors and visas are required and currently cost US\$20 for a single tourist visa, valid 90 days from issue date. We recommend you process your application in good time. Alternatively you can get one on arrival at Bole International if you entry into Ethiopia is via Addis Ababa - it takes around 20 minutes to process. Should you be arriving into Ethiopia by any other route (i.e via the Omo River) then you must obtain your visa in advance from your country of origin.

Fact file

- \* Located in the North East corner of the African Continent, The 10th largest country in Africa
- \* Time zone: GMT +3hours. Julian calendar which consists of 12 months of 30 days each and a 13th month of 5 or 6 days.
- \* Ethiopia extends over an area of 1,112,000 square kilometers
- \* Population estimated at 65 million, divided into more than 80 ethnic groups
- \* National Dish is injera a flat sour dough pancake made from a special grain called teff.
- \* Traditionally Ethiopian's drink Tej (a honey mead) or Coffee with meals
- \* Main ethnic groups: Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, Somali, Guragie, Sidama, Wolaita, Afar, Hadiya and Gamo.
- \* Geographically dominated by the central plateaux rising to 2,000-3,000 metres above sea level
- \* Ras Dshen at 4,453 metres is the summit of Simien Mountains (the fourth highest mountain in Africa)
- \* The country is highly fertile and crossed by many rivers – the Blue Nile is the most prominent.
- \* Eastern Ethiopia is bisected by the Syrian-African Rift, crossing from North to South creating a series of Rift Valley lakes
- \* Endemic wildlife to view in the highlands includes: Gelada Baboon, Walia Ibex, Simien Wolf and the Lammergeyer Vulture



