

Ethiopia is one of the most fascinating lands I have ever visited in the world; with a rich and varied history that began long before Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire existed. It is a place of dramatic natural beauty, of mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, and the magnificent Blue Nile falls.

The Omo Valley is a cradle of a unique kaleidoscope of cultures who have kept traditions alive for generations. Here you will visit the Mursi Tribe whose women are famed for wearing large plates in their lips and ears.

You will also visit Turmi, home of the Hamar tribe. The women wear elaborately decorated goatskin and decorate their hair with clay and butter. A Hamar man comes of age by leaping over a line of cattle.

Northern and Southern Ethiopia

17 Days

Day 1: Arrival in Addis Ababa

Addis Ababa, “New Flower” in Amharic, is the third highest capital in the world. It is both the capital of Ethiopia and the African Union.

Freshen up at your hotel before you dive into the city’s bustling activity. Visit Lucy, your oldest ancestor, at the National Museum. Learn more about Ethiopia’s rich ethnic diversity at the Ethnographic Museum.

In the afternoon, take a look at St. George’s Cathedral, built in 1896 to commemorate Ethiopia’s victory over the Italian invaders in the Battle of Adwa. It houses works of the renowned artist Afewerk Tekle, as well as a small museum. Alternatively, visit the Holy Trinity Cathedral with its colorful windows depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament.

Addis Ababa features the largest open air market in Africa, Mercato. Try your bargaining skills. Or drive up to Entoto to enjoy a panoramic view of Addis, lying 700 meters down to the foot of Entoto.

Overnight: Sheraton Hotel (www.sheratonaddis.com). Lunch and dinner are included.

Day 2: Fly to Bahir Dar

A one-hour flight in the morning takes you to Bahir Dar. Locals refer to this vibrant university town on the shores of Lake Tana as the “Riviera of Ethiopia”. Lake Tana is the biggest lake in Ethiopia, and it is the source of the Blue Nile.

Discover the Blue Nile Falls a few kilometers outside of Bahir Dar on your feet and enjoy stunning views on the “smoking water” from different perspectives. In the afternoon, you’ll embark on a boat ride on Lake Tana to Zeghe Peninsula. The monasteries of Ura Kidane Mehret and Azwa Maryam have religious art on display that dates back to the 14th century.

Overnight: Kuriftu Resort & Spa (www.kurifturesortspa.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 3: Full Day Boat Trip on Lake Tana

After breakfast, you embark on a boat ride on Lake Tana, the largest highland lake of Ethiopia. You’re hopping from island to peninsula to island to visit ancient Christian art on display at Narga Selassie Monastery and the churches of Azwa Maryam and Ura Kidane Mehret.

Overnight: Kuriftu Resort & Spa (www.kurifturesortspa.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 4: Drive to Gondar

After breakfast, you proceed to Gondar. Known as “the Camelot of Africa”, it is famous for its medieval castles and churches.

The Kings of Ethiopia based their power in Gondar for two centuries. The city was the first capital of the Ethiopian empire, which began in 1632 with the reign of Fasilides. In Gondar, there are a dozen castles built by various Emperors over the course of 236 years. Many picturesque ruins lie in the Royal Enclosure.

The other places of interest are the Bath of Fasilides and the church of Debre Birhan Selassie with its legendary 135 angels painted on its ceiling.

Overnight: Mayleko Lodge (www.maylekolodge.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 5: Fly to Axum

After breakfast you fly to Axum, once home to the mythic Queen of Sheba. In the 10th century, it was the capital of the Axumite Kingdom, a hotspot of global trade for Africa, the Middle East, and beyond. It is here that Ge'ez, the language of ancient Ethiopia, originated.

The earliest records and legends of Axum date back at least 3000 years. The town and its surroundings are filled with archaeological sites, ruins of palaces, underground passageways, tombs, and stelaes. You start your tour of Axum at the Stelae Park. Its obelisks made of solid granite from the hills surrounding Axum date back more than 3,000 years. The tallest of it rises to over 75 ft.

The site of Queen Sheba's palace contains the remains of what was once a massive palace with stone walls and its own impressive drainage system. Over 50 of the palace's chambers have been excavated to date.

The Church of Maryam Zion was built by Emperor Fasilides in 1665. The podium on which the church is standing might belong to the original church constructed by King Ezana or King Kaleb in the 4th or 6th century, after the Axumite Kingdom adopted Christianity. Legend has it that the current church is the sanctuary of the Ark of the Covenant. According to the legend, Emperor Menelik I, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, brought the Ark of the Covenant from Jerusalem to Axum, where he settled and established one of the world's longest known uninterrupted monarchical dynasties. The Ark is in the care of an old and especially holy guardian monk, and according to tradition, he is the only man who is allowed to gaze upon it.

Overnight: Yared Zema Hotel (www.yaredzemaininternationalhotel.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 6: Fly to Lalibela

Your destination today is Lalibela, the mystic “New Jerusalem” with its legendary rock churches.

This almost inaccessible mountain stronghold lies 7,700 feet above sea level and was built by King Lalibela of the Zagwe Dynasty in the 12th century.

Today you visit both groups of the rock-hewn churches.

Overnight: Mountain View Hotel (www.mountainviewhotel.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 7: Excursion to Nakuto Laab, Asheton Maryam or Yemrehane Christos

Today you leave the town of Lalibela to visit one of three ancient monasteries: Nakuto Laab, Asheton Maryam or Yemrehane Christos.

Nakuto Laab was built inside a cave by King Lalibela's nephew and successor. If you choose Asheton Maryam, you have the option of riding on mules instead of trekking to this somewhat far off gem. Like Nakuto Laab, Yemrehane Christos was built inside a cave in Axumite style.

In the afternoon, you attend a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Overnight: Mountain View Hotel (www.mountainsviewhotel.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 8: Fly to Arba Minch

Arba Minch ("Forty Springs") derives its name from the innumerable little springs that bubble up in the evergreen forest covering the flats below the town.

Overnight: Paradise Lodge (www.paradiselodgeethiopia.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 9: Excursion to the Dorze People

The Dorze people live off subsistence farming and weaving. Their *shama* cloth is famous all over Ethiopia. After visiting one of their villages, you embark on a boat ride on Lake Chamo. You're almost guaranteed to spot hippos and crocodiles.

Overnight: Paradise Lodge (www.paradiselodgeethiopia.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 10: Drive to Jinka

Today you visit a Konso village with its characteristic terraced hillsides. On your way to Jinka you stop at Weito. In Jinka, learn more about the incredible ethnic diversity of Ethiopia at the South Omo Research Center.

Overnight: Eco Omo Safari Lodge (www.eco_omo.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 11: Drive to Turmi

After breakfast you visit a Mursi village. The Mursi people are famous for the iconic lip plates their women wear. On your way to Turmi, you visit a Bena village. Turmi is home to the Hamar.

Overnight: Buska Lodge (www.buskalodge.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 12: To Kolcho

A day trip takes you to the Karo people that live along the River Omo.

Overnight: Buska Lodge (www.buskalodge.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 13: Omo Rate and Drive to Konso

Cross the River Omo in a canoe to visit the Tsenai people in Erbore. Afterwards you get to meet the Galeb people in Dhesanech.

Overnight: Kanta Lodge. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 14: Drive to Yirga Alem

Yirga Alem is nestled between coffee fields and lush green. The nearby forest is home to a variety of endemic mammals.

Visit the Sidama people in a village close to Yirga Alem.

Overnight: Aregash Lodge (www.aregashlodge.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 15: Full Day in Aregash Lodge

Visit the local market, hike through local villages to the waterfalls and participate in a basic Sidama lifestyle.

Overnight: Aregash Lodge (www.aregashlodge.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.

Day 16: Drive to Langano

Today you go to Awassa. Relax on the shores of Lake Awassa and check out the famous Fish Market.

Overnight: Sabana Beach Resort (www.sabanalangano.com). Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.



Day 17: Drive Back to Addis Ababa

On your way back to Addis Ababa you visit the Stelae Field of Tiya, listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

In the evening, we take you to a memorable farewell dinner in a traditional restaurant with music and dance.

Day use of the Sheraton Hotel. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included.