

SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

TOUR TO NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

27 September to 10 October 2017 (14 days)

Organiser & tour manager: Reinoud Boers of ArchFox Tours

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National guide: to be advised

Ethiopia is a country that provides many experiences. This tour will cover the Christian plateau situated in the north-west of the country. Travelling soon after the main rainy season, the country should be green and full of flowers. We will visit the superb underground rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the fabulous remains of the ancient Axum Empire, the fascinating Sabeian temple at Yeha, centuries-old and wonderfully decorated Ethiopian churches and monasteries, the spectacular Simien Mountains, the royal castles of Gondar – the ‘Camelot of Africa’ – and Lake Tana, from which the mighty Blue Nile emerges.

All this together with a proud and beautiful people, fascinating archaeological sites and a range of excellent museums, wonderful bird life and a unique cuisine makes this tour very different from others. You will find it a unique travel experience in a profoundly beautiful and fascinating land.



TOUR ITINERARY

Wednesday 27 September: Johannesburg – Addis Ababa

Participants meet Reinoud and Marion Boers in front of the Ethiopian Airlines check-in desk, OR Tambo International Airport, at 12:00. Depart on flight ET 808 at 14:10. Our non-stop flight lands at Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport at 20:25 (+1 hour). We are met by Fikreselassie Admassu of FK Explorer Ethiopia Travel and Tours, and our national guide. Transfer to either the **Nexus Hotel** or the **Debre-Damo Hotel** for a three-night stay.

Thursday 28 September: Addis Ababa

At 08:30 we leave for the **National Museum of Ethiopia**. We hope to be met by Dr Berhane Asfaw, Ethiopia's senior palaeo-anthropologist, who, although retired, will show us around the museum's laboratory and give us an overview of current research in the country. We will hopefully be able to see the fossil remains of the 3.2 million-year-old (myo) skeleton of *Lucy* or *Dinknesh* ('Thou Art Wonderful'), which was discovered in 1974 by anthropologist Don Johansson at Hadar close to the Awash River in the Rift Valley. Subsequent discoveries in that area include the 2.5 myo *Australopithecus garhi*, the 4.4 myo *Ardipithecus ramidus*, and *Ardipithecus kadabba* dated to between 5.2 and 5.8 million years old. Thereafter we will have a conducted tour of some of the museum's more than 100 000 artefacts that cover prehistory, history, ethnography and art. The prehistoric section contains casts and original fossils of various hominids, including *A. africanus*, *A. boseii*, *Homo habilis*, *H. erectus* and *H. sapiens*.

Lunch will be at the excellent Italian-owned **Fresco Restaurant** opposite the museum. Afterwards we drive up **Mount Entonto** for views over Addis Ababa and to see the **palace of Menelik II**, Emperor of Ethiopia from 1898 to 1913, and the **Entonto Mariam Church**. A stop will be made at the cotton clothing market on the way down and thereafter we visit Jewellery Street with its many jewellery shops.



Palace of Menelik II on Mount Entonto

Friday 29 September: Addis Ababa

Morning tour to the **Ethnographic Museum** at the University of Addis Ababa, which houses collections on most of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, including their musical instruments, utensils and implements. The museum also displays religious books and other Christian and Muslim church treasures, paintings by famous Ethiopian artists and the living room of Emperor Haile Selassie I.

Afterwards we visit **St George's Cathedral**, dedicated to the national saint of Ethiopia. The cathedral was built by Menelik II to commemorate his victory over the Italians at Adwa in 1896. Its small museum houses the best collection of ecclesiastical artefacts in Ethiopia – paintings, crosses, parchments, books and beautiful handicrafts. If permission can be obtained and time permits we stop at the Africa Hall of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to see **stained glass windows designed by Afewerk Tekle**, Ethiopia's greatest living artist.

Continue to the beautiful **Trinity Cathedral** nearby, which was constructed to celebrate Ethiopia's liberation from the Italians in 1941. Most of Ethiopia's patriots and leaders are buried in this cathedral and a memorial tomb commemorates the 60 government ministers massacred by **the Derg**, the harsh regime that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. After the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army took power following the ousting of **Emperor Haile Selassie I**, it was renamed the Provisional Military Administrative Council, but continued to be known popularly as the 'Derg'. In 1975, it formally abolished the monarchy and embraced Communism as an ideology. The regime eventually became formally known as the Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia. Until 1987 the Derg

executed and imprisoned tens of thousands of its opponents without trial. In 1987, **Mengistu Haile Mariam**, its chairman since 1977, abolished the Derg and replaced it with the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. However, Mengistu and the surviving members of the Derg dominated the new government. After years of warfare by a coalition of ethnic-based parties, Mengistu was overthrown in 1991.

In the evening, there is a **welcome dinner at 2000 Habesha**, an ethnic Ethiopian restaurant. Enjoy the country's typical dish of tef-based *injera* accompanied by a range of *wats* (Ethiopian and Eritrean stews or curries prepared with chicken, beef, lamb, a variety of vegetables and spices) to the accompaniment of Ethiopian music played on traditional instruments, and song and vigorous folkloric dances.

Saturday 30 September: Addis Ababa – Lalibela

At 06:30 depart for Bole Airport for our 08:10 flight ET122 to the World Heritage Site of **Lalibela**, which offers exceptional testimony to the medieval and post-medieval civilization of Ethiopia. The site is often referred to as '**The New Jerusalem**' or 'The Eighth Wonder of the World' because of its spectacular complex of **eleven underground churches** hewn out of solid volcanic rock. The surrounding landscape is amongst the most rugged and awe-inspiring in Ethiopia.

On arrival at Lalibela airport at 10:15 and our transfer to Lalibela, we stop at the **Ne'akuto Le'ab Church** built under a cliff overhang by a king of the same name. As a relatively simple church it probably predates the Lalibela churches. It has lovely treasures, including medieval manuscripts. Continue to the **Mountain View Hotel** for a two-night stay. After settling in and an early lunch, we join our local expert guide to visit the first **four of Lalibela's churches** in the Southern Group. Until now scholars have dated the churches of Lalibela to around AD 1200, but research by David Phillipson, professor of African archaeology at Cambridge University, suggests that three of the churches – **Gabriel & Raphael, Merkurios and Danagel** in the Southern Group – may have their origin 500 years earlier in the waning and politically unstable days of the Axum Empire. Based on architectural styles and other factors, he suggests that the Merkurios and Gabriel & Raphael churches, which are located in highly defensive positions, were initially carved out of the rock as a type of elite palace or fortress complex, while another structure from the mid-7th century became the church of Danagel.



Prof. Phillipson believes that at least four of the remaining eight churches were constructed specifically as places of worship in the 10th and 11th centuries, while the other four were built from the 12th to the mid-13th century. His research demonstrates a substantial continuity between the Axumite civilisation and that of medieval Ethiopia. The dark and lofty monolithic churches of varying shapes and sizes, with high pillars, windows and a maze of tunnels, display a **level of masonry expertise** that is astounding even in modern terms. The structures are mostly still in use and contain wonderful gold and silver artefacts. Myth has it that the churches were built by the kings of the Zagwe dynasty, starting with Emperor Lalibela, but this information probably applies to the youngest four churches only. Afterwards there will be time to shop at stalls featuring nice arts and crafts.

Sunday 1 October: Lalibela



This morning we visit the remote **Yemrehane Kristos Cave Church**, 40 km away. Situated in a vast cavern of Mount Abuna Yosef, the church precedes the Lalibela churches and dates to the reign of the third Zagwe ruler of the same name (1087–1127±). King Yemrehane Kristos is credited with restoring links between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian-based Coptic Church. Yemrehane Kristos is a particularly fine example of late-Axumite architecture, being constructed of alternating layers of wood and white gypsum. It is exquisitely preserved and incorporates distinctive architectural features, such as cruciform-carved windows and a magnificent coffer ceiling. The back of the cavern is a memorable and eerie place. It is reputed to contain the bones of over 10 000 Christian pilgrims who apparently travelled from as far away as Egypt, Syria and Jerusalem to die at this church. A visible jumble of assorted skeletons provides macabre backup to this unlikely tale. To reach the cavern, a 25-minute walk may be required as close vehicle access is not always guaranteed.

After lunch at our hotel, we continue with our visit of the Lalibela complex, visiting the **six churches in the Northern Group**, including the masterpiece, **Bet Giorgis**. Being a Sunday, we will experience a **wonderful atmosphere**: devout Ethiopian Orthodox Church members celebrating services with singing, music and prayer. Near Bet Giorgis we will also see the region's **double-storey thatched homes**, which are a legacy of the Amhara people.

Monday 2 October: Lalibela – Axum

Depart for the airport at 08:00 for our flight ET122 to Axum departing at 10:35. Arriving at Axum airport at 11:15, we transfer to either the **Sabeian International Hotel** or the **Yared Zema Hotel** for a three-night stay. After settling in and an early lunch we visit the famous **Stelae Park** for a close-up view of granite monoliths dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, which mark the royal tombs of kings. Originally six carved stelae stood here. Today only two are still erect, one rising to 20.6 m and weighing 160 t, and the other to 33 m, the tallest stela to be erected in the world. This stela was taken by Italians as war bounty in the late 1930s, but returned to Ethiopia and restored in about 2005. The fallen remains of the other stelae are found in situ. The stelae are carved with imitation doors, windows and beams to resemble the multi-storied royal palaces of the time. Plain stelae from an earlier time will also be seen nearby, and we will explore the fascinating **Tomb of Remhai (Tomb of the False Door)**. The narrow entrance passage of the **Tomb of the Brick Arches** (not accessible) was discovered by Prof. Phillipson underneath a fallen stela.



We continue our visit to the nearby **Mai Shum**, more popularly known as Queen Sheba's Bath, and the **Tombs of King Kaleb** (514–542 AD) and **Gebre-Meskal**, which are walled by massive, exact-fitting granite blocks. Kaleb's tomb reportedly had brass, unicorn-adorned towers on each corner. The underground galleries and chambers could have served as a treasury. The remains of a church erected over the tombs at a later date are visible.

Tuesday 3 October: Axum

At 09:00 we set out to visit the **museum at Stellae Park** before continuing to the **St Mary of Zion Church Complex**. The largest building is the **Cathedral** built by Emperor Haile Selassie in the 1950s to enable women to have a place of worship as well. Alongside the cathedral lies the excavated site of what is believed to have been **Axum's original Christian church** built in the 5th century. On the other side of this rises the Chapel where the **Ark of the Covenant**, which is believed to have been brought to Axum from Israel by Menelik I some 3 000 years ago, is said to be housed. The chapel is not accessible by anyone and is guarded by one individual for life.

Further along lies the 17th century **Tsion Maryam Monastery**, the holiest church of Ethiopia, which has been destroyed and rebuilt at least twice. Its first putative destruction occurred at the hands of Queen Yodit, the semi-legendary, non-Christian, Beta Israel warrior-queen who around AD 960 laid waste to Axum and its countryside, destroyed churches and monuments, and attempted to exterminate the members of the ruling Axumite dynasty. Its second, confirmed, destruction occurred in the 16th century at the hands of **Ahmad ibn Ibrihim al-Ghazi** 'The Conqueror', also nicknamed Gagn (the 'Left-Handed'), who from Harar in what is now eastern Ethiopia launched destructive assaults on the Christian highlands from 1528 to 1560. Rebuilt by Emperor Gelawdewos and then enlarged by King **Fasilides** during the 17th century, the monastery became the traditional place for the crowning of Ethiopian emperors. Monasteries are unfortunately not allowed to be visited by women and only the male participants will be able to see this building's beautiful wall and ceiling paintings. The ladies will instead visit a new church museum in the church compound where the crowns of former Ethiopian rulers, crosses and religious books are on display. The enclosure is also a storage area for other artefacts, such as stones from the ancient church and stone thrones.



Tsion Maryam Monastery (above) and the ceiling of the Church of Arbaet-Ensesa, or the Four Animals (right)



Afterwards there is an exciting visit to the Church of **Arbaet-Ensesa (Church of the Four Animals)**, probably the most beautifully decorated church we will see. The public is not normally allowed access to this church, but entrance will have been arranged specially for us. After lunch at the Yared Zema Hotel, we look at a **4th century tablet** that records the victories of King Ezana in three ancient languages – Sabaeen, the Ethiopian church language of Ge'ez and Greek, as well as a **new archaeological excavation** nearby, before driving out to the **Durgur ruins**, claimed to be the palace of Queen Sheba, but considered by archaeologists to be the impressive **Ta'akha Maryam**, the largest elite complex of Axum. Opposite, we find rough-hewn, up to over 4 m high undecorated stelae in the **Gudit Stelae Field**, which are much older than those in the Stelae Park. We continue into the countryside to **visit the quarry** from which the stelae were carved. A walk up the hill in the late afternoon brings us to a quite excellent relief on a rock face, known as the '**Lion of Gobedra**'.

Wednesday 4 October: Axum – Adwa – Yeha – Adwa – Axum

At 07:00 we embark on a wonderful 55 km journey through impressive mountain landscape to Adwa and Yeha to the east of Axum. **Adwa** is of great significance to Ethiopians as it was here that Emperor Menelik II defeated an Italian invasion in 1896. Around 18 000 Italian troops, with 56 artillery pieces, faced around 100 000 Abyssinians, mostly riflemen. The Italians suffered about 8 500 casualties against Ethiopia's 12 000 to 13 000. Some 3 000 Italians were taken prisoner and they left behind all of their artillery, 11 000 rifles and most of their transport. This decisive defeat for Italy secured Ethiopian sovereignty.



The countryside around Adwa and the 2 500-year-old Sabean temple at Yeha

Further along the road we arrive at the settlement of **Yeha**, the site of a 2 500-year-old **Sabaeen temple** reminiscent of Yemenite architecture. The 12 m high walls of the temple are built of huge, smooth and exact-fitting sandstone blocks that are inscribed with Sabaeen inscriptions and reliefs of ibexes, the sacred animal of southern Arabia. A pagan faith linked to the Sabean civilisation of South Arabia was perhaps practised here. Large statues of plump, dreadlocked women unearthed here and visible in the National Museum in Addis indicate a fertility cult of sorts. Judaic relics and historical artefacts are housed in a tiny but remarkable treasure house in the monastery alongside.

On the return journey, we will visit an old monastery, **Aba Gerima**, named after one of the nine saints who came to Ethiopia in the 6th century. The monastery is not open to women, but arrangements will be made for some of the displays to be carried outside. Back in Adwa, we will visit two historical sites, namely the **Adua base and command post** of the Italians during their occupation of Ethiopia (1935–1941) and the **Fremuna** or **Forto**, a 17th century fortification of Portuguese Jesuits during their conflict with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians who did not want to convert to Catholicism. A lunch or picnic lunch will be had at a suitable stop. Return to Axum.

Thursday 5 October: Axum – Simien Mountains National Park

We depart from Axum at 07:00 for the Simien Mountains, a World Heritage Site. Our drive is memorable for **spectacular vistas and breath-taking landscapes** as we cross three deep river valleys and surmount numerous passes, some over 3 300 m high. Homer wrote that the Simien Mountains were so beautiful that they became the **playground of the gods**.

We pass through the area where in the 1980s the northern states of Ethiopia waged resistance against Mengistu's tyrannical rule from 1974 to 1991. On the way to the **Tekeze River** lies the battlefield where in February 1989 the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which employed superior military tactics and had

the support of the local population, wiped out the poorly led, almost 40 000 strong 604th Corps of the Third Revolutionary Army, the division set up to extinguish the revolt in Tigray. Some 23 000 troops were taken prisoner. The debacle precipitated the withdrawal of the national army from Tigray, a collapse in morale among government forces and the fall of Addis Ababa to the TPLF in May 1991.



After crossing the Tekeze a picnic lunch will be enjoyed either under shady trees or at a local hotel at **Adiarkay** before we continue along a newly paved mountain road originally built by the Italians. The scenery with Simien peaks around us rising to 4 430 m is superb. We climb to the top of the plateaux via **Buit Ras** to reach the **Simien Lodge** (www.simiens.com), an eco-lodge in the 180 km² **Simien Mountains National Park**. Situated at a height of 3 260 m, it is claimed to be the highest hotel in Africa and all rooms enjoy wonderful views.

Friday 6 October: Simien Mountains National Park – Gondar



We spend a wonderful morning in the national park, relaxing or hiking as per choice. Scouts will accompany the hikers. The park boasts varied and often endemic flora with three marked botanical areas. On the meadows adjoining steep cliffs enjoy meeting troops of Gelada monkeys, which are only found in these mountains. Geladas are visually striking, with burning eyes and leathery complexions. Males have golden manes and large canines, which they frequently bare at each other. Both sexes have a bald, hourglass-shaped patch of skin on their chests, the redness of which telegraphs a male's social status and a female's reproductive stage. Look out for many mountain-bird species, including the bearded vulture or lammergeyer and the augur buzzard. But above all, enjoy the magnificent vistas over the mountains.

We depart from the lodge after lunch and travel through well-watered highland farming country to the regional capital of **Gondar**, arriving at the **Goha Hotel** by about 18:00. On the way we stop at a village formerly inhabited by Falasha, Ethiopians of Jewish faith, before they were relocated to Israel between 1979 and 1990. They call themselves House of Israel (Beta Israel) and claim descent from Menilek I, traditionally the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Their ancestors, however, were probably local Agau who were converted by Jews living in southern Arabia during the occupation of Yemen by the Axum

empire. The Falasha remained faithful to Judaism after the conversion of Axum to Christianity in the 4th century. Today's inhabitants continue to make pottery in the Falasha tradition.

Saturday 7 October: Gondar

Gondar is set in a landscape of great beauty and hosts what is often referred to as the '**Camelot of Africa**'. In 1636 Ethiopian King Fasilides expelled the Portuguese from the region and made Gondar his capital. It remained the seat of power until the capital moved to Addis Ababa in the second half of the 19th century. King Fasilides built the first of many enchanting castles in the Royal Enclosure. With their upper towers and round turrets, they are an unexpected sight in Africa. At first glance the castles have a vaguely Moorish feel, but closer scrutiny reveals Axumite and southern Arabian influences.

After breakfast, we depart for the walled **Royal Enclosure**. Here seven well-preserved castles and the ruins of others stand in the rolling parkland. Constructed of massive cut-stone blocks without the use of mortar, the buildings arose between 1632 and 1855. Many of the structures, such as **King Fasilides' library**, may be entered. Later we visit the **Bath of Fasilides**, which is filled once a year for the Timkat (Epiphany) celebrations.



In the afternoon, another highlight will be the elaborately decorated 17th century **Debre Birhan Selassie Church** built during the reign of Emperor Iyasu (1682–1706). Its wonderful painted ceiling of angels' faces has been described as among the most charming in Christendom. We will also visit the **Miriam Kusquam Church** and the ruins of **Mentewab's castle**. As we drive through downtown Gondar look out for Italian **art-deco architecture**. After dinner, enjoy an Ethiopian coffee ceremony specially arranged for us.

Sunday 8 October: Gondar – Lake Tana – Bahir Dar

We depart at 06:30 on a 90-minute drive to Gorgora on **Lake Tana**. This lake, which is the source of the Blue Nile, is fringed with riverine woodland that hosts a wide diversity of bird life. We board a motorised boat for a pleasant full-day journey down the extent of the 3 600 km² lake and visits to three of the 21 churches and monasteries located on 37 islands or along the lake's edge. The churches date from as early as the 14th century. They are built in a distinctive round style of mud, wood and reeds woven into intricate patterns, and are decorated with colourful,

almost Byzantine frescoes reflecting Biblical traditions and legends, and have elaborately painted ceilings. The churches are World Heritage sites.

Our first stop is at the 17th century **monastery of Narga Selassie**, a church without substitute. Then, after a picnic lunch on board, we arrive at the lovely 14th century **Azua Mariam Church**. It is believed that the painting style employed by all Lake Tana churches and monasteries originated at this church, which is therefore also called '**The Painting House**'. Our last visit is to **Kebrane-Gabriel** – the lake's principal monastery. It boasts an impressive cathedral-like building and a wonderful treasury with many artefacts, such as the original iron cross, claimed to date from the year of its opening in 1313.



As women are not allowed on this monastic island, they will visit a small church on the nearby island of Entos. Later we will sail into the mouth of the Blue Nile from where the river follows a torturous 800 km journey through Ethiopia before entering Sudan and meeting up with the White Nile. Up to 80 per cent of the Nile's water originates in Ethiopia. We disembark at either the **Delano Hotel** or the **Jacaranda Hotel** in the pretty market town of **Bahir Dar**.

Monday 9 October: Bahir Dar – Blue Nile Falls – Addis Ababa

This morning we visit Africa's second-most famous falls, the 'Smoking Water' **Tissisat Falls**, 35 km downstream from Lake Tana. It is reached after a one-hour drive and a 30-minute walk through riverine woodland where birds such as the yellow-fronted parrot can be seen. The path crosses over a castellated bridge built by Goan artisans in the 17th century. At the 400 m wide falls, the Blue Nile begins its torturous journey by thundering down a 50 m cascade. Unfortunately, much of the water is diverted to feed a hydraulic power-station in the gorge.

Back in Bahir Dar, we have lunch at the lakeside **Tana Hotel** before visiting Bahir Dar's market, one of the most popular in the country. Depart for the airport at 15:30 for our flight ET142 to Addis Ababa at 17:10, arriving there at 18:10. Transfer to the **Nexus Hotel**. Our day ends with an **Ethiopian farewell dinner**, another ethnic experience, this time at the **Checheho Cultural Restaurant**. Enjoy typical dishes to the accompaniment of traditional Ethiopian music, song and dance. Salads are available for those who are not keen on Ethiopian dishes.

Tuesday 10 October: Addis Ababa – Johannesburg

An early start for our homeward journey: our Ethiopian Airlines flight ET809 to Johannesburg departs at 08:40. Arrive in Johannesburg at 13:05.

PRICE DETAILS

Per person sharing: R43 500 plus US\$50

Single supplement: R5 900

THE US DOLLAR COMPONENT

This amount, which will be collected during the tour mainly in Ethiopian birr, will cover the following direct expenses.

- Gratuities for the national guide, local guides and drivers
- Tips for hotel staff and porters
- Tips at sites and museums visited
- Out-of-pocket expenses for the group

INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE

Economy class flights between Johannesburg and Addis Ababa return and within Ethiopia; all arrangements in Ethiopia as per the itinerary; surface transportation in Ethiopia; Lake Tana boat crossing; accommodation in the hotels specified in rooms with en-suite shower/bath, air-conditioning/fans as far as available; all meals; 1 ℓ of bottled water per person/day when travelling; all entrance fees; the services of a group tour leader and an English-speaking Ethiopian guide throughout; local guides where required; all tips, gratuities and fees.

NOT INCLUDED IN TOUR PRICE

Personal expenses (drinks, laundry, optional entertainment, etc.), group travel insurance (see 'Important Information' below) and visa costs (see 'Important Information' below).

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Organiser and tour leader: Reinoud Boers, ArchFox Books and Tours, 5 Henry Road, Rivonia, Sandton; PO Box 2196, Rivonia, 2128; tel/fax 011 803 2681; cell 082 566 6295; fox@boers.org.za.

Ethiopian tour operator: FK Explorer Ethiopia Travel and Tours PLC, tel. 00 251 11 663 8431 or 651 3778, mobile 00 251 911 21 4425, fkwiknet@ethionet.et, website www.explorerethiopia.et.

Our destination: Located in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is an ancient independent nation civilised by a mix of peoples from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. It is the second-most densely populated country in Africa.

Languages: Ethiopia has 80 languages, but Amharic, Oromigna and the Semitic Tigrigna are spoken by two-thirds of the population. Amharic is the official language, while English, which is widely spoken, is the language of instruction and business. Arabic, French and Italian are sometimes spoken.

Religion: Forty-five per cent of Ethiopians are Christians and generally belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, while 35% are Suni Muslims and 11% adhere to traditional beliefs. Muslim fundamentalism is not experienced in Ethiopia.

Tour conditions and terms: Please refer to the Tour Booking Form.

Outside contact during the tour: Hotel contact details will be provided to participants.

Passports: Passports must have a validity of at least six months and have two empty pages.

Visa requirement: Tourist visas are required by South African, European and US passport holders. The visa cost is currently R480.00. A visa service will be provided at a cost of R150 per person and details of requirements will be advised.

Travel insurance: Valid travel insurance is essential for this tour. Group travel insurance for persons up to 69 years of age costing R25 per person/day (total R350 for 14 days) will be arranged and charged separately. The cost of travel insurance for persons 70 to 79 years old will be R2 131.00, and for persons 80 years and older R2 804.00. Participants who may have their own travel insurance need to provide confirmation of this, as well as a copy of the insurance schedule.

General: Conditions in Ethiopia can be different and Western standards should not be expected.

Security/crime: Ethiopia is quite safe in general, but casual theft and pick pocketing does occur, especially in larger towns and markets. Take care of your belongings.

Number of participants: A maximum of 25 persons, including the tour leader.

Tour guides: The tour will be accompanied throughout by a professional English-speaking tour guide. Local guides will accompany us at specific sites.

Air travel: All flights will in economy class with Ethiopian Airways. A special group fare applies.

Foreign participants: Participants joining from other parts of the world will join the tour in Addis Ababa and need to book their own return flights and flights within Ethiopia. Where possible, international flights should be booked with Ethiopian Airlines to benefit from discounted internal flights. The tour price will be reduced by the flight component for these participants.

Ground transport: The group will travel throughout in two 22-seater Coasters with drivers.

Standard of roads: Although one should be prepared for some poorer roads, most main roads have been surfaced in recent years and the standard of both gravel and surfaced roads is generally good.

Accommodation: Expect simple but clean three or four-star hotels. The best hotels available are generally used outside Addis Ababa. Where rooms with double beds for couples are not available, twin-bedded rooms will be supplied.

Meals: Dinners will generally be had at our hotels, while lunches will be taken at hotels or restaurants. Picnic lunches will be arranged on longer journeys when such an arrangement will be most suitable. Standard Western meals are generally served in Ethiopia, but a couple of special Ethiopian meals comprising the staple injera (pancakes made from tef) and spicy wats are included.

Health precautions: Inoculation against Yellow Fever is a requirement. Inoculations against hepatitis A and B, meningitis, rabies, tetanus and typhoid and polio are recommended. The highlands of Ethiopia are malaria free.

Diarrhoea: Take care with the water you use and the food you eat. Bring the necessary medicine, especially rehydration remedy.

Water: Use only bottled water, which is free available in shops and hotels at a cost of about US\$0.80 per 1.5 or 1.8 l bottle (US\$ 0.50 more in hotels), should be used. Each travelling day, 1 l of bottled water will be made available per person. In the case of sparkling water, the *Ambo* brand is recommended.

Climate: We will be travelling in Ethiopia's autumn. As we will be there immediately after the annual summer rains, the country should be green and full of flowers. The central highlands and the mountainous regions to be visited have a temperate climate. The average daytime temperature will be around 23°C, belying Ethiopia's proximity to the Equator. There is the possibility of light showers.

Mode of dress and behaviour in churches: Dress comfortably and informally, but modestly in deference to Christian Orthodox dress codes. Women should not expose their knees or shoulders in public and should therefore not wear shorts and sleeveless tops. Always remove shoes when entering a church (you may wear socks). Speak quietly, move slowly, avoid walking in front of worshippers performing prayers, and do not use a flash when taking photos.

Clothing: Take light cotton clothing. Sturdy, closed shoes with rough soles are advisable. Sweaters or jackets are essential for cool evenings and bring a rain jacket.

Other items that could be useful to bring: Sunhat, sunblock, sunglasses, water bottle, Game, toilet paper, wet paper towels, instant hand sanitiser, torch and batteries (for use at Lalibela), personal medication, eye drops, insect repellent, toiletries, towel, bathing suit, adaptor, binoculars, photographic equipment with adequate SD-card capacity and an umbrella. A money belt is always useful.

Luggage: As far as possible, bring soft-sided but sturdy holdalls. Because storage space on the Coasters is limited, and for your own comfort, please keep luggage compact. Use travel locks and affix address labels to the inside of luggage. A small carry pack for water, lunch packs, etc. could be useful.

Currency and spending money: Payments in Ethiopia need to be made in Ethiopian birr (ETB). Ideally, carry your spending money in US\$ cash, which you will be able to exchange readily at most hotels at a rate close to the bank rate. But euros and British pounds are also well accepted. The relevant exchange rates in March 2017 were:

- R1 = 1.80 birr (1 ETB = 0.56)
- US\$ 1 = 22.81 birr (1 ETB = 0.044)
- €1 = 24.50 birr
- £1 = 28.30 birr

Credit cards: Major credit cards are accepted for purchases by certain merchants in Addis Ababa, but not yet in many other towns. ATMs are available in Axum, Gondar and Bahir Dar.

Cell phones: Cell phones generally operate throughout Ethiopia. Local Simcards are available at about US\$1 equivalent, but you will need to top-up with airtime (25, 50 and 100 birr). To purchase a Simcard you will need to show your passport and submit two passport photos.



Electricity and electrical plugs: 220 volts and the two-pin round European-style plug that fits into recessed wall sockets as shown alongside is used. Bring an adaptor if you are not sure.

Photography:

The photographing of airports, bridges, military installations, government buildings, policemen and military personnel is strictly prohibited. Always ask when you wish to photograph people close-up. Also note that some museums and sights may require payment of a photo/video fee.

Time: GMT minus 3 hours – one hour ahead of South Africa. Ethiopians measure time in 12-hour cycles starting at 06:00 and at 18:00, so our 7 o'clock is their 1 o'clock, etc. This will not affect us.

Ethiopian calendar: Ethiopia uses the Julian calendar, which differs from the Gregorian Calendar by 7 to 8 years and about 14 days. Years are divided into 12 months of 30 days and a 13th month of five or six days.

Things to buy: Superb filigree and other jewellery in silver and gold, often with religious provenance; decorative handicrafts; coffee. When buying gold and silver jewellery, which is sold by weight at the day's metal price with little mark-up, take care that the item is weighed correctly.

Artefacts: Items that could be interpreted as antiquities must be cleared by the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa before their export is permitted. Always obtain purchase receipts.

Drinks: Alcohol is freely available. The coffee is always good.

Fluids in hand luggage: Remember the security restrictions on fluid containers in hand luggage on flights – containers with more than 100 ml are not permitted.