

Historic Ethiopia & Wild Omo Valley

January 16-February 3, 2022 with Timket Festival

Pre-Tour Extension to Danakil Depression & Tigray Rock Hewn Churches

January 9-16

Post-tour Extension to Harar

February 3-5



Ethiopia is the home of some of the most exotic ancient civilizations in the world and the land where some of our earliest human ancestors have been discovered. The country's landscape is littered with old ruins and wonders -- ancient sculpted towers, Arab-influenced walled towns and early churches carved from solid rock. It also has its share of wild places -- of lions and hippos and untamed rivers.

In the wild Omo Valley, we encounter the tribal cultures of the Hamar, Mursi and Dorze.

Tourist infrastructure is still minimal. While flexible, adventurous travelers will be enchanted nonetheless, others may find traveling in Ethiopia too stressful. Omo Valley is really "off-the-beaten-track." The roads are in rough condition (if there is a road at all), and you should be prepared for some bumpy drives. The hotels are improving!

Jan 16 Day 1 Arrive in Addis Ababa / Jupiter Hotel (L)

You will be met on arrival and transferred to hotel for immediate check-in. Most flights arrive at about 8 am. The rest of the morning, time to recuperate from the long flight.

Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, the city is located 2,500m (8,200ft) above sea level in one of the highest parts of the Entoto Mountain Chain, which rises to 3,000m (9,800ft) above sea level. It enjoys an excellent climate all year round, with an average temperature of 25C (77F).

We depart at 12 noon and head out to lunch at the fabulous Lucy Restaurant and then to the National Museum next door. The National Museum exhibits many archaeological and historical findings. Its' collection is considered one of the most important in sub-Saharan Africa. View the paleontology exhibit, including two remarkable casts of Lucy. The real bones are preserved in the archives of the museum. We also visit Addis Ababa University campus and the Ethnological Museum (Institute of Ethiopian Studies) in the same compound. This is close to the National Museum.

North: Historic Route: Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, Bahir Dar

Jan 17 Day 2 Fly to Axum ET 128, dep 7:40 am, arrive 910 am / Sabean Hotel (B,L,D)

Axum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and holy city of Ethiopia, dating back over 2000 years and the cradle of Ethiopian civilization. Famous long before the time of Christ, Axum was the capital of the long Axumite reign, one of the oldest African empires and represented a crucial connecting point between Africa and Asia for almost a thousand years. The legends narrated in the Kebra Negest ('Book of Kings') recount how the city of Axum as early as the 10th century BC was the city where the Queen of Sheba resided. It is rumored that the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon brought the Ark of the Covenant to Axum and it remains there to this day, preserved in a sanctuary.

Early breakfast available at 5 am. We must depart the hotel at 5:30 am for check-in at 6 am. Often the ET flights depart earlier than scheduled without any advance notice ☹

On arrival visit the steles, granite monoliths dating from pre-Christian times and decorated with symbolic engravings. In ancient times, there were seven steles, now there are six as Mussolini took one of them during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Also visit the Archaeological Museum of Axum.

Continue to the hotel for check-in and lunch. (There are no decent outside restaurants in Axum.)

At about 1:15 we depart for the afternoon sightseeing to include: church of Saint Mary of Zion (Tzion), which contains the crowns of various Ethiopian kings and other treasures. A chapel in the church is believed by many to contain The Ark of the Covenant.

Culminate the day with a visit to the Queen of Sheba's Bath & Palace. This large reservoir is an excellent place to observe the local women collecting water for washing. Both the reservoir and the palace post-date the Queen, but the names persist. The palace area has been fully excavated and worth a short look.

On the way back to the hotel, we'll stop at the Axumait Handicraft Center that has a large diverse collection of quality arts.

Dinner at the hotel or perhaps the Yared Zema Hotel Restaurant.

Jan 18 Day 3 Fly to Lalibela - Timket Festivities / Maribela Hotel (B,L,D)

Breakfast at 6:45 am. Depart 7:45 am transfer to airport for the flight to Lalibella, ET 123 departing 10:15 am, arriving 10:40 am On arrival, check-in to the hotel and lunch at the hotel restaurant.

After lunch, about 1:15 pm, we head out to witness one of the most colorful and highly celebrated festivals in Ethiopia, **the Timket evening procession**, called Ketera.

During the two day Timket celebration, worshipers dress in pure white traditional Ethiopian dress, in dramatic contrast to the brilliantly hued velvet and satins of the priests' ceremonial robes and embroidered umbrellas.

The procession starts at about 2 pm. During Ketera, priests take out the Tabots- replicas of the original Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments, from each church and proceed, carrying them wrapped in velvet on top of their heads to the place where the next day' celebration will take place. At Lalibela all the Taboats are taken to the 'Taboat Maderia', accompanied by priests bearing prayer sticks and sistra, ringing bells, blowing trumpets, and swinging bronze censors from which wisps of incense smoke escape into the evening air. The Tabots are kept in their special tent in the meadow, each hoisting a proud banner depicting the church's saint in front. The dancing and chanting by the priest and the faithful continue all night. More info: Sacred sites, Ark of Covenant https://sacredsites.com/africa/ethiopia/sacred_sites_ethiopia.html

This evening, we have dinner at the Kana Restaurant.

After dinner and rest at the hotel, we will return to the 'Taboat Maderia' to attend the night celebrations.

Jan 19 Day 4 Lalibela - Timket Festivities / Maribela Hotel (B,L,D)

This is the date on which the Ethiopian Orthodox church commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ in the river of Jordan.

Early in the morning, (about 5:30 am), we drive to the 'Taboat Maderia' to join the celebration with the crowd waiting to be baptized by the holy water (starts about 7 am). The water which symbolizes the Jordan River is blessed by the priest and the patriarch then dips a golden cross and extinguishes a burning consecrated candle on the alter. He then sprinkles water on the assembled congregation in commemoration of Christ's baptism in the Jordan River.

Following the baptism, the Tabots start their way back to their respective churches, while feasting, singing and dancing continue all the way to the churches. On Timket, everyone dresses in the dazzling white of the traditional dress, providing a dramatic contrast to the jewel colors of the ceremonial velvets and satins of the priests' robes and sequined velvet umbrellas. The elders march solemnly, accompanied by singing, leaping priest and young men. All these activities recall the ancient rites of the Old Testament; a culture that has remained unchanged over the centuries.

We will stay for a little of the festivities and then return to hotel for breakfast at 9 am. From 10 am to 12:30 pm you have the option to have free time or to return to the festivities. Lunch at Ben Abeba Restaurant.

This afternoon we'll **tour the famous eleven rock-hewn/monolithic churches**. At the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th centuries, King Lalibela of the Zaghwe dynasty built a series of rock hewn churches, now classified as UNESCO World Heritage Site and rightly acknowledged as one of the wonders of the world. The entire city may be described as a sculpture dedicated to the glory of God. Even from the air, the churches, carved into the rugged mountainsides, are a breathtaking spectacle.

Carved out of pink granite rock, each church (Bet) has a unique architectural style; all are superbly carved and most of them are decorated with well-preserved paintings. It is estimated that it took 25 years to construct the churches. For the kingdom to have kept a large work force engaged in economically unproductive labor for such a period means it was very wealthy. The area was fertile and agriculturally productive then, whereas deforestation and ecological degradation have since made it barren. In addition to the 11 churches in the city, there are others in the surrounding countryside. All are still in use.

Tour the first group of churches. Bet Medihanialem is the largest, supported by 72 pillars and houses the 7kg (15 lbs) gold Lalibela Cross. We go through a tunnel from Bet Medihanialem to Bet Mariam, in which there is a

pillar that it is said Jesus Christ leaned against when he appeared in a vision to King Lalibela. Bet Mariam also contains fabulous carvings of various birds and animals. We also visit Bet Danaghel; a chapel built in honor of martyred nuns. Bet Golgotha and Bet Mikael are twin churches and many believe that a visit to Bet Golgotha alone can guarantee your place in heaven! The twin churches also contain many important religious items and some of the best examples of early religious art in the country. The last church we visit is Bet Giyorgis (church of Saint George), one of the more recent churches to be excavated and best preserved.

Please Note: visiting the cave temples requires climbing steps without railings and walking through underground passages that are narrow and have uneven flooring. The stone steps can be slick. This can be challenging if you have difficulty walking or are unsteady on your feet. Wear shoes with good grip and support. **We can hire a helper to assist you, pay direct—please request in advance.**

Return to the hotel to freshen up, some free time. Dinner at the hotel or Mead Restaurant.

Jan 20 Day 5 Lalibela / Maribela Hotel (B,L,D)

Breakfast at 7:30 am. Depart at 8:30 am to visit the second group of cave churches.

We'll have lunch at the wonderful Seven Olives Restaurant.

Visit a family for a cooking experience and Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony. The wife of the household will also make injera, a sourdough risen flat bread with a spongy texture. Traditionally made out of teff flour, it is a national dish of Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Return to hotel. Dinner at hotel.

Jan 21 Day 6 Fly to Gondar / Haile Resort Hotel (B,L,D)

Depart at 7:30 am for a drive to visit Na'akuto La'ab cave church.

Time permitting, on the way back towards town, we'll stop for a traditional coffee at one of the quaint outdoor street stalls and be able to see the coffee beans roasting as we sit under a canopy and chat with the owner and his/her family. These casual stalls are frequented by locals so a chance for some spontaneous interaction.

We depart at 11:00 am for the transfer to the airport for the flight to Gondar ET 123 departing 1:20 pm, arriving 1:50 pm. Check in is 11:30 am.

On arrival transfer to hotel lunch. No decent restaurants outside the hotel.

Gondar was the first capital city of the Ethiopian empire, which began in 1632 with the reign of King Fasilledes. In Gondar there are dozens of castles built by various emperors over the course of 236 years.

The city has various Islamic influences as well as some Italian architecture remaining from Italy's occupation.

We'll spend the afternoon visiting the palaces, residences and open air baths of King Fasilledes; the monasteries of Qusquom, the church of Debre Berhan Sellassie (Light of the Trinity) with its 16th century paintings and frescoes, which is located at the summit of a hill and surrounded by fortified walls. Debre Berham Selassie is rumored to once have been the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant.

Transfer to hotel for dinner and overnight at Haile Resort.

Jan 22 Day 7 Gondar – Excursion to Simien National Park / Haile Resort Hotel (B,L,D)

Please note: the part of the Simien Mountains that we visit is at an altitude of 10,498 feet.

Breakfast at 6 am. We will depart at 7 am to Simien National Park. The road to the entrance is now fully paved and is approximately 1.5 hours drive. Then another 30 minutes on a dirt road.

We will stop at the Semien Park Lodge for tea/coffee and bathrooms. Then drive further (on a rough dirt road) to Sankaber for the best views and a walk along the cliffs. A picnic table will be set up for lunch in a picturesque setting.

At the high point of the road, there are superb views across the eroded foothills of the range and you may see the endemic Gelada (or 'bleeding heart') baboons. Sit in their migration path to get some incredible pictures.

The Simien Mountains National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and contains some of the most dramatic scenery in Africa - great volcanic plugs, formed some 40 million years ago and eroded over the eons 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 meters. At 4620 m, Ras Dashen is the highest in the country and the fourth highest in Africa.

Wildlife: There are currently about 2700 animals in the park and this number is fairly static. Although the predators have declined, increased farming in the park means that the gelada do not have the same grasslands and woodlands as previously. Gelada live in family groups made up of a dominant male and up to 8 females with their respective young. They come together in larger bands and during the dry season these bands can be as large as 800 animals.

There are a few leopards in the Simiens. They live in the wooded valley areas of the north escarpment and sometimes venture onto the plateau to hunt although they prefer the cover of the trees. The best place to find leopard is around Sankabur although generally their activity is nocturnal.

Hyenas are still found in some parts of the Simiens although their numbers are depleted by locals who consider them a pest. Likewise the jackal numbers are not as large as they used to be but jackal can be viewed, especially at night. Walia Ibex numbers are increasing. They were once a threatened species but protection and reduction in predators has meant that their numbers are increasing. They are easily recognized by their long curved serrated horns and it is possible now to get within 100 meters of these beautiful animals. Chennuk is the best place to see them.

The number of Simien Wolf or Red Fox in the park are officially 77 animals but the number could be lower than this since they are very susceptible to rabies brought in by domestic dogs. They are the descendants of the European wolf and they became stranded in the mountainous areas of Ethiopia after when the last ice age retreated. This endemic creature is now in great danger of extinction. After our visit, we drive back 30 minutes in the direction of the park entrance and stop at the wonderful Simien Lodge restaurant for lunch.

On the way back to Gondar, we have a brief stop to visit the former Felasha (Ethiopian Jews) village at Wolkayit, where you can purchase characteristic pottery and meet the last remaining descendant.

Return to Haile Resort for overnight.

Jan 23 Day 8 Drive to Bahir Dar /Avanti Blue Night Resort (B,L,D)

Depart at 8am for the drive to Bahir Dar (175 km/3 hrs). Bahir Dar is a pleasant city located on the southern shore of Lake Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia with 37 islands and 20 of them have churches and monasteries of considerable historical and cultural significance.

On arrival at the lodge, check-in to the hotel and some independent time to enjoy the lovely hotel surroundings. Lunch at Lake Shore Restaurant 12 noon to 1 pm.

This afternoon we drive about 30 km south of Bahir Dar, to visit Blue Nile waterfalls. The road will be unpaved and bumpy, but worth the journey especially to see authentic life as we pass through several small

villages along the way. We can stop to visit the school in the main village, if it is open.

The waterfall, 100m wide, plunges for 45 meters, giving rise to steam clouds. We cross the Blue Nile River in a papyrus boat (traditionally known as a "Tankwas"). Descend to the base of the falls (about 20 minutes walk), climb back up the other side. If you do not wish to walk, you can relax and enjoy the scenic views. There are often local people selling coffee and other refreshments in the area.

Dinner at the hotel restaurant.

Jan 24 Day 9 Bahir Dar / Avanti Blue Night Resort (B,L,D)

At 8 am, we shall board the boat docked on the lakeside of the hotel property, for a boat trip on Lake Tana to the Zeghe Peninsula, known for its 14th century, round, grass-roofed churches with their magnificent wall murals.

Visit the monastery churches, including Baeta Mariam and Ura Kidane Mihret. Ura Kidan Mihret is the best known of the monasteries and has an important collection of religious icons from the 16th to 18th centuries. Azoa Mariam is known for its paintings. You will walk through dense forest with prolific bird life. This is a highlight of the Historic North in my opinion.

Return to the hotel and enjoy lunch at Lake Shore Restaurant.

Enjoy the hotel facilities, relax, maybe have a massage. At approx. 4 pm we will visit the local market. Dinner at the hotel restaurant.

Jan 25 Day 10 Fly to Addis Ababa / Jupiter Hotel (B,L,D)

Enjoy a morning at leisure. We'll have an early lunch. Transfer to airport at 11:30 for flight ET 145, departing 1:50 pm to Addis Ababa, arriving at 2:40 pm.

This afternoon we shall visit 1-2 markets, depending on time...Markets close at 6:30 pm. Here are some options. Guide will plan the visits according to our time of arrival and time of market closures plus traffic congestion. We will not be able to get to all of them.

Salem's Ethiopia, rated #1 on Trip Advisor for shopping in Addis Ababa. Owned by a woman and employing women, they sell traditional jewelry, scarves and basketry, local coffee; traditional as well as contemporary Ethiopian designs. It is a tranquil oasis in the centre of a busy city - light music playing while you shop & no-one rushing you or harassing you while you browse. You can see spinning, weaving and basket making. Comfortable places to sit for non-shoppers. Prices are not cheap but fair for the quality. They accept credit cards.

Shiromeda, bustling market specializing in traditional clothes where locals shop. It is set at the foot of the Entoto Hill. Bargain hard (start negotiations at 50-60% less than asking price). Afterwards, visit Entoto Hill, a lovely place to wander about and see the lifestyle of a small hill village. Watch the women haul down eucalyptus bundles; see the Palace of Menelik II and various noteworthy churches including the first church of Addis. Enjoy fantastic views of Addis Ababa from the hilltop.

Sabahar Market, is a fair trade organization specializing in handspun cotton textiles, with reasonable prices by American standards. You can see the progress from the silk worm to the finished product; view weavers and spinners in action; dyers run back and forth preparing and drying the next colors for some exquisite linens and scarves. You'll enter a courtyard with beautiful gardens set back away from the traffic and crowds. Merkato is the largest Ethiopian market, noisy and crowded. It's not really for tourists (though there is a bit of jewelry and clothing); it is more of a local market to buy things for everyday life - from electronics to live chickens. Though chaotic, it can be of interest for some visitors who like to be in the midst of the "real local market" experience.

Dinner this evening at the excellent Makush Italian Restaurant and Art Gallery. Those on the Historic North tour only, will transfer to the airport this evening after dinner.

The South: Omo Valley

One of the highlights of our visits to the villages of the various ethnic groups in Omo Valley is to visit during their colorful market days. Each village has weekly markets on certain days when people come from all the surrounding areas to buy and sell practical supplies as well as jewelry and handicrafts. The markets general start at 10 am and end at 3 pm. We have arranged the sequencing of the itinerary to be able to attend one or more markets. However this often means a very full, long day. Please know we are not trying to torture you with early departures, long drives (some on very bumpy roads) and late lunches. The villages are often remote and not close to our accommodation, therefore we fit in these visits en-route during our day of activities. Do bring some snacks for the car (take extra fruit, cheese, breads from the breakfast buffet).

Jan 26 Wed Day 11 Addis Ababa-Arba Minch / Haile Resort (B,L,D)

Depart at 9:15 am for the transfer to the airport for the flight to Arba Minch, ET 135 dep 11:45 am, arr 12:50.

The Rift Valley is a deep fission that extends for over 6,000 km (3,800 miles) from the Middle East to Mozambique- testimony to the massive shifting of the earth's tectonic plates. The rift contains a marvelous series of lakes, which are teeming with fish and provide a habitat for hundreds of species of birds. Arba Minch is located on the shores of Chamo Lake, one of the Rift Valley lakes.

On arrival, lunch at Dorze Lodge. Afterwards, we will drive to the Guge Mountains, 40 km northwest, to visit the Chencha and Dorze villages.

Some of Ethiopia's best woven cottons come from Chencha, which is located 8 km northwest of Dorze Village. Men weave and women spin. We will try, but not guaranteed, to visit the weaving cooperative at Gambela Doko village, 1.2 km from Chencha (open 10am-5pm).

Once warriors, the Dorze have now turned to farming and weaving to earn a living. Their success in the field of weaving has been phenomenal and the Dorze name is synonymous with the best woven cotton cloth. The "elephant huts" of the Dorze are unique. Each Dorze bamboo house has its own small garden surrounded by beds of spices, cabbage and tobacco.

Then transfer to the hotel. Dinner at Tourist Restaurant, famous for its fresh fish dishes.

Jan 27 Thur Day 12 Arba Minch – Konso-Turmi / Bushka Lodge (B,L,D)

Depart the hotel at 8:30 am to enjoy a boat trip on clear blue waters of Lake Chamo to see the crocodiles, hippos & aquatic bird species. The northern shores of Lake Chamo are famous for its large crocodiles, which can be seen in great numbers lounging in the heat. The Guji tribe can be seen plying the waters in their elegantly carved ambatch boats (similar to those depicted on the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs), not only fishing but also transporting cattle! The duration of the boat trip is approx. 1.5 hours.

Continue approx. 2 hours to Konso. Lunch at the Kanta Lodge Restaurant. After lunch we will **visit the weekly market in Alduba village**. This is the main market of the Benna tribe but Hammer people come here as well.

Continue to Turmi (approx 3 hours/85 km on gravel road). Dinner at Bushka Lodge.

Jan 28 Fri Day 13 Turmi-Murulle-Turmi / Bushka Lodge (B,L,D)

Breakfast at 6:30 am. We depart at 7 am and drive 65 km southwest on a rough road (approx 2 hours) through the savannah along tracks that are barely visible, passing through a vast meadowland with shrubs and umbellifers ('umbrella' acacia trees) to the Murulle area.

We arrive at Korcho village with beautiful views over the Omo River to see the Karo ethnic group, experts in body painting, using clay and locally available vegetable pigments to paint fantastic patterns on each other's faces, chests, arms and legs. These designs have no special symbolic significance, but are created purely for fun and aesthetic effect, each artist vying to out-do their fellow artists. Karo men also sculpt and shave their hair into extravagant shapes, with special ochre "caps" of hair usually containing several ostrich feathers.

Return on the same rough road (yes it will seem like the road will never end!). Lunch at Bushka Lodge. Afterwards, we visit a local school in Turmi.

In late afternoon, if lucky, we may be able to see a spectacle called 'cattle jumping,' a ceremony that constitutes rite of passage for young men. This will be a spontaneous event. It usually occurs on market days. Possibly today or tomorrow. If our guide gets news it is happening we will attend this instead of the market.

Dinner at the hotel restaurant. Today and for the next few days we enjoy some of the most magnificent sunsets from a vantage point that overlooks the mountains of Kenya and Sudan.

Jan 29 Sat Day 14 Turmi- Omorate- Dimeka - Turmi / Bushka Lodge (B,L,D)

Departing at 7:30 am, we drive 70 kms from Turmi on a good but unpaved road (approx 1 hour) to Omorate, located at the southeast point of Ethiopia and the final border zone of Ethiopia and Kenya.

We'll cross the Omo River in a primitive dug out canoe (about a 10 minute ride) to visit the village of the Daasenech (formerly known as Geleb) people. They are very friendly and the small village has a nice feeling of community. Today is the weekly market in Omorate. It is much smaller than others we will visit.

We again cross the river and return to Turmi on the same road. Lunch at Bushka Lodge.

Then set out (20 km/45 min) to Dimeka. **Today is the colorful main market day for Hamar tribe at Dimeka (starts at 10 am, ends at 3 pm).** This is one of the largest and best markets in Omo Valley. The Hamar are good looking people, especially the women; they have very nice handmade crafts beside selling local agricultural products. For photography lovers, it is an endless visual candy for the lens. Karo, Tsemay, Banna and Bashada people also can be seen here.

Return to Turmi for overnight.

Jan 30 Sun Day 15 Drive Turmi-Jinka / Eco Omo Lodge (B,L,D)

This morning we visit another Hammer village. Then drive to Jinka (126 km/ 85 km on gravel road, 40km on asphalt; approx 2.5 hrs). Visit the Ari village.

Dinner at Eco Omo Lodge and overnight.

Jan 31 Mon Day 16 Jinka-Mago National Park & Mursi Highlands-Konso / Kanta Lodge (B,L,D)

Breakfast at 7 am. We shall start early again today, 7:30 am for another adventuresome full day!

Enjoy spectacular scenery as the road crosses soft rolling hills. Rising in the highlands southwest of Addis Ababa, the Omo River charts its course southwards for almost 1000 kms (620 miles) but never reaches the sea and instead pours into Lake Turkana, East Africa's fourth largest lake. Over millions of years its' flood waters have cut deep gorges into the mountains.

We drive about 1.5 hours through Mago National Park, sitting on the eastern bank of the Omo River. Mago Park, together with its sister park, Omo National Park, are some of the least visited game parks in the world and what a joy it is not to see many vehicles in the vicinity.

Here, we visit the Mursi highlands where the most illustrious of Ethiopia's unique tribes lives. The Mursi are known all over the world, for their decorative lip plates that adorn the lower lips of the Mursi women. The plates stretch the lower lip beyond imagination and the women's beauty and desirability is determined in direct proportion to the size of the plate. Men of the Mursi paint for their bodies and faces with white paint. Just like any other ethnic tribe in the lower valley, the men must pass a test before they can get married. A Mursi man is given a stick called a Donga and must face one opponent. The men then battle it out, beating each other with the sticks. The Mursi men and women may appear gracious but the Mursi warriors are not to be sneezed at. On their arms are deep crescent incisions that represent each enemy they have killed in battle.

The various cultural aspects of the tribe will be explained and you will be able to take their photographs (fees per photo) and interact with them. It is truly fascinating.

We will depart the park by 11 am driving about 1.5 hours and stop for lunch at the Eco-Omo Safari Lodge in Jinka.

Onward to Konso (2.5 hour-drive). We'll arrive in Konso by about 6:30 pm.

Feb 1 Tue Day 17 Konso / Kanta Lodge (B,L,D)

A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2011, the Konso Cultural Landscape is named after its agriculturist inhabitants. A striking feature is the ancient hilltop paleta (terrace and walled villages). The cornerstone of Konso culture is a highly specialized and successful agricultural economy. Terracing buttressed with stone enable these people to extract a productive living from the infertile hills and valleys that surround them.

Today is an excellent day to meet the people and learn of a culture that has had very little outside influence. The people are colorfully dressed, and impressive terracing of the land as well as cultural traditions can be seen. The Konso, a pagan people, erect eerie wooden totems (called waka) replete with phallic symbols over the graves of the dead and have numerous cults based around the breeding and veneration of serpents. Beaded jewelry is also of cultural significance and often denotes a woman's status. Girls wear strands of beads around their waist while mothers wear two strands on each ankle and grandmothers one strand. The number of blue beads in the anklets indicates the gender of their children. Men also use beads with young boys wearing white beads or cowry shells for protection and men of high ritual status donning dark blue transparent glass beads.

We depart at 9 am and begin with a visit to the Chief of Konso's palace (really a simple compound of huts) and should Chief Kala Gezahegan be in residence, we may be granted an audience. The chief is a most delightful person with a warm smile, dedication to his people with wisdom to lead. We will take a walk behind the palace to see the waka of the chief's father and grandfather.

Return to the lodge for lunch.

This afternoon visit a typical Konso village about 8 minutes drive from our lodge. Konso villages are quite different from the rugged villages you have visited elsewhere in Omo Valley. The Konso villages are walled and walking paths wind around the village. The villages are very pleasant, beautiful and serene.

Afterwards, a visit the excellent Konso Museum that has an extensive collection of ethnographic objects as well as a stunning permanent exhibit on the waka (around 200 examples that were confiscated by local authorities after being looted by foreign collectors).

If time permits, we drive 20 minutes to see "New York," thus named for the vertical erosion formations made of quartz. Return to Kanta Lodge in late afternoon for some leisure time, dinner and overnight.

NOTE: electricity runs from a generator. It is turned off at about 11 pm and turned on next morning at 6 am. Take showers at night before or just after dinner to insure possibility of hot water. Sequence of activities this day is subject to change depending on the King's availability.

Feb 2 Day 18 Drive to Hawassa / Haile Resort (B,L,D)

We'll depart at 8 am for the drive to Awassa (approx 5 hrs), located on the edge of Lake Hawassa, surrounded by mountains. Lunch is a tad late so once again, have snacks handy in your day bag.

Lunch on arrival at the hotel restaurant and leisure time. Enjoy relaxing at the hotel located above the lake.

This afternoon, those who are interested—*pending confirmation*—visit Hawassa Children's Center vocational program. If occurring, we may be able to attend a performance of the center's theater program.

Feb 3 Day 19 Hawassa-Addis Ababa / Jupiter Hotel Day Use (B,L,D)

This morning, we depart at 7 am to stroll about the local fish market in Hawassa. A bustling scene of local fishing boats bringing in their catch, massive storks, pelicans and other birds and, of course, a great people-watching place. A short visit here, 20-30 min maximum.

Then we shall enjoy more of the Rift Valley landscape and the stunning views on the drive back to Addis Ababa (approx 6 hours including stops, but could be longer due to traffic congestions).

Estimated time of arrival in Addis Ababa around 3 pm and transfer to hotel for day use; check-out at 6:30 pm for those departing tonight.

We depart the hotel at 6:30 and enjoy dinner at 2000 Habesha Cultural Restaurant, an excellent traditional restaurant with a wonderful music and dance program. <http://www.2000habesha.com/>
The restaurant is close to our hotel and the airport. Those who are staying overnight will be dropped off at hotel before we continue to the airport with those who are departing.

Excursion to Harar

Feb 3 Overnight in Addis

Feb 4 Addis Ababa- Harar / Wonderland Hotel (B,L,D)

Transfer to the airport for the morning flight to Dire Dawa, ET 206, dep 7 am, arrives 8 am. It is approximately a 45-minute drive to Harar. En-route we stop at the fascinating chat market. On arrival transfer to hotel. Begin the visit of Harar, return for lunch in the hotel restaurant.

For centuries, Harar has been a major commercial centre, linked by the trade routes with the rest of Ethiopia, the entire Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and, through its ports, the outside world. Harar Jugol, the old walled city, was included in the World Heritage List in 2006 by UNESCO in recognition of its cultural heritage. According to UNESCO, it is "considered 'the fourth holy city' of Islam" with 82 mosques, three of which date from the 10th century, and 102 shrines. Founded in the 7th century by Arab immigrants from Yemen, it was chosen as the capital of the Adal Sultanate from 1554 to 1557. Harar saw a political decline during the Sultanate of Harar, only regaining some significance in the Khedivate of Egypt period. During Abyssinian rule, the city decayed while maintaining a certain cultural prestige. Today, it is the seat of the Harari ethno-political division.

Harar is known for the great wall that encircles the old town of Harar. It was built in the 16th century at the time of Amir Nur Al- wazir Mujahid. This medieval walled city with its 368 alleyways squeezed into just 1 sq km, is more reminiscent of Fez in Morocco than any other city in the Horn. Its countless mosques and shrines, animated markets, crumbling walls and charming people will make you feel as if you've floated right out of the 21st century. It's the east's most memorable sight and shouldn't be missed. And, as if that wasn't enough, there are many chances to get up-close and personal with wild hyenas.

We shall explore the walled town on foot including Feres Magala Square, see the 16th century domed tomb of

Emir Nur, the Church of Mehane Alem, a typical old Harar house and visit the Harar Museum.

In the evening, we attend the fascinating wild hyena feeding by the locals on the outskirts of Harar town.

Feb 5 Harar-Addis Ababa-Depart / (B)

Transfer to the airport in Dire Dawa for flight ET 201 departs 1225, arrives Addis Ababa 1315. Transfer to hotel for day use; check out 6 pm. Transfer to airport for your departure for late evening flight.



Our Guide Historic North & Omo Valley: Mr. Henock Tsegaye was born in Addis Ababa. He studied at Goethe Institute (earning a certificate in German), Royal University College and Haromaya University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in marketing management. He also obtained an advanced diploma in Tourism Management from the Tourism Training Institute. He has been guiding individuals and groups from all over the world since 2008. Henok brings his considerable expertise and warm, passion and open attitude to our tour.

PRICES

Historic North & Omo Valley Full Tour (19 Days):

\$5555 per person, based on min 6 people. Single room supplement \$985.

Plus domestic airfares, Five Flights (estimate): if flying internationally on Ethiopia Air, \$589; if flying other carriers, \$1050. **The airfare prices get higher as the date of departure gets closer. Sign up as early as possible (8-10 months in advance) for best prices!**

Historic North Only (10 Days): \$3350 per person based on min 6 people; single room supplement \$705

Plus domestic airfares, Four Flights (estimate): if flying on Ethiopia Air, \$476; if flying other carriers, \$850.

Omo Valley Only (10 Days): \$3420 per person based on min 6 people; single room supplement \$290

Plus domestic airfare (estimate): if flying internationally on Ethiopia Air, \$125; if flying other carriers, \$215.

Optional Extra night in Addis Ababa: \$60 per person twin share; \$98 single room.

Airport transfers outside tour days: \$52 per transfer/car

Main Tour Includes: accommodations based on availability

Addis Ababa, Jupiter Hotel Bole 4*, <http://www.jupiterinternationalhotel.com/>

Axum, Sabeen Hotel <http://sabeenhotel.com/>

Lailibela, Maribela Hotel <http://www.hotelmariabela.com/>

Gondar, Goha Hotel <http://www.gohahotel.com/>

Bahir Dar, Avanti Blue Resort <http://www.bluenilehotel.com/>

Omo Valley

Arba Minch, Haile Resort <http://hailehotelsandresorts.com/arbaminch-resort>

Turmi, Bushka Lodge, <http://buskalodge.com/>

Jinka, Eco Omo Lodge <http://eco-omo.com/>

Konso, Kanta Lodge

Awassa, Haile Resort <http://www.hailehotelsandresorts.com/hawassa-resort>

Last day Addis Ababa, Jupiter Hotel Bole, wash/change

All meals, accompanying guide full tour + local tribal guide for each village, land transport, porters at domestic airports, bottled water in the vehicle during the drives, entrance fees.

Does Not Include: International flight, flights within Ethiopia (quoted separately), trip cancellation/travel insurance, tips, visa fee, camera fees (3-4 birr/ approx .40 per photo per person photographed), personal expenses such as phone calls, laundry services.

Extension to Harar: \$420 per person based on min 4 people twin share, single room supplement: \$75. Plus air estimate: \$240 if on ET international; \$430 if flying other carriers

Includes: accommodations (1 night Addis Ababa & 1 night Harar, 1 day room use in Addis last day), all meals, transport by private ac vehicle, local guide, and entrance fees.

NOTES:

Vehicles: For the Historic Route: Toyota Coaster bus, with ac & mic, 22 seats

In Omo Valley: 4WD (3 passengers per vehicle so everyone has a window). The guide will ride in one of the cars. All cars will stop together at sites to hear the guide's talk.

The drive between Gondar and Semien Mountains was once quite rough with a long distance on gravel road. The road construction is almost completed as smooth asphalt road except last 20 km is still a rough bumpy dirt road.

Hotels in Omo Valley: where available we use the top hotels; the rest are best available, clean, with hot running water and good, safe food. Avanti Blue Resort in Bahar Dar and Haile Resorts in Arba Minch and Awassa are up-market category, best in the country. Unfortunately, even after the hotel confirms our reservations, occasionally the bookings get bumped when the government takes it over for meetings. Please know that we would not intentionally put you in a poor quality hotel. We are constantly updating the hotel list as new ones are developed or renovated.

Suggest bring a flashlight and an accepting attitude. Some hotels in Omo Valley run on generators for electricity. These are turned off at night. This means water for showers in late evening or early morning will not be hot. Suggest take a shower before dinner.

Hotel in Harar: Wonderland is the best one, but still quite low quality.

Meals: I am sorry to have to report, the food in Ethiopia is not very good by western standards. The meat/chicken/fish is usually over cooked and dry/tough. We have selected restaurants that offer the best available such as the Lucy Restaurant and Jupiter Hotel Restaurant in Addis. As many clients have said, we don't go to Ethiopia for the food! If you have a special diet, do let us know. We can arrange in advance.

Drives/Flights: All drive times are approximate and may differ than stated depending on unexpected situations such as road detours or local events. Flight schedules are subject to change. The itinerary will be adjusted by our guide on the spot to address any changes.

The day-to-day itinerary sequence may change slightly to coordinate with any local events or changes in road conditions and domestic flight schedules. We will sequence the itinerary in Omo Valley to coordinate with visits to at least two of the market days. Tours are planned a year in advance, but local activity schedules are often not available or are subject to change. We may see unscheduled events/ceremonies such as weddings and bull jumpings, if we are lucky!