

NOTES ON ETHIOPIA

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1. Introduction

These notes are to help you anticipate what conditions you will meet in Ethiopia during EAGLE with a little about areas you might visit on a private holiday. It is based on experience gained by colleagues who have worked in Ethiopia and from the Ethiopian Embassy web pages to be found at <http://www.ethioembassy.org.uk> (UK) and <http://www.ethiopianembassy.org/index.shtml> (USA).

2. Ethiopia background

Ethiopia is the only country in Africa that has never been colonised, and its people have a proud tradition of fighting for their independence. The country is also unusual for its rich Orthodox Christian heritage, which the Ethiopians maintained even when all its neighbours embraced Islam in the 7th century.

Travelling in Ethiopia won't be everyone's glass of t'ella: there's not much of a tourist infrastructure here, and you can forget checking your email. But the landscape is fabulous, the people will make you welcome, the sense of history is tangible and you won't have to worry about crowds of snap-happy tourists. And of course, all of it comes on a less-than-shoestring budget.

Although the situation for travellers to Ethiopia has improved immeasurably, travel after dark is ill-advised and areas near the Eritrean border should still be avoided. Areas near the Somali border should also be avoided, due to banditry. If travelling to Sudan or Kenya, get local advice and travel in convoy. Steer clear of public political gatherings and demonstrations, particularly in Islamic regions.

Full country name: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Area: 1,127,000 sq km (439,530 sq mi)

Population: 55 million

Capital city: Addis Ababa (pop 3 million)

People: Oromo (40%), Amhara and Tigrean (32%), Sidamo (9%), Shankella (6%), Somali (6%), Afar (4%), Gurage (2%)

Language: Amharic, Tigrinya, Orominga, Guaraginga, Somali, Arabic, English

Religion: Muslim, Ethiopian Orthodox, animist

Government: Federal republic

President: Girma Wolde-Giyorgis

GDP: US\$242 billion

GDP per head: US\$400

Inflation: 10%

Major industries: Agriculture, forestry, agricultural processing

Major trading partners: USA, Germany, Japan, Italy



3. History

Ethiopia has been around for a very long time. The country's Rift Valley is known as the cradle of humanity - fossils of the oldest known upright hominid, the 3.5-million-year-old 'Lucy', were found here in 1974. Ethiopians have a record of their rulers that stretches back 5000 years, and although this is not supported by other records, you can find Biblical passages which record Ethiopian episodes around 1000 BC. The son of the Queen of Sheba, Menelik I, is regarded as the first emperor of Ethiopia - his dynasty ended with Haile Selassie, who ruled from 1930 until 1974.

According to local tradition, ancient Ethiopians were Jews, and a community of Ethiopian Jews lived in the country until the late 1980s, when the last of them moved to Israel. Christianity was brought to the then Kingdom of Axum by St Frumentius, who was consecrated as the first bishop in 330AD. Axum was slap-bang in the path of the armies of Islam, which set out from Mecca on a holy war of conversion in 632AD, and although the Christian kingdom was cut off from the rest of Christendom, Islam never really took hold.

Over the next thousand years, the kingdom came under attack from various forces - pagan tribes forced the Ethiopian emperors to abandon their cities and become nomads for a time, Muslims moved into the east of the country in the 12th and 14th centuries, and in the 16th century the Islamic kingdoms gained the support of the Ottoman Empire, seriously threatening the power of the Kingdom of Axum.

After a remarkable life span, the Axum empire broke down into its constituent provinces in the 18th century, triggering 100 years of warfare between rival warlords. The shattered empire was

eventually reunified by Ras Kassa, who crowned himself Emperor Tewodros in 1855, but later shot himself when his fortress was besieged by a British military expedition. Subsequent emperors invested the privy purse in European arms and expanded the empire. In 1936 the country was overrun by Mussolini's Italian troops, who hung around until 1941, when Italy surrendered to the Allies and Ethiopia regained its independence.

In 1962 emperor Haile Selassie annexed Eritrea, sparking a guerilla fightback by the disgruntled Eritreans which would last 30 years. Although Haile Selassie was seen as a national hero, opinion turned against him as nobility and the church filled their pockets while millions of landless peasants went hungry. In 1974, as students, workers, peasants and the army rose against him, Selassie was deposed and a military dictatorship took over. Under the leadership of Mengistu Haile Mariam, the new government, the Derg, threw out Americans, jailed trade union leaders, banned the church and turned to the USSR for economic aid. Upheaval was the last thing the already unstable country needed, and the Eritreans and invading Somalis took full advantage of the chaos. Soviet and Cuban troops intervened to fight back both forces, but did not succeed in defeating the Eritrean guerillas.

Mengistu tried to tighten his grip on the country by instituting conscription, curfews, population transfers - a disastrous initiative which herded people around the countryside in an effort to avoid famines - and people's committees, a sinister form of neighbourhood watch. But it was all to no avail - the Eritreans took Ethiopia's main port, the Tigray People's Liberation Front joined in the fighting, the Soviets pulled out, coffee prices fell and a major famine ravaged the country. In May 1991 Mengistu fled and a rebel coalition under Tigrayan Meles Zenawi took over. They inherited six million people facing famine, a shattered economy and moribund industrial and agricultural sectors, but decided to make moves toward democracy anyway.

A new constitution was ratified in 1994, notably allowing any of Ethiopia's nine regions to become independent if they wish to. The country's first parliamentary elections were held in 1995, with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front winning 98% of the vote - all the major opposition parties boycotted the poll. Meles Zenawi became prime minister and appointed a predominantly Tigrayan cabinet. The government's priorities include expanding the private sector and improving food security. Relations with Eritrea deteriorated in recent years and in June 1998 armed conflict broke out and borders were closed. Two years later, in 2000, the border war came to a close when Ethiopia defeated Eritrea and a peace agreement was signed.

4. Culture

There are almost as many languages as there are peoples in Ethiopia, about 80 in all. The languages come from a variety of families - Semitic, Hamitic, Nilotic and Omotic. Amharic, spoken in the country's heartland, is Ethiopia's official language, but Tigrinya, spoken in the north, and Orominya, spoken in the south, have semi-official status. The Oromos are the largest ethnic group in the country, and are made up of a muddle of Christians, Muslims and traditional animists. Amharic and Tigrinya use the Ge'ez script, with an understated 231 letters - keep an eye out for fabulously complex Amharic typewriters. Kids are taught English from junior high onward, and many people can speak a smattering or more.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has dominated religious life in the country since the fourth century, when two brothers from Tyre began evangelizing with the blessing of the king. The church is part of the Coptic Church, which has its headquarters in Alexandria. Ethiopian Orthodoxy has a strong monastic tradition, and until the Marxist revolution, there were Orthodox clergy in almost every town in the country. Orthodoxy combines more standard Christian beliefs in God, Catholic saints and Jesus (although there is more emphasis on the Old Testament than in many western churches) with traditional African beliefs about spirits and devils - church services often include dancing, astrology and fortune telling. Believers fast every Wednesday and Friday, avoiding meat, dairy and sometimes fish.

Ethiopian literature is traditionally Christian, with the earliest writings in Ge'ez being translations of Greek Christian works. Ge'ez literary production really took off in the 13th century, when a stack of Coptic, Syriac and Greek religious works were translated from Arabic. About 200 years later, Ge'ez writers branched out into original works, beginning with the lives of saints and moving onto apocalyptic books such as the *Elucidation of Jesus* and the *Mystery of Heaven and Earth*. Amharic took over from Ge'ez around the 16th century, and again, writers concentrated mainly on translations of religious works. It wasn't until the end of WWII that Amharic writers really began writing about other issues - Makonnen Endalkaches, Kebede Mikael and Tekle Tsodeq Makuria are notable postwar writers who addressed moral and patriotic themes.

5. Languages

Ethiopia is a land of enormous diversity and as a result Ethiopia has more than 80 languages and over 200 dialects. Amharic or Amharigna is the official language of Ethiopia although the government encourages local languages to be taught in schools. The working languages of the national/regional governments may differ according to regions. Other main languages include Oromigna and Tigrigna. English is spoken in major towns.

Amharic: This is the official national language until a decision is made by the new national assembly about what the new national language will be. Amharic does not use a latin script so the following phrases are purely phonetic.

Tenastalign	How are you?	Shintibait	Toilet
Ciao	Goodbye	Buna	Coffee
Salam	Peace	Shai	Tea
Dehnaderu	Good night	Injera	Sour dough pancake
Dehna Neh(m)	How are you?	Wot	Sauce or stew
Dehna Nesh (f)	How are you?	Tela	Local beer
Dehna	Fine	Tej	Honey wine
Senti no?	How much is it?	Yekirta	Excuse me
Ayasfeligegnim	I don't want it	Amesegenalehu	Thank you

Leslassa	Soft drink	Na	Come
Amboha	Mineral water	Hid	Go
Birra	Beer	Yellem	None
Woha	Water	Chigr yellem	No problem
Ow (as in 'how')	Yes	Chigr alla	Problem
Ishi	OK	Gasgazza	Cold
Aydellem	No	Mook	Hot
Sigarra	Cigarette	Ky	Right
Koom	Stop	Katata	Straight on
Gra	Left	Aneed	Let's go

Oromifaa: This is the language of the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. The Oromo live in central and southern Ethiopia. Oromifaa uses a latin script.

Akkam Jirtuu	How are you?	Mana Fincaani	Toilet
Negaa-ti	Good bye	Buna	Coffee
Nagaan-bulii	Good night	Shaayi	Tea
Mayqa?	How much is it?	Biddeena	Sour dough pancake
Hin barbaadu	I don't want it	Ittoo	Sauce or stew
Laslaafaa	Soft drink	Farsoo	Local beer
Bishaan Ambo	Mineral water	Daadhi	Honey wine
Biraa	Beer	Dhiifama	Excuse me
Bishaan	Water	Galatoomi	Thank you
Heye	Yes	Kootu	Come
Tole	OK	Deemi	Go
Miti	No	Rakoon Ingiruu	No problem
Sijaraa	Cigarette		

Tigrigna This is the language of Tigray and Eritrea, and is related to Amharigna. But is much more complicated.

Kamelekhum?	How are you?	Shintibait	Toilet
Dehankunu	Good bye	Bun	Coffee
Dehan hider	Good night	Shahi	Tea
Kindey?	How much is it?	Injera	Sour dough pancake
Aydelin	I don't want it	Tsebhi	Sauce or stew
Leslassa	Soft drink	Suwa	Local beer
Mai gaz	Mineral water	Mes	Honey wine
Birra	Beer	Yekireta	Excuse me
Mai	Water	Yekin yelley	Thank you
Oowe	Yes	Na'a	Come
Harrai	OK	Kid	Go
Aykonnen	No	Tsegem yellen	No problem
Shigarra	Cigarette		

6. Currency

The currency is the Ethiopia Birr, made up of 100 cents. There are about 12 Birrs per pound sterling and 8 birr per US dollar. Visitors may import an unlimited amount of foreign currency, provided that declaration to Customs of such currency is made on the blue form provided by Customs on arrival. At present there seems to be virtually no policing of declared cash. Foreign currency may only be changed at authorised banks and hotels. The currency declaration form (if provided on entry) should be retained as this may be required by Customs on departure. Exchange money only at authorised dealers and keep the documents in case they are needed when you convert back on leaving Ethiopia. Most of the time the forms are not inspected. Rates for traveller's cheques and cash are virtually identical. Money may be exchanged at large hotels (Hilton, Sheraton, Ghion) in the evenings and at weekends. One cannot rely on Foreign Exchange outside Addis, Nazret, Awasa and other big towns.

Visitors will be able to change back any excess of more than 100 Ethiopian Birr to foreign currency at a bank prior to travel. Amounts less than 100 Birr may be changed in the airport if the bank is open and you have a correctly stamped blue form.

Credit cards are not widely accepted and can probably only be used in the large hotels in Addis. Even when they are accepted they are subject to a government tax.

7. Topography

With an area of 114 million square kilometres, Ethiopia is as large as France and Spain combined and is five times the size of the UK. From the north and running down the centre are the Abyssinian highlands. To the west of the chain the land drops to the grasslands of Sudan, to the east to the deserts of the Afar. South of Addis Ababa, the land is dominated by the Rift Valley Lakes. Ethiopia is strategically located in the Horn of Africa. Its proximity to the Middle East and Europe, together with its access to the major ports of the region, enhances its international trade. It is bordered by the Sudan in the west, Somalia and Djibouti in the east, Eritrea in the north and Kenya in the south.

Ethiopia's central plateau varies in height between 2,000 and 3,000 metres. In the north and centre of the country there are some 25 mountains whose peaks rise over 4,000 metres (13,200ft), the highest being Ras Dashen at 4,543 metres (14,538ft).

8. Climate

There are two seasons in Ethiopia: in most of the country the dry season prevails from October until May with short rains in March; the wet season runs from June until the end of September. In the Omo and Mago parks however, in Southern Ethiopia, the seasons are different with the main rains from March to June, and shorter rains in November.

Although Ethiopia lies within 15 degrees north of the equator, owing to the moderating influence of high altitude, the central highlands, where most Ethiopian people live, generally enjoy a temperate and pleasant climate. In the highlands above 2,000 metres the temperature rarely exceeds 25° C in most of the country. In the lower lying areas (Awash, Omo and Mago parks), which experience sub-tropical and tropical climates, it can get considerably hotter. The temperature generally drops quite rapidly towards sunset.

9. Calendar & Time

In 1582 when the Christian world adopted the revised Gregorian calendar, Ethiopia stayed with the Julian calendar. As a result the Ethiopian year has twelve months of 30 days each and a thirteenth month of five or six days depending on whether it is a leap year. The first month of the Ethiopian year is September (or Meskerem), and New Year's Day is the 11th September in the European calendar. The year is calculated to be either seven or eight years behind the Gregorian year depending on whether the date is before or after 1st January. So, the 1st January 1999 in the UK is 23rd Tahisas (the fourth month) 1991 in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is in the +3 hrs GMT time zone. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that in addition to this Ethiopia also has its own time. This is based on the conception that the Ethiopian day is constituted of roughly 12 hours of daylight, starting at 6.00am and roughly 12 hours of darkness, starting at 6.00pm. Rather than have am and pm they refer to in the day or in the night. So, 7.00am is 1.00 in the day Ethiopian time and 7:00pm is 1.00 at night.

Urban Ethiopians often use both systems as appropriate. Nevertheless, in general, when asking about dates and times, it is always worth checking which system is being used!

Events

On 19 January, Ethiopian Christians celebrate Christ's baptism at the festival of Timkat. During the festival, which runs for three days, priests remove the symbolic Ark of the Covenant from every church and parade it to a nearby consecrated pool. Giant Masses are held, accompanied by late night picnics. Ethiopian New Year, Enkutatash is celebrated on 11 September, which is also the feast of John the Baptist. Enkutatash is a spring festival, with kiddies dancing in the streets, handing out flowers and miniature paintings, bonfires and plenty of singing and dancing. On 27 September another Christian festival, Maskal, commemorates the finding of the True Cross on which Christ was crucified. Town squares are filled with huge piles of *maskal*, or 'cross', daisies, which later become giant bonfires. Ethiopian Orthodox Christmas is celebrated on 7 January.

10. Food and Drink

The national dish for most Ethiopians is injera, a flat, sour dough pancake made from a special grain called teff, which is served with either meat or vegetable sauces (wot). Ethiopians eat these injera by tearing off a bit of injera and uses it to pick up pieces of meat or mop up the sauce. Berbere, the blend of spices which gives Ethiopian food its characteristic taste can be hot for the uninitiated, although vindaloo or hot curry fans will not have any problem.

When eating national food Ethiopians eat together, off one large circular plate. Visitors and guests will have choice morsels and pieces of meat placed in front of them, and when eating doro wot, chicken stew, the pieces of meat are eaten last, after filling up on injera and sauce. You eat with your right hand, and should always wash your hands before eating. Traditionally, a server will bring warm water and basin before and after a meal, but this is only likely to occur in restaurants in Addis.

Orthodox Christians eat “fasting food” (vegetarian) such as shuru wot or yesom on Wednesdays and Fridays. In the field it may be difficult to get meat dishes on these days. Similarly on other days getting vegetarian food will be difficult. If you are able to get vegetarian food on other days it may not be fresh.

Ethiopia produces its own wines – Dukam and Goudar are two good, dry reds. Crystal is a dry white wine and Axumite is a sweet red – and spirits, like gin, ouzo and brandy. There are also traditional alcoholic beverages such as tela (a local beer made from grain), tej (honey wine or mead) and kati kala (distilled liquor) and waraki.

Restaurant prices can vary from 3 birr in the cheaper restaurants to around 25 to 30 birr per head in a restaurant with national music and dancing. Prices do not generally include drinks.

Coffee:



Coffee Ceremony

Ethiopia is the home of coffee. An intricate traditional coffee ceremony is performed in many households. This may also be seen in most of the larger hotels in Addis Ababa. The time devoted to the ceremony indicates how important the drink is to Ethiopians.

At the start of the ceremony a table is scattered with freshly-cut grass to give the fresh and fragrant scent of outdoors. A female attendant or the lady of the household sits on a low stool beside a charcoal brazier. She first lights a stick of incense to provide the right atmosphere. Guests are given a snack such as popcorn whilst the ceremony is proceeding. The green coffee beans are roasted in a pan and then ground with a pestle and mortar. After the beans have been roasted typically the hostess will bring the pan around for you to savour the aroma of the beans. Then the pot for boiling the coffee is produced, a round clay pot with a plump base and a long narrow neck and spout. After the water has been heated the coffee is added and brought to the boil. The coffee is poured into small, traditional cups and sugar

Eating/drinking Etiquette

There are a number of things it is useful to be aware of:

You should only eat with your right hand

If offered a taste of something it is considered to be very unlucky if you only have 1 taste (in general to only do something once is considered unlucky)

In stews (wots) there will often be only a few chunks of meat – these are generally eaten last.

If eating together from one large plate it is considered impolite to reach across to eat something that is not in front of you.

11. Clothing

Light, summer clothes are suitable for daytime wear and a jacket or sweater is useful for the evening when the temperature is much cooler. In Addis long trousers and shirt or T-shirt (and equivalent for women) will suit most, though shorts are acceptable. Elsewhere, shorts and a light T-shirt are probably most comfortable unless you need protection from the sun. A hat can reduce glare and help you feel cooler – broad-rimmed hats are not easy to find in Ethiopia. A pullover is needed for evening wear in some locations.

Some of the tracks are exceedingly dusty so you will often get filthy. Clothes dry in a few hours and you may be able to do laundry in some locations. You should take enough clothes for several days, to tide over the hiatus of changing location. Even so, you may have to accept some

degree of grubbiness in the dustier areas.

Footwear for walking expeditions and visiting historic sites should be light but strong, thus sandals are not recommended. Sandals can be easy on the feet but are little protection against thorns or snakes and scorpions.

12. Electricity supply and shaving

This is nominally 220V ac. Electricity sockets are of the continental European style (2 round pins), although you should not rely on having electrical sockets in your hotel room outside of Addis, Nazrat and other large towns.

13. Communications

Post

Postcards are available in Addis at the major hotels and stamps can be bought either from the hotels or from post offices.

Telephone

The “cheapest” option is to use the phone at a telecommunications hut (in most large towns). Hotels are expensive.

Email

Available in Addis and Nazrat

Addis Ababa: Email facilities are available at all the main hotels plus there are some internet cafés. In general it has been found that yahoo is much easier and quicker to access than hotmail. Prices range from several birr per minute to about 75 cents. Example prices are: Ghion Hotel - 2 birr/minute; Ethio Der Travel (beside Taitu Hotel) - 75 cent/minute.

Nazrat: Email is available from USi (1.50 birr/minute). 1st floor of building beside Mame's restaurant. It is sometimes available at Rift Valley (2 birr/minute) but this should not be relied upon.

14. Photography

Visitors should request permission before taking people's photographs. Generally, there are no problems about photographs with the exception of some areas, particularly in Afar and in the Omo valley. In these regions people may ask for money. Photography in churches is usually allowed, but payment may be required. Video photography in famous tourist attractions such as the Blue Nile Falls carry a charge. In some areas such as airports, bridges and around military camps photography may be prohibited altogether. Be careful, even in Addis, if you don't know what you are photographing.

There is quite a range of photographic goods in Addis, and to a lesser extent in other towns, but it is probably cheaper to bring your films with you. Ideally, films should be kept cool,

particularly after exposure, but probably they will take no harm during your stay provided you avoid the highest temperatures i.e direct exposure to sunshine, particularly in a closed vehicle. (Packed among clothes your stock of films will probably be lagged against the extremes.)

A u/v filter is advisable, particularly above 8000' (2500m).

Bring spares of any vital batteries as these may be hard to find even in Addis.

Some of the tracks are very dusty and a very fine dust will penetrate into all corners of the vehicle. You will have to decide on your own compromise between camera protection and accessibility, but strong plastic bags with a seal on one edge could be useful.

Beware of photographing the locals: some object on religious grounds and may protest strongly, even throwing rocks; others expect to be paid, often asking ridiculous prices. If you wish to photograph them bargain hard and agree on price and conditions before you take your pictures - enquire would be a reasonable price. If you have a Polaroid you can give instant photos as presents and then get on with serious photography.

For photographing game and birds you need the longest focus lens you can afford/hold steady - at least 200mm for a 35mm camera. As subjects are often seen early or late in the day, the combination of long lens and low light can make a faster film useful.

When photographing game and birds be ready: stopping the vehicle often precipitates their flight. In general, don't talk, and move vehicles and yourself as smoothly as possible.

15. Travel and Tourism

Ethiopia's uniqueness makes it a fascinating destination for every kind of traveller, but in particular for the traveller who wants that bit more. Ethiopia's historic sites are extremely wide-ranging and possibly the most extensive in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa. Experts claim that such sites are only a fraction of what Ethiopia has to offer given that a further 95% remain to be discovered and excavated.

Archaeologists and anthropologists continually claim that the oldest hominid remains (Australopithecus ramidus, a new species, 4.4 million years old) were originally discovered here in the Afar region. More recent findings by Professor Tim White from the University of California, Berkeley, suggest that the earliest ape man lived in Ethiopia 5 million years ago (Daily Telegraph, Monday 18th January 1999).

Major Tourist Attractions

Ethiopia has a magnificent cultural heritage, seven sites are included in the world cultural heritage list:

1. The Simien National Park (North Gondar Zone)
2. The Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (North Wollo Zone)

3. Castles of Gondar and other monuments of Gonder Style (Gondar)
4. Lower Valley of the Awash palaeontological and prehistoric sites (Afar Region)
5. Tiya pre-historical and archaeological sites, central Tigray (Tigray Region)
6. Axum historical and archaeological sites, central Tigray (Tigray Region)
7. Valley of the Omo, palaeontological and prehistoric sites (South Omo Zone)

Others include
 Rift Valley Lakes
 Marar



The natural beauty of Ethiopia amazes the first-time visitor. Ethiopia is a land of rugged mountains (some are over 4000 meters high) broad savannah, lakes and rivers. The unique Rift Valley is a remarkable region of volcanic lakes, with their famous collections of birdlife, great escarpments and stunning vistas. Tisisat, the Blue Nile falls, must rank as one of the greatest natural spectacles in Africa today. With 14 major wildlife reserves, Ethiopia provides a microcosm of the entire sub-saharan eco-system. Birdlife abounds and indigenous animals from the rare Walis Ibex to the shy wild ass roam free just as nature intended. Ethiopia, after the rains, is a land decked with flowers and with many more native plants than most countries in Africa. Among the many natural tourist attractions, only the principal ones are briefly given below.

The Simien Mountain National Park

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 the Simiens are 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 national park has three general botanical regions. 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, and over 1000 are said to live in the park. Also in the park are families of the unique Gelada Baboon with its scarlet 'bleeding heart on its chest,' and the rare Simien fox. The Simien fox, although named after the mountains is rarely seen by the visitor. It is more likely to be seen in the Bale National Park. Over 50 species of birds have been reported in the Simien mountains.

Access to the park is from Debarq, 101km from Gonder, where riding and pack animals may be hired. This should be arranged in advance through your local tour operator or the Office of the Wildlife Conservation Department.

The Blue Nile Falls (Tisisat Falls)

The River Nile, the longest river in Africa rises in Ethiopia. From Lake Tana, the Blue Nile, known locally as Abbay, flows from Ethiopia to meet the white Nile in Khartoum to form the great river that gives life to Egypt and the Sudan. It has been said that the Blue Nile contributes up to 80% of the Nile's flow. Nowhere is it more spectacular than when it thunders over the Tisisat Falls near Bahar Dar. Here millions of gallons of water cascade over the cliff face and into a gorge, creating spectacular rainbows, in one of the most awe-inspiring displays in Africa, earning its name 'Smoking Water'. The Blue Nile falls can easily be reached from Bahar Dar and the Scenic beauty of the Blue Nile Gorge, 225KM from Addis Ababa, can be enjoyed as part of an excursion from the capital.

Lake Tana

Lake Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia is the source of the Blue Nile from where it starts its long journey to Khartoum and on to the Mediterranean. The 37 islands that are scattered about the surface of the Lake shelter fascinating churches and monasteries, some of which have histories dating back to the 13th Century. However, it should be noted that most of the religious houses are not open to women. The most interesting islands are: Birgida Mariam, Dega Estefanous, Dek, Narga, Tana Cherkos, Mitsele Fasiledes, Kebran and Debre Maryam. Kebran Gabriel is the principal monastery (which can be visited by male tourists, from Bahar Dar) with its impressive Cathedral-like Building first built at the end of the 17th Century. Dega Estephanos, which is also closed to women, is on an island in the lake, and is reached by a very steep and winding path. Although the church is relatively new (only one hundred years old), it houses a Madonna painted in the 15th century. However, the treasury of the monastery is a prime attraction with the remains of several emperors, as well as their robes and jewels.

On the banks of the lake are many more religious houses such as Ura Kidane Mehret and Narga Selassie, many of which are open to women.

Near Gorgora, at the northern end of the lake, the Susneyos palace is a forerunner of the magnificent palaces and castles of Gonder, and dates from the reign of Emperor Susneyos. In the same area the medieval church of Debre Sina Mariam is particularly important.

A sail or cruise on Lake Tana is one of the most pleasant excursions for visitors to this region, particularly in the heart of the summer. Boats can be hired from the Marine Transport Authority in Bahir Dar. Along the lakeshore bird life, both local and migratory visitors, make this an ideal place for birdwatchers. Bird lovers will not want to miss Fasilidas island, which is especially famous as an important wetland. The whole of the lake Tana region and the Blue Nile Gorge have a wide variety of birds both endemic and visitors. The variety of habitats, from rocky crags to rain forests and important wetlands, ensure that many other different species should be spotted.

The Sof Omar Cave (own transport needed).

South of Omar is one of the most spectacular and extensive underground cave systems in the world. Formed by the Wabi River as it changed its course in the distant past and carved out a new channel through limestone foothills, the Sof Omar systems is an extraordinary natural phenomenon of breathtaking beauty.

The cave which is now an important Islamic Shrine was named after the saintly Sheikh Sof Omar who took refuge here many centuries ago. The cave has a religious history that predates the arrival of the Muslims in Bale – a history calculated in thousands of years.

The Rift Valley

The Ethiopian Rift Valley, which is part of the East African Rift System, comprises numerous hot springs, beautiful lakes and a variety of wildlife. The valley is the result of two parallel faults in the earth's surface, between which in distant geological time, the crust was weakened and the land subsided. Ethiopia is often referred to as the 'water tower' of Eastern Africa because of the many rivers that pour off the high tableland. The Great Rift Valley's passage through Ethiopia is marked by a chain of seven lakes. Each of the seven lakes has its own special life and character and provides ideal habitats for the exuberant variety of flora and fauna that make the region a beautiful and exotic destination for tourists. Langanoo is best for swimming. Ziway and Awasa may have bilharzia. Abaya has crocodiles.

Some of the lakes are suitable and safe for swimming and other water sports. Lakes Abiata and Shalla are ideal places for bird watchers (note that crime is reported to be high in this region). Most of the Rift Valley lakes are not fully exploited for tourists except Lake Langanoo where tourist class hotels are built. The Rift Valley is also a site of numerous natural hot springs and the chemical contents of the hot springs are highly valued for their therapeutic purposes though at present they are not fully utilised. In short, the Rift Valley is endowed with many beautiful lakes, numerous hot springs, warm and pleasant climate and a variety of wildlife. It is considered as one of the best areas for the development of international tourism in Ethiopia.

National Parks

The Awash National Park

Lying in the lowlands to the east of Addis Ababa and astride the Awash River, the Awash National Park is one of the finest reserves in Ethiopia. The Awash river, one of the major rivers of the horn of Africa, waters important agricultural lands in the north of Ethiopia and eventually flows into the wilderness of the Danakil Depression. The dramatic Awash Falls, as the river tumbles into its gorge, is the sight not to be missed in the national park. Awash national park, surrounding the dormant volcano of Fantale, is a reserve of arid and semi-arid woodland and savannah, with riverain forests along the Awash river. Forty-six species of animals have been identified here, including beisa oryx and Swayne's hartebeest. The bird life is prolific especially along the river and in the nearby lake Basaka and there are fine endemic ones amongst the 392 species recorded. A special attraction is the beautiful clear pools of the Filwoha hot springs.

Access to the park is best from the main Addis Assab highway. There is a caravan lodge Kereyu Lodge at the edge of the gorge.

The Omo National Park

One of the most beautiful national parks in Ethiopia, its 4068 sq km of wilderness bordered by the Omo river, is home to an amazing range of wildlife. 306 species of birds have been identified here, while large herds of eland, some buffalo, elephants, giraffe, cheetah, lion, leopard, Burchell's zebra are not uncommon.

Rafting on the River Omo. The park is not easily accessible, as the current means of access is via Omorate and the ferry to the north bank of the river. The park HQ is 75 km from Kibish settlement. However, a new airstrip is available close to the HQ and a pleasant campsite on the Mui River – plans are in hand for further major improvements.

The Mago National Park

Covering an area of 2162 km on the banks of the Omo River, the Mago National Park is relatively undeveloped for tourists. The broad grasslands teem with herds of buffalo, giraffe, elephants and kudu, while sometimes it is possible to find lions, leopards and Burchell's zebra. The abundant bird life here is typical of dry grasslands and river banks.

Gambala National Park

In these areas many interesting species of animals and birds can often be seen by the visitor. According to the Wildlife information office, Dowsett Forbs has identified 813 species of birds, 596 residents and 224 regular seasonal migrants in Ethiopia.

Bale Mountains National Park

The Bale Mountains include Ethiopia's second highest mountain but are not as rugged as the Simiens. The region is home to several of Ethiopia's endemic animals including the Ethiopian Fox and Mountain Nyela. Entrance to the park is from the park HQ at Dinsho.

16. Souvenirs

Be careful about buying anything which is old or antique as a permit is required. You should check with the shop and make sure you get a receipt. It is suggested that you wrap any such objects well and get it stamped at the National Museum where for a fee of 1 Birr they will give you an export permit which you will have to produce if you are searched at the airport or elsewhere. Taking such purchases out obviously requires planning in advance. Obviously, there would be no problems with coffee, local handicrafts, leather goods etc which are made for tourists and which may be bought at the last minute or at the airport.

17. Documents

Passport with valid visa.

Medical certificates (only yellow fever essential)

18. What to bring

Apart from items mentioned above, bring a torch, penknife (with bottle and tin opener), films, sun-creams, hat, and sunglasses.

Also consider binoculars –but be careful about using them in sensitive areas like Addis.

As wines and spirits are expensive, you are advised to bring your duty-free allowance. The local beer is recommended.

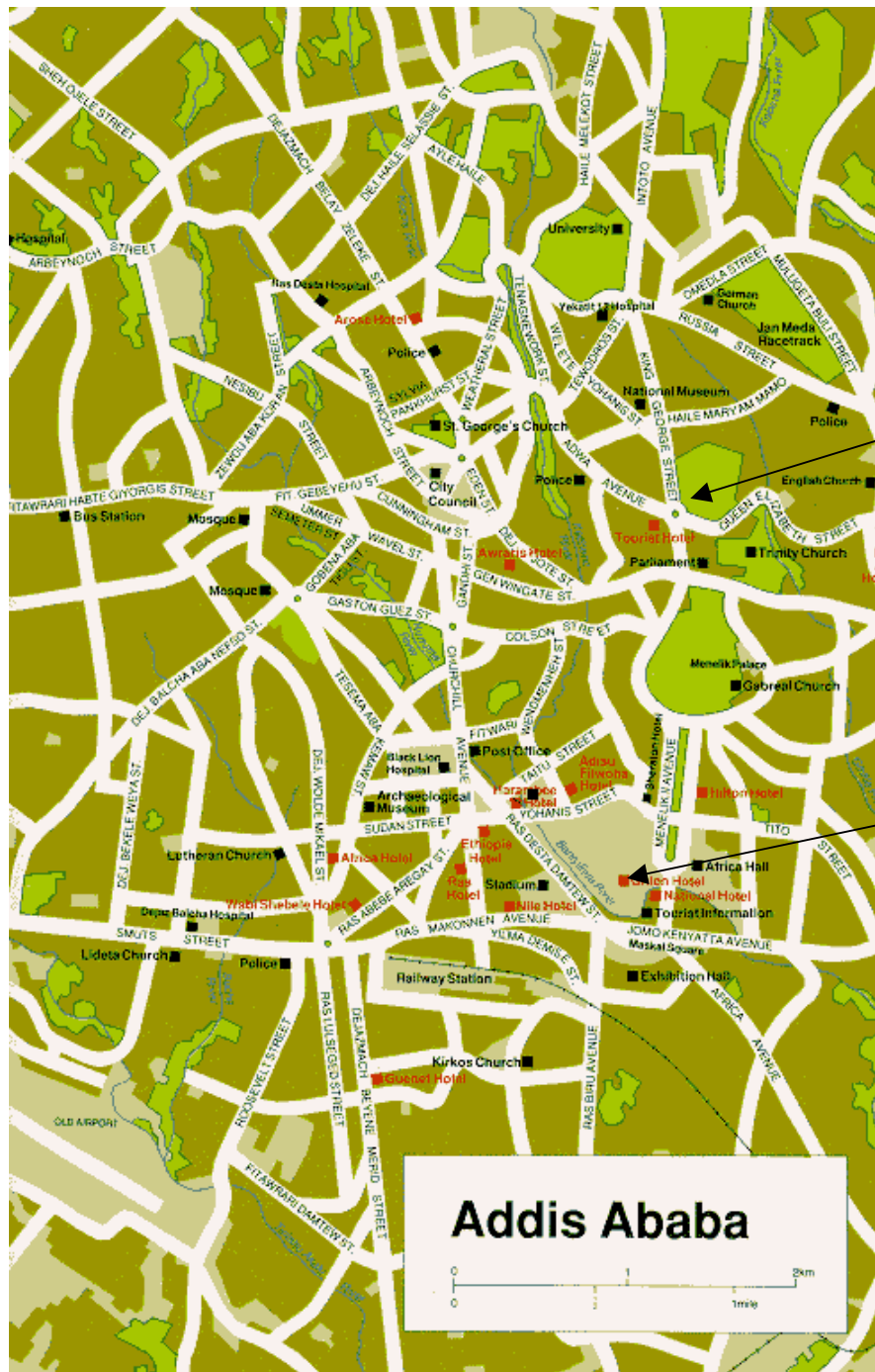
19. Leaving Ethiopia

There is an airport tax of US\$20 or equivalent in foreign currency.

You have to leave behind any Ethiopian currency

You can be asked for your copy of your list of imported currencies etc (see Currency).

20. Addis Ababa



Science
Faculty
AAU
(Arat Kilo)

Ghion
Hotel

Addis Ababa

0 1 2km
0 1 mile

21. Web Sites to Explore

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African-Studies/Country-specific/Ethiopia.html>

<http://www.usaid.gov/HORN/ethiopia>

<http://travel.state.gov/ethiopia.html>

<http://www.foc.gov.uk/>

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/africa/ethiopia/>

<http://www.cyberethiopia.com/>

<http://home.wanadoo.nl/spaansen/>

22. Reading List

Guidebooks

Lonely Planet Guide to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti
Ethiopian Amharic Phrasebook – Lonely Planet
Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia (English and German editions)
Collins Birds of East Africa

Travel Writing

The Blue Nile – Alan Moorehead
The Mountains of Rasselas – Thomas Pakenham
In Ethiopia with a Mule – Dervla Murphy

23. Useful Contact Information

Ghion Hotel	P.O. 1643 Addis Ababa	+251-1-513222 (Tel)	+251-1-510278 (Fax)
Rift Valley Hotel	Nazrat	+251-2-114444 (Tel)	+251-2-114409 (Fax)
British Embassy	Fikre Mariam Abatechan St	+251-1-612354 (Tel)	+251-1-614154 (Fax)
US Embassy	Entoto St	+251-1-550666 (Tel)	+251-1-551094 (Fax)