

EXPLORE!



Blue Nile and Lalibela

14 days

Ethiopia - Trip code ET

Blue Nile and Lalibela

Join us for a journey through one of Africa's least explored countries. As we travel along the Historic Route, we visit rock-hewn churches, ancient obelisks and the forbidden Medieval town of Harar. We also see many of the country's astonishing natural wonders, from the dramatic Tississat Falls to the rugged Simien mountain range.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Lalibela** - Explore impressive churches carved in rocks.
- ★ **Bahar Dar** - Walk to the top of Tississat Falls, the Water that Smokes.
- ★ **Axum** - Obelisks, temples and palaces in the final resting place of the Ark of Covenant.
- ★ **Simien Mountains** - Rugged and spectacular mountain scenery.
- ★ **Gondar** - Exceptionally well preserved castles from the 17th Century.
- ★ **Harar** - A medieval walled city and the cradle of Islam in Ethiopia.
- ★ **Awash Saba** - A National Park dominated by a dormant volcano, home to mammals and predators.

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour Addis Ababa, fly Dire Dawa, drive Harar

Addis is situated at an elevation of around 2438m and is only about a century old. It has some elegant modern buildings and is quite spacious with wide streets and green areas. It remains the capital of a predominantly rural area and the Mercato is one of the largest open markets in Africa. You will have use of day rooms in Addis. This afternoon we fly to Dire Dawa, the commercial centre of the region and the main rail head for the Djibouti to Addis railway. From here we ascend by road from the plains to the walled city of Harar, nestling at 1700m on a hillside. The city walls are pierced by 5 gates topped by 25 towers. The 16th century mosque with its slender minaret and the narrow streets lined with small shops all give the impression of having wandered into a city from the Arabian nights.



Accommodation: Heritage Plaza Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - In Harar; exploring the medieval city on foot

Harar is the cradle of Islam in Ethiopia and by the Middle Ages, Harar had become known as the fourth most sacred city in the Islamic world. It remained closed to outsiders and even when the Victorian scholar Burton visited Harar, he entered the city disguised as a Turkish trader. Later, the poet Rimbaud came and was captivated by the beautiful people. The house where he spent his happiest days still stands. He died trying to return to the city he loved. We'll spend the day exploring the city.



Accommodation: Heritage Plaza Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Drive to Awash Saba; visit Awash National Park

Today we drive to the scenic Awash National Park, we will visit the town of Aweday famous as the site of the country's largest chat market (a mildly stimulating plant). The scenic Awash National Park located in the dry acacia savanna of the Rift Valley. The skyline of the park is dominated by the jagged edges of Mount Fantelle, a dormant volcano whose crater towers above the surrounding bush. This afternoon we will have an opportunity to visit its splendid waterfall spilling into a 150m gorge. We may also have the opportunity to spot some of the parks wildlife. The most visible large mammals are the Beisa Oryx, Soemmering's gazelle and the Slat's dik-dik. The park boosts the presence of predators such as lions, hyenas and jackals they are however only seen infrequently.



Accommodation: Genet Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Addis; orientation tour

We drive back to the capital and aim to arrive in the afternoon. We will make an orientation tour of the city visiting the two major highlights of the city, the Ethnographic Museum and the church of the Holy Trinity, whose large dome and slender pinnacles make it a landmark in the city.



Accommodation: Ghion Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Fly to Axum; Timkat celebration

This morning we fly to Axum. Our journey brings us to the sacred city in the Tigrayan region, that was the capital of the Ethiopian empire between the 1st and 10th centuries AD. As the birthplace of Christianity within the country, it was also a bustling commercial centre. Evidence of Axum's former importance now lies at several points in or near the town. Ruined fortresses, palaces and churches, plus an abundance of giant obelisks or 'stelae', carved from enormous slabs of granite stand as mute reminders of its former glory. Axum makes claim to be the final resting place of the sacred Ark of the Covenant. But while its local guardians continue to celebrate the legend, the object of their veneration is kept strictly under wraps. This afternoon we will witness the start of the Timkat celebrations.



Accommodation: Yared Zema Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Timkat celebrations; sightseeing in Axum

Today we awake early to see the Timkat ceremonies in the morning, followed by an afternoon of sightseeing in Axum. This will include such sites as the Stellae field, the museum and the St Mary of Zion church.



Accommodation: Yared Zema Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Drive to Debarq

Today we have a full day's drive to Debarq, the village base for hiking in the Simien Mountains. The range lies north of Gondar and many of the peaks rise above 4000m. The highest is Mt. Ras Dashen at 4543m, the fifth highest in Africa. The mountains are crisscrossed with tracks worn out by the local people travelling from village to village or moving their animals to fresh pastures. The combination of these tracks and the spectacular scenery make for excellent walking.



Accommodation: Simien Park Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Walk in Simien Mountains

Today we plan to explore the Simien mountains National Park on foot (approx 4 hours walking). We'll keep an eye out for some of Ethiopia's endemic mammals, the Walia ibex, gelada baboon and the rare Simien fox - misnamed as it is not really a fox, but a member of the dog family restricted to Ethiopia.



Accommodation: Simien Park Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Visit Gondar

Today we drive to Gondar, located on the high plateau just north of Lake Tana. The town was the imperial capital of Ethiopia for 200 years. Gondar's most famous monuments are its exceptionally well preserved 17th century castles. The largest and best is that of King Fasilidas. It is a stone-built construction with round turrets and wooden balconies. The king also built a remarkable bath a mile or so outside of town known as the 'Pavilion of Delight'. This whole complex of buildings is unique in Ethiopia and unlike anything found elsewhere in Africa. This afternoon, as well as visiting the castle ruins, we'll also make a visit to the Debre Berhan Selassie Church famed for its ceiling frescoes of many faces.



Accommodation: Goha Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - To Bahar Dar, visit Tississat Falls

This morning we drive to Bahar Dar, capital of the Amhara region situated on the shores of Lake Tana. This afternoon we visit Tississat Falls, Amharic for water that smokes located about 32km south of Bahar Dar. After crossing a 16th century Portuguese built bridge, we walk up the hillside on an easy path to a viewpoint (approximately 45 minutes). There may also be the opportunity to extend this to a 2 hour circular walk including a short boat crossing of the Nile. In the afternoon we visit a viewpoint close to the Nile source near a one time residence of Haile Selassie. Here we can pause to consider the tremendous distance this body of water must now travel to reach its mouth in the Delta region of lower Egypt and the Mediterranean. Please note: viewing of the falls is subject to local authorities allowing water to flow from the Blue Nile dam.



Accommodation: Tana Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Boat trip on Bahir Dar, discover the source of the Nile

Today we take a boat trip on Lake Tana, visiting the Zeghie peninsula and Ura Kidane Meret Church. This dates back to medieval times and contains valuable manuscripts and religious treasures. From Lake Tana, the river meanders towards the falls, then becomes the Blue Nile on its thousand-mile journey to meet the White Nile at Khartoum. After lunch there will be some free time to enjoy the local market and then we will take a trip to find the source of the Nile.



Accommodation: Tana Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Fly to Lalibela, explore the northern cluster of rock-cut churches

Today we will fly to one of the world's most remarkable historic sites, Lalibela. Although churches carved in rock are found in other parts of the world, those found in Ethiopia are particularly interesting. Generally, they were excavated on all sides of a rectangle, leaving a large block of granite isolated in the centre. This rock was then shaped and formed both inside and out and the carvings show extremely skillful workmanship. Lalibela, the New Jerusalem, is thought to have been constructed some 800 years ago by King Lalibela. Lalibela was his capital city, but today it is a small village. Our tour this afternoon involves a certain amount of scrambling through a labyrinth of tunnels.



Accommodation: Panoramic View Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 13 - Visit rock-cut churches

Today we continue our exploration of the churches of Lalibela. The churches stand in two main groups on either side of a stream, known locally as 'The River Jordan'. There are 11 rockcut churches of which the most impressive is Bet Giorgis. It is carved in the form of a Greek cross and approached through a passage in the rock. Between them, these rock-cut churches are one of the great wonders of the world. Most churches have a permanent roof built over them to preserve them for posterity and are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Accommodation: Panoramic View Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - In Lalibela, fly Addis, tour ends

This morning we will take a flight back to the capital of Addis Ababa where the tour ends.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 13



Transport

Bus
Boat
Flight



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Boat Crew
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)
Muleteer(s)



Accommodation

4 nights simple hotel
9 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Ethiopia Trips

Climate

Ethiopia is generally pleasant and warm, but varies with altitude. The long rains usually arrive mid- June to early September and the short rains between mid-February and April although this pattern has been completely erratic in recent times. After the rains, the highlands of northern Ethiopia are usually green and thus particularly scenic. The temperature all year round rarely falls below 18°C. Night-time temperatures in the mountains can be cold and can drop below freezing at higher altitude. There is a strong risk of sunburn at high altitude in Ethiopia. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at

<http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page.

Time difference to GMT

+3

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Christian, Islam

Language

Amharic, English

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

Addis Abba - National museum £1 Bahar Dar - Sunrise boat trip £7 (minimum 5 people to operate)

Clothing

Daytime temperatures are mainly warm and comfortable but evenings in the highlands can be cold. We recommend a thick jumper or warm fleece and lightweight wind/waterproof clothing. Take a sun hat.

Footwear

Comfortable, good walking shoes with ankle support are strongly recommended as well as comfortable sandals.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Please note that there is a weight restriction of 7kg for hand luggage/daypack for international and internal flights.

Equipment

Bring sun cream, a torch and memory cards for your camera. An insect repellent against fleas could be useful for the churches at Lalibela.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow US\$50 for tipping of local drivers, guides, boat crew and for any miscellaneous tipping of hotel staff.

Country Information

Ethiopia Trips

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket

restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£3

Dinner price

£6

Beer price

£1.5

Water price

£1

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Ethiopian Birr.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

It is advisable to take your spending money in Sterling, Euros or US Dollars cash (high denomination notes usually get better exchange rates). Please note that any pre- 1999 or torn US Dollar bills will not be accepted in Ethiopia. Please keep any receipts as you may be able to change back any unused local currency.

Where To Exchange

Your Tour leader will advise you.

ATM Availability

Very Limited.

Credit Card Acceptance

Limited.

Travellers Cheques

Very difficult to exchange and are not recommended. Up-to-date information re: global exchange rates can be obtained at <https://www.currencyexpress.com/explore/>

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Ethiopia: Visas for UK nationals can be obtained on arrival, although this can change at short notice, and you should be prepared to queue on arrival. Please ensure you have 2 recent passport sized photos with you when applying on arrival, these may or may not be asked for. For a single entry visa you can apply via the e-visa website: <https://www.evisa.gov.et/#/home>. You will need to print a copy of your evisa approval letter and present this with your passport at immigration upon your arrival. The approval letter will take a minimum of 3 days to be processed so we strongly advise for you to apply within plenty of time before your departure. You will be permitted to stay within Ethiopia for upto 30 days or upto 90 days depending on which single entry visa you request. We strongly recommend for you to read the Help section on the e-visa website before applying. Should you wish to apply for a visa prior to departure via the consulate in the UK, please note that a single entry visa is valid for 30 days from the date of issue, so you must submit your application no more than two weeks prior to departure. It is also possible to apply for a multi-entry visa which is valid for 3 months from issue.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them [here](#).

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Ethiopia Trips

Vaccinations

We recommend protection against malaria, hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid and polio. Although the risk is low you may also consider immunisation against rabies and meningococcal meningitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against Malaria. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.
