

Exploring Ethiopia, from the Blue Nile to the Simien Mountains

www.kudutravel.com/tours/ethiopia-walking-tour

11 –25 February 2019

Ethiopia has held legendary status for centuries, with travellers' tales of extraordinary imperial cities, a unique culture with its own church, language and script, exotic traditional ceremonies and a bewildering geographical and natural diversity. Exploring Ethiopia, these legends become vivid reality, providing a fascinating and rewarding insight into an isolated society where life has continued virtually unchanged for millennia.

Over two weeks, travelling by road, internal flights and on foot, we visit Lake Tana (source of the Blue Nile) with its early grass-roofed churches; the ancient imperial capitals of Axum and Gondar and informative museums in Addis Ababa (including the prehistoric finds which have earned Ethiopia the title of 'Cradle of Humanity'). We witness atmospheric Ethiopian Orthodox services in the remarkable complex of 12th century rock-hewn churches in Lalibela and walk in the Simien Mountains, perhaps the most dramatic scenery in Africa.

HIGHLIGHTS of the tour include:

- Explore the ancient imperial capitals of Axum and Gondar on foot
- Witness atmospheric Ethiopian Orthodox services in the 12C rock-hewn churches of Lalibela
- Walk in the spectacular scenery of the Simien mountains, based in a warm and comfortable thatched lodge
- Birdwatch on the Rift Valley lakes, in search of white pelicans, wattled ibis and black-winged lovebirds
- Travel by boat on Lake Tana, source of the Blue Nile, to visit remote monasteries

Guests' comments on this trip:

A tremendous experience, full of interest and challenge. The guide's local knowledge and friends added a great extra dimension to the trip.'

'A truly memorable trip. It felt as though we were tiptoeing through history, Ethiopian culture and the local orthodox tradition of the Christian faith.'

Itinerary

DAY 1

L, D included

Meeting at Addis Ababa airport in the morning, we transfer to our very comfortable and welcoming modern 4-star hotel for some rest before lunch. Acclimatisation in Addis involves adjusting to altitude, a different calendar and even a different daily clock! In the afternoon we briefly visit the highlights of the National Archaeological Museum, including the three and half million-year-old skeleton of 'Lucy', pre-Aksumite exhibits and an exotic collection of Royal crowns, robes and thrones. We move on to the excellent Ethnographical Museum, housed in Haile Selassie's former summer palace. We view the royal bedchamber and bathrooms and, time permitting, end our afternoon with a visit to Holy Trinity Cathedral to see the massive mausoleums Haile Selassie had constructed for himself and his wife.

DAY 2

B, L, D included

This morning we travel south towards the Ethiopian Rift Valley. We head first for the crater lakes of Bishoftu where we spend a couple of hours walking around Lake Hora or alternatively, at a slower pace, we begin discovering the remarkable natural heritage of the country, with more endemic species of birds and plants than anywhere else on the African continent. We are looking out for fish eagle, wattled ibis, pied kingfisher, hammerkop, African pygmy goose and black-winged lovebird. After lunch overlooking Bishoftu Crater Lake, we drive further south into the Omoro region to Lake Koka. Here we take a stroll along the shore seeking the white pelican or the giant Marabou stork. We walk past local people working on their land and we may get a chance to visit a local home. We return to Addis in the early evening.

DAY 3

B, L, D included

We depart early from Addis on a domestic flight to Bahir Dar and check into our stylish 4 star lodge, beautifully situated on the shores of Lake Tana. We walk to Bahir Dar's extensive and colourful open-air market, with stalls selling vegetables, spices, grain, local wild coffee, vividly coloured textiles, baskets and coffee pots. After an early lunch, we drive a rough dirt road to our walk to the Blue Nile Falls beginning at a 17th century Portuguese bridge. A hydro-electric plant upstream means that water levels are now much reduced, but nevertheless, this is a beautiful walk through the expansive African landscape. Our walk ends with a short ferry ride across the Blue Nile before we drive back to our lodge.

DAY 4

B, L, D included

This morning we board our private boat just a short walk from the hotel and cross Lake Tana to the Zeghie peninsula. Flocks of white pelicans fish in the lake, as do the local people, who still use alarmingly insubstantial-looking papyrus reed boats. On landing, we walk along footpaths through the wild coffee trees for which the peninsula is famous. We visit the beautiful 16th century circular church of Ura Kidane Mihret with magnificent wall murals and the grass-roofed Azuwa Maryam. We return to Bahir Dar for a late lunch and the remainder of the afternoon is free to enjoy a complimentary massage or to swim in the lodge pool.

DAY 5

B, L, D included

A full day of driving (300 km, approximately 6 hours of driving, plus stops) takes us away from Lake Tana through beautiful rural landscape, where we see people threshing grain or carrying their produce to market. An hour after leaving Gondar, we can take a short walk around Kossoye viewpoint, which provides magnificent views of the Simien Mountain range and of the lower ridges and valleys. The Simien Mountains National Park (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) presents some of Africa's most dramatic topography, with jagged peaks soaring to 4,550 metres (Ras Dashen, Ethiopia's highest point), precipitous gorges and a series of alternating plains and escarpments stretching north to Eritrea. Our new and comfortable eco-lodge is set at 3,260 m on the edge of the escarpment with superb views.

DAY 6

B, L, D included

This morning, accompanied by a National Park game scout, we set off from the lodge in search of the endemic Gelada ('bleeding heart') monkeys on their cliff-face roosts. Our walk takes us across a zone of Afro-Alpine flora, including the fragrant Abyssinian Rose, hypericum trees, everlastings, dianthus and tree heathers, and we meander across meadows and grasslands surrounded by fantastic crags and pinnacles of eroded volcanic plugs. The views are stupendous and we keep a lookout for klipspringers, the endemic thick-billed raven or lammergeyer and augur buzzard cruising overhead. We have a simple picnic in the shade of the heather trees

before continuing our journey on foot. A thirty minute drive brings us back to our lodge in time to enjoy some free time until dinner.

DAY 7

B, L, D included

This morning begins with a 45 minutes' drive into the heart of the National Park. For 1.5 hours we walk along an easy path pausing frequently to take in more of the magnificent views and to watch the plentiful Geladas. Our walk ends at the spectacular 500 metre Jinbar waterfall. We then drive 45 mins to Chenek camp (3,600 m), where the mountain escarpments converge and the views extend into infinity. After a picnic lunch on a dramatic outcrop, we can walk further out to the viewpoints to photograph the impressive Giant Lobelias. This is also the best area in the National Park for wildlife - particularly for the chance of spotting Menelik's bushbuck, golden-backed jackal and the endangered and elusive Walia Ibex.

DAY 8

B, L, D included

Leaving the high mountains we drive 3 hours south back to Gondar, the new capital founded by Emperor Fasiladas in 1636. Fertile land surrounded the capital and supplies of gold, ivory and slaves passing through en route to the Red Sea, Sudan and Egypt ensured the prosperity of the new city. Just before reaching the town, we stop at the Ploughshare Project, which helps local women in difficult circumstances. After lunch we visit the 16th and 17th century castles of the imperial compound, several of which are in good condition. We then visit the mural embellished church of Debre Berhan Selassie, which was reputedly saved from destruction by the Mahdist Dervishes by a swarm of bees. The afternoon concludes at Emperor Fasiladas Baths - an important religious site, especially for the Timkat (Epiphany) ceremonies. Our comfortable hotel enjoys a spectacular location.

DAY 9

B, L, D included

A mid morning flight takes us to the remote and barren Lasta mountains, which conceal Ethiopia's 'New Jerusalem'; the rock hewn churches reputedly built by the devout King Lalibela of the Zagwhe dynasty in the late 12th century. These extraordinary monoliths are cut into deep trenches in the basaltic scoria and were described by the 16th century Portuguese writer, Alvares, as 'edifices, the like of which – and so many – cannot be found anywhere else in the world'. As a place of pilgrimage and of continuous worship for the best part of a millennium, these churches remain at the spiritual heart of Ethiopia. After checking in to our new 3 star hotel (each room has a balcony overlooking the valley below), we spend the remainder of the day visiting the churches of the northwest cluster, close to the town centre. We may be fortunate enough to observe a colourful religious service, accompanied by drumming and chanting.

DAY 10

B, L, D included

This morning a ninety minute drive through a patchwork of golden barley fields, thorn trees and wattle and daub huts takes us to the foot of the unusual cave church of Yemrehanna Kristos. Completing the journey on foot, we approach an unprepossessing brick wall which hides the exceptionally carved and decorated church and the enormous cave. We return to Lalibela for lunch at an award winning restaurant and conclude the afternoon by visiting the fascinating south east cluster of churches. Carved out of soft red volcanic tufa, these churches are connected by an incredible series of labyrinthine passageways and tunnels.

DAY 11

B, L, D included

A morning flight delivers us to Axum, at first glance merely a dusty little market town. But it had a glorious past – from 200 BC to 700 AD it was the seat of an Empire, which traded with

Arabia, India and China, had its own alphabet and notational system and constructed great engineering works. We see the incredible *stelae*, the largest single pieces of stone erected anywhere in the world, and visit the so-called Queen of Sheba's Palace and Baths. We also visit the Mariam Tsion Church, which Ethiopian Orthodox Christians believe contains the Ark of the Covenant. There will also be some free time to discover one or two excellent shops selling traditional and antique silver, unusual baskets and woven natural fabrics, and that most colourful of Ethiopian souvenirs: the ceremonial umbrella.

DAY 12

B, L, D included

We begin today with a pleasant 2 hour walk just outside Axum through magnificent scenery with extensive views, our path bordered by gigantic Euphorbia Candelabrum. We then visit the 6th century tombs of King Kaleb and his son before beginning our drive to Gheralta in N.E. Tigray. Shortly after passing through Adua, scene of Ethiopia's defeat of the Italians in 1896, we come to Yeha, once a powerful city in the pre-axumite Da'mit civilisation. The 2,900 year old temple is the oldest existing building in Ethiopia and the adjoining monumental building is still being excavated. The remaining 3.5 hour drive takes us through the dramatic Adua mountains up to a pass at 3,000 m. We arrive at our special lodge just before sunset over the Gheralta range of mountains. The lodge is Italian owned, with authentic Italian style – and meals!

DAY 13

B, L, D included

After breakfast, a half hour drive brings us into the heart of the imposing Tigrayan mountain scenery. Against a backdrop of red sandstone rock pillars we spend the morning walking along local trails through farmland dotted with palm trees, or strolling through fields where we may spot Abyssinian Ground Hornbill or glossy starling. We return to our lodge for lunch and in the afternoon drive to visit the remote Medhane Alem Adi Kasho - one of the oldest and finest of the rock cut churches for which the region is famous. We return to our lodge in time to enjoy sunset over an aperitif.

DAY 14

B, L, D included

Our final full day begins with a drive to Abreha we Atsbeha. This large rock cut church has a beautifully carved roof and colourful nineteenth century murals. We then complete our drive to Mekele, arriving in time for lunch at a traditional restaurant. We return to Addis Ababa on the afternoon flight and check in to our international 4 star hotel, where we celebrate our final dinner in the hotel restaurant.

DAY 15

B, L, D included

A morning airport transfer concludes this fascinating cultural and historical journey through Ethiopia.

Activity Level

Standard

9 walking days (ranging from 1 to 4 hours daily), fairly rough underfoot everywhere. Proper, good, hiking boots with ankle support and walking poles/sticks are essential for the Simien Mountains. Be aware that altitude and heat/cold makes walking more demanding.

Temperatures

During February, temperatures are likely to range from 8°C (at night in the Simien mountains) to 28°C (during the day). This is the dry season in Ethiopia, but showers are still possible.

Accommodation

- 2 nights in Addis Ababa, in a very comfortable and welcoming 4-star hotel
- 2 nights in Bahir Dar, in a stylish 4-star lodge, beautifully situated on the shores of Lake Tana
- 3 nights in the Simien Mountains, in a new and comfortable eco-lodge set at 3,260 m
- 1 night in Gondar, in a comfortable hotel which enjoys a spectacular location
- 2 nights in Lalibela, in a new 3-star hotel offering rooms with balconies overlooking the valley below
- 1 night in Axum, in a modern hotel, dull but comfortable
- 2 nights in the Tigray region, in an Italian owned lodge
- 1 night in Addis Ababa, in an international 4-star hotel

Trip Price, per person sharing

£4,708.25 until 10th May 2018

£4,835.50 until 10th August 2018

£4,962.75 until 10th November 2018

£5,090 after 10th November 2018

<https://www.kudutavel.com/faq#discounts>

£780 single supplement

£600 deposit per person

Please note that the single room supplement is imposed by the hotels and not by Kudu Travel. If you are willing to share but no other suitable guest books on the trip, we regret that the supplement will be payable.

Price Includes

- all accommodation for Days 1 through 15, on a twin shared basis
- all meals (with beer and wine when available, at lunches and dinners) as listed in the daily notation
- 4 internal flights as described (booked in connection with your international Ethiopian Airways flights, a surcharge of £ 300 applies if your international flights are with another airline)
- all land transportation in private vehicles as described, except during free periods
- Lake Tana boat trip as described
- all entrance and sightseeing fees except during free periods
- donations to churches visited
- services of an English-speaking local guide, Kudu Travel tour leader, game scouts, drivers throughout
- tips for porters, restaurant & hotel staff, drivers, church “shoe guards”, local guides (appreciation for Kudu tour leader is entirely at your discretion)

Price does not include

- International transportation to and from Addis Ababa
- trip cancellation, medical or other insurance
- immunisations, prescriptions or other medical requirements
- passport, visa and health documentation
- personal expenses (laundry, alcohol besides wine and beer with group lunches and dinners, free time activities, etc.)
- meals noted as excepted in the daily notation
- transport and transfer of excess baggage
- Ethiopian departure tax, if any

VALUE FOR MONEY - SO MUCH IS INCLUDED

On Kudu trips you will only need money for postcards, presents to take home, the odd G & T or an irresistible ice cream. Festival and opera tickets, museum and gallery entrances, National Park fees, all meals (with a very few exceptions specified in individual itineraries), wine with lunch and dinner, access to specialist books carried by the guides, gratuities for porters and hotel and restaurant staff, boat rides, train trips, internal flights, wine tastings, 4WDs with drivers, the services of skilled local guides and trackers etc. are ALL INCLUDED in the cost of your holiday.

We are confident that, like previous very satisfied guests, you will discover that our tours give you excellent value for money.

Responsible Travel

In keeping with our commitment to responsible tourism, the trip price includes a £25 donation to the UK registered charity, EthiopiAid, which is working with the poorest communities in Ethiopia, providing a women's hospital and a home for orphaned children.

Off the Beaten Track

Please remember that Ethiopia is well off the beaten track and is a very poor country. Electricity and water supplies are often erratic, travel arrangements can be disrupted, standards of driving, vehicle maintenance and ideas of safety may fall below standards enforced in Europe. Travel in Ethiopia necessarily involves rough roads, dust and sometimes flies; it can be hot by day and (in the Simien Mountains) cold at night. Local food does not always appeal and outside Addis Ababa several of the hotels we use, although the best available and designed to cater to foreign travellers, would only rate 3 stars in Europe.

Ethiopia offers imaginative travellers a uniquely rewarding experience of a unique culture, but if the caveats listed above bother you, you should consider carefully whether a holiday in the third world is suitable for you. Kudu Travel will endeavour to do everything possible to ensure a smooth-running tour, but please be ready with your curiosity about other cultures, your sense of humour, patience and tolerance when travelling in such a remote land.

Visa and Health Requirements

All visitors require a visa, obtainable from the Ethiopian Embassy, or on arrival at Addis Ababa airport – further information will be supplied upon booking.

A Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is normally not required but immunisation/boosters against Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus, Typhoid and Polio are recommended. **Please consult your doctor** about this, and also the latest situation on malaria prophylaxis, in good time (**at least 6 weeks before you travel**). You may also wish to check the advice given to travellers by the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk/travellers) and the FCO (www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

Insurance

It is essential, and a condition of booking, that you protect yourself with a suitable travel insurance policy as soon as you book a trip. We can help to arrange comprehensive cover for UK residents. For further details, please see our website or ask our office.

Size of Party

This trip will run with a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 14 guests.