This unique and comprehensive itinerary covers all the major highlights of the northern and eastern regions of Ethiopia. We start the tour in Addis Ababa to witness the famous Timkat (Epiphany) religious festival. The Ethiopian Orthodox church with its many ancient traditions and festivals has had a significant influence on the country’s way of life for centuries. The festival is celebrated with colourful processions and, when witnessed at close quarters, can be a most unique and memorable experience. Other tour highlights include the remarkable 12th century churches at Lalibela and the rock-cut churches of the Eastern Tigray region and Axum, where Ethiopia’s rich history stretches back nearly 3000 years, with famous legends of the Queen of Sheba and the lost Arc of the Covenant. The dramatic mountain terrain of the Simien National Park, the magnificent gorges of the Awash National Park and the picturesque setting of Lake Tana all feature as natural highlights, whilst the medieval walled centre of Harar adds to the country’s mysterious and ancient past.

ITINERARY

Day 1  Fly to Addis Ababa
Evening flight from Heathrow Terminal 2 with Ethiopian Airlines direct to Addis Ababa.

Day 2  In Addis Ababa
Early morning arrival and transfer to Belle Vue hotel or similar for two nights. This afternoon we visit the National Museum that houses the famous remains of ‘Lucy’ and the magnificent Trinity Cathedral, resting place of Haile Selassie. Welcome dinner in a quality restaurant overlooking the city (B,L,D)

Day 3  In Addis Ababa. Witness Timkat Festival
Today we witness the ancient ceremony of Timkat; marking the Ethiopian Orthodox celebration of Epiphany. Ancient traditional music and singing accompany colourful processions of robed priests and deacons making this an unforgettable spectacle (B,L,D)

Day 4  Visit Awash National Park
We drive into the Rift Valley and visit the Awash National Park. We visit a magnificent 150 m deep gorge carved by the Awash River filled by waterfalls and teeming with endemic birdlife. Overnight hotel lodge (B,L,D)

Day 5  Drive to Harar
We drive through the Hararghe Mountains, a region well known for growing one of the best qualities of coffee in the country and colourful Oromo roadside markets. Later, in Harar, we will be able to witness the ancient and bizarre ritual of feeding the town’s resident hyenas by mouth! Overnight at the Heritage Plaza hotel (B,L,D)

Day 6  Visit old Islamic Harar
We have a walking tour within the old walled 15th century Islamic city of Harar and enjoy its architectural treasures, historic houses and colourful bustling markets filled with the smell of herbs, spices and coffee for which the area is famous. We drive to Dire Dawa. Two nights at the Selam hotel (B,L,D)

Day 7  In Dire Dawa
This morning we drive to the recently opened cave painting at Lega Odda dating to 5000 BC before visiting the daily market in town. Later we visit the Ethio - Djibouti railway Transport Company which is the only railway line in Ethiopia, established in 1902 and still using the old diesel locomotives today. We will also visit a coffee processing factory (B,L,D)

Day 8  Fly to Addis Ababa
We fly to Addis Ababa and this afternoon we visit the excellent Ethnographic museum housed in Addis Ababa University. Overnight at the Belle Vue hotel (B,L,D)

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Day 9  Fly to Bahar Dar. Visit Lake Tana. Drive to Gondar
This morning we fly to Bahar Dar and enjoy a relaxing boat trip on Lake Tana with a stop on Zege peninsula to visit the 17th century monastery of Ura Kidane Mehret, beautifully painted with colourful frescoes of biblical scenes. In the late afternoon we journey along the lake road to Gondar. Two nights at the Quara hotel (B,L,D)

Day 10  In Gondar
We visit the 17th century imperial capital of Gondar known as the ‘City of Castles’ picturesquely located beneath the Simien Mountains. We explore the Royal Enclosure with its complex of impressive castles and palaces and the superb church of Debre Birhan Selassie, whose ceilings are covered with paintings of winged angels (B,L,D)

Day 11 Visit the Simien Mountain National Park
We journey into Ethiopia’s most scenic highland range with spectacular plateaux and deep gorges; the Simien Mountains. The parks’ stunning scenery and pastoral lifestyle has remained unchanged for centuries and is home to the indigenous Gelada baboon and rare Simien fox. Overnight at the Simien Park eco-lodge (B,L,D)

Day 12 Drive to Axum
Continuing our journey north winding along steep mountain passes and through dramatic gorges we eventually arrive at Axum, Ethiopia’s spiritual centre and possibly home to one of the world’s most elusive relics; the Arc of the Covenant! Two nights at the Ramhai hotel (B,L,D)

Day 13 In Axum
This morning we visit the small but interesting Archaeological Museum and the famous giant obelisks, which have puzzled archaeologists for centuries. We will also wander through the towns’ fascinating local market. In the afternoon we visit the restored palace ruins reputed to be those of the Queen of Sheba (B,L,D)

Day 14 Visit Yeha temple. Drive to Gheralta
Driving north we visit Yeha temple, the oldest of Ethiopia’s antiquities beautifully set in scenic surroundings, dating back to the 4th century BC. We continue our journey into the eastern Tigray, a fascinating region containing many rock-hewn churches dating from the 8th century. Overnight at the Gheralta Lodge (B,L,D)

Day 15 Visit rock cut churches. Drive to Mekele
The rock-cut churches of the region are seen as one of Ethiopia’s greatest heritages yet they are still relatively unvisited. Today we will visit some of them. We overnight at the Mekele Axum hotel (B,L,D)

Day 16 Drive to Lalibela
A long but scenic drive south to Woldia before heading west along a winding road that follows the spectacular canyon of the river Tekeze, one of the main rivers of Ethiopia, to Lalibela. Two nights at the Jerusalem hotel (B,L,D)

Day 17 In Lalibela
Today we visit the remarkable complex of UNESCO listed 12th century rock-cut churches. In the late afternoon we will visit a traditional tukul hut and enjoy a traditional coffee ceremony with a local family (B,L,D)

Day 18 Fly to Addis Ababa
We return to Addis and have time at leisure perhaps to visit some of the Churchill Road souvenir shops and an historic coffee house. A farewell Ethiopian dinner with a traditional cultural show has been arranged before a late evening transfer to the airport for our Ethiopian Airlines flight. Day rooms at the Belle Vue hotel or similar (B,L,D)

Day 19 Fly to London
Early hours departure direct to London Heathrow Terminal 2

Cost £2295.00 per person in a twin room (excl. international flights) Single supplement charge £300

Price includes:
› Tour accompanied from London by Patrick Syder FRGS
› Ethiopian guide for the duration of the tour
› All transportation – private a/c minibus
› Three Ethiopian Airlines domestic flights
› Best available hotel accommodation outside Addis Ababa on full board basis
› Traditional Addis Ababa restaurant dinners
› Full sightseeing program including entrance fees
› Airport transfers
› Bottled water daily
› Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities

PLEASE NOTE – personal travel insurance, visa fees, alcoholic drinks, guide and driver gratuities, international flights are not included in the land tour cost (visa on arrival fee is $50.00) (Included meals denoted by B Breakfast, L Lunch, D Dinner)