

Ethiopia – Easter Festivals and Historic Abyssinia

Tour Code ETA

3 - 17 April 2017

This classic northern circuit itinerary covers all the main heritage sites plus includes some of the most beautiful regions of northern Ethiopia. The remarkable 12th century churches at Lalibela are a tour highlight and two days are spent to marvel at this Eighth Wonder of the World. Ethiopia's rich history stretches back nearly 3000 years in Axum, where the legends of the Queen of Sheba and the lost Arc of the Covenant are famous. 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. This comprehensive tour is timed to coincide with a colourful procession in Axum celebrating the eve of Palm Sunday and Easter in Lalibela. The lesser known but equally extraordinary rock-cut churches of the Eastern Tigray region around Mekele and the 17th century castles and palaces of Gonder, Africa's Camelot, are also included in the tour and the dramatic mountain terrain and fertile plateaus of the North and the picturesque setting of Lake Tana, source of the Blue Nile, adds to the country's mystery



Priest with decorative cross and crown, Lalibela © www.syderimages.com

ITINERARY

Day 1 Fly to Addis Ababa

Morning flight from Heathrow Terminal 3 with Turkish Airlines via Istanbul to Addis Ababa arriving at midnight. Transfer to the Kaleb hotel or similar for two nights

Day 2 In Addis Ababa

Morning at leisure. 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 smart Addis Ababa restaurant overlooking the city (B,L,D)

Day 3 Fly to Mekele. Visit rock-cut churches of Eastern Tigray

We take an early morning flight to Mekele, in the Eastern Tigray, a fascinating region containing many rock-hewn churches dating from the 8th century. These architectural gems remain in active use today and house priceless paintings and sacred medieval artefacts and their remote location add to their mystery and intrigue. Overnight at the Axum hotel with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 4 Drive to Gheralta. Visit rock-cut churches of Eastern Tigray

We drive through a stunning landscape of sandstone plateaux to reach Gheralta wonderfully set overlooking the location of the rock-cut churches found in the region and we visit one or two of the more accessible ones. Overnight at the boutique standard Gheralta Lodge with dinner (B,L,D)

Day 5 Drive to Axum

A long but interesting drive north-west to Axum today and along the route we visit Yeha temple, the oldest of Ethiopia's antiquities beautifully set in scenic surroundings, dating back to the 4th century BC. We arrive in 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 Sabian hotel (B,L,D)

Day 6 In Axum Palm Sunday Procession

This morning we visit the Church of St. Mary of Zion and see the nearby Sacred Chapel, reputed to be the resting place of the sacred Ark of the Covenant, plus the town's small but interesting museum and nearby famous giant obelisks, which have puzzled archaeologists for centuries. Later we experience a unique Ethiopian tradition only performed in this ancient city on the eve of Palm Sunday. Colourfully dressed priests process outside St Mary Zion church holding ornate crosses and chanting biblical text (B,L,D)

Day 7 Drive to Simien National Park

We depart Axum and journey into one of Ethiopia's most scenic highland range with spectacular plateaux

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and deep gorges. In the late afternoon we arrive to entrance to the Simien Mountain National Park. We overnight at the Simien Eco-Lodge located with fabulous views across the dramatic mountain range (B,L,D)

Day 8 Walking in the Simien Mountains. Drive to Gondar

We have a morning walk to fully appreciate the parks' stunning scenery and pastoral lifestyle that has remained unchanged for centuries. After a picnic lunch we continue to admire the dramatic landscape of the Simien range home to the indigenous Gelada baboon and rare Simien fox as we journey to Gondar. Overnight at the Goha hotel (B,L,D)

Day 9 Visit Gondar, drive to Bahar Dar

Morning visit to the 17th century imperial capital of Gondar. This 'City of Castles' is picturesquely located beneath the Simien Mountains and today we explore the Royal Enclosure with its complex of impressive castles and palaces. We also visit the church of Debre Birhan Selassie, whose ceilings are covered with paintings of winged angels. After lunch we drive to Bahar Dar, on the shores of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile. Two nights stay at the Tana hotel, located on the lakeshore, with private gardens (B,L,D)

Day 10 In Bahar Dar. Visit Lake Tana

Today we spend the day enjoying a relaxing boat trip on Lake Tana and spend time visiting some of the more accessible monasteries situated on the islands, beautifully painted with colourful frescoes of biblical scenes (B,L,D)

Day 11 Drive to Lalibela

We drive to Lalibela, located in the remote northern highlands at 8500ft. and transfer to the Jerusalem hotel for our three night stay. The highlight of our visit is to the remarkable complex of 12th century rock-cut churches. (B,L,D)

Day 12 In Lalibela *Good Friday Service*

This morning we visit the Eastern cluster of six with many of their interiors adorned with beautiful, well-preserved frescoes. Later we will visit a traditional tukul hut and enjoy a traditional coffee ceremony with a local family. We hope to be able to witness some of the Good Friday (*Siklet*) service at one of the rock-cut churches (B,L,D)

Day 13 In Lalibela *Easter Eve Vigil*

We visit the western complex of Lalibela churches with their elaborate exteriors this morning. After lunch we drive the short distance to Na'akkutolab Monastery carved from living rock set in a large cave and also see the Church of Saint George, arguably the finest of all the rock churches carved in the shape of a cross. Later we will be able to witness the Easter vigil service in one of the subterranean rock-cut churches, a ceremony that that has not changed over 800 years (B,L,D)

Day 14 Fly to Addis Ababa

Today the Easter fast is broken with traditional feasts across Lalibela. 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 the Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul. Day rooms at the Kaleb hotel (B,L,D)

Day 15 Fly to London

Early morning arrival at Istanbul and connecting flight to Heathrow Terminal 3 arriving in mid-morning

Cost £2395.00 per person in a twin room (excluding international flights) Single supplement charge £300



Tigrayan woman, Axum
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Price includes:

- ▶ Tour accompanied from London by Patrick Syder FRGS
- ▶ Ethiopian guide for the duration of the tour
- ▶ All transportation – private a/c minibus
- ▶ Two 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, Turkish Airlines international flights are not included in the land cost (visa on arrival fee is \$20.00, Turkish Airlines international flights start from £425.00 through Flight Centre UK) (Included meals - B Breakfast, L Lunch, D Dinner)