ETHIOPIA

DETAILED ITINERARY

THE HORN OF AFRICA

Aug 14/26

Woman from Mursi tribe.

Photo: © Cheryl Chanter

Few places offer such a myriad of experiences for the traveler as Ethiopia. Much of the fascination of this country lies in its many historical sites. According to legend, the first Ethiopian king, Menelik, was the son of the biblical King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba! Ethiopia also has nine national parks, protecting many of its endemic species. The ancient tribal culture compliments the unique history and nature of Ethiopia. Experience tribal cultures such as the Hamer, the Mursi and the Dorze, whose traditional lifestyle is a stark contrast to our modern life.

We explore Ethiopia, using the capital of Addis Ababa as our base. We travel to the historic north, a region rich in ancient traditions and dramatic landscapes. We visit a monastery church on Lake Tana before traveling to Gondar, our base for exploring the incredibly scenic Simien Mountains. We explore Lalibela and the monolithic churches carved out of pink granite that date back to the 12th century. We visit Axum, home of the

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

• 23 land days • Maximum 16 travelers • All meals included • Start and finish in Addis Ababa • Includes 3 internal flights • Visit 5 UNESCO Sites • Explore the monastery churches of Lake Tana • Hike in the stunning Simien Mountains • Visit the monolithic churches of Lalibela • Visit the sites in Axum and Gondar • Omo Valley • Encounter the Mursi, Karo, Hamer and Dorze tribes

DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

Jan 11 - Feb 02, 2027	-	**$9595 USD**
Jan 15 - Feb 06, 2027	-	**$9595 USD**
Jan 16 - Feb 07, 2028	-	**$9995 USD**

Activity Level: 3

Comfort Level: 5 days over 9,000 feet. Some rough/dusty roads and long drives.

ACCOMMODATIONS: Comfortable hotels in the north and the south, but the accommodations in the south are more basic. All have private bathrooms.

Queen of Sheba in the 10th century, where we see the stelae and some of the crowns of former kings. Axum is also reputed to be the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant.

Returning to our base in Addis Ababa, we then head to the tribal south, into the Omo Valley. We take a boat trip on Lake Chamo for crocodile and hippo spotting and then visit a Konso village.

Our journey takes us into the region of the Mursi people, whose women have the practice of using disks to expand their lower lip. We go "off-roading" to the River Omo, then on to Turmi to visit the Hamer and other Indigenous tribes. We travel up through the Rift Valley, concluding our journey back in Addis Ababa.

DAY 1 ARRIVE IN ADDIS ABABA

You are met on arrival in Addis Ababa and transferred to our hotel. The name of the city in Amharic means 'new flower'. Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, it is located at 2,500m (8,202ft) above sea level in one of the highest parts of the Entoto Mountain chain (3,000m / 9,842ft above sea level).

Addis Ababa is a pleasant city with wide avenues of jacaranda trees, interesting museums and one of the largest open-air industrial markets in Africa, known as the "Mercato". We meet this evening for dinner and orientation.

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

DAY 2 ADDIS ABABA SITES

We spend the day exploring Addis Ababa. In the morning we visit the National Museum, one of the most important sub-Saharan museums in all of Africa. The museum is home to the fossilized humanoid Lucy, as well as an amazing collection of artifacts, royal items and art. We then proceed to the Ethnological Museum,

which was the former palace of Haile Selassie.

After lunch, we drive to the Holy Trinity Cathedral. Holy Trinity Cathedral is the largest Orthodox Church in Ethiopia and has survived through many historical periods, as its interesting architecture can attest to. The Cathedral contains the thrones and the tombs of the emperor and some of the royal family.

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

DAY 3 FLY TO BAHIR DAR

We take a short flight this morning north to Bahir Dar, a vibrant and laid-back city nestled on the southern shores of Lake Tana, Ethiopia's largest and most historically significant lake. Known for its palm-lined avenues, colorful markets, and lakeside charm, Bahir Dar offers a peaceful introduction to the cultural and natural beauty of the region.

After lunch on the shore of Lake Tana, we take a boat to a nearby peninsula to visit beautiful Orthodox monasteries such as Ura Kidane Mihiret. Ura Kidane Mihiret is the best known of the monasteries and has an important collection of religious icons from the 16th to 18th centuries A.D. There are 37 islands on Lake Tana and 30 of them have churches and monasteries of considerable historical and cultural interest. If time permits, we will visit the colorful Bahir Dar market.

Overnight in Bahir Dar.

DAY 4 TO GONDAR, TIMKET FESTIVAL (JANUARY DEPARTURES ONLY)

This morning we drive to Gondar, arriving at our hotel by lunchtime. Gondar was the first capital city of the Ethiopian Empire, which began in 1632 with the reign of Fasilidas. In Gondar, there are a dozen castles built by various emperors over the course of 236 years. The city seems more European than African.

After some rest, we can join the festivities and enjoy the famous Timket Festival. The Timket festival, or Epiphany in Ethiopia, is the most colorful and exciting festival of the year and a great celebration for locals and travelers alike.

Overnight in Gondar.

DAY 5 TIMKET AND GONDAR SIGHTSEEING, TO SIMIEN MOUNTAINS

This morning there is an option to go to the overnight resting place of the tabots. Tabots are holy replicas of the Ark of the Covenant - the sacred chests described in the Book of Exodus as carrying the stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. The tabots are blessed with water by the priests and then singing and dancing accompany the tabots back to their churches.

After the morning festivities, we begin exploring medieval Gondar. We visit Fasilidasi Palace, probably the most impressive of all the castles found in the area and the oldest!

After lunch, we have a long drive to the Simien Mountains, where we will be staying in the highest lodge of Africa, at 3400 meters.

Overnight in Simien Lodge.

DAY 6 SIMIEN MOUNTAINS

We have a full day to enjoy the Simien Mountains (UNESCO World Heritage Site). The road passes over mountainous areas of wild beauty. In the park, many of the mountain peaks exceed 4,000m (13,123ft). The highest is Ras Dejen, at 4,543m (14,905ft) above sea level. These mountains consist of volcanic masses that have been eroded away by centuries of rain. Today they have amethyst-colored peaks and deep gullies which have been further deepened by rivers. The crevices play host to the walia ibex.

The escarpment offers scenic views and the chance to see the endemic gelada baboons, sometimes in herds of over a hundred, along with the endemic walia ibex whose population is now on the rise after poaching drove them to near extinction. Cliff-nesting birds are also common, including the lammergeier (bearded vulture).

Overnight in Simien Lodge.

DAY 7 SIMIEN MTS. TO GONDAR AND FLY TO LALIBELA

We drive from Simien Mts. to Gondar and transfer to the Airport and fly to Lalibela.

The city of Lalibela contains 11 monolithic churches that were built in the 12th century and are carved out of pink granite rock; they have been classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Each church has a unique architectural style; all are superbly carved and most of them are decorated with well-preserved paintings. The entire city may be described as a sculpture dedicated to the glory of God.

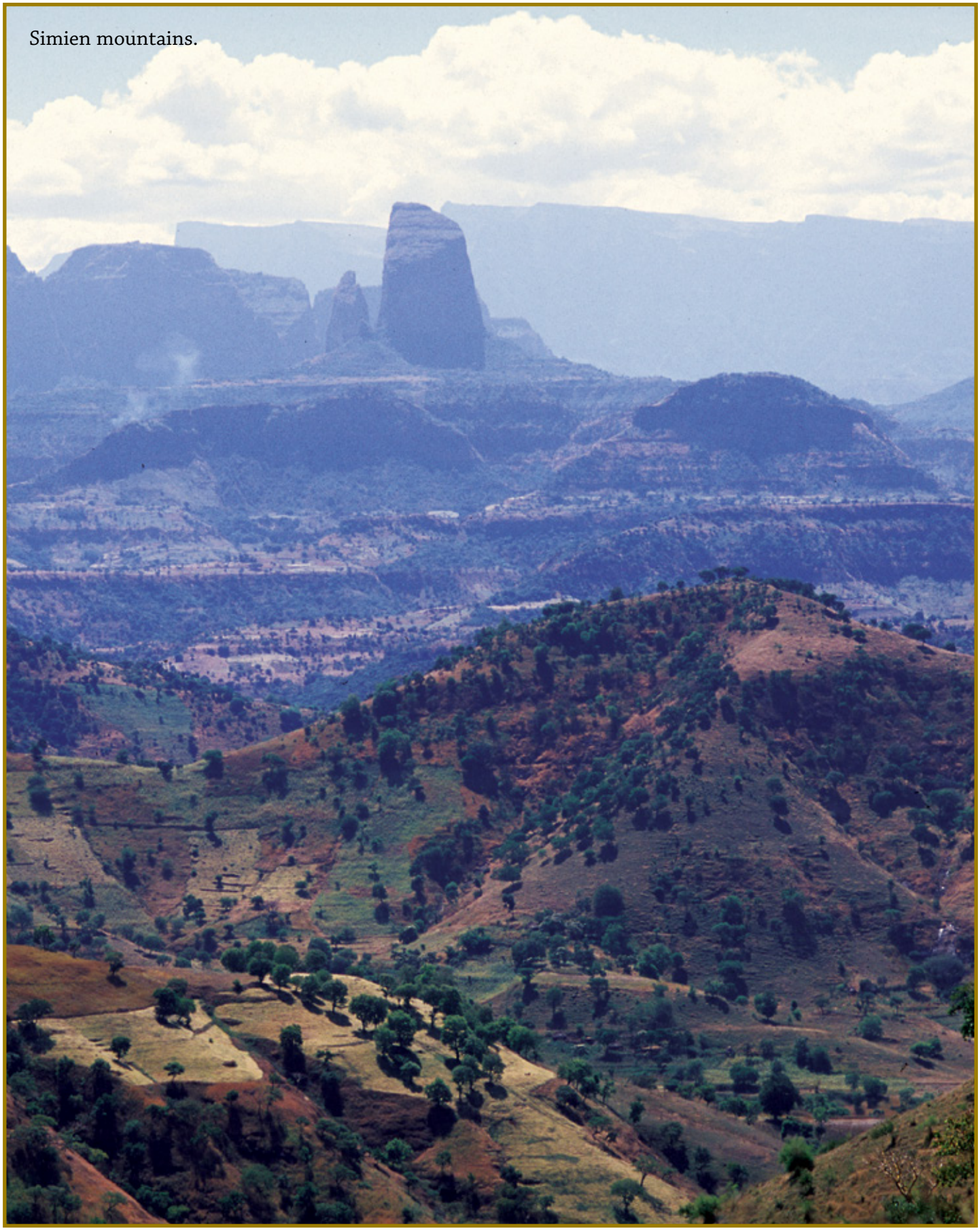
Overnight in Lalibela

DAY 8 LALIBELA & NORTHERN CHURCHES

Today we spend time exploring the best churches in the northern, as well as eastern areas of Lalibela. Tonight, we will enjoy our group dinner with spectacular views of the area.

Overnight in Lalibela.

Timket celebration


Simien mountains.

DAY 9 LALIBELA

Today we spend time exploring the best churches in Lalibela and this afternoon we visit Nakuta Lab, followed by a coffee ceremony!

Overnight in Lalibela

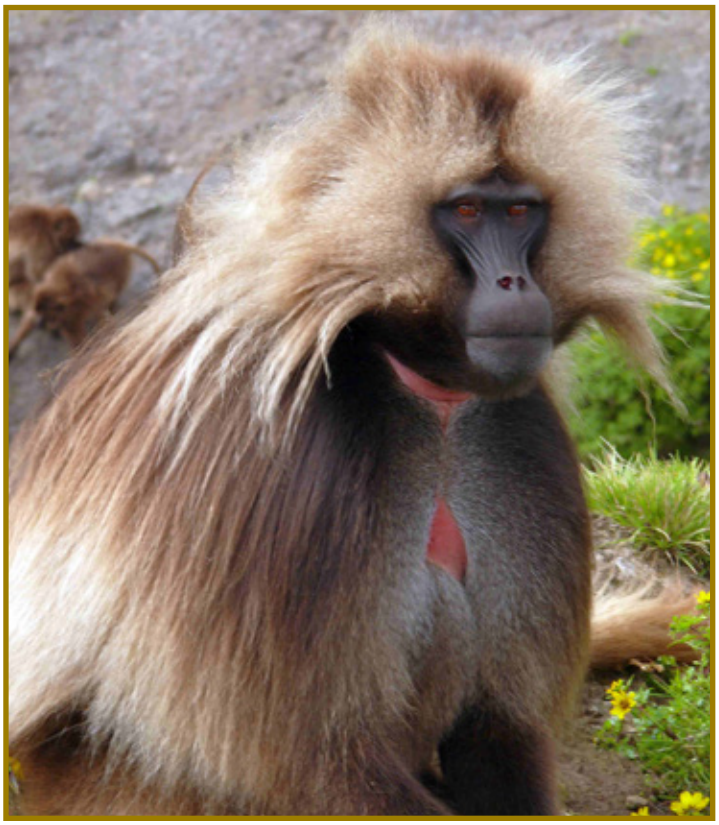
DAY 10 LALIBELA TO ADDIS ABABA

We fly back to Addis Ababa this morning. After lunch, we enjoy a free afternoon; you may want to visit one of the many museums or the interesting mercato.

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

DAY 11 FLY ADDIS ABABA TO AXUM

Axum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The legends narrated in the Kebre Nagast (Book of Kings) recount how the city of Axum as early as the 10th century B.C. was already the city in which the Queen of Sheba resided. It is recounted that the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon brought the Ark of the Covenant to Axum and it remains there to this day, preserved in a sanctuary. Famous long before the time of Christ, Axum was the capital of the long Axumite reign, one of the oldest African empires, and represented a crucial connecting-point between Africa and Asia for almost a thousand years.



We visit the stelae; granite monoliths dating from pre-Christian times and decorated with symbolic engravings. The second largest of the stelae was looted by Mussolini's troops in 1937, and stood for years in the Piazza di Porta Capenamin in Rome. After much discussion over the years, the stelae was finally returned from Italy to Axum in 2005.

We will also visit the church of Saint Mary of Zion; a chapel in the church is believed by many to contain The Ark of the Covenant. This chapel is protected by "The Guardian," who is the only person allowed into the chapel and the only one who may set eyes on it.

We may also visit a small museum here, which contains the crowns of Ethiopian kings and other treasures.

Overnight in Axum.

DAY 12 FLY AXUM TO ADDIS ABABA AND DRIVE TO LAKE LANGANO

We have an early morning flight back to Addis Ababa where we will transfer to our vehicles. To begin the Southern part of our adventure, we head off in 4x4 vehicles to Lake Langano which is about 143 miles (230 km) from Addis Ababa. Enroute, we visit the lakes of Debre Zeit and Ziway. We arrive to our lodge in the early afternoon. In the afternoon we enjoy some free time to relax and enjoy this wonderful part of the country.

Overnight in Langano.

Gondar ruins.

DAY 13 TO ARBA MINCH

We set out early today and pass by the Rift Valley lakes before arriving into Arba Minch. This town is the largest in southern Ethiopia. It is situated between the Rift Valley, Lake Abaya and Lake Chamo. Enroute we will visit the Alaba village and we will drive through Welayta and Gamogoffa area.

Overnight in Arba Minch.

Note: Omo Valley Adventure

In order to fully experience and explore this incredibly diverse, yet sometimes isolated UNESCO area, we really get "off-the-beaten-track". Sometimes the road is in rough condition (if there is a road at all) so you should be prepared for some bumpy drives. Accommodation in small towns is modest. A certain spirit of adventure is required for this journey and any travel hardship will certainly be made up for in experience!

DAY 14 VISIT, LAKE CHAMO

This morning we head to the nearby Arba Guge Mountains to visit the Dorze people and see how they live in these fascinating beehive huts. They are also famous for their elaborate scarfs, woven products, as well as for their special dancing.

After lunch, we have a relaxing boat ride on Lake Chamo, where we will have the opportunity to watch for the resident hippos, crocodiles and abundant bird life.

Overnight in Arba Minch.

DAY 15 ARBA MINCH, TO JINKA

Our drive today will offer some of the most beautiful scenery Ethiopia has to offer - soft rolling hills with dark red soil and plentiful crops and forests. The road continues into the savannah, running alongside the mountains of Men, then following the Karkerte Mountains, providing splendid panoramic views until reaching the soft terraced hills of Konso. We will enjoy a visit in the Konso village to meet the locals who are excellent farmers. The Konso people consists of a pagan society who erect totem poles on the tombs of their dead. We arrive in Jinka in the evening in time to enjoy dinner.

Overnight in Jinka.

DAY 16 MURSI TRIBAL ENCOUNTER

This morning we will enjoy a very unique Mursi tribal encounter outside of their village. The Mursi women have the custom of expanding their lower lips using disks that gradually get larger and larger. These are people who farm the land and breed livestock and they live in almost complete isolation from the rest of the world. After our visit, we return back to Jinka where we will explore a small but very interesting local anthropological-ethnological museum run by a German foundation, dedicated for the different tribes of the Omo Valley.

We then visit the Ari Village. The people of Ari live in the lush surroundings of the Jinka and grow coffee and fruits for trading and self-consumption. Their villages are green and surrounded by banana, mango and avocado. The Ari people are said to be one of the most culturally and economically dominant groups in the Omo valley.

The people are friendly and will often invite you into the villages where you can witness some of their traditional lifestyle activities, how they make local liquor made of sorghum, garlic and maize and how they make a pot. Some Ari villages are quite large and contain several streets. Their buildings range from the typical bamboo and straw huts to more substantial structures made from mud and wattle.

DAY 17 HAMER VILLAGE VISIT, TO TURMI

Today we will have a long drive which will take us from Jinka to Turmi, passing through the Woyto Valley as we go. Turmi is home of the Hamer Tribe. This afternoon we will visit the Hamer village with an opportunity to take photos and learn about their society. The Hamers are one of the most beautiful and dignified people of the Omo Basin. The women color their hair with red earth and butter and wear elegant leather skirts festooned with tiny pearls.

Overnight in Turmi.

DAY 18 MURELE, OMO BEND AND KARO PEOPLE

We travel through the savannah in a typically African landscape arriving at Murele, located on the River Omo surrounded by huge trees. This is the land of the Karo tribe. Here it is possible to meet them and visit their village along the river. In the afternoon we drive back through the savannah, along tracks that are barely visible, passing through a vast meadowland with shrubs and umbel lifers ("umbrella" acacia trees).

Overnight in Turmi.

DAY 19 ARBA MINCH VIA KONSO, ARBORE TRIBE

Today we start our return journey northward, towards the lakes of the Rift Valley. The Rift Valley is a deep fissure that extends for over 3728 miles (6,000 km) from the Middle East to Mozambique, testimony to the violent and massive shifting of the Earth's tectonic plates. The rift contains a marvelous series of lakes, which are teeming with fish and provide a habitat for hundreds of species of birds. Enroute we visit an Arbore village and, time permitting, stop at some small markets. We travel

Timket Festival.

along the side of Lake Chamo and arrive at Arba Minch late afternoon to early evening.

Overnight in Arba Minch.

DAY 20 DRIVE ARBA MINCH TO AWASA

This morning we return to the road that leads back up the Rift Valley. We cross fertile land planted with bananas, cereals and tobacco, inhabited first by the Oromo people and then by the Sidamo. All kinds of fruit are sold along the roadside. After lunch, we make our way to the regional capital, Awasa. It is located at 1685 m (6119 ft) and sits at the edge of the smallest lake in the Ethiopian Rift Valley.

Overnight in Awasa.

DAY 21 FISH MARKET AND LAKE AWASA

Today we set off to explore the famous fish market of Asa Gebeya, located on an inlet to Lake Awasa. Every morning, fisherman arrive by their wooden rowboats loaded with their daily catch of tilapia. The setting is spectacular, with the mountains, the lake and rich vegetation of dense scrub and woodland. We then make our way to Amorra Gedel Park which is home to many birds, as well as guereza and grivet monkeys.

After lunch, we enjoy a motorboat ride along Lake Awasa, the smallest lake of the Rift Valley lakes. Lake Awasa (9000 hectares) is surrounded by rolling hills, formed in an ancient volcanic crater. The area teems with bird life including several endemic species, along with hippos, and if we are lucky, we may also see a pygmy goose. We return to our hotel in the afternoon with time to relax poolside before dinner.

Overnight in Awasa.

DAY 22 ADDIS ABABA

After a leisurely breakfast, we return to Addis Ababa. The remainder of the day is free for any last minute shopping or resting before meeting with the group for our farewell dinner in a traditional restaurant, complete with a traditional dance.

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

DAY 23 DEPART ADDIS ABABA

We say farewell to this remarkably varied country with a transfer to the airport for your departure flight.

*Many flights do not depart Addis Ababa until after 10pm. In this case, it is possible to depart after the farewell dinner on Day 22 if that is your preference.

Hamer girl

Arbore woman

Hamer woman

Mursi woman

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (porterage), national guide, bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE "EDUCATIONAL" TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, "educational". We visit many nature reserves and local villages. We also have talks and discussions on many aspects of Ethiopian history and culture, but this is only one aspect of what we do. We believe that it is equally educational to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their home and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most "educational" moments are spent having a cold drink with locals in a street market.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL WHILE IN ETHIOPIA?

All land transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We have our own vehicles for road travel — we use a coaster mini-bus in the north and 4 x 4 vehicles in the south; we travel on three domestic flights, and we use a boat on Lake Tana and Lake Chamo.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in comfortable, well located accommodations with private washrooms through-out the north. Basic accommodation in the south (hotels have private washrooms).

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

Ethiopia's climate reflects its topography. The highlands are classed as temperate with an average daytime temperature of 60°F (16°C). The far south and the eastern lowlands are hot and dry; the western lowlands are hot and humid. Throughout the trip, you can expect temperatures between 59° –77°F (25°– 15°C).

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of $500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the "Terms and Conditions" section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed "What to Take" list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you after you have booked the trip.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals during the itinerary are included, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks offers personalized flight itineraries — not group flights. Stop over en route, come in a few days early, or extend your stay. Call for a customized flight itinerary.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to you once you have booked the trip.

Rock Church dedicated to St. George, Lalibela.

Karo tribe village.