

# Ethiopia – Ancient Lands of Abyssinia

## (Easter Festival Departure)

### Tour Code ETE

#### Departing 24 March 2010

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 their Easter week celebrated with colourful processions accompanied by ancient music and hypnotic chant. To witness this at close quarters is the most unique and memorable experience. The remarkable 12th century churches at Lalibela are a further 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 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.



Palm Sunday Procession, Axum  
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#### ITINERARY

##### Day 1 Fly to Addis Ababa – Wednesday 24 March

Evening flight from Heathrow Terminal 3 with Ethiopian Airlines direct to Addis Ababa

##### Day 2 In Addis Ababa – Thursday 25 March

Morning arrival and transfer to the Ghion hotel 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 smart Addis Ababa restaurant overlooking the city (L,D)

##### Day 3 In Addis Ababa – Friday 26 March

This morning we visit the Ethnographic museum at Addis Ababa University. After a break for lunch we visit the Addis Ababa museum housed in a former royal residence before driving up into the Entoto hills to enjoy panoramic views across the capital. There will also be the option to visit some of the Churchill Road souvenir shops and an historic coffee house which sells the best Ethiopian coffee!. (B,L,D)

##### Day 4 Fly to Axum. In Axum – Saturday 27 March

Early morning flight to Axum and 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. This afternoon we experience a unique Ethiopian tradition only performed in this ancient city on the eve of Palm Sunday. Colourfully dressed priests process outside the Church of St. Mary of Zion holding ornate crosses and chanting biblical text. Steeped in ancient tradition this is a fascinating event to witness at close proximity. Two nights at the Ramhai Hotel (B,L,D)

##### Day 5 In Axum – Sunday 28 March (Ethiopian Orthodox Palm Sunday)

Church services and a lively atmosphere throughout the town mark Palm Sunday. This morning we visit the small but interesting Archaeological Museum and the famous giant obelisks, which have puzzled archaeologists for centuries and we visit the restored palace ruins reputed to be those of the Queen of Sheba. In the afternoon we visit Yeha temple, the oldest of Ethiopia's antiquities beautifully set in scenic surroundings (B,L,D)

##### Day 6 Drive to Simien National Park – Monday 29 March

We depart Axum and journey into one of Ethiopia's most scenic highland range with spectacular plateaux and deep gorges. In the late afternoon we arrive at the town of Debarq, entrance to the Simien Mountain National Park. We overnight at the Simien Park hotel (B,L,D)

##### Day 7 Walking in the Simien Mountains. Drive to Gondar – Tuesday 30 March

We have a morning walk to fully appreciate the parks' stunning scenery and pastoral lifestyle that has remained

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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 strategically located overlooking the city (B,L,D)

**Day 8 Visit Gondar, drive to Bahar Dar – Wednesday 31 March**

Morning visit to the 17<sup>th</sup> 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 superb church of Debre Birhan Selassie, whose ceilings are covered with paintings of winged angels. After a break for lunch we drive to Bahar Dar, on the shores of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile and on arrival we view this magnificent spectacle. We have a two-night stay at the Tana hotel, located on the lakeshore, with private gardens rich in birdlife (B,L,D)

**Day 9 In Bahar Dar – Thursday 1 April**

A short drive this morning across a fertile ancient crater brings us to the Tisisat Falls where the Blue Nile plunges over a 45 m basalt rock face to form one of Africa's most spectacular waterfalls. We also have a brief stop at the lively local market. In the afternoon we enjoy a relaxing boat trip on Lake Tana with a stop on one of its many islands to visit a 17<sup>th</sup> century monastery beautifully painted with colourful frescoes of biblical scenes (B,L,D)

**Day 10 Fly to Lalibela – Friday 2 April (Ethiopian Orthodox Good Friday)**

A morning flight to Lalibela, located in the remote northern highlands at 8500ft. and transfer to the Jerusalem hotel for our three night stay. After lunch we drive a short distance to visit Na'akkutolab Monastery carved from living rock set in a large cave where we hope to be able to witness some of the Good Friday (*Siklet*) service (B,L,D)

**Day 11 In Lalibela – Saturday 3 April**

The highlight of our visit is to the remarkable complex of 12<sup>th</sup> century rock-cut churches. Today we visit the Eastern cluster of six with many of their interiors adorned with beautiful, well-preserved frescoes. In the late afternoon we visit the Church of Saint George. Arguably the finest of all the rock churches carved in the shape of a cross. We enjoy a traditional Ethiopian dinner tonight. 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 12 In Lalibela – Sunday 4 April (Ethiopian Orthodox Easter Sunday)**

This morning we continue with a visit to the western complex of Lalibela churches with their elaborate exteriors. Today the Easter fast is broken with traditional feasts across the town. This afternoon we will visit a traditional tukul hut and enjoy a traditional coffee ceremony with a local family (B,L,D)

**Day 13 In Lalibela. Fly to Addis Ababa – Monday 5 April**

We board 4WD vehicles this morning and venture into the valleys of the Wolo range to visit the beautiful Yemrehanna Monastery built in typical Axumite style. We hope to visit a local school before departing to the airport for our flight back to Addis ababa in the late afternoon. Two nights at the Ghion hotel (B,L,D)

**Day 14 Day excursion to Debre Libanos– Tuesday 6 April**

Full day excursion to the ancient monastic centre of Debre Libanos founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A farewell traditional dinner with cultural show (B,L,D)

**Day 15 Fly to Addis Ababa. In Addis Ababa – Wednesday 7 April**

After breakfast we transfer to Bole International airport for the return flight with Ethiopian Airlines via Rome arriving into Heathrow Terminal 3 in the afternoon (B)

**Cost £1895.00** per person in a twin room (excluding international flights) Single supplement charge £350



**Price includes:**

- ▶ Tour accompanied from London by Patrick Syder
- ▶ Led by specialist Ethiopian guide, Samson Tilahun
- ▶ Three domestic Ethiopian Airlines flights
- ▶ All transportation in private minibus exclusive to the group
- ▶ Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- ▶ Best available hotels on a full board basis
- ▶ Traditional Addis Ababa restaurant dinners
- ▶ All departure taxes
- ▶ All airport transfers
- ▶ Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities

Not included – visa fee, travel insurance, drinks, guide and driver gratuities, Ethiopian Airlines international flight (available direct with airline from £520.00)