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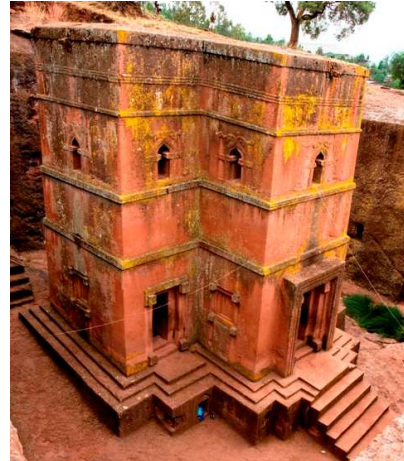
AFRICAN ADVENTURE TOURS

Phone: +251 - 114 - 42 43 43
+251 - 911 - 98 27 18
Fax: +251 - 114 - 42 42 47
info@african-adventure-tours.com
www.african-adventure-tours.com
P.O. Box: 59314, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

AAT-1114

MESKAL FESTIVAL, BAHIR DAR, GONDAR, LALIBELA & AXUM

Duration: 8 Days / 7 Nights



Tour Highlights:

- Domestic flights between destinations for comfort and more time to explore
- Celebrate Ethiopia's most important religious festival, the Meskel, in Addis Ababa
- Boat trip on Lake Tana to visit the ancient monastery Ura Kidane Mehret and Azwa Maryam
- Explore the dramatic nature of the Blue Nile and Tiss Isat Falls
- Travel the Historic Route to the Castles of Gondar, Lalibela's famous rock-hewn churches and the palace of Queen Sheba in Axum
- Explore the dramatic scenery of the Simien Mountains National Park
- Visit the old city of Harar, considered as the "fourth holiest city of Islam"
- Traditional Ethiopian farewell dinner with "coffee ceremony"

Travel date: 26 September - 3 October

Departure with a minimum of two participants.

Please arrange your flight in such a way that you arrive in Addis Ababa on the 26 September in the morning or early afternoon. For earlier arrivals a transfer can be arranged on request.

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Day 1: 26 September: Arrival in Addis Ababa

WELCOME TO ETHIOPIA. On arrival in Addis Ababa our representative will meet you at the airport. After transfer to your hotel an overview of the program will be given. After lunch, attend the colorful Meskel Festival in the city centre. This important festival of the orthodox Christians is celebrated to commemorate the finding of the true cross. Overnight in 4-star hotel.



Day 2: 27 September: Fly Bahir Dar, Blue Nile Falls

After breakfast fly to Bahir Dar, a small town on the southern shore of Lake Tana. The lake is the source of the Blue Nile and the largest lake in Ethiopia. Thirty of its thirty-seven islands host churches and monasteries of considerable historical and cultural interest. After refreshment, take a boat trip on Lake Tana to visit two of the most accessible and representative monasteries, Ura Kidane Mehret and Azwa Maryam, which still serve their original function. In the afternoon, take the short walk to the best viewing point of the impressive Blue Nile Falls, locally known as Tiss Isat or 'Smoke of Fire'.

Day 3: 28 September: Drive to Gondar

On the 180 km long drive to Gondar you experience a typical Ethiopian-African landscape - wide grazing land, hilly mountains and numerous farmlands. Visit the castles and churches built by emperor Fassiledes and his descendants, also known as Africa's Camelot. Later proceed to the fascinating Debre Birhan Selassie Church - one of the World's heritage sights. Its walls and ceilings are decorated with scenes of biblical lore and medieval history.



Day 4: 29 September: Excursion to Simien Mountains

After early breakfast we drive from Gondar to Debarq, the head quarter of the Simien Mountain National Park. We proceed to Sankaber where we walk around enjoying endemic Gelada Baboons and the bone breaker giant bird Lammergeyer. Afternoon drive back to Gondar.

Day 5: 30 September: Fly Axum

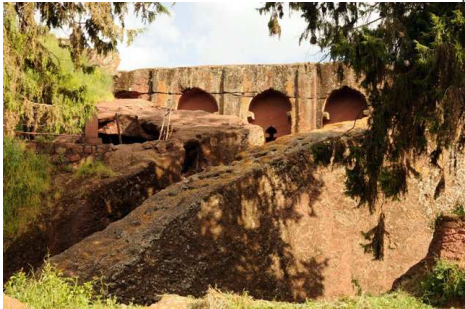
After breakfast fly to Axum and visit the historical and archaeological sites. The ancient city marks the location of the heart of ancient Ethiopia, when the kingdom of Axum was the most powerful state between the eastern Roman empire and Persia. The archaeological and historical attractions in Axum include: the archaeological museum, the magnificent monolithic steles and obelisks, the tombs of king Kaleb and king Gebre Meskal, the legendary bath of Queen Sheba and the ruins of her palace. The 16th century cathedral St. Mary of Zion, the holiest church in Ethiopia is said to host the original Ark of the Covenant. The churches and monasteries of Axum are richly endowed with icons and historical crowns of ancient emperors.



Day 6: 1 October: Fly Lalibela

After breakfast transfer to the airport and flight to Lalibela. The town of Lalibela, lies among the Lasta Mountains at 2630 m above sea level and remains until today a place of pilgrim and devotion for Ethiopian Christians.

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<p>The construction of the eleven rock-hewn churches is attributed to king Lalibela of the Zagwe Dynasty. Some of the 12th century churches are monolithic, carved from a sloping mass of red volcanic scoria underlaid by dark grey basalt and interconnected by a maze of tunnels and passages with openings to hermit caves and catacombs. Some are of the basilica type, having archaic features and imitating architectural elements from earlier periods, yet they differ in design and style. Two are decorated with interesting wall paintings and carved figures. The Lalibela churches are included in the World Heritage List since 1978.</p> <p>Afternoon visit of the first group of six churches which lie in rock cradles one behind the other: Bet Golgotha, Bet Mika'el, Bet Maryam, Bet Meskel, Bet Danaghel and Bet Medhane Alem. Bet Medhane Alem, the largest one, is built like a Greek temple and its stone floor is so polished by the countless numbers of visitors that it reflects shafts of light from apertures in the walls high above. In a corner are three empty graves symbolically dug for biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.</p>		
<p>Day 7: 2 October: In Lalibela</p> <p>After breakfast take a mule ride to the 13th century rock hewn monastery of Asheten Mariam. The church is situated on the top of a mountain at an altitude of 3150 metres. The roundtrip takes about 4 hours. We return to Lalibela for lunch. In the afternoon, visit the other groups of rock churches. Bet Giyorgis, the most elegant church, lies somewhat isolated in the southwest part of the village on a sloping rock terrace. It can only be reached through a tunnel. The group of four, south of the Jordan River, comprise of Bet Emanuel, Bet Mercurios, Bet Abba Libanos and Bet Gabriel-Rufa'el.</p>		
<p>Day 8: 3 October: Fly to Addis Ababa, departure</p> <p>After breakfast you check in to the airport for your flight to Addis Ababa. The rest of the day visit historical sites in Addis Ababa. In the evening fare well dinner party, with dances from different ethnic groups, in a traditional Ethiopian restaurant. Afterwards transfer to the airport for flight home.</p>		



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<p><u>PRICE</u></p> <p>Price per person (on the basis of 2 travellers) = US \$ 1.542 Price per person (on the basis of 3 travellers) = US \$ 1.238 Price per person (on the basis of 4 travellers) = US \$ 1.087 Single room supplement = US \$ 143 Plus domestic flights ca. US \$ 250 (only if the roundtrip international flight is with Ethiopian Airlines) otherwise ca. US \$ 600</p>		
<p>Price includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special qualified guide as well as mandatory local guide and scout fees in parks and villages - 4-star hotel in Addis Ababa and the best available hotels outside of Addis Ababa - All accommodation based on twin room occupancy - Meals in Addis, on bed and breakfast basis - Meals out of Addis, on full board basis - Farewell dinner in Addis to enjoy traditional Ethiopian food and music - All entrance fees at sites, churches, parks and villages - All transfers and visits in Addis Ababa using mini-bus according to the itinerary - All ground transportation including insurance, fuel and all costs of the driver - Boat trip on Lake Tana - A traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony at a convenient time in the program - Government taxes <p>Price doesn't include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International flights - Lunch and Dinner in Addis Ababa - Any kind of drinks, alcoholic or non-alcoholic - Video filming and photographing fees - Incidental meals, snacks and drinks - Tips and items of personal nature like laundry, souvenirs, etc. - All what is not included in the list above 		