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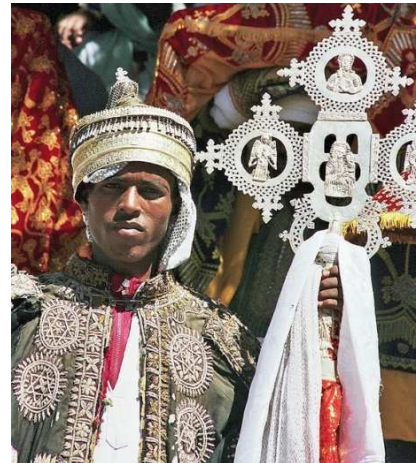
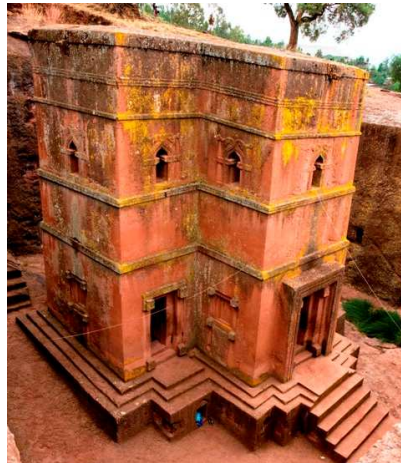
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AAT-1137

CHRISTMAS & TIMKET FESTIVAL, HISTORIC ROUTE & OMO VALLEY

Duration: 17 Days / 16 Nights



Tour Highlights:

- Walk the path of pilgrims between the amazing rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and celebrate Ethiopian Christmas
- Celebrate Ethiopia's most important religious festival, Ethiopian Epiphany in Addis Ababa
- Boat trip on Lake Tana to visit the ancient island monasteries Ura Kidane Mihret and Azwa Maryam
- Explore the dramatic nature of the Blue Nile & Tiss Isat Falls
- Visit the Castles of Gondar, which are known as Africa's Camelot
- Visit the splendid vestiges of the fabled Queen Sheba in Axum
- Explore the Colorful tribes of the south who still adhere to ancient animistic rituals
- Traditional Ethiopian farewell dinner with "coffee ceremony"

Travel date: 3 - 19 January

Departure with a minimum of two participants.

Please arrange your international flight in such a way that you arrive in Addis Ababa on the 3 January in the morning or early afternoon. For earlier arrivals a transfer can be arranged on request.

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Day 1: 3 January: 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. The rest of the day visit historical sites in Addis Ababa including the National Archaeological Museum, where the 3,6 million year old skeletal remains of "Lucy" rest, which were discovered in 1974. Proceed to the Ethnological Museum, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, the Mercato Market and Mount Entoto, which rises up to an altitude of 3200 m offering a panoramic view of the metropolis. Overnight in 4-star hotel.

Day 2: 4 January: 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: 5 January: 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 Fasilides 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: 6 January: Fly to Lalibela

After breakfast transfer to the airport for the short 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. 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. 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.



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Day 5: 7 January: Ethiopian Christmas Festival in Lalibela

Whole day attend the colorful and largely celebrated Ethiopian Christmas Festival in Lalibela. The procession starts early in the morning around dawn. Many believers and pilgrims attend this important orthodox festival.

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Day 6: 8 January: In Lalibela

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 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.

Day 7: 9 January: Fly Axum

After breakfast fly to Axum. Visit the historical and archaeological sites of Axum. 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 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 artifacts.



Day 8: 10 January: Fly Addis Ababa

After breakfast fly to Addis Ababa. Rest of the day at free use.

Day 9: 11 January: Drive to Arba Minch

Drive to Arba Minch via Wolayta Sodo. This drive will take you along the scenic farmlands of Gurage people with views of the lush green hills and valleys. You arrive late in the afternoon at Arba Minch. Arba Minch - meaning 'Forty Springs' in Amharic - takes its name from the bubbling streams that cover the forest and the flats of the town.



Day 10: 12 January: Doze Village, Lake Chamo

After breakfast visit the Dorze tribe, famed for their bee hive shaped houses and their weaving skills. Weaving is a primary profession for many Dorze. They are also farmers, who prevent soil erosion by ingenious terracing of the mountainsides. Around their huts they have their own little garden with vegetables, spices, tobacco and enset (false-banana or musa ensete). In the afternoon take a boat trip on Lake Chamo, where you can spot many hippos and a most spectacular concentration of giant crocodiles. The water birds are great the scenery is truly unforgettable.



Day 11: 13 January: Drive Jinka

After breakfast drive to Konso where you visit the Konso people, known for colorful dresses and unusually engraved wooden statues, used as grave markers. Continue along impressive land

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terracing to the village of the Woito people, near the Woito river. On the way to Jinka stop at the Key Afer Market (Thursday is market day), a tribal market, where different ethnic groups gather to sell and buy their agricultural products.



Day 12: 14 January: Jinka—Mursi—Jinka

After breakfast leave Jinka and drive to the Mursi village to visit and appreciate the very attractive culture of the Mursi tribe. They are renowned for the strange custom followed by their women who, on reaching maturity, have their lower lips slit and circular clay discs inserted. Proceed to Mago National Park. After a picnic lunch, you will drive to see big mammals and different species of birds. In the late afternoon drive back to Jinka.

Day 13: 15 January: Jinka—Turmi

Drive to Turmi across various villages browsing the different ethnic tribes all with their own unique culture and lifestyle. Visit Dimeka's colorful market and encounter the Hamer, Karo and Dassanech people. Visit the Hamer people and their village. Hamers have remarkable hairstyles made from ochre, water and binding resin. They rub the mixture into their hair then twist the strands repeatedly to create coppery-colored locks. This is a sign of wealth and welfare. Hamers are considered to be masters of body decoration. Overnight in spacious, bright and clean bungalows, located in a fenced and secure compound, which contain 2 single beds. Toilet and shower facilities are located in a separate building. We regret that, due to limited space, singles may be required to double up in Turmi.

Day 14: 16 January: Turmi—Yabello

Drive to Yabello visiting the Arbore and the Tsemay people en-route. After lunch stop at Konso, continue to the region of the Oromo Borena and visit their village. They are well known in cattle rearing. From their deep 'singing well' they carry water to their cattle by forming a long line of people and passing on the buckets while singing.



Day 15: 17 January: Lake Awassa

Today we drive to Awassa over the beautiful Sidamo Mountains and through coffee plantations. On the way, we stop at Wenago to visit the Tutu Fella stele field – an unusual collection of carved stones. We continue to Lake Awassa, which is surrounded by mountains and populated by countless species of birds. Awassa is a large city but manages to retain an easy-going feeling, making it a pleasant place to spend some time. There is a bustling central market as well as a fish market. The lakeshores are fringed with lush vegetation where monkeys are frequently seen. Hippos live in the lake - they emerge onto the shore to graze after dark. The lake has excellent birdlife, with many species of waders present, as well as heron, stork and Fish Eagles.

Day 16: 18 January: Drive to Addis Ababa

Early morning drive to Addis Ababa through the breathtaking natural beauty of southern Ethiopia. After a quick check in to the hotel attend the eve of Timket, which starts eleven days after the orthodox Christmas. The Ark of the Covenant is the most sacred element of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In the early afternoon replicas of the Ark of each church, are covered in silk and

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carried solemnly by priests to a nearby body of water. Tens of thousands of believers attend the procession. As evening falls, the priests and many believers participate in the overnight vigil around the Arks until dawn.

Day 17: 19 January: Timket Festival in Addis Ababa, departure

After breakfast drive to Jan Meda to attend the Timket Festival. Timket, meaning Epiphany, commemorates Christ's baptism in the River Jordan. It is observed by Christians all over the world but it is of special significance in Ethiopia and it is the most important and colourful event of the year. Although the festival is largely religious, it has no lack of secular elements such as partying and match-making. Huge crowds gather around the body of water, where Timket eve took place. After the chief priest blesses the water, the celebration reaches its climax. Many jumps into the water, the rest are eager to get a splash. After the religious vows are renewed, the Arks are paraded back to their church. The remainder of the day is free for shopping on your own. Evening fare well dinner party in a traditional Ethiopian restaurant with dances from the different ethnic groups. Afterwards transfer to the airport for flight home.



PRICE

Price per person (on the basis of 2 travellers) = US \$ 3.280

Price per person (on the basis of 3 travellers) = US \$ 2.734

Price per person (on the basis of 4 travellers) = US \$ 2.445

Single room supplement = US \$ 486

Plus domestic flights ca. US \$ 300 (only if the roundtrip international flight is with Ethiopian Airlines) otherwise ca. US \$ 640

Price includes:

- 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 accommodation 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
- Traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony at a convenient time in the program
- Government taxes

Price doesn't include

- 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