

Travel Notes

Ethiopia singles out as an absolutely unique country due to its long history of orthodoxy, geopolitical location and relative isolation for millennia.

The people are very hospitable all around, and yet, respectfully reserved in socializing with new people quickly.

The liturgical music of the country enjoyed notational base already in the 6th c AD introduced by the saint-composer Yared in Axum. The supposedly millennia old 'Geda System' of the Oromo is by far the ideal basis of democracy, which might have been the basis for Egyptian as well as Greek civilization.

Ethiopia enjoys its own alphabet, own calendar as well as own time counting system. Ethiopian Jews continued their ancient religious rites up until recently. Christianity was introduced to the Axumite Empire and made state religion already in the early 4th c AD. The 1st Hijira of Islam (to Ethiopia) took place by the Companions of the Prophet Momammed before Islam got foothold in Medina.

Ethiopia is undoubtedly the most outstanding country in the whole continent in its riches of history. Yet very little is so far traced and made public.

Topography

With an area of 1,104,300 square kilometers, Ethiopia is as large as France and Spain combined. From the north and running down the centre are the Abyssinian highlands, to the west of the chain the land drops to the grasslands of Sudan, to the east to the deserts of the Afar and the Red Sea. South of Addis Ababa the land is dominated by the Rift Valley Lakes. The main rivers are the Blue Nile, the Tekezze, the Awash, the Wabe Shabele, the Omo, and the Baro. You may well see Ethiopia as the 'roof of Africa' as 80% of the land over 3000 meters in the whole continent is found in Ethiopia.

Population

The current population is estimated to be over a 100 million, making it the second most populated country in Africa.

Government and current history

In 1974 the imperial government of Haile Selassie I was overthrown by a popular upheaval that was usurped by a group led by non-commissioned officers of the armed forces. During the following 17 years Ethiopia was wracked by civil wars and state sponsored famines. The military regime was finally overthrown in May 1991 by a coalition of rebel groups called the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which continues to dominate the government today. Ethiopia is now a Federal Republic made up of 9 regions, based mainly on

ethnicity. The present government was re-elected in May 2015 for a 5-year term. Next elections are due in May 2020.

Economy

Land is the direct source of livelihood for more than 85% of the population. Coffee (originating from Kaffa, the birth province of the beans in the south west of Ethiopia) provides the bulk of foreign currency earnings, though other products have gained importance affecting this balance. Ethiopia is the third biggest coffee exporter in the world. The export of oilseeds (the fourth biggest exporter of oilseeds in the world), pulses, spices, gold, flowers, livestock, skins and hides (Ethiopia has the largest domestic livestock population in Africa), textiles, *chat*, honey (tenth in the world in honey production) and animal feed makes up the rest of Ethiopia's foreign currency earnings, with tourism making an increasingly important contribution – recent figures now put tourism ahead of coffee exports on terms of foreign currency earnings.

The opening up of the economy since the overthrow of the previous government in 1991 has created more favorable grounds for development of Ethiopia's rich resource base. Ethiopia is the "water tower" of the region (the Blue Nile contributes more than 85% of the main Nile flow) and projects are now being implemented to better exploit the country's water resources both for power generation (up 500% since 1991, and set to increase by an additional 500% by 2015 (the export of hydro energy to neighboring Djibouti, Kenya and the Sudan is underway) and to boost agricultural production through irrigation schemes. Mineral exploration and mining has stepped up in recent years. There are reserves of oil, natural gas, coal, gold, copper, tantalum, potash, zinc, iron ore, nickel, marble, precious and semi-precious stones.

Thermal energy generation schemes are already operational in Afar and Oromia Regions. The total geothermal resource potential in Ethiopia is found in the Great Rift Valley and is estimated to be over 5000 MW, and the Ashegoda wind farm in Tigray, northern Ethiopia, together with the Adama or Nazereth I and II wind farm (the biggest wind farms in Sub Saharan Africa), are generating 528MW. Additional wind farms are planned near Asela, as part of Ethiopia's push for a green economy.

The late Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, in 2011 laid the foundation stone of what is being called the Grand Renaissance dam, which on completion will generate 6000 MW, making it the 10th biggest dam in the world. The site is on the Blue Nile, in the Beni Shangul Region, some 40 km from the border with Sudan. Other hydro energy projects are planned for other places on the Blue Nile and in Oromia.

When to come

Ethiopia entertains, more or less, 12 hours day light throughout the year everywhere. Even the main rains (mid June- mid September on the highlands) & (March – mid June around South Omo) are nowadays of little impact on travel. However, ideal preferred time to visit the north as well as south would be the months of October, November, December, January

& February. Exploring the Afar Depression by road could be done between October and April.

Customs

Customs regulations are strict. As an amateur tourist, you are expected not to carry professional cameras, which need a special prearranged permit. Authentication that will be issued by an authority is required to take out some artifacts like icons. Save receipts of your purchased items that you may be requested to show on exit. With the exception of some localities in the south, cphotography with an amateur camera is free. However, as video fees can apply, please double check before using your video camera at any instance.

Climate and clothing

Due to the high altitude, the average annual temperature for the country is 16⁰C. However, in low lying areas like the Afar, the Awash, Somali Region, lower Omo Valley and Gambella, it could be significantly hot.

Pack light clothes for the day time and a jacket or sweater for the evenings, and a good pair of walking shoes. Trekkers in the Simien and Bale Mountains will need warm clothes, water-proofs and 3-4 season sleeping bags.

When entering Churches or Mosques, both men & women should take off their hat and shoes. It would be appreciated if ladies covered their head with a scarf and wore either long skirts or trousers.

Health

The possession of a valid Yellow Fever vaccination certificate is no longer mandatory but visitors coming from countries where Yellow Fever has been reported may be requested for. Immunization for Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus, Typhoid and Polio is recommended.

Most places in your itinerary are malaria free. However, you would need precaution for Bahir Dar just after the rains – in September & October. Lowland areas along the Awash River, the Omo Valley, Rift Valley and Gambella are subject to malaria outbreaks. It is thus advisable to consult your doctor for the appropriate prophylactics. Avoiding mosquito bites by keeping mosquitoes at bay with room sprays or keeping the room temperature always lower than outside temperature & repellent creams could be an alternative.

Private clinics are now available in most towns while pharmacies are stocked considerably.

Generally, visitors are expected to acquire standard holiday health insurance from home.

Food

The Ethiopian national dish consists of injera, a flat, circular pancake of fermented dough made from tef (staple indigenous grain on the highlands), on top of which are served various kinds of cooked or roasted meat, vegetables and pulses. The sauces are generally spiced with berbere,

(a blend of herbs and spices including red pepper) that gives Ethiopian sausage its characteristic taste. Vegetarians should try “fasting food” = vegetarian, available in major restaurants, a colorful spread of salads, vegetables and pulses devoid of all animal products.

One eats national dishes with the right hand, tearing off pieces of injera to pick up the “toppings”.

Addis Ababa now boasts of a wide variety of restaurants offering dishes of international cuisine – European, Asian, Middle Eastern.

Drink

Bottled safe potable water is available throughout the country. Multiple of brands with choice of various sizes, still or with gas, are in the market. There are several brands of locally produced beer. Ethiopia produces its own wine and spirits, while imported spirits are also widely available. There are home-made fermented or distilled alcoholic beverages.

Accommodation

Addis Ababa is now entertaining a growing number of 5 star hotels –starting with 5*+ Sheraton Addis – and other tourist class hotels. Up country, there are various standard hotels. Currently, camping would be necessitated for the Afar Depression and western Omo area only.

Travel by road, air and rail

Major roads connecting major touristic sites are now more or less rehabilitated to world niveau. Provided you have the time, travelling by road allows visitors to experience Ethiopia’s wonderful scenery. Ethiopian Airlines operates a safe, extensive and generally efficient and reliable domestic air service. Ethiopian Airlines offer charter services as well. As soon as railway passenger services are resumed, we will avail the option for railway enthusiasts.

Ethiopia has embarked on a massive road renovation and construction program, and many areas are now accessible by good asphalt roads. Given the size of the country, the achievement so far is encouraging to witness a well connected countrywide network soon.

Money

The use of credit cards is now more prevalent and most banks accept Visa/MasterCard or Ameciran Express, availing ATM machines. The foreign exchange rate is regulated by the global market. You would need to show the exchange receipt in the case of selling back your extra local Birr upon departure.

Miscellaneous

Visa- A citizen of one of the following countries can get tourist visa for US\$50.00 for 30 days upon arrival at the Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa. (January 2017 update)

List includes:-

1. Argentina,
2. Australia,
3. Austria,
4. Belgium,
5. Brazil,
6. Canada,
7. China [including passports issued in Hong Kong (SAR China) & MACAO (SAR China)]
8. Czech Republic
9. Denmark,
10. Finland,
11. France,
12. Germany,
13. Greek,
14. India,
15. Ireland,
16. Israel,
17. Italy,
18. Japan,
19. Republic of Korea,
20. Kuwait,
21. Luxembourg,
22. Mexico,
23. Netherlands,
24. New Zealand,
25. North Korea
26. Norway,
27. Poland,
28. Portugal,
29. Russian Federation,
30. Slovakia
31. South Africa,
32. Spain,
33. Sweden,
34. Switzerland,
35. Thailand,
36. United Kingdom
37. United States

Airlines connecting Ethiopia to the world: flying into/out of Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Airlines (with inland connections), Lufthansa, Emirates, Turkish Airlines, Qatar, Gulf Air, Egypt Air, Kenya Airways, Saudia, Sudan Airways and Yemenia.

Internet

Internet cafes are now available in most of the larger towns, though connection speed can be demanding. With fiber optic networks connection on the move, the immediate future is however bright for Ethiopia.

Electricity

220 volts 50 cycles AC. Plugs are of the round two-pin variety.

Photography –

As a matter of courtesy, permission should be sought before photographing individuals and in many parts of the country. Particularly among the ethnic groups living by the Omo River, people will demand a fee. In some sites (like in Churches and the Blue Nile Falls) there is a charge for video photography.

Visitors are highly advised to avoid donations on the street to help discourage dependence mentality, especially amongst children. Donations can be organized to reach the needy in schools or in any other welfare shelters.