



Ethiopia

Pre-Departure Information



*Although your journey with us may end
Africa will forever be inscribed in your heart*

Ethiopia has been shrouded with uncertainty to many western perceptions, and often portrayed as a place of terrible droughts, starving people, the 'Derg' and then in contrast, wonderful Christian history with centuries-old frescos, be-robed and bearded priests clutching silver crosses! It has been all of these but has now moved out of this near-stereotype to become Africa's greatest enigma. Ethiopia is a unique and amazing country, retaining its own identity and culture, and not becoming yet another African country swamped by western clothes, tawdry Chinese goods and poverty. Located in the 'Horn of Africa', and bordered by Somalia in the east, Sudan to the west, Kenya in the south and Eritrea in the north, it is a wonder it has been peaceful for so long. It is also the only African country never to have been successfully colonized, despite a brief occupation by Italy!

Addis Ababa is the capital, centrally located in the highlands, the third capital site in the countries' history. The first being Axum and then Gonder. The main airport, BOLE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT is located on the edge of the city and is undergoing a series of on-going upgrades and improvements. Ethiopian Airlines is the largest and fastest growing airline in Africa! At 435,071 sq miles (1,126,829sq km), the country is 27th in size, in the world!

The country has a massive wealth of history to see in the north of Addis, mainly around the churches of the Ethiopian, Coptic, Greek orthodox, Egyptian orthodox and Muslim faiths. Bahir dar has 23 monasteries on the scattered islands on lake Tana alone, the source of the White Nile! Many of these are nearly 1000 years old. Lalibela is home to the famous rock-hewn churches, while Gonder has the palace gardens where the stone-built palaces of seven emperors still stand...including the cages of the Lions of Judah.

No other African state has an ancient history so carefully preserved by time, and available to be enjoyed by travelers.

The south of the country is land occupied by a multitude of tribes, some exotic and unique and others slowly now losing this innocence with government schemes moving into the region bring with them western clothing, plastic buckets and similar dross. A loss to Ethiopia and the cultural world. The OMO VALLEY was famous for the MERSI tribe (women with large round lip plates), BANA tribe and 30 odd others as well. Some wear only body paint of ash and clay, others ornate head dresses with shaved skulls and feathers, purple woven woolen clothes, and have wood and thatch palaces inside stone walled fortresses where the king resides.

It is a land of contrasts...ancient bumping against modern, 4x4 verses oxcarts, drums vs cell phones and carved wooden honey containers vs plastic drums!

Much of the country is still very basic and accommodations ARE NOT ON PAR with western standards except in Addis and Arbaminch. Be prepared for simple foods and basic accommodations!



CLIMATE

The country is divided topographically between the highland massifs of the Simiens in the west and north-west, and the lowlands of the south and south-east. The Great Rift Valley trough divides them. The highlands are naturally cooler than the rest of the country. Addis, at 7874ft asl/2400masl has a mild climate year round.

Rainy season:

Light rains March to May

Heavy rains June to September.

Average 47 inches/1200mm

Dry season:

October to February.

Temperatures in Addis:

Mean: 60.8F/16C with highest at 70F/23C.

LANGUAGES

80 languages may be spoken in the country each day, but Oromiffi dominates the south, and Somali the east. Amharic and Tigrinya the north, with English becoming more frequently heard in the bigger cities, as a second or third language. It is medium of instruction in secondary schools.

A number of Nilotic and Semitic languages are among those spoken in outlying areas.

TIME

EAT (UTC) +3.

SAFETY

Visitors landing in Addis are welcomed at the airport, and then transferred by private vehicle to their hotel. A journey of about 20 minutes normally.

When walking amongst crowds and in the markets, take normal precautions, and hide wallets and money BEFORE leaving the vehicle, and only carry small bills of cash. Otherwise, one's personal security is not at risk, wherever one might go. Always be aware of where you are and how you appear to the locals. Pick-pockets and beggars are common in urban markets.

CURRENCY - ETB

The ETHIOPIAN BIR (ETB) is the national currency. It is freely available at Bureau de Changes and banks.

It is wise to change US Dollars in the main towns before one heads off to outlying areas.

PLEASE NOTE: PHOTOGRAPHY OF RURAL PEOPLE WILL VERY LIKELY HAVE TO BE NEGOTIATED BEFORE HAND, AND A FEE PAID, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTHERN REGIONS.

The MERSI can be particularly difficult in this regard. For this specific purpose, it is recommended that one change about US\$150 for a 10-day trip. Each photo may cost you about 5bir, and the smarter ones count each shutter sound!



Gratuities may be paid in US\$ in main town regions, but there are sometimes extra drivers, porters and the like, so it is an idea to carry some extra Bir, for unscheduled needs.

*United States Dollars

Please note that generally only post -2006 dated notes will be accepted.
When shopping in towns though, or visiting churches in outlying areas, LOCAL Bir is NECESSARY.

CREDIT CARDS

These may be used ONLY in Addis, as there is nothing that can process the cards in any small towns and villages. Perhaps Gonder and Lalibella's banks too, may be able to process a card, but that's about it.
With time, the sophistication of the system will be such that their use will become more widespread.
ATM's will only give you Ethiopian Bir, NOT DOLLARS, and you get a better rate through the ATM, than at a Bureau.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

It is up to the guest to ensure that passports and visas are valid for six months beyond the intended length of stay. There should be SIX blank VISA pages for any visa as well as for entry stamps on arrival. Please note these are visa pages, NOT endorsement pages. This is important as IMMIGRATION OFFICIALS WILL BE STRICT about this, especially if you are travelling between several countries during your trip.

All passport holders should verify with their travel agent or relevant consulate concerning visa entry requirements. If you are extending your journey to other countries, please establish entry requirements for those countries as well. Please ensure that you have all the necessary visas prior to departure (unless available on entry).

Travel in Southern Africa is normally conducted in English and it is therefore beneficial for guests to have knowledge of English and be able to communicate in that language.

EMERGENCY "Paper work"

Please photograph the face page of your passports, credit cards and any other vital documents, so that you have copies of these on you.

1. **Lost Passport:** Photograph/scan a copy of your passport face page for quick reference.
2. **Lost Credit cards:** Photograph/Scan all credit cards and keep copies same as above.
(Don't scan back of Credit Cards)
3. Scan air tickets as above.
4. Leave a copy of these documents at home as well, with a contactable friend.

INSURANCE

It is a condition of booking, that the sole responsibility lies with the guests to ensure that they carry the correct comprehensive travel and medical insurance to cover themselves, as well as any dependents/travelling companions for the duration of their trip to Southern Africa.



FLIGHT CHECK-IN TIMES

Please check in early at all airports (at least one and a half hours prior for domestic flights, two hours prior for regional flights and three hours prior for all international flights) due to additional security which now affects international travel around the world.

Please be aware that during peak season, delays are often encountered on scheduled flights. Remember that you are on holiday... relax and enjoy the ambience, which sometimes has no sense of urgency at all!

RECONFIRMING FLIGHTS

Please ensure that your onward flights are reconfirmed, when applicable, at least 72 hours prior to flying. The camp managers will be responsible for reconfirming your local onward flights between camps, but INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS should be your responsibility.

DRESS

Women should always dress modestly, with legs covered by a long skirt or loose pants. Although it is not necessary for women to cover their heads with a shawl or scarf when visiting the churches, it is a sign of respect.

Men can wear either shorts or longs.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

We do recommend that you stipulate any medically important foods that you may NOT consume whilst traveling here. Ethiopia is not a sophisticated country, and therefore specialist western foods may not be available.

Most citizens eat only rice, few salads, eggs, tef or injera and various meats like goat, beef, chicken and fish.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Please advise us if you will be celebrating any special occasions, such as a birthday or anniversary during your trip.

COMMUNICATION

Cell phone coverage is in place over much of the country, between the major towns only. However, if necessary, put an agreement in place to ensure your phone service provider will allow you to use your phone BEFORE you leave home.

WIFI is only available in a few of the hotels in the northern towns, like Addis and Lalibela.

The southern areas are far less likely to have either cell phone coverage or wifi. Arbaminch is the last opportunity for this! If you consider it absolutely necessary to have your own communication, then we suggest you hire a satellite phone in the USA.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

It is of utmost importance that you inform us of ANY medical conditions that may affect your safari whilst traveling here. Medical facilities are primitive in outlying regions, with Addis and Arbaminch offering the best medical centers at the worst.



HEALTH

There are a few basic health matters that require care and attention. The following points are recommended guidelines only. Please consult your doctor and also check with your health department prior to departure for any changes in health regulations.

1) Malaria

Malaria is common within Africa. Although not widespread, it is encountered anywhere where wet conditions prevail and settlements exist. It is also strongly affected by seasonal conditions; it is therefore best to be prepared any time one travels to Africa.

Malaria prophylactic recommendations for travelers:

- Expert opinion differs regarding the best approach to malaria prophylaxis. It is important to bear in mind that malaria may be contracted despite chemoprophylaxis, especially in areas where chloroquine resistance has been reported. Both chloroquine-resistant and normal strains of malaria are prevalent in Africa.
- Please remember that the best precaution is the preventative kind:
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and trousers/slacks in the evenings.
- Apply insect repellent to the backs of hands, ankles and neck and throat area.
- Please use the mosquito net over your bed where supplied/available.
- If staying in a bungalow or tent, staff will spray with a suitable insecticide to kill any mosquitoes that may have flown into your room.
- Mosquito coils are also effective.

2) Tick Bite Fever

Ticks can be found in the wilderness of Africa, tick bites can possibly lead to tick bite fever. Symptoms of tick bite fever include, headache and painful, enlarged lymph glands in the area of the bite. If you experience any of these symptoms after returning home from your travel, please visit your doctor and advise them of the possibility of tick bite fever. Precautions can be taken to avoid being bitten when going on bush walks; these precautions include wearing long trousers tucked into socks and boots.

LYME'S DISEASE IS NOT YET A THREAT IN AFRICA.

3) Water

It is very important that you drink plenty of water especially during the warmer months. It is generally recommended that guests drink at least 4 to 6 pints (2 to 3 liters) of water per day to limit the effects of dehydration. This excludes tea, coffee and alcoholic beverages, which act as diuretics and therefore can actually contribute to dehydration. It is recommended that you drink bottled water throughout Africa.

4) Medical Conditions

Please make us aware of any medical conditions you have prior to your arrival. This includes any allergies e.g. bee stings, nuts, shellfish etc.

5) Inoculations

Please consult your doctor or local travel clinic with regards to any other suggested inoculations for your travels.



IMPORTANT

There is a significant difference between the luggage allowance:

- On International flights and internal flights in some regional countries (Zimbabwe), the allowance is 44lbs/20kg excluding hand luggage.
- In East Africa, only 33lbs/15kg is allowed, including hand luggage.
- **Please check** just prior to departure for any changes in **Ethiopian Airlines** luggage regulations.

LUGGAGE ON SCHEDULED FLIGHTS - 44lbs EXCLUDING HAND LUGGAGE

Scheduled airlines in generally carry a weight restriction of 44lbs (20kg's) on checked luggage per economy class traveller, and a carry-on, which may include your photographic equipment. Please ensure that you comply with the applicable restrictions (further details regarding number of luggage pieces and exact dimensions, for the particular carrier can be obtained from your ticketing agent).

Please note when combining scheduled airline flights and air transfers (as specified below), then restriction will apply unless alternative arrangements have been made for the storage or separate transfer of excess luggage, which will be at an additional cost.

Sufficient locks or baggage ties for baggage safety, is advised. Sometimes a colored ribbon will identify YOUR luggage more easily if it is just a black bag!

LUGGAGE ON INTERNAL AIR TRANSFERS - 44lbs, INCLUDING HAND LUGGAGE

There are strict weight restrictions in place for the following reasons:

- Light aircrafts are designed with a maximum bodyweight and luggage weight allowance.
- Most of our airfields are over 3000ft./1000 meters above sea level and are located in the tropics, and therefore the permissible aircraft carrying capacity is reduced.
- The aircrafts also have physical space restrictions.

Some important issues must please be noted for air transfers:

Luggage, including hand luggage, is restricted to 44lbs per person. Only soft bags will be accepted, no hard suitcases can be transported, as they physically cannot fit into the aircraft. The maximum dimensions of the soft bags that can be accommodated are as follows: 10 inches wide x 12 inches high and 24 inches long. Please keep in mind that the baggage compartments on the light aircrafts are only 10 inches high, so the pilots must have the ability to manipulate the bag into the compartment.



Passengers weighing 220lbs or more, or two guests travelling together whose combined weight is 440lbs, must please advise us in advance as an extra seat for the additional weight will have to be costed into the package for safety purposes. If we are not advised of this information prior to arrival, this can cause a problem on the ground and could result in a private charter, which will be billed directly to the guest.



PLEASE NOTE: IF YOUR CAMERA EQUIPMENT IS EXCESSIVE, THEY WILL NOTICE AND ASK TO WEIGH IT, AND LIMIT YOU ACCORDINGLY.

LOST LUGGAGE

Luggage that goes missing on scheduled flights is beyond our control. The airport baggage handling company controls what happens to passengers' luggage from when it is checked in or out until it is put on or taken off the aircraft.

We suggest that you pack a small bag with your essentials including **any life sustaining medication, which can be carried with you as hand luggage**. If your luggage goes missing, you will still have your essential items on hand to see you through the first couple of days while we try and recover your lost baggage.

LOSS OF ARTICLES

Please note that we cannot accept any responsibility for the misplacement of any articles whilst on your travels. Naturally, we will endeavor to reunite you with your misplaced items.

CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES

CAMOUFLAGE CLOTHING IS FORBIDDEN IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Addis is generally cool to mild during the day, cooler at night. The northern cities may be hot during the day (70 F plus) and scrambling amongst the churches and buildings generates a sweat. At night it can cool down to 50 F. The southern areas entail hours of traveling in vehicles, generally in hot dry conditions, (80 – 90F) so lightweight clothing is recommended.

Remember to pack the following items:

- Generally, most folk only need 4 changes of clothing for a safari.
- Long sleeved shirts for day and evening can reduce sunburn and insect bites; short sleeves are fine as well.
- Pants, with zip-off legs are ideal; alternatively shorts are great for daywear.
- Bush colors for daywear, light colors for night wear.
- Underwear and sleeping attire or tracksuit.
- Scarf/Pashmina/Buff for keeping the neck warm.
- Personal toiletries and medication (most camps do supply reputable branded shampoo & conditioner).
- Insect repellent is provided by the camps.
- Comfortable closed walking shoes like trainers (Avoid big heavy boots).
- Light shoes or sandals, X1 pair of each.
- Warm layers for cold evenings, and a lightweight water proof/wind proof jacket.
- Sunglasses & hat with brim or peak cap.
- Sun block and lip balm (Recommended to bring minimum factor 30 SPF).
- Anti-malarial prophylactics are essential all year round.
- Last of all take a pen for those important postcards home.

Do not bring any jewelry and perfumes.



- We suggest that when in Safari Camps/lodges you wear 'bush' colors such as olive green, khaki, gray and brown.
- Bright and light colors should be avoided, except at night. It is advisable to wear light colored clothes at night, as insects tend to avoid light clothing.
- Avoid wearing black and dark blue during the day as these absorb heat & attract insects.
- Some hotel properties do require men to wear long trousers to dinner.

LAUNDRY

Laundry is normally only done if you are spending two nights at a destination, as items are sun dried in most places. Ironing is necessary of all items as well, including underwear!

POWER

220 Volt. European 2-pin type plugs. Some of the more remote lodges and camps are not on the National Grid, but instead, run a generator for a few hours each day, and in the evening.



TIPS/GRATUITIES

Tipping is customary, but not compulsory. If you feel that the service you have received was above normal, then we offer a few guidelines. In most rural settings only Bir are accepted and keeping a stash of smaller denominations is recommended.

- **Drivers:**
Much of the time you are transported around in 4x4 vehicles, particularly the south, and these drivers spend many hours with you. We recommend US\$10 to US\$14 per person day.
- **Porters in hotels:**
US\$1- per bag
- **Guides**
They will take you around in Addis or other northern cities
US\$10 per person per day.
- **Shoe-minders**
Outside the churches in the northern towns
US\$1 person.
- **Personal Private Guide** for the whole safari:
Normally these individuals make all the difference to a safari, and their roles are more involved than just guiding. Guests generally use their own judgment in this regard.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Please note that photography of government buildings, many airport buildings, State House and officials in uniform is normally strictly prohibited. Be courteous, polite and always ask permission.

Please be advised that the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones) is not allowed in many of the conservation areas, due to their use in poaching operations and the disturbance caused to the wildlife and other guests.



POACHING

PLEASE BE AWARE: POACHERS ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA OUTLETS TO TRACK AND POACH ENDANGERED WILDLIFE (RHINOS & LARGED-TUSKED ELEPHANTS). SO PLEASE DO NOT POST PHOTOS OF THESE ANIMALS ON YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS. POACHERS WILL USE EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE TO FIND THESE ANIMALS, INCLUDING USING THE GEO TRACKER AND LOOKING THROUGH EVERY PHOTO TO DETERMINE THE LOCATION.

Example: If a photo of a rhino or a large-tusked elephant is posted on social media, the poachers will look at every photo in that particular photo album to determine what reserve that the animal is located on. Therefore, even if the geo tracker is turned off, a photo of the lodge or any mention of the lodge in the post will give away the location of the photographed animal.

CAMERAS & BINOCULARS

WHAT CAMERA SHOULD I HAVE ON SAFARI?

Cameras are a way of ensuring that we can record a moment in time. Sights and scenes of persons, places and in our case, wildlife and safari camps! We take a photo as a form of a non-violent benevolent trophy. A reward and proof of a successful chase. Photographs tell it in colour! 100% of our safari guests bring a camera on safari.

Choosing a camera is fraught, as the camera industry has thrown itself into this arena wholeheartedly and made it difficult. *This short brief is to try and help you make the right choice.*

Any safari to Africa is a significant investment of thousands of dollars. It seems worthwhile to invest a few hundred in a camera that will record the event for life! Although camera choice is a *personal one*, I have included some pointers to assist with this choice.

There are frankly FOUR main types of camera.

1. The small '**POINT & SHOOT**' variety. They are small, palm size and convenient to carry in a pocket or purse with essentially an automatic function that guarantees a good picture - in a room, a car, or when taking fairly close-up pictures of friends and family.
2. The second variety are the typical **DSLR** (Digital Single Lens Reflex) cameras that can take interchangeable lenses and photographic enthusiasts will use these. They come now with a full gamut of electronic settings to facilitate taking photos in a variety of light conditions and generally have a video setting as well. There are a number of really good brands and models on sale, BUT the lenses come at a price.
3. The third variety is '**COMPACT**' cameras. These have been built to bridge the gap between the Point & Shoot, and the DSLR's! These incredible cameras weigh about 30% of the DSLR's, and yet have built-in lenses that easily rival the 'big' lenses used typically for sports and wildlife photography. They are truly amazing! These cameras have *the same range* of adjustments seen on the heavier, semi- and professional cameras, AND, the lens 'reach' of the heavy glass lenses too! There is a built in flash, movie facility, screen view, viewfinder, 'Intelligent' options, Automatic, S, M, P, and A parameter functions as well. The lenses range from X20 to X60 in magnification, giving the user equivalent 300mm to sometimes 500mm! A small number of manufacturers are producing an innovative camera without all the moving parts of a typical camera.



4. **'MIRROR LESS'** cameras. These cameras will in time compete with the traditional DSLR cameras. There is no viewfinder. One sees the image through the rear screen. There is no internal mirror and complex moving parts...hence the term 'mirror less', and significant weight reduction. These cameras are lighter, have lighter lenses, without any loss of image quality. Interchangeable lenses are available in some brands, up to 250mm, but rarely larger.

The LENS is another important factor in selecting a camera. Again, the small 'Point & Shoot' cameras will have small, retractable lenses that work well in a room or close setting and so will collect very poor wildlife images, taken at a distance because they lack the necessary 'zoom' ability, which magnifies the object onto the sensor plate.

The DSLR gives one the option to fit a zoom lens of different sizes to magnify the image in the camera. Essentially the greater the zoom numbers the bigger the image. For example, a 18 – 150 zoom, is going to be a poor lens for wildlife photography, but great for photographing houses or portraits! A 70 – 300 zoom is far better suited for wildlife, as is any lens from 300mm onwards.

The better Compact cameras now have lenses that have a x10 up to x60 ability! These are significant 'zoom' numbers and will certainly give the user a wonderful result. We recommend a camera lens with an equivalent zoom of at least 300mm.

PLEASE BEAR IN MIND ONE CAN HIRE LENSES NOW FOR A FRACTION OF THE RETAIL COST.

Other Factors to consider:

1. Weight
2. Quality of camera
3. Who is going to use the camera?
4. What do you want to spend on this camera?
5. What are you going to do with the pictures?

Please ensure that you have enough memory cards, film and batteries for the duration of the trip, as these are not always available locally. Recharging facilities for video and camera equipment is generally available at most camps and lodges. It is advisable to bring your own adaptor and re-charging equipment. Ensure your equipment is in a padded, dust and heatproof case, as dust will get 'in' everywhere!

WHAT BINOCULARS SHOULD I TAKE ON SAFARI?

Binoculars are a vital part of every safari, and should be considered as important as a camera or decent hat. Most game viewing is carried out from a vehicle and so the game will commonly be within 150 feet of the vehicle. Larger animals, birds (even for non-birders) and small animals form a main part of the wildlife seen on a safari.

Many people regard binoculars as an unnecessary piece of equipment, used once and forgotten. *Bino's* as they become known, may be used on safari, again on the second safari, your children's safari, at the local 'ball game', on hunting & fishing trips, and for birding from the comfort of your verandah.



Choosing which to have needs professional help... let me try!

FOR SAFARIS, we recommend 7x40, 7x50; 8x40; 8.5x42

10 x 42 is recommended for serious birders, those with a 'steady hand' and more sedentary use from a vehicle, a hide or on a tripod.

The small 10 x 25 binoculars, often touted as 'convenient' by sales people are of little functional use on safari as they are too small to use in a vehicle quickly and for extended periods, and limit the amount of light coming into the binocular.

Brands

There are a number of very good value brands, but the better reviews mention CELESTRON GRANITE, MINOX, NIKON, BUSHNELL, PENTAX and at the top of the pile are LEICA, LEITZ and SWAROVSKY, but these are expensive. Naturally your personal considerations such as budget and availability will play a big part in the selection process. Any safari to Africa is a serious investment of resources and it seems rather shortsighted to limit ones' enjoyment of the trip by not purchasing or borrowing decent equipment to facilitate getting the most out of the safari!

RECOMMENDED READING

We recommend the following books for travellers intending to visit Ethiopia.

1. The Scramble for Africa – Thomas Pakenham
2. Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia – Paul Henze.
3. Haile Selassies's War – Anthony Mockler
4. Brown Condor – Thomas E Simmons
5. In Ethiopia with a Mule – Dervla Murphy
6. Cutting for Stone – Abraham Verghese

Birds

1. Birds of the Horn of Africa – Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson & John Fanshaw (2011)
(Refer: African Bird Club)

Mammals

1. African Mammals – Jonathan Kingdom

QUALITY & FEEDBACK

We pride ourselves in running quality itineraries and offering the best experience.

If you have a problem, please bring it to our attention at the time, thereby giving us a chance to try and rectify it immediately on site, as it will be more difficult to resolve later on.

YOU have chosen a fabulous way to have a holiday, and you will never forget it.

Have a wonderful safari!

