

AFRICA · HISTORY · SACRED SITES · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · CULTURE · ADVENTURE



Ethiopia

Ethiopia keeps its own script, calendar and ancient Orthodox church: Lalibela's churches were carved down into solid rock, the Simien Mountains shelter gelada monkeys found only in Ethiopia's highlands, and Aksum's giant stelae recall an ancient empire. Coffee is roasted with ceremony, injera comes with everything, and the long distances reward travellers willing to plan.

**The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to parts of Ethiopia.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 21 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Addis Ababa	 CURRENCY Ethiopian birr (ETB) £1 ≈ ETB 217	 LANGUAGE Amharic, Oromo Tigrinya, Somali	 BEST TIME Oct-Feb
 DAILY BUDGET £35-£180 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E, F, L 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 7h 50m direct ~£500-£900 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Ethiopia is a highland country of ancient Christian kingdoms, a walled Islamic holy city and some of Africa's most dramatic landscapes. Most first visits follow the 'historic route' in the north: Addis Ababa, then Bahir Dar for Lake Tana's island monasteries and the Blue Nile Falls, Gondar's 17th-century castles, trekking in the Simien Mountains, Aksum and the rock churches of Lalibela, linked by short domestic flights. The south offers a different trip altogether – the Bale Mountains' Ethiopian wolves, Rift Valley lakes and the cultures of the Omo Valley – while Harar and the Danakil Depression pull the more adventurous east.

Travel here is rewarding but rarely effortless. Roads are long and slow, so most visitors fly between northern sites and use local guides, and a scout is compulsory for Simien treks. Day-to-day costs are low, but park fees, guided treks and Danakil tours add up. Ethiopia surprises people with its altitude – Addis sits at around 2,350 metres – its cool highland evenings, its extraordinary food culture built on injera, and its deep Orthodox Christian traditions. It suits curious travellers comfortable with some unpredictability; check the FCDO advice region by region, as it changes.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

SACRED SITE

Lalibela's rock-hewn churches

Eleven medieval churches carved down into volcanic rock around the 12th and 13th centuries, linked by trenches and tunnels and still in daily use. Cross-shaped Bete Giyorgis is the icon; visit at dawn to hear priests chanting.
- 2

NATURE

Simien Mountains National Park

A UNESCO-listed massif of jagged peaks and sheer escarpments where troops of gelada graze the clifftops and walia ibex cling to ledges. Treks of two to seven days start from Debark, with a scout compulsory.

3

HISTORY

Aksum's stelae

Towering carved stone obelisks mark the royal tombs of the Aksumite kingdom, which traded with Rome and India. The nearby Church of St Mary of Zion is said to hold the Ark of the Covenant.

4

CULTURE

Harar Jugol

The walled old town of Harar packs 82 mosques and over 100 shrines, plus colourful Harari houses, into its narrow lanes. After dark, watch the hyena men feed wild hyenas by hand outside the walls.

5

ADVENTURE

Danakil Depression

One of the hottest places on Earth, well below sea level: acid-yellow sulphur springs at Dallol and salt flats where Afar miners cut blocks by hand for camel caravans. Visits are made on organised tours.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Addis Ababa

≈ 3.9 million people

The high-altitude capital is a gateway rather than a beauty, but the National Museum, home of the 'Lucy' hominid fossil, the Merkato market and the coffee and jazz bars justify two days.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Gondar

≈ 466,000 people

Ethiopia's 17th-century royal capital, with the castle compound of Fasil Ghebbi, Fasilides' Bath and the painted ceiling of Debre Berhan Selassie church; the springboard for the Simien Mountains.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Mekelle

≈ 458,000 people

Tigray's regional capital and the traditional base for Danakil Depression tours and the cliff-top rock churches of Gheralta; check the FCDO advice before planning travel here.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Ethiopia

Best time: **Oct-Feb.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

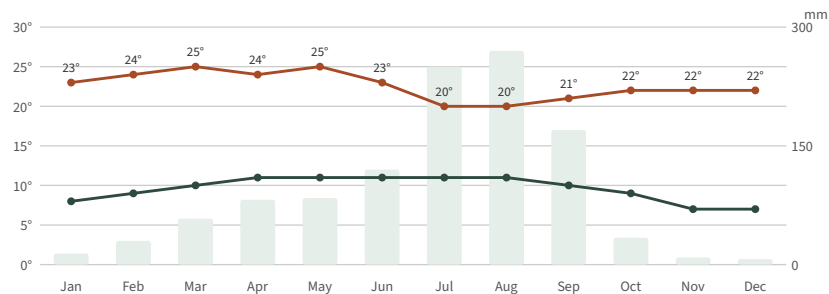
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Addis Ababa

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan	Timkat Ethiopian Epiphany on 19 or 20 January: tabots, replicas of the Ark's tablets, are paraded to water in white-robed processions, most memorably in Gondar and Lalibela.
Sep	Meskel On 27 or 28 September, huge bonfires topped with crosses are lit to mark the finding of the True Cross; Addis Ababa's Meskel Square hosts the biggest celebration.
Sep–Oct	Irreecha The Oromo thanksgiving festival at the end of the rainy season, when huge crowds in traditional dress gather with grass and flowers at Lake Hora Arsadi in Bishoftu.

How much does Ethiopia cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ ETB 7,610 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £80 per person / day ≈ ETB 17,395 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £180 per person / day ≈ ETB 39,138 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Doro wat A deep-red chicken stew slow-cooked with berbere spice, onions and spiced butter, served with hard-boiled eggs on injera — the dish of feast days.	Kitfo Finely minced raw beef warmed in spiced butter with mitmita chilli, eaten with ayib cheese and greens; ask for it 'leb leb' if you prefer it lightly cooked.	Beyaynetu The fasting platter of colourful vegan stews — lentils, shiro, greens and more — on injera, a staple on Wednesdays, Fridays and through Lent.
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Getting around

Ethiopian Airlines' domestic network is the practical way to cover the historic north, linking Addis with Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibela, Aksum and Mekelle in about an hour each. Long-distance buses such as Selam and Sky Bus are cheap but slow and leave at dawn. Many visitors hire a car with driver for flexibility. In Addis, use the Ride or Feres taxi apps, or the light rail.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C E F L 220V — bring a UK-to-C/E/F/L adapter
DIALLING CODE +251

EMERGENCY NUMBERS Police and emergency: 911 Ambulance (Addis Ababa): 907 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Around 10% in restaurants is appreciated; tip guides, drivers and park scouts separately, and keep small notes for church caretakers.

ETIQUETTE

Eat with your right hand, and accept gursha — a mouthful fed to you by your host — as a compliment. Cover shoulders and legs and remove shoes in churches.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (ADD), Addis Ababa

Visas & entry for Ethiopia

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to visit Ethiopia for tourism or business.

You do not need a visa if you have a valid Ethiopian Diplomatic ID Card, Ethiopian Temporary Residents Permit or Ethiopian Origin ID (Yellow Cards).

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Chikungunya

Dengue

Hepatitis B

Measles

Meningococcal disease

Polio

Rabies

Tuberculosis

Yellow fever

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK. There is a risk of yellow fever in parts of the country — vaccination may be advised.

MALARIA

High risk of malaria

- There is a high risk of malaria in Ethiopia below 2,000m: antimalarial tablets recommended.
- There is no risk of malaria in Addis Ababa or in areas above 2,000m.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Ethiopia

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Thu 7 Jan 2027	Christmas Day
Tue 19 Jan 2027	Epiphany
Tue 2 Mar 2027	Adwa Victory Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Fri 30 Apr 2027	Good Friday
Sat 1 May 2027	International Workers' Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Easter Sunday
Wed 5 May 2027	Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Sun 12 Sep 2027	Ethiopian New Year
Tue 28 Sep 2027	Finding of True Cross

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Amharic

ENGLISH	AMHARIC	SAY IT
Hello	ሰላም	seh-LAHM
Thank you	አመሰግናለሁ	ah-meh-seh-GNAH-leh-hoo
Please	እባክዎ	eh-BAH-kwo
Excuse me	ይቅርታ	yih-kir-TAH
How much is this?	ይሄ ስንት ነው?	YIH-heh sint noh

Know before you go

- If you fly into Ethiopia on Ethiopian Airlines, ask about its discounted domestic fares for international passengers — often much cheaper than booking separately.
- Ethiopia uses its own calendar, seven to eight years behind, and a 12-hour clock starting at dawn, so '2 o'clock' may mean 8am. Always ask whether a time is Ethiopian or European.
- Check the FCDO travel advice for each region on your route — it differs sharply across the country and changes often — and buy insurance that covers where you're going.