

The Simien Mountains Massif in the northwest corner of Ethiopia is one of the major highlands of Africa, rising to the highest point in Ethiopia, Ras Dejen (4,620m), which is the fifth highest peak in the African continent. The West Plateau is bounded on the north and east by a massive escarpment, many kilometers long and over 1,000m high in places, and cut along its length by steep gorges.

Your trekking route through the Simien Mountains is far from the regular tourist trails. It will take you to beautiful lowland valleys such as Lamo, and the high escarpments of the Simien Plateau, where Amhara villages can be found, still unchanged after hundreds of years. You will fly to Gondar, which was once the capital of Ethiopia from its foundation by Emperor Fasilidas in 1632 and until 1886. You will have the chance to explore the castles of Emperor Fasilidas, powerful symbols of seventeenth century wealth in a country that is unfortunately now so poor. You will trek to Chenek located at around 11,800ft / 3,600m with wonderful views to Inatye and Emietgogo and the high escarpments of the Simien Plateau.

The summit is challenging and rewarding, and is followed by a tough ridge route, topping several 4000m peaks en route. The trek from Arkwasyie will offer one of the toughest days on the itinerary because you will have to leave the higher plateau 11800ft/3600m, cross several substantial ridges and valleys, climb down the near vertical Devil's staircase with 3,000ft/900m descent to reach Lamo, one of the most beautiful locations in the Simiens.

We trek through the Simien Mountains National Park which is primarily a wildlife sanctuary for endangered species such as the Gelada Baboon, which we expect to see in huge numbers, and the Walia Ibex, which is more difficult to find.

Please note that this itinerary is tough, and you may encounter poor weather. The itinerary is not for the unfit or the faint hearted.

Day 1: International Departure

You will leave London Gatwick at (time TBC) for the night flight to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Day 2: Addis Ababa

Day in Addis. Ghion Hotel with dinner.
Option for walk or city visit.
Dinner & o/nt Ghion.



Day 3: Addis Ababa to Gondar

Your flight to Gondar leaves at 0715hrs and arrives about 0850hrs. On arrival in Gondar, we offer a tour of the 17th century castles of Emperor Fasilidas and his descendants in the Royal Enclosure, built when Gondar was the capital. Altitude approx 2175m. Dinner and overnight at the Goha Hotel.

Day 4: Debarq to Sankaber - 18 km

Drive about 4 hours 110kms north to the gateway and market town of Debarq, passing through beautiful mountain scenery en route. At Debarq, approximate altitude 2600m, the HQ of the Simien Mountains National Park, stop for a short drink before continuing for 1 hour into the park to rendezvous with muleteers and armed scout. Check provisions, load mules, lunch in the town hotel and trek past the market and on the trail to the first camp – Sankaber. Leaving Debarq, the place is buzzing with people and life, a testament to its location on the ancient caravan route between Gondar and Axum, and we follow an undulating path up and down spurs, across the Lamma Wenz (river), and past welcoming villages. We round Aman Amba and keep close to the edge of the escarpment looking down on Adarmaz Camp in the valley below, before seeing the spectacular views from Sankaber, altitude 3230m. Trek time approx 4 hours.



Day 5: Sankaber to Chenek - 22 km

Trek from Sankaber to Chenek Camp. The terrain is varied, fertile in parts, and harsh elsewhere, at first descending to the escarpment, near the head of the Wazla Wenz, where there is a dramatic view of the Jinbar Wenz waterfall cascading down the Geech Abyss. Up

again to Argin and Ambaras, up through the woods, the views are spectacular. Overlooking Dirwara, a gap in the cliff wall reveals a view to Inatyte and along the escarpment to Emietgogo 4000m., before we reach camp at Chenek. The camp itself has caves, sometimes the unusual rock hyrax, and offers great views over the escarpment, notably from the outcrop above. However it is notoriously damp and misty. Chenek altitude 3600m. Sankaber altitude 3230m. Overall altitude gain 370m. Trek time 8/9 hours.

Day 6: Chenek to Ambiko – 25 km

A long but interesting walk from Chenek at 11800ft./3600m to Ambiko at 3100m. You are now leaving the boundaries of the Simien Mountains National Park. This is primarily a wildlife sanctuary, formed in 1969 to protect endangered species such as the Walia Ibex, the Simien Wolf, and the Gelada Baboon. You may also see some of Ethiopia's 30 endemic bird species, about 9 of which can be seen in the Simiens. Unfortunately, the Simien Wolf has disappeared from this area, and the other species are continually being pushed away from their usual habitat. This is a sensitive area, and on environmental grounds we are conscious that vehicle support should be reserved for emergencies. Camp at Ambiko at low altitude 3100m before summit day. Undulating alt +600m -1400m +200m. Overall loss 500m. Trek time approx 9/10 hours.

Day 7: Ambiko to Ras Dshen & return – 22 km

Early start from Mizma to Ras Dshen summit and then down to Metelal, camping at lower altitude. At first, ascend in a loop to the south-east, through the gully, then north to the summit. Scrambling up, you will notice that there are 2 distinct hog-back rock summits, the first being the highest. Ras Dshen 15157ft/4543m. This is Africa's fifth highest mountain and the highest in Ethiopia. This is it! This was your challenge! But don't stop now! Now is the long descent back to camp following the route you took on the

way up. A tough day. Alt +1343m -1343m. Trek time approx 11/12 hours.

Day 8: Ambiko to Arkwasiye - 20 km

A steep descent to the valley floor followed by a 23 hour steep ascent. After this the terrain becomes easier rounding several bends to finally see the village of Arkwasiye. Altitude gain 500m. Alt at camp at Arkwasiye approx 3600m. Trek time 7/8 hours.

Day 9: Arkwasiye to Lamo - 18 km

We have to leave the higher plateau and village of Arkwasiye (11800ft./3600m), cross several substantial ridges and valleys, then climb down the near vertical Devil's staircase with a 3000ft./900m. descent. The reward for this effort is Lamo, one of the most beautiful locations in the Simiens. Our overall height loss will be around 5200ft/1600m. Alt at Lamo approx 2000m. Trek time 10 hours.

Day 10: Lamo to Mulet – 17 km

Lamo is also known as Mekarebya. Look north-east across the valley to the circle of mountains around Amba Ton and you will see the view illustrated on Ethiopian Airlines tickets. Today you should allow around eight hours for a day of ridge and valley treks through some spectacularly beautiful scenery to Mulet, where we camp at much the same altitude as Lamo. Trekking time about 8 hours. Altitude undulating approx 1900m.



Day 11: Mulet to Axum – 13 km

Walk down to the market town of Adi Arkay. From Awaza located at around 6500ft/2000m. with wonderful views to Amba Ton and the high escarpments of the Simiens Plateau, walk to Adi Arkay 1600m. Trekking time approx 2/3 hours. Altitude dropping to Adi Arkay 1600m from 1900m. After a celebratory drink in a cafe, say goodbye to your muleteers and camp staff, and meet the vehicles for the five hour drive to Axum, for welcome showers, dinner and overnight at the Yeha Hotel.



Day 12: Historic Axum - Addis Ababa

A chance to see the amazing stellae of Axum, learn about the region's pre-Christian culture, and the Axumite Empire. Axum dates back some 2,000 years to when it was the hub of the Axumite Empire. The Queen of Sheba made it her capital 1000 years before Christ. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was founded here in the fourth century and Axum remains the holiest city of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. This capital city was the first place in Ethiopia to adopt a new religion -- Christianity. According to the Old Testament, The Queen of Sheba was born in Axum, but travelled to Israel to meet King Solomon.

They had a son named Menelik, who later became the first emperor of Ethiopia. Menelik brought the original Arc of the Covenant back to Ethiopia from Israel. Today, the Arc, which once housed the Ten Commandments, remains well hidden in Axum. It is guarded by a select group of monks, whose sole commitment is to protect the sacred vessel. Axum is also known for its massive, towering sculptures that are more than two thousand years old. Their significance is still under investigation by archaeologists. Return charter flight in the afternoon to Addis for your final debrief and travel to a truly wonderful Ethiopian restaurant with authentic dancing for your final celebratory meal.

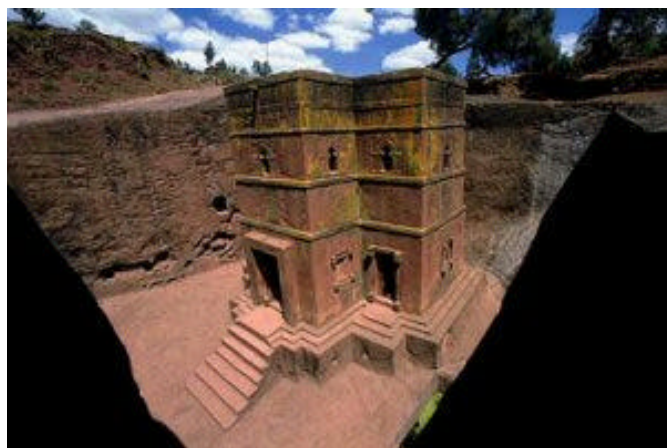
Day 13: Axum to Lalibela

Morning flight to Lalibela (time to be confirmed); check in Roha Hotel for lunch, and afternoon visit of first of the Rock Churches.

Lalibela is arguably the one place in Ethiopia that no tourist should miss. Were it virtually anywhere but in Ethiopia, Lalibela would rightly be celebrated as one of the wonders of the world. Perched at an altitude of 2630m, among the wild craggy mountains of Lasta and vast rocky escarpments, there is a stark cathedral-like grandeur to Lalibela, a strange, isolated town famed for its rock-hewn churches. Lalibela, formerly called Roha, now carries the name of the 11th Century King Lalibela of the Zagwe Dynasty. Legend tells of rivalry between the young Prince Lalibela and his elder brother, King Harbay, following their mother's revelation that Lalibela would be King. Harbay attempted to murder Lalibela with a poison which put Lalibela to sleep. During this sleep, Lalibela was taken to Heaven by angels, where God ordered him to build churches in Roha. Awakening from his sleep, and forgiving his brother, the two travelled to Roha, where Harbay abdicated to make way for Lalibela. On his coronation, Lalibela set about building the churches, the work being completed quickly because angels were said to continue the work at night.

Day 14: Lalibela

Morning mule trek to the monastery of Acheton Mariam. Afternoon visit second group of Rock Churches. O/nt Roha Hotel.



The churches are carved from the rock they stand in, and many are comprised of labyrinthine tunnels and crypts connecting galleries and grottos. The largest church is Bet Medhane Alem, built almost like a Greek temple, surrounded by square columns, and a further set of columns supporting the roof inside. In one corner are three symbolic graves, dug for biblical patriarchs Abraham, Issac and Jacob.

Day 15: Lalibela to Addis

Fly to Addis Ababa and transfer to the Ghion Hotel for dinner & overnight stay. The hotel has beautiful gardens, terrace annexe, tennis courts, a large thermal-water swimming pool with diving boards, and a smaller learners' pool with naturally warm poolside showers and cool poolside cafe. The thermal water is said to be great for aches and pains.

Day 16: International Departure

The flight to the UK leaves at noon, and arrives at London the same day (timeTBC).

N.B. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, the strength of walkers and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your trek guide will have the final say.

