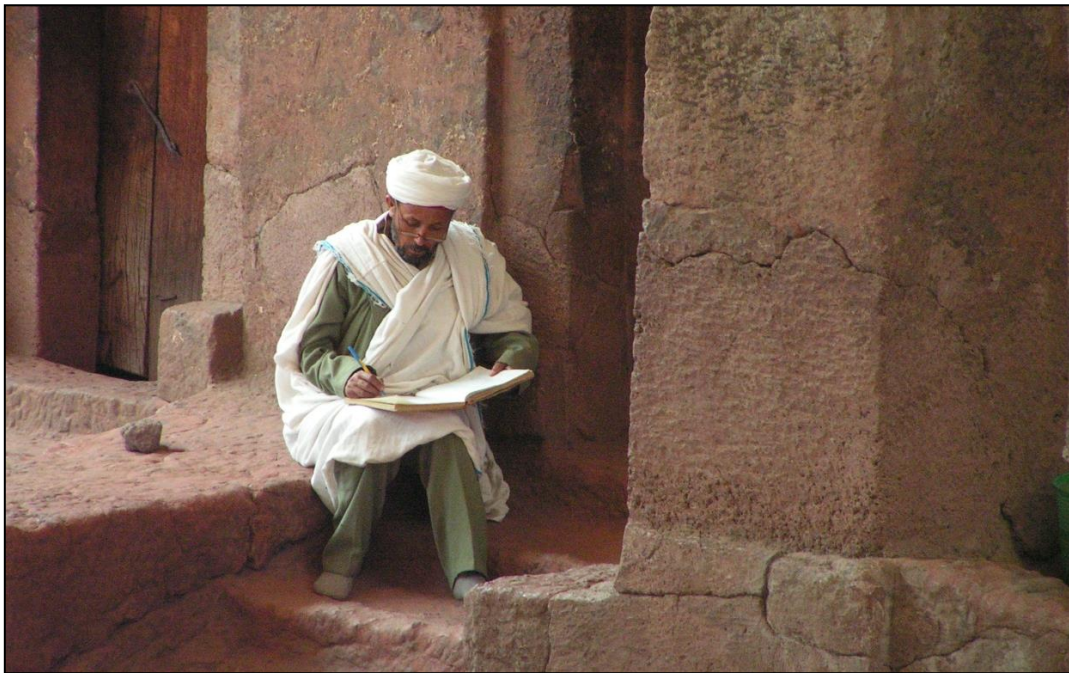


ANCIENT ETHIOPIA

Fully Guided tour

7th to 17th April 2017 to coincide with the Palm Sunday and Easter festivities



Fri 7 April: Depart London

Depart London Heathrow at 2100hrs. PM on the night flight to Addis Ababa.

Sat 8 April: Arrive Addis Ababa

You will be met on your arrival at 0635hrs. AM at Bole International Airport and driven (approx. 20 mins.) to your hotel in Addis city centre, the Jupiter Hotel, or similar.

Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, **Addis Ababa** is located at 2,500m above sea level in one of the highest parts of the Entoto mountain chain (3,000 meters above sea level). It enjoys a warm climate all year round, with an average temperature of 25°C. It is a pleasant city, with wide avenues of jacaranda trees, interesting museums and one of the largest open air markets in Africa, known as the "Mercato". It also boasts Ethiopia's best restaurants!

Depending on time of your arrival, we'll arrange for a short tour of the city this afternoon, starting with the **Holy Trinity Cathedral**, followed by a visit to the National Museum, where cultural and archaeological relics, including a plaster cast of "Lucy," the 3.2 million-year-old Hominid, are displayed.

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Time permitting, you might like to visit the Mercato, East Africa's largest market.

Overnight in Addis. *Please note that meals are to your own account on this arrival day but the remainder of the tour is full board.*

Sun 9 April: Palm Sunday; Gheralta (B, L, D)

Today is Palm Sunday, or Hosanna, one of the major religious festivals in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar, commemorating the arrival of Christ in Jerusalem.

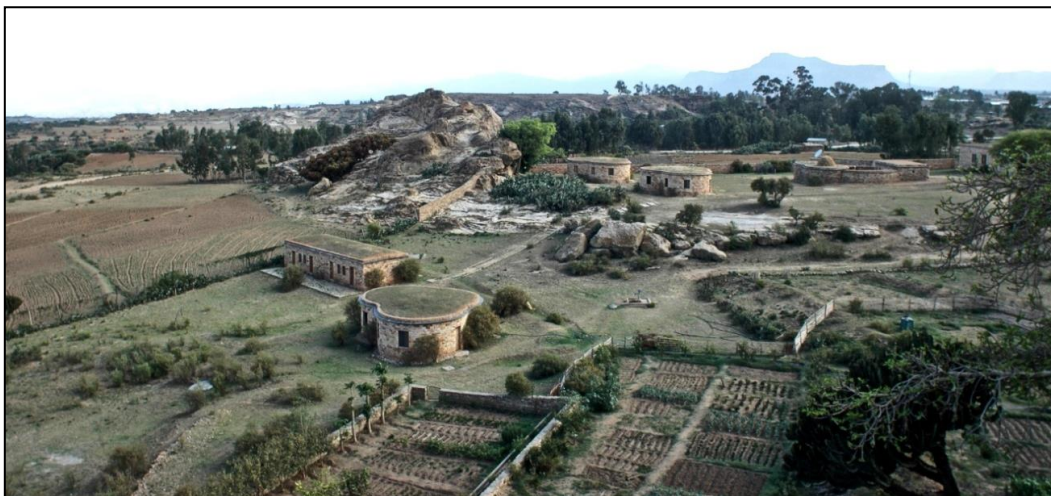
During this important festival day, the whole city comes alive in celebration, with the Holy Trinity Cathedral Church the centre of the festivities. Both laity and clergy gather to mark the occasion. It is common to see priests dressed in full ceremonial attire, and the laity wearing white robes and handmade palm rings.

After the watching the morning Palm Sunday celebrations, catch the noon flight to Mekele (12:00-13:25), in Tigray region.



From Mekele, you'll be met by your local guide and begin the drive to Gheralta, arriving early evening. Check into **Gheralta Lodge** for two nights (half-board).

This boutique, Italian-owned lodge is set on a high hill overlooking the Gheralta plains. Constructed in the local Tigrayan-style, its stone, wood and thatch huts blend in effortlessly with the wild, rural surrounds. Enjoy a fine dinner overlooking the dramatic landscapes of Tigray.



If time allows, you will be able to include some church visits or a stop at a traditional Ethiopian coffee house en-route to Gheralta.

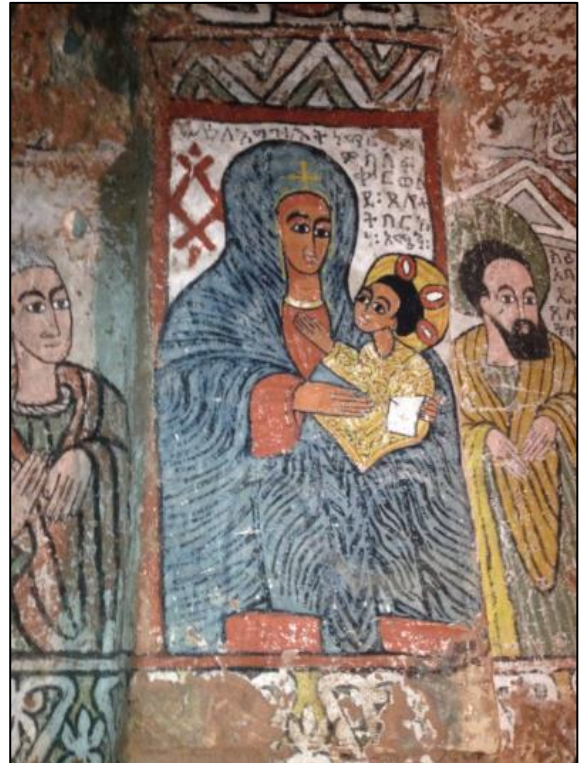
Mon 10 April: Tigray (B, L, D)

You will have a full-day to explore the unique and little-visited rock churches of Tigray.

Begin your tour of Tigray with a visit to the dramatic **Church of Michael Imba**, an early cruciform and semi monolithic church that is typical of the churches found in the region. Situated on a hill, reaching Michael Imba involves an easy walk up a rocky incline, followed by a short climb down to the church entrance, which is carved into the rock below the surface level.

From Michael Imba, continue to **Wukro** for a leisurely lunch at a local restaurant, and then on to **Abreha & Atsbeha**, one of the most dramatic of the rock-hewn churches of Tigray. Dedicated to the famous kings of Axum, the two brothers and 4th-century Christian converts Abreha & Atsbeha, this church is renowned for its magnificent 17th-century murals.

Wukro Churkos to the north of Wukro town is another early cruciform and semi monolithic church with some remarkable interior adornments. Michael Imba is of a similar style. All three churches share Axumite architectural qualities that support the claim that these are the earlier of the rock-hewn Ethiopian churches and certainly pre-date the rock churches of Lalibela. Your guide will explain more about their history, and the debate surrounding the precise date of their construction, during the visits.



NB. The number of holy places visited during the day will depend on group dynamics and fitness levels as well as time spent at preceding churches.

In the evening, return to Gheralta Lodge for dinner and overnight.

Tues 11 April: Drive to Axum (B, L, D)

Depart Gheralta Lodge this morning and drive approx. 3 hours to Axum.

En route there will be time to stop at the ancient **Temple of Yeha**. A Sabean construction, Yeha is reputedly the oldest standing stone structure in Ethiopia, dating back to approx. 700BC. There is also a small market at Yeha most days of the week.

Arrive Axum in the afternoon and check into Yared Zema Hotel for one night. In the afternoon, enjoy a guided tour of Axum, taking in the city's major sights and monuments, including the famous stellae and the **Church of St Mary of Zion**.

Ethiopian tradition holds that the royal city of Axum was founded in the 10th century BC as the royal seat of the Queen of Sheba. During this era, the tradition continues, Menelik, son of Sheba and King Solomon, carried the Ark of the Covenant to Axum where it remains to this day, preserved in a sanctuary within the church of St Mary of Zion. Whatever the veracity of this legend (archaeologists prefer to date the origins of Axum to the 5th century BC), Axum has played a crucial role in Ethiopia's history, and remains to this day very much the religious and historic centre of the country.

The city was the capital during the long Axumite reign (est. 5th-century BC to 10th-century AD), and was thus at the heart of one Africa's greatest and oldest empires. During this time, it represented a crucial connecting-point between Africa and Asia.



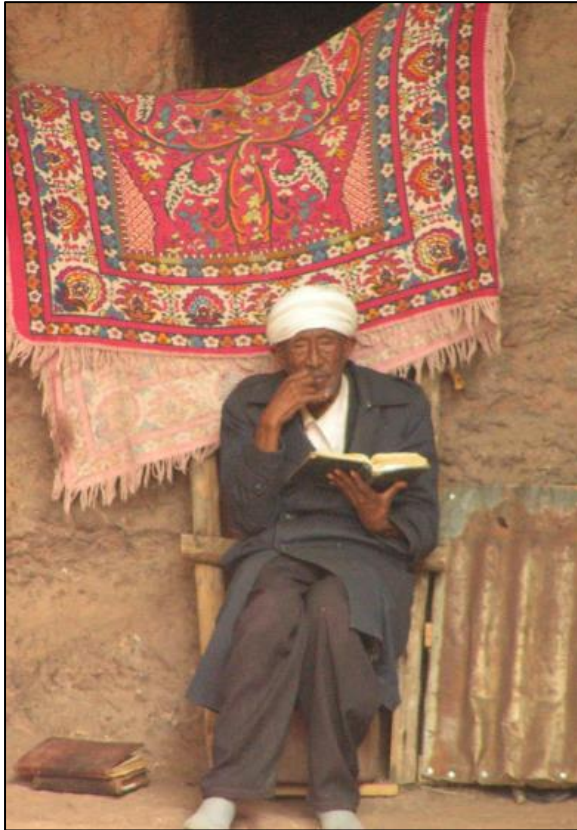
Start your tour of the ancient city with a visit to its most famous site, the dramatic **Stellae Field**. These granite monoliths almost certainly pre-date the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia, and their symbolic engravings, the exact meaning of which remains a mystery, provide an insight into early Ethiopian religious culture. (The stellae also figure in Ethiopia's more recent history. During the Italian occupation, Mussolini had one of the obelisks removed to Rome. It has since then been returned, restored and re-erected in Axum, its status as a national monument reaffirmed.)



After visiting the stellae, continue to the **Church of St Mary of Zion**, Ethiopia's holiest site. The Church is said to house the Ark of the Covenant. Visitors, of course, aren't allowed to see the Ark, but there are a number of other treasures on display, including the royal crowns of successive Ethiopian kings.

Wed 12 April: Fly to Lalibela (B, L, D)

Catch the morning flight from Axum to **Lalibela**, arriving around noon.



Located at an altitude of 2,600 metres above sea level, the mountain city of Lalibela is remote even by Ethiopian standards. It has long been a holdout for the Orthodox Ethiopian Church, untouched by the Islamic conquests of the 16th-century and later European attempts at colonisation. For Orthodox Ethiopians, pilgrimage to the churches of Lalibela, where services are still held daily, is as important as the pilgrimage to Mecca is to devout Muslims. Nowhere in Ethiopia does the spirituality of its people echo louder than in Lalibela.

Lalibela is of course most famous for its 12th-century monolithic churches, of which there are 11, each carved out of pink granite rock and collectively considered to be one of the wonders of the world. Each of the churches has a unique architectural style, though they share many features; most notable, each has been carved from the top-down, a technique not practiced anywhere else in the world.

They are also all beautifully decorated. Looked at in isolation, each of the temples is remarkable, but taken together they are a wonder; the entire city has been described as a sculpture dedicated to the glory of God, and as you wander the complex network of tunnels and subterranean passageways that connect its underground structures you'll come to appreciate why.

The temples at Lalibela are loosely divided into two groups. Today you'll take your time visiting the first group of temples.

You stay tonight in the Mountain View Hotel, or similar.

Thur 13 April: Lalibela (B, L, D)

There will be time today to explore the second group of churches and the Monastery of Nakuto La'ab, named after its constructor, the nephew and successor of King Lalibela.

Fri 14 April: Gondar and Simien Mountains (B, L, D)

Leave Lalibela on the morning flight to Gondar. On arrival, meet with your guide and then begin drive to the **Simiens**, stopping for coffee en route. The drive time from Gondar to the Simiens is approximately two hours but may vary depending on the weather and traffic. Altitude sickness is a risk, as you will be ascending to approx. 3,500m, though your time spent at Lalibela will have provided some altitude acclimatization. Nevertheless,

drink lots of water before you reach the Simiens to ensure you don't dehydrate while in the mountains.

The Simien Mountains, which include Ras Deshen (Ethiopia's highest mountain), are located in the north-western corner of the country. Now a world heritage site, the Simiens boast some of Africa's most beautiful mountain scenery. This mountain country is home to endemic flora and fauna, and scenery of such splendour that many travellers consider this the most beautiful mountain country in all of Africa. Bird and animal life here includes the walia ibex, the gelada baboons, the bearded vultures, thick-billed ravens and eagles.



Many gelada baboon can be seen on the escarpment. There are currently an estimated 2,700 baboons in the park, their numbers fairly static. Although their predators have declined, increased farming in the park means that the gelada do not have the same grasslands and woodlands as previously. Gelada live in family groups made up of a dominant male and up to 8 females with their respective young. They come together in larger bands and during the dry season these bands can be as large as 800 animals. Never rush at gelada, or even look them in the eye, as they consider this a threat. If lucky you may spot the endemic Walia Ibex; birding is good in the Simiens and there are several species of endemic plants.

You stay tonight at the Simien Mountain Lodge, which enjoys a fabulous position right on the edge of the escarpment.



Sat 15 April: Gondar (Easter Eve) (B, L, D)

The better of the morning will be spent exploring the escarpment, before returning to Simien Mountain Lodge for lunch.

After lunch, drive back to Gondar, arriving late afternoon. Check into the Goha Hotel, or similar. This afternoon will be spent exploring Gondar's historic monuments as the city prepares itself for Easter.

Gondar was the capital of the Ethiopian Empire during the reign of Fasilidas, who founded the city in the 1630s (the precise dates of its founding are unclear). It is set in a mountainous landscape of stunning beauty.

This afternoon you shall visit the city's historic centrepiece, **Gondar Castle**, built by Emperor Fasilidas and his descendant, Yohannes I, as well as the fascinating **Debre Birhan Selassie Church** (a World Heritage site). With its walls and ceilings decorated with scenes of Biblical lore and medieval history, Birhan Selassie serves as one of the best examples of the religious art of the Gonderian period.



Preparations for Easter ('Fasika') will be well underway during your visit and you'll have a chance to witness the early stages of the festivities at Debre Birhan Selassie Church, where the Easter service extends through Easter Eve into the early hours of Sunday morning.

A real air of excitement always attends major festivals in Ethiopia, making this a wonderful time to be in Gondar.

Sun 16 April: Easter in Gondar (B, L, D)

Continue your exploration of Gondar this morning. Late morning, we can arrange a visit to a nearby visit to see the Easter celebrations in a local setting.

After lunch, return to Addis Ababa on the afternoon flight.

Check into the Jacaranda for one night. At the end the day, we will arrange for you to enjoy a traditional Ethiopian dinner at a hilltop restaurant to mark your last evening in Ethiopia.

Depart Addis on your flight home tonight or tomorrow AM.

Mon 17 April: / Int'l Departure (B)

Depart Ethiopia at 10:45 this morning on the day flight to London – arriving Heathrow at 17:00.



Booking Information: The cost to join this small group tour is **£1,958 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation and subject to availability at the time of booking.

Flights are not included and will be booked on your behalf by Gane and Marshall when you confirm your interest.

Please contact jeremy@ganeandmarshall.com or telephone 01822-600-600 to make your booking.

Includes:

- Full-board accommodation
- Local guide and driver
- All entrance fees and boat fees
- All transfers and ground transportation

Excludes:

- Flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Travel expenses and entrance fees