

# ANCIENT ETHIOPIA

## FULLY GUIDED SMALL GROUP TOURS

Departing January, April and September 2015/16

*“There is nothing in sub-Saharan Africa – in a sense, nothing else in the world – that prepares the visitor for the wealth of historical and cultural treasures, both ancient and living, contained in northern Ethiopia.”*

**Philip Briggs, Bradt Guide to Ethiopia**



**G**ane and Marshall invite you to join one of our very special *Ancient Ethiopia* programmes. These small group guided tours have been designed to give the first-time visitor to Ethiopia an insight into the country's rich cultural heritage. We have three departures planned for 2015/16, each of which has been timed to coincide with a major Ethiopian festival. All of the tours follow a similar programme (Addis Ababa, Tigray, Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, the Simien Mountains and Lake Tana) but will be tailored to the Christian festival with which they coincide. So on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of January you will be at the wonderful rock church of Abreha & Asbeha in Tigray, where you may participate in and witness

the famous festival of *Timket* (often referred to as Ethiopian Christmas), celebrating the baptism of Christ. For the *Palm Sunday* festivities in April, you will be at the very heart of Ethiopian Christianity, in the Church of St Mary Zion in Axum. While for *Meskel*, in September, you will be in Meskel Square in Addis Ababa, where you can watch the lighting of the Demera.

These unique tours will be led by our Ethiopian partner and guide, Zablun Beyene, one of the top authorities for the Historic Route and Ethiopian culture more generally. Zab is the most fluent guide we know of in Ethiopia. He's worked on numerous projects in the country, not only guiding tourists but also managing film projects for TV. His great knowledge of Ethiopia enabled him to be appointed to work on such programmes as the BBC's 'Human Planet', 'the Incredible Human Journey' with Dr. Alice Roberts, 'Tribe' with Bruce Parry, 'An African Journey' with Jonathan Dimbleby, and 'Nile' with Joanna Lumley. Zab will accompany you throughout your journey, sharing with you his unparalleled knowledge of the country and its history.

At *Gane and Marshall* we have over 20 years' experience of organising holidays to Ethiopia. Our Ethiopia tours are unique in that they allow you to travel to remote regions of the country seldom visited on standard tours, such as Tigray. They are also exceptional value. For less than £3,000 per person, we provide a fully-supported, full-board tour, accompanied throughout by a highly-experienced, dedicated guide, and inclusive of all transfers, accommodation, meals and entrance fees.

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### Timket Programme (17-29 January 2016)

Each year between January 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Ethiopians celebrate Timket, the holiest festival on the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian calendar. A celebration of the Epiphany, Timket is a jubilant, joyous festival, which sees Ethiopians from across the country take to the streets in a ritual that begins with a procession of tabots (replica Arks of the Covenant) and culminates in a re-enactment of the baptism of Christ. This is one of the most exciting times to visit Ethiopia, when the country is at its most lively and welcoming!

Our Timket tour begins in Addis Ababa on the 17<sup>th</sup>, just as the city is preparing for the coming celebration. You will not stay in Addis for the duration of the festivities, however, as many travellers do. Rather, on the 18<sup>th</sup> we arrange for you to fly to ancient Tigray (Tigrai), site of some of the oldest Christian churches in Ethiopia. Here, away from the hustle and bustle of the capital, you will witness the Tigray festivities in the spectacular church of Abreha & Atsbeha, one of over 100 rock churches to be found in the region, and on the River Mareb.



The rest of your tour is taken up with an exploration of the main sites on Ethiopia's famous Historic Route, including Axum, Lalibela, Gondar and Lake Tana. Also included is a night on the escarpment in the Simien Mountains National Park.

[View the full Timket programme.](#)

### Palm Sunday Programme (1-13 April 2015)

The Palm Sunday celebrations take place in April, a week before Easter, and commemorate Jesus' entry to Jerusalem. Unlike Timket, which takes place across the country, the main celebrations during Palm Sunday are at Axum, in the vicinity of the Church of St Mary of Zion, Ethiopia's holiest site and the purported home of the Ark of the Covenant. Palm Sunday attracts far fewer visitors from outside of Ethiopia than Timket, but for Ethiopians it is one of the major festivals of the year. Axum comes alive during the celebrations, and the morning ritual at St Mary of Zion on Sunday provides a stunning spectacle.



Our Palm Sunday programme follows much the same route as our Timket programme but is timed to coincide with the Palm Sunday celebrations on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April. The tour provides a marvellous opportunity to witness a feature of Ethiopian religious culture that very few visitors to the country experience.

[View the full Palm Sunday programme.](#)

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### Meskel Programme (25 Sep - 08 Oct 2015)

The third of Ethiopia's major festivals, Meskel takes place every year in September and commemorates Queen Helena's discovery of the True Cross. According to Orthodox legend, Helena had a premonition that if she lit a bonfire the smoke would lead her to the location where the true cross was buried.

The celebration of the finding of the true cross is one of the most festive holidays in Addis Ababa. During the festivities, the city comes alive in celebration. Meskel Square, the main intersection in town where the event takes place, is closed off while the festivities take place. Pilgrims enter the Square in procession, led by priest and church choirs performing carefully-coordinated chants, songs and dances. The festival culminates in the lighting of the Demera, a huge bonfire in the centre of the square. It's a stunning spectacle, yet attracts few visitors from outside the country.

In Ethiopia the Meskel celebration is also the marker which divides the short rainy season from the dry season. During this time, small yellow flowers (known as Meskel flowers) can be found throughout the country. Many Ethiopians will carry these flowers from house to house during the week of Meskel. This is very much a spiritual celebration, but, like so many Ethiopian festivals, Meskel is also tied up with more earthly concerns, as a seasonal celebration intended to mark the end of the green season.

[View the full Meskel programme.](#)



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### Booking Information

Our Ancient Ethiopia itinerary is offered as a small group departure with fixed travel dates, and is led by our most experienced guide in Ethiopia, Zablou Beyene. The Timket, Palm Sunday and Meskel tours all cost **£2,045 per person**, inclusive of all ground costs: driven transfers, full-board accommodation, guide and activities. Flights with Ethiopian Airlines, including international flights from London and all regional flights within Ethiopia, will cost in the region of **£870** per person. Please note that flight costs will likely vary if travelling from outside the UK; please let us know at the time of booking if you are travelling from the US or continental Europe and we can provide a full quote for international flights. Alternatively you may prefer to book your own international flights.

To book a place on this tour, or to enquire about a private departure, please contact Jeremy Gane on 01822 600600 or [Jeremy@ganeandmarshall.com](mailto:Jeremy@ganeandmarshall.com).

### Private tours

We also offer our Ancient Ethiopia guided tour as a private departure. If you are unable to join any of our fixed departures, let us know and we can help you plan a private tour at a more suitable time of year. If possible, we will arrange your departure to coincide with a different Ethiopian festival.

The cost of a private tour is dependent on the size of your group and the numbers travelling. Please contact us for a quote.

### Contact Gane and Marshall

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