

ETHIOPIA

The Historic Route and the Simiens

Addis Ababa, Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, the Simiens & Bahir Dar



Day 1: Addis Ababa

You will be met on arrival in Addis Ababa and transferred to your hotel in the city centre, the Saro Maria.

Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, Addis Ababa is located 2,500m above sea level in the Entoto mountain chain, where it enjoys an excellent year-round climate, with an average temperature of 25°C. It is a vibrant, developing city that is a pleasure to explore on foot, with wide avenues of jacaranda trees, interesting museums and one of the largest open-air markets in Africa.

Depending on the time of your arrival, it may be possible to fit in an afternoon guided tour of the city, taking in the Holy Trinity Cathedral, the National Museum, and the market.

Day 2: Axum

Morning flight from Addis Ababa to Axum, where you will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel in the city centre. In the afternoon, commence your tour of Axum's major sights.

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. Around this time, the tradition continues, Menelik, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, brought 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 the religious and cultural heart of the country very much to this day.

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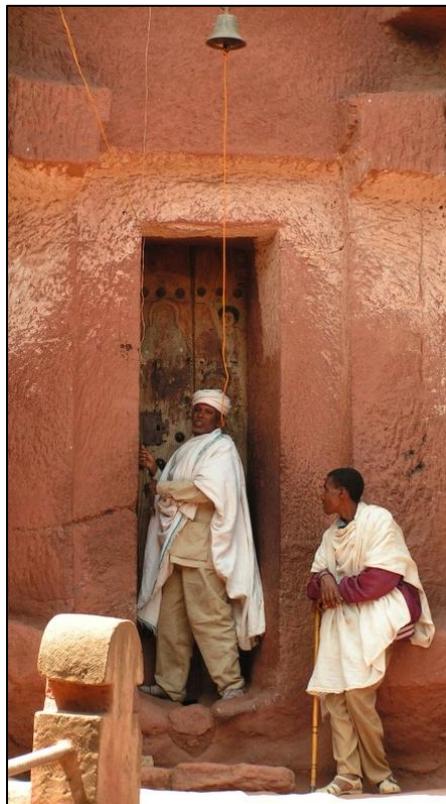
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Axum was Ethiopia's capital during the long Axumite reign (est. 5th-century BC to 10th-century AD), and was thus at the heart of one Africa's greatest and oldest empires. During this time, it represented a crucial connecting-point between Africa and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



Your afternoon tour of Axum will take in the main highlights, beginning with the famous stellas, granite monoliths dating from pre-Christian times and decorated with symbolic engravings, before continuing to Ethiopia's holiest temple, the church of Saint Mary of Zion.

End your tour with a visit to the Palace of the Queen of Sheba, followed by a short drive to a high viewpoint overlooking this ancient site, before returning to the guesthouse.



Day 3: Lalibela

Morning flight from Axum to Lalibela, arriving 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 by 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 notably, each has been carved from the top-down, a technique not practiced anywhere else in the world. They are also 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 quickly come to appreciate why.

The temples at Lalibela are loosely divided into two groups, and today you'll focus on exploring the first.

Overnight at Mountain View Hotel which has wonderful views of the Lasta Mountains.

Day 4: Lalibela mule trek

This morning, leave the main temple complex at Lalibela and head into the hills, travelling alongside the pilgrims on mule and by foot to the remote monastery of Asheton Maryam. The journey up a steep and winding track to the monastery is an adventure in and of itself. And the view from the top – the monastery is located at an altitude of almost 4,000m above sea level – is stunning.

In the afternoon, return to the temples at Lalibela and take the time to explore the second, and most famous, group of rock churches, including the Church of St George, or Bete Giyorgis. After the tour, return to your hotel for dinner and overnight.

NB. If the mule trek, which can also be completed on foot, does not appeal, let us know and we'll allow for more time at the main Lalibela complex or alternatively arrange for you to drive to Yimrehane Kiristos, a remote cave church.

Day 5: Gondar

Leave Lalibela on the late morning flight to Gondar, arriving early afternoon. You'll be met on arrival and transferred to the Goha Hotel, or similar. Then, after lunch, begin your tour of the medieval city.

Set in a mountainous landscape of stunning beauty, Gondar was founded in the early seventeenth century (the precise dates are unclear) as the capital of the Ethiopian Empire under Emperor Fasilides. It provides a fascinating insight into this most tumultuous era in Ethiopian history.

Today's tour will take in the city's historic centrepiece, Gondar Castle, built by Emperor Fasilides and his descendant, Yohannes I, as well as the fascinating Debre Birhan Selassie Church, an UNESCO 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.



Day 6: Simien Mountains Excursion

Wake to an early breakfast and then begin the drive into the Simien Mountains, stopping for coffee en route. The drive time from Gondar to the Simiens National Park is approximately two hours but it may vary depending on the weather and traffic. Altitude sickness is a small but real risk as you will be ascending to approx. 3,500m (though your time in Lalibela should have helped



acclimatise you to the altitude). 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 Dshen, 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, as well as flora and fauna that is endemic to this region. The wildlife is hugely varied and includes the walia ibex, gelada baboon, bearded vulture, thick-billed raven and eagle.

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 before.

Gelada form family groups comprising a dominant male and up to 8 females with young. These families join with others to form huge troops, which during the dry season can number as many as 800. You'll have plenty of time to watch the Gelada at a distance this afternoon. With luck, you may also spot the endemic Walia Ibex.

After exploring the escarpment on foot, check in to Simien Mountain Lodge, which enjoys a fabulous location right on the edge of the escarpment, for dinner and overnight.

Day 7: Simiens to Gondar

This morning there will be time to further explore the Simien escarpment on foot and by vehicle, before returning to Gondar late afternoon. Check into the Goha hotel for dinner and overnight.



Day 8: Bahir Dar

Depart Gondar after lunch and drive to Bahir Dar, a pleasing city located at 1,800m on the shores of Lake Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia. On arrival, check-in at Kuriftu Lodge, or similar for one night.

Day 9: Lake Tana and Addis

In the morning embark on a boat tour of Lake Tana to explore some of its unique island monasteries.

Start with the famous 14th-century monastery of Ura Kidanemihret, on the Zeghie Peninsula; then walk through the coffee trees to Azewa Mariam to explore its wonderful 16th-century mural paintings, crowns, crosses and many old church treasures, before ending at Debre Mariam (14c), the most striking of the Lake Tana monasteries.



In the afternoon, drive to the airport for your flight back to Addis, arriving early afternoon.

On arrival in Addis, check-in at your hotel, the Saro Maria, or similar (this will either be on day room basis or overnight depending on your international flight times).

This evening, we will arrange for a farewell dinner in a restaurant with Ethiopian music and dance, or in a good city centre restaurant.

Day 10: International departure

Transfer to the airport for your international flight home.

Please see price guide overleaf.

Price Guide:

The cost of this itinerary is from **£2,770 per person**, based on two travellers in twin/double accommodation. For larger group sizes please contact us for a quote. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Full-board accommodation
- Local guide and driver
- All entrance fees and boat fees
- All transfers and ground transportation
- Internal flights (based on international flights with Ethiopian Airlines)

Excludes:

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

