

NORTHERN SUDAN

with Ethiopia & Djibouti

18 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Addis Ababa

Arrival at Addis Ababa Airport. Welcome to Ethiopia!

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Addis Ababa: City Tour

This morning we have an orientation tour of Addis Ababa, including visits to both the National and Ethnographic Museums. Addis Ababa is the largest city of Ethiopia and its capital city at the same time. Situated in the center of the country, Addis sits at 2400 meters above sea level, making it one of the highest capital cities in the world.

A visit to the National Museum introduces us to one of the cities most famous residents -- Lucy, a proto-human skeleton discovered in Ethiopia in 1974 and believed to be 3.5 million years old. The Ethnographic Museum, on the university campus of Addis Ababa, displays many items important to daily life in rural Ethiopia. A brief section also pertains to the life of the late Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's last emperor, crowned in 1930.

Today we will also visit the Holy Trinity Cathedral, the second most-important place of worship in Ethiopia and the final resting place of Emperor Haile Selassie.

Overnight in Addis Ababa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Addis Ababa - Awash National Park

Today we travel by road to Awash National Park, located in the northern part of the Great Rift Valley at the point where the rift widens out into the Afar depression. This National Park was the first to be established in Ethiopia mainly on advice given by UNESCO on account of the great numbers and varieties of wild mammals and birds. This will be a full day of very scenic travel. Located at the southern tip of the Afar Region, this park is 225 kilometers east of Addis Ababa. The south boundary of the park is formed by the Awash river which swings north soon after leaving the park and eventually disappears into the Afar (Danakil) region.

In the late afternoon we will make a foray into the park with the hope of seeing some African wildlife and to enjoy the unique topography and vegetation.

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Overnight at Awash.

Overnight at Awash.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Awash - Dire Dawa

Early this morning we'll have another foray into the park before continuing our full-day journey to Dire Dawa.

Dire Dawa was founded in 1902 when the railroad from Djibouti reached the area, and its growth has resulted largely from trade brought by

the railroad. Dire Dawa is also an ideal site of ethnic variety whereby the diversified cultural styles of Oromo, Somali, Afar, Harari, and others are easily observed.

Overnight at Dire Dawa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Dire Dawa - Harar: City Touring

This morning we'll have a look at Dire Dawa and it's French era railway station and interesting spice market before continuing our journey further east to the ancient city of Harar. On arrival we begin our sightseeing program.

The medieval walled city of Harar stands amid green mountains on the eastern wall of the Great Rift Valley, with wonderful views of the vast Danakil Desert to the north, the fertile Harar Mountains to the west, and the cattle rich Ogaden plains to the south. Situated near the Somali border, Harar's heritage is almost entirely Muslim and Oriental; with its mosques and shrines. This is considered by many to be the fourth most sacred center of the Islamic world, and its Islamic character is best expressed in the Grand Mosque (AL JAMI), which dominates the town. It is rightly renowned for it's intricately worked filigree jewelry of silver, gold, and amber.

This evening we will visit the town's most enduring attraction: a "hyena man show," where you can get a chance to stretch out your hands and feed the hyenas.

Overnight in Harar.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Harar Sightseeing - Dire Dawa, Ethiopia - Djibouti City, Djibouti

Today we explore the walled city of Harar, with the Christian and Muslim markets, the former residence of the French author, Arthur Rimbaud, and the Harari Museum that depicts the interior architecture and decoration of the homes of the Harari people.

Harar is the provincial capital of Ethiopia's largest administrative region, Hararge. Once fiercely religious, Harar was a forbidden city and closed to visitors until 1887 CE, when King Menelik restored central rule. Harar has much of its 16th century CE architecture and city walls still intact, and with its 99 mosques, including the 16th century Grand Mosque. Harar is unlike anywhere else in Ethiopia and has played a pivotal role both historically and contemporarily in the current excellent relations between Ethiopian Muslims and Christians.

Harar's Megalo Gugo Market is a center for beautiful baskets of woven grass, decorative wall-mats and bright shawls, as well as all the fruit, vegetables, spices and grains of the province. Harar's five gates -- the only means to enter or leave the city center -- have been guarded over the years. One of the gates of the city happens to be the impressive 'Shawa Gate', which for centuries served as a bridgehead for the entry of Islamic ideas into Africa from the nearby Arabian Peninsula.

Later we drive back to Dire Dawa in time to connect with our late afternoon flight to Djibouti City where we'll have dinner upon arrival.

Overnight in Djibouti City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Djibouti City: City Tour - Tadjoura & Sables Blancs

Djibouti City is the capital and largest city of Djibouti, located in the coastal region on the Gulf of Tadjoura. Home to around 600,000 inhabitants, the city contains over 60% of the nation's population. The settlement was founded in 1888 by the French on land leased from the ruling Somali and Afar Sultans. During the ensuing period, it served as the capital of French Somaliland and its successor the French Territory of the Afars and Issas. Under its veneer of urban bustle, the city remains a down-to-earth place, with jarring cultural and social combinations.

This morning we will enjoy a panoramic tour of the city during which we plan to see the colourful market, the railway station, the main port

and the central mosque.

Later we will take a private boat across the Gulf of Tadjoura to Tadjourah, the capital of one of the six regions in Djibouti (+/- 1.5 hours). Upon arrival we will head straight to our hotel which is situated right on the beach at Sable Blancs!

You will have some free time to relax in the afternoon before dinner at our hotel.

Overnight at Tadjoura.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Tadjourah - Lake Assal - Djibouti City (or Khartoum)

Today we travel by road southwest to Lake Assal, located in the North-Central part of Djibouti. Shortly after our departure from the beach area we will make a brief stop in Tadjoura - known as the 'White City.' The Sultanate of Tadjoura has many white buildings and is a historic city. This was where the French colonization started when the sultan granted a piece of land to the French. Soon Djibouti City became the most important city of the country. Nowadays Tadjoura serves as an important port and fishing settlement.

Lake Assal is a saline lake, which lies 155 m (509 ft) below sea level in the Afar Triangle, making it the lowest point on land in Africa and the second-lowest land depression on Earth after the Dead Sea. Situated in the Danakil Desert, the lake is bounded by hills on the western region. No outflow occurs from the lake, and due to high evaporation, the salinity level of its waters is 10 times that of the sea, making it the most saline in the world after Don Juan Pond, Antarctica. Salt extraction by the Afar nomad tribes of camel drivers and Issas from Lake Assal's salt bank established the ancient caravan routes. These linked the lake with the mountains of Ethiopia for barter trading such items as sorghum, coal, and other commodities. Salt was also bartered with South Abyssinia for items like coffee, ivory, musk, and also (historically) slaves. It was a source of wealth for the local tribes.

After a day of scenic stops and short walks we will continue our journey back to Djibouti City.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to changeable flight schedules, it is possible that we will need to depart Djibouti City this evening and arrive in Khartoum very early tomorrow morning. We will have hotel rooms waiting for us in Khartoum if this is the case.

Overnight in Djibouti City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Djibouti City, Djibouti - Khartoum, Sudan

Today (or last evening) we fly from Djibouti City to Khartoum, Sudan.

Because of a lack of air connections in the region, today's journey might be somewhat convoluted, with stops possibly in Dire Dawa and/or Addis. Due to such uncertainties, we don't have any activities officially scheduled for today, but your Tour Leader will determine the group's energy and interest levels and possibly suggest something to do today after some rest. Admittedly, there are not a lot of "attractions" in Khartoum in a touristic sense, so our time here may be somewhat free-form and unstructured.

Overnight in Khartoum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Khartoum: City Tour & Dervish Ceremony

This morning we start our Khartoum city tour.

First will be a visit to the Archaeological Museum, which features, among other things, two beautiful temples rescued by UNESCO and moved from the Lake Nasser area when it was flooded in the 1970's. We then cross the confluence between the Blue Nile and the White Nile near the Presidential Palace where, in 1885, General Gordon was beheaded by the Mahdi's troops. Later we reach Omdurman, the old capital of

Sudan, where we see the Mahdi's Tomb from outside.

In the afternoon we will visit the interesting Khalifa's House (possibly closed for renovation) which holds a small museum about the Mahdya. We then visit the colourful souk of Omdurman where we experience a large, colourful and lively local market and interact with the friendly locals.

Just prior to sunset we will head to the tomb of the Sufi leader, Ahmed al Nil, in order to observe the Sufi Dervish Ceremony, held only on Fridays. This is not the 'formal' kind of ceremony that one may have seen in Turkey with actual whirling as such, but rather a very casual and informal "dancing" and moving to beat-driven music. The atmosphere is celebratory and the locals get involved and visitors are made to feel very welcome.

After sunset we will return back to the center of Khartoum for dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Khartoum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 11 Khartoum - Karima

This morning we begin the journey northward through the Western Desert. We travel in a flat desert where the view can span 360° around and we reach Wadi Muqaddam with its many acacia trees.

En route we'll make rest stop at the "chai houses," literally tea houses, a Sudanese version of a truck stop in the desert where local truck drivers usually stop for a quick meal and some rest. In the afternoon we arrive in Karima, where we check in at the charming Nubian Rest House at the foot of Jebel Barkal, the holy mountain of the old Egyptian and Nubian Pharaohs

The Nubian Rest House: Karima is a small town located on the right bank of the Nile, close to the famous archaeological site at Jebel Barkal, south of the 4th Cataract. The town is a small, dusty, and quiet village where a big market takes place in the morning. The Nubian Rest House is a charming small hotel built in the typical Nubian style, surrounded by a large private enclosure, a nice garden, and leisure area. Each of the 22 A/C rooms is characterized by a typical Nubian door with its own private bathroom and a pleasant veranda. A reception area, restaurant, and lounge with decorated walls complete the wonderful setting. All the buildings are made with local bricks covered by hand-spread clay plaster as used in the area. The hotel is Italian-managed with the help of well-trained Sudanese staff.

Overnight in Karima.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Karima: Jebel Barkal & the Necropolis of El Kurru

A landmark in the Nubian Desert, Jebel Barkal ("Jebel" means mountain in Arabic) can be seen from several kilometres away. At the foot of this wonderful and isolated red sandstone mountain, considered holy since the ancient times, stands a large temple dedicated to the Pharaohs of the New Reign and to their patron, Amon. Amon's ancient "Pure Mountain", the Olympus of the Nubians, was the religious Nubian heart for more than 1,000 years. Besides the ruins of the big temple, there are still several sculpted granite rams that were supposed to border a long avenue that probably led to the pier on the Nile. In the mountain wall there is a large room decorated with bas-relief.

The Jebel Barkal archaeological sites are listed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. The royal necropolis of the ancient city of Napata, the Nubian capital (from 800 to 400 BC) before the Meroitic period, had a large number of pyramids located in three different places: a few hundred metres north of Jebel Barkal; a dozen kilometres southwards from the holy mountain, in El Kurru; in Nuri, located on the other bank of the Nile.

After lunch we will travel southwards to the village of El Kurru where we find one of the necropolises of the ancient capital, Napata. Here we can visit one tomb, which is excavated in the rock under pyramids -- partially collapsed -- and totally decorated with images of the Pharaoh, the gods, and multicolour hieroglyphic inscriptions. Not far from here there is an interesting site of petrified wood, an ancient forest with hundreds of huge trunks.

In the late afternoon we return back to Karima.

Overnight at Nubian Rest House.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Karima: Cruise on the Nile & the Necropolis of Nuri

After breakfast we will visit the market in Karima, where we have the chance to witness and experience the real life of Sudanese people. We then board a small covered motorboat for a relaxing cruise along the Nile where we enjoy the beautiful sand stretches and cultivated islands along the river. A little further northward there used to be the beautiful granite rocky formations of the 4th Cataract, which prevented the Nile from flowing slowly and formed many rapids that obstructed navigation. In 2008 the Dam of Merowee was completed and the flooding of the artificial lake started. We may enjoy a picnic lunch in the area, or we may return to the Nubian Rest House for lunch.

After lunch we will visit the archaeological site of Nuri where we will see many pyramids, including the pyramid of the great Taharqa.

Return to the Nubian Rest House for dinner and overnight stay.

Overnight in Karima.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Karima & Old Dongola

Today is a full day full of interesting encounters and visits. Early in the morning we will follow the Nile until we reach the archaeological site of Old Dongola. Here we discover the ruins of a Christian Coptic temple with marble columns as well as the ruins of several churches situated on the banks of the Nile.

This area is the central part of the Nubian region. Here the population lives in small villages amongst yellow sand dunes and palm trees, and they speak a different language from the Arabs. Here Islam is not as "strict" as in other regions of Sudan; many women don't cover their faces, and they are often more willing to speak with foreigners. Some houses in the Nubian villages are painted with patterns of flowers, but most of them are completely white.

Return to Karima.

Overnight in Karima.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Karima - Bayuda Desert - Meroe

Today we depart Karima and continue our journey south to Meroe via the Bayuda Desert.

The Bayuda Desert is an area bounded by the loop formed by the Nile between the 4th and the 6th Cataract and characterised by sharp black basalt mountains, most of them volcanic and typically cone-shaped. They alternate with level pebble stretches and large valleys crossed by dry wadis where only little vegetation survives and gazelles can sometimes be seen. We are likely to meet isolated groups of Bisharin nomads, who live in family groups in small huts made of intertwined branches close to the rare water wells, with their caravans and herds of camels and donkeys.

In the first part of the crossing we drive among sand dunes. After a few kilometres on the asphalt road, the adventure continues as we follow the Wadi Abu Dom, driving on a sandy track among many acacia trees and some wells where it is possible to meet nomads.

Suddenly more than 40 pyramids located on top of a hill come into view, some of them perfectly-preserved. This is the Royal Necropolis of Meroe. We'll stop a distance away to enjoy the view and for photos before arrival at the Meroe Camp, also with a beautiful view of the pyramids.

THE MEROE CAMP

Meroe Tented Camp is located in Bagarwyia, (about 230 km north of Khartoum) overlooking the beautiful pyramids of Meroe. Accommodation consists of 22 twin-bedded tents (4x4m), tastefully-furnished. Each one has its own private separate bathroom hut with shower and toilet (located a short walk from your tent). The camp is located 2 km from the Royal Necropolis. Each tent is equipped with a veranda with two comfortable chairs to relax in front of the astonishing view of more than forty pyramids. The electricity in the tents is supplied by a generator working till 11:00 pm. The camp is managed by an Italian manager with the help of well-trained Sudanese staff.

Overnight at Meroe Camp.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 16 Meroe: the Necropolis & Royal City of Meroe

This morning will be dedicated to visiting the pyramids of Meroe. The Royal Necropolis of Meroe is located at about 3 km from the Nile on some hills covered by yellow sand dunes. Several pyramids stand out with their sharp shapes against the clear sky. Each one has its own funerary chapel with the walls fully decorated with bas-reliefs that show the king's life and offerings to the gods.

In the afternoon we move along the Nile in order to visit the ruins of the royal city. Excavations that have taken place here confirm that the town of Meroe once covered a large area, and the royal city was located in a central position surrounded by suburbs and a boundary wall. Most of the area where the city is located, formed by many small hills covered by red clay fragments, has yet to be excavated.

Overnight at Meroe.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Meroe - Temples of Naga & Mussawara - Khartoum

This morning we continue backward Khartoum with two important stops along the way.

We stop at Mussawarat, not far away from Naga. This settlement is located in a beautiful valley crowned by hills. Here the ruins of a very large temple are visible; it once played an exceptional important role. Its main characteristic, the "Great Enclosure" is made by many constructions and boundary walls which surround a temple built in the 1st century A.D. The large number of elephants represented on these walls makes you think that this animal used to have an important role in this area. Beyond the big wadi there is another temple -- restored by a German archaeological mission -- dedicated to the god Apedemak. Picnic in the area and then visit the site of Naga.

Naga is one of the two centres that developed during the Meroitic period. In Naga, in a typical Saharan environment with rocks and sand, we find a temple dedicated to Apedemak (1st century A.D.): a wonderful building with bas-relief decorations depicting the god with a lion's head, the Pharaoh, noblemen, and several ritual images.

A few metres away there is a small and odd construction with arches and columns, named "kiosk", in which we can notice Egyptian, Roman, and Greek styles all at the same time. Not far away we reach another temple dedicated to Amon with many statues of rams and beautiful gates decorated with bas-reliefs.

We arrive back in Khartoum in the late afternoon.

PLEASE NOTE: As most international flights from Khartoum depart late in the night, ie around of after midnight, you may not have a full night in Khartoum. We will, of course, have rooms in which you can freshen up, pack, and rest before departing for the airport.

"Day rooms" in Khartoum.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 18 Departure from Khartoum

Departure from Khartoum.

RHLAH S'IDAH (BON VOYAGE!)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast