

# Ethiopia Directory

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## ACCOMMODATION

Finding accommodation in Ethiopia is easy. Finding accommodation that won't curl your toes and send you running for the doors is tiring work – thankfully we've done most of that for you.

Ethiopia's range of options is heavily slanted towards the budget end (US\$1 to US\$20 per night), with Addis Ababa and major tourist centres providing only a handful of midrange options (US\$20 to US\$50). True top-end picks (US\$50 and up) are only found in the capital.

The various listings throughout this guidebook are given in the order of the author's preference.

## PRACTICALITIES

- The best-known English-language daily newspapers are the government-owned *Ethiopian Herald* and the privately owned *Monitor*. Other weekly private newspapers include the *Fortune*, the *Reporter*, the *Sun*, *Sub-Saharan Informer* and the *Capital*. Only the *Ethiopian Herald* is available outside Addis Ababa. The weekly *Press Digest* and *Days Update* (both Birr15) give useful summaries of the most important stories from the week's Amharic and English press.
- Radio Ethiopia broadcasts in English from 1.30pm to 2pm and 7pm to 8pm weekdays. The BBC World Service can be received on radios with shortwave reception, though frequencies vary according to the time of day (try 9630, 11940 and 17640 MHz).
- Ethiopia's ETV1 channel broadcasts in English from 10.30pm to midnight. Many hotels and restaurants have satellite dishes that receive BBC or CNN. Others have South Africa's multichannel DSTV system.
- Ethiopia's electricity supply is 220V, 50 cycles AC. Sockets vary from the European continental two-pin, earth prong (two round prongs), rated at 600W to South African/Indian-style plug with two circular metal pins above a large circular grounding pin.
- Ethiopia uses the metric system for weights and measures.

## Camping

Tents are useful in Ethiopia for trekking, the exploration of remote regions and to save money on extended stays. If you're just planning a short trek, tents can be hired from Addis Ababa's tour operators (p282) or from business in Lalibela, Gonder and Debarq.

In theory, you can camp anywhere, bar the obvious off-limit sites, such as military installations. 'Established' campsites have

## BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com). You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

been set up in some of the national parks and in the Omo Valley, but most lack facilities and consist of little more than a clearing beside a river. It's always essential to treat drinking water at the sites.

There are increasing numbers of upmarket hotels now allowing camping on their grounds, though prices are close to what you'd pay for nice budget accommodation.

All camping fees in this book are per person unless stated otherwise.

## Hotels

Hotels will play home to everyone who's not camping. Even in the capital, there are no hostels, homestays, or university or rental accommodation available to travellers.

Pricing invariably leads to resentment from many travellers as countless hotels (many openly) charge substantially higher rates for *faranjis* (foreigners, especially Western ones). Although you make take offence to a hotel owner calling you a rich *faranji*, remember prices are still dirt-cheap, and you'll always be given priority as well as the best rooms, facilities and service. That said, we still applaud those establishments with flat rates.

Charging same-sex couples more for rooms than mixed couples is also pervasive but less justifiable.

Some hotels (particularly government-owned ones) charge a 10% service charge and 15% tax on top of room prices. We've incorporated these extra charges into the room prices listed.

In Ethiopia, a room with a double bed is confusingly called a 'single', and a room with twin beds a 'double'. In our reviews we've used the Western interpretation of singles, doubles and twins. Similarly when hotel managers say the room has a 'shared shower', they mean a shared bathroom. Note that there are rarely single occupancy rates.

Reservations are wise in Gonder, Aksum and Lalibela during the major festivals. See the relevant Sleeping sections for advice.

Although there are no left-luggage facilities in Addis Ababa, most hotels will hold your belongings for no extra charge.

## BUDGET

Since our last visit, the quality of budget hotels, which make up 95% of the country's hotels, has made a notable leap. There are still countless dives, but the number of clean and comfortable options is rising, especially in the north. We definitely pulled less fleas this go around! Although an aberration, we even managed a smart room with hot shower and satellite TV for Birr50!

The vast majority of budget rooms are always spartan – think four walls, linoleum rolled over a cement floor, a bed and, if you're lucky, a plastic chair. Depending on your budget, you can typically have your pick of a shared or private bathroom.

In smaller, out-of-the-way towns hotels may double as drinking dens and brothels – bring earplugs. Many lack glass windows, only having a shutter to let air and light in.

Maintenance doesn't seem to be a high priority, so the best budget hotels are often those that have just opened. If you hear of a new hotel in town, it may be the best place to head.

## MIDRANGE

Although very comfortable compared to Ethiopian budget options, most midrange hotels here would be scraping by as bare-bones budget options in the Western world. They typically include a simple room with private bathroom and satellite TV, as well as an adequate restaurant, secure parking and a garden. Though usually clean and quiet, the majority are looking tired and run-down, and very rarely offer good value for money. Many are old 'tourist' hotels that were nationalised in the 1970s and '80s under the socialist Derg, and many still host the orange shag carpets of that era!

Worth singling out, however, is the Ghion Hotel Group. Its chain of hotels along the historical circuit (Bahir Dar's Tana Hotel, Gonder's Goha Hotel, Aksum's Yeha Hotel and Lalibela's Goha Hotel) provides the best accommodation in northern Ethiopia.

Each offers exceptional settings, attractive traditional designs and great service.

Several slick new privately owned mid-range options have cropped up in Arba Minch, Bahir Dar and Lalibela, so more are sure to follow.

### TOP END

There are several top-end options in Addis Ababa, including the five-star 'Luxury Collection' Sheraton Hotel that rivals anything on the continent for facilities and comfort. The nearby Hilton seems inconspicuously modest in comparison.

## ACTIVITIES

With two amazing 4000m mountain ranges and countless other peaks and valleys hosting unique wildlife, it's little wonder that trekking in Ethiopia has become a major activity. Rock climbing is also possible, but this sport is still in its infancy here. The waterways churning through Ethiopia's topographic delights play home to some fine rafting and fishing. Last but not least, the fact that Ethiopia's skies are blanketed with a plethora of endemic and migratory birds has led to a boom in bird-watching. If statistics are to be believed, more people come to Ethiopia to see its birds than to see anything else. Grab your binoculars and enjoy!

### Bird-Watching

The birds of Ethiopia are so numerous, so diverse and so colourful that they attract twitchers from around the globe. To do the birds and the art of bird-watching

justice, we've created a special boxed text, Ethiopia's Endemic Birds (p62). It highlights some of Ethiopia's most famous birds and gives you the lowdown on where to go to find them and when. The Animals section (p60) of the Environment chapter also delves into some of the species you'll spot while travelling through the country.

Some of Addis Ababa's tour agencies (p282), as well as some excellent agencies abroad, offer great bird-watching tours.

### Fishing

Ethiopia's lakes and rivers are home to over 200 species of freshwater fish, including very large catfish (up to 18kg), tilapia, large barbus, tigerfish, the brown and rainbow trout and the famously feisty Nile perch.

Fly-fishing, bait fishing with float and leger, freelining, threadline spinning and trolling are all permitted fishing practices, but you'll need to be totally self-sufficient as far as equipment is concerned.

Popular fishing spots include Lake Tana in the north and the Rift Valley lakes in the south. Fishing is permitted almost everywhere in Ethiopia, with the exception of rivers in the Bale Mountains National Park, where endemic species are found.

### Rock Climbing

There's untapped potential for rock climbing, particularly around Mekele in the region of Tigray, which offers sandstone climbs in the HVS - E2 (4-5c) range, though you'll have to come fully equipped and self-sufficient, and prepared to locate your own

### SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR TREKKING

Before embarking on a trek, consider the following points to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

- Pay any fees and possess any permits required by local authorities.
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable walking for a sustained period.
- Obtain reliable information about physical and environmental conditions along your intended route (eg from park authorities).
- Trek only in regions, and on trails, within your realm of experience.
- Be aware that weather conditions and terrain vary significantly from one region, or even from one trail, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any trail. These differences influence what you should wear and what equipment you carry.
- Ask officials before you set out about the environmental characteristics that can affect your trek and how you should deal with them if they arise.

### RESPONSIBLE TREKKING

Trekking in Ethiopia has the potential to put great pressure on the environment. You can help preserve the ecology and beauty of the area by taking note of the following information.

- Carry out all your rubbish. Never ever bury it.
- Minimise the waste you must carry out by taking minimal packaging and taking no more food than you'll need.
- Where there's no toilet, at lower elevations bury your faeces in a 15cm deep hole (consider carrying a lightweight trowel for this purpose). At higher altitudes soil lacks the organisms needed to digest your faeces, so leave your waste in the open where UV rays will break it down - spreading it facilitates the process. Always carry out your toilet paper (Ziplock bags are best). With either option make sure your faeces is at least 50m from any path, 100m from any watercourse and 200m from any building.
- Don't use detergents or toothpaste within 50m of watercourses, even if they're biodegradable.
- Stick to existing tracks and avoid short cuts that bypass a switchback. If you blaze a new trail straight down a slope, it will erode the hillside with the next heavy rainfall.
- Avoid removing any plant life as they keep topsoils in place.
- Try to cook on lightweight kerosene, alcohol or Shellite (white gas) stoves instead of burning dead Erica wood or eucalyptus. Never burn indigenous trees.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about wildlife and the environment.
- Never feed animals as it messes with their digestive system and leads them to become dependent on hand-outs.
- If camping, try to make camp on existing sites. Where none exist, set up away from streams on rock or bare ground, never over vegetation.

routes. Contact **Village Ethiopia** (☎ 0115 523497; www.village-ethiopia.com), which has catered to climbers in the past.

### Trekking

Trekking is the highlight of many people's trips to Ethiopia. Treks from a few days up to two weeks are regularly completed in the striking 4000m surroundings of Simien Mountains National Park (p125), while treks through the rich wildlife of Bale Mountains National Park (p181) typically last four to six days.

New horse treks in the western range of the Bale Mountains are now possible out of Dodola (p179). Also new on the scene are ecotreks around Lalibela (p163).

### White-Water Rafting & Kayaking

Rafting began in Ethiopia in the 1970s, when an American team rafted the Omo River in the southwest. Most Addis Ababa tour operators (p282) now run trips as do some international operators, such as the incredibly experienced **Remote River Expeditions** (www.remoterivers.com).

The Omo River rafting season is from September to October (after the heavy rains). Tours usually last from one to three weeks. The white water (classed as a comparatively tame three or four on the US scale) is not the main attraction, rather it is the exposure to wildlife (particularly birds) and tribal groups (such as those along the Omo River).

Shorter rafting trips can also be planned on the Blue Nile (a few days) and Awash (one or two days) Rivers. Although two historic expeditions have recently paddled the Blue Nile from Lake Tana to Khartoum and beyond to the Mediterranean, this journey won't be on any travel agency itinerary for a millennium or so.

In theory, excellent kayaking could be had on all the rivers mentioned earlier, but it's not for the inexperienced. Trips need to be well planned, well equipped and well backed up. In the past, some badly planned trips have gone tragically wrong. Get in touch with the Addis Ababa tour operators, which will put you in touch with experienced kayakers in Ethiopia.

### IN SEARCH OF SOUVENIRS

During the last several hundred years, thousands of manuscripts and other national treasures, including gold and silver crosses and even a giant stele (!), have left Ethiopia as 'souvenirs'. Most will probably never be recovered.

Today, tourists, antique dealers, professional thieves and even diplomats are responsible for the disappearance of works of art. In 1996 a German tourist removed several items from the National Museum at Aksum, and in March 1997 a Belgian tourist almost succeeded in removing Lalibela's famous 7kg gold cross. Things became so critical that the World Bank recently funded a four-year project to try and create a nationwide, computerised inventory of Ethiopia's treasures.

At the current rate of 'souvenir' removal, it's thought that Ethiopia will be bereft of most of her treasures by 2020. If you don't want to risk wasting money on a souvenir that can't leave the country have a look at the following list of banned souvenirs.

### List of Banned Souvenirs

The following list is adapted from the official catalogue of objects that are now denied export permits. Be warned that currently much parchment is being denied permission.

- Animal and plant fossils and any prehistoric items such as stone tools, bones or pottery.
- Anything of outstanding anthropological or ethnographical interest.
- Anything with an ancient inscription on it.
- Old processional or hand crosses that bear the names of kings or religious leaders; or any currently in use at churches or monasteries.
- Any items (including manuscripts, books, documents or religious objects such as chalices, crosses and incense burners) currently serving in churches.
- Any old wooden items.
- Coins and paper money not currently in circulation.
- Any endangered species or their products, such as ivory, tortoiseshell or leopard skins.
- Any items of exceptional artistic interest whether old or modern.
- Art with outstanding historical value, such as engravings with historical figures.
- Any items formerly belonging to the emperor, his family or to Ethiopian nobles

### Exportation Permits

Although you may have been told that you'll need an exportation permit from the Department of Inventory and Inspection at the National Museum if you plan to leave Ethiopia with anything that looks antique, this is no longer the case.

As of late 2005 customs officials at Bole International Airport and Addis Ababa's main post office, now trained in the art of antiquities, will make the determination as to whether your souvenir can leave Ethiopia. If you haven't declared questionable souvenirs and they're discovered by officials, you'll likely have the item confiscated and have a lot of explaining to do.

### BOOKS

One of the best-known books about Ethiopia is Graham Hancock's *The Sign and the Seal*. The author spent 10 years trying to solve one of the greatest mysteries of all time: the bizarre 'disappearance' of the Ark of the Covenant. Though the research and conclusions raised an eyebrow or two among historians, this detective story is very readable and gives a good overview

of Ethiopia's history and culture, however tenuous the facts!

Evelyn Waugh's *Remote People*, though rather dated now, includes some wry impressions of Ethiopia in the 1930s. *Waugh in Abyssinia* is based on the author's time as a correspondent covering the Italian-Ethiopian conflict in the 1930s.

The charming *A Cure for Serpents* by the Duke of Pirajno recounts the duke's time

as a doctor in the Horn and is beautifully and engagingly written. Episodes include encounters with famous courtesans, noble chieftains and giant elephants.

The newly reprinted (locally) *Ethiopian Journeys*, by the well-respected American writer Paul Henze, charts travels during the emperor's time. Recently published locally is *Off the Beaten Trail*, by John Graham, which is based on travels around the country during the author's time as an aid worker.

*In Search of King Solomon's Mines* entertainingly takes the reader through Debre Damo, Lalibela, Gonder and other exotic Ethiopian locations on author Tahir Shah's quest to find the mythical mines of Solomon.

Thomas Pakenham's fascination with the historical anecdotes revolving around Ethiopia's *ambas* (flat-topped mountains) is the basis of *The Mountains of Rasselas*, an engaging book on Ethiopia's history.

For the best travel literature see p16. Interesting Ethiopian history books are found in the sidebars of the History chapter (p26).

### BUSINESS HOURS

In general, banks, post offices and telecommunications offices are all open the core hours of 8.30am to 11am and 1.30pm to 3.30pm weekdays and from 8.30am to 11am Saturday, but many open earlier, close later or stay open for lunch.

Most government offices are open from around 8.30am to 12.30pm (to 11.30am Friday) and 1.30pm to 5.30pm Monday to Friday. Private organisations and NGOs open from 8am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm weekdays. Shops usually operate half an hour later. Outside Addis Ababa, restaurants typically open between 7am and 8am and close between 9.30pm and 10.30pm. Restaurant reviews in this guide won't list business hours unless they differ from these standards.

Cafés are typically open daily from 6am or 7am through to 8pm or 9pm, while *tej beats* (honey-wine bars) usually run daily from 10am to 10pm. Bars open from 6pm to midnight.

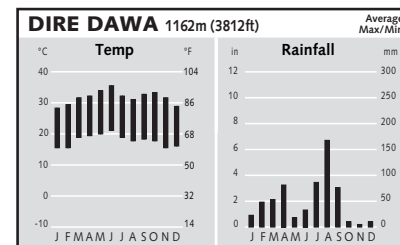
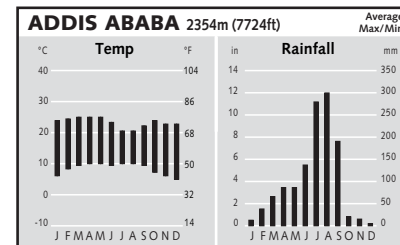
Internet cafés are typically open 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday. Some have limited hours on Sunday.

### CLIMATE CHARTS

Compared with other equatorial nations, Ethiopia's climate on the whole is very mild. Average daily temperatures on the wide-ranging highlands are below 20°C. It's only the lowland fringes in the east, south and west where daytime temperatures can soar past 30°C.

The majority of rains traditionally fall between mid-March and early October, with the central and western highlands receiving up to 1600mm annually. The far east and northern highlands only receive significant rainfall in July and August (400mm to 1000mm). The far south breaks the trend receiving most of its rain in April, May and October.

More information on weather patterns can be found in the Climate section of each destination chapter. See also the When to Go section, p14.



### COURSES

Unless you're living in Addis Ababa, there are really no courses of note in Ethiopia. It's likely due to the lack of demand – perhaps most travellers are just too busy trying to absorb the country's history, culture and nature while on the go!

For long stays, the Institute of Language Studies at Addis Ababa University offers four-month language courses (see p90).

## CUSTOMS

Upon arrival in Ethiopia, visitors must declare foreign currency. There's no limit to the amount of currency that can be brought in, but no more than Birr100 can be exported and imported. You may import 2L of spirits and 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars duty-free.

If you're bringing with you anything of value, such as a video camera or laptop computer, you may be required to register it on your passport as you enter Ethiopia at immigration (to deter black-market trading).

Leaving the country with certain souvenirs can be a problem (see the boxed text, p256).

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Compared with many African countries, Ethiopia and its capital, Addis Ababa, are remarkably safe places. Serious or violent crime is rare; against travellers it's extremely rare. Outside the capital, the risk of petty crime drops still further.

A simple traveller's tip? Always look as if you know where you're going. Thieves and con artists get wind of an uncertain newcomer in a minute.

Though the following list may be off-putting and alarming, it's very unlikely you'll encounter any serious difficulties – and even less likely if you're prepared for them.

### At the Airport

Commission-seeking taxi touts and guides can be a problem at most airports. Unless you want to take money from your pocket and put it straight in theirs, decide on the hotel you wish to stay before you step out of the airport and don't let them take you elsewhere. And always negotiate the taxi rate *before* you get in. The majority of Ethiopian taxi drivers are helpful, charming and honest.

### Begging & Giving

Many travellers find that the begging they encounter is one of the most distressing aspects of travel in poorer countries.

Ethiopia has its fair share of beggars. Some travellers resent being 'targeted' by beggars because they are foreign. However, the work of high-profile aid efforts has made this inevitable. Foreigners are often seen as dispensers of charity.

It's difficult to know when to give, to whom and how much. A good rule of thumb is to give how locals give; small coins dispensed to those who can't make a living, such as the disabled, the ill, the elderly and the blind. Handing out more only increases expectations and leads to more disappointment down the line.

If you don't want to donate money, say instead *igzabier yisteh/yistesh* (m/f; God bless you) with a slight bow of the head; this is a polite and acceptable way of declining to give.

Although it's hard, you should never give to children, whether it be money, sweets, pens, empty water bottles or food. Older Ethiopians are heartbroken seeing younger generations of children, who are no worse off than they were when they were young, begging for money, empty water bottles, food etc. Most children don't beg because they need the items, but because they can get the items. Being rewarded for this behaviour only pulls them from school, robs them of a traditional childhood and makes them believe they need hand-outs from Westerners (instead of growing up proud and self-reliant like past generations).

Yes, giving to kids puts a smile on their face, but you have to remember this is temporary and only leads to unhappiness in the future. If you really want to help children in need, you need to invest time and effort. This may involve visiting a community and finding out what materials the school needs. This allows teachers to distribute materials to those students actually in need. No, you won't see the joy on the child's face, but if you're giving for the right reason that should not be important.

### Civil Disturbances

Since the controversial government elections in May 2005, there have been two isolated occasions in Addis Ababa where large opposition protests have sparked violence. On 8 June 2005 at least 22 civilians were killed when police fired into crowds of protesters throwing stones. The fallout resulted in thousands of opposition party members, journalists and protestors being jailed.

A week of similar demonstrations in November 2005 resulted in police killing 46 and arresting thousands more. Although

Addis Ababa is once again quiet, travellers should monitor local news and stay clear of any mass demonstrations.

If you're concerned, check your government's latest security reports on countries (such as those published by the British Foreign Office).

### Land Mines

Most travellers have nothing to fear from mines, but those trekking in parts of Tigray or driving off-road in the Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia or along the Kenyan border should check with local village officials. Keep to well-worn routes when possible. A useful phrase might be *Fenji alle?* (Are there mines here?) Popular trekking areas such as the Simien and Bale Mountains National Parks are perfectly safe.

### Mobbing & Faranji Frenzy

The most wearisome annoyance in Ethiopia is the famous '*faranji frenzy*', which greets you at almost every turn. For the new arrival as much as for the old-timer, the phenomenon is distressing.

The shouts of 'You, you, you, you, YOU!' is what most raises the hackles of travellers. Bear in mind, however, that the Amharic equivalent (*Ante!/Anchee!*) is the colloquial way of catching someone's attention. In other words, it's not as rude and aggressive as it sounds in English.

It can also take the form of screaming, giggling, shouting or sniggering children. Like begging, there's no clear response. Ignoring it or, even better, treating it with humour is probably the best answer. Anger only provokes children more (there can be few things more tempting than a grumpy *faranji!*). An Amharic *hid!* (clear off!) for a boy, *hiji!* for a girl or *hidu!* for a group is the Ethiopian response, and sends children scuttling, but it can have the reverse effect, and is considered rather harsh from a foreigner.

If you're waiting for a bus and become a 'captive spectacle', trying to communicate with locals usually breaks the animal in a zoo feeling. You may just transform the howling mob into delightful and charming individuals.

Although you're never likely to get used to *faranji frenzy*, at least feel thankful that it's almost *never* aggressive or hostile.

## Scams

Compared to other African countries, Ethiopia has few scams and rip-offs to boast of. Those that do exist, like the siren scam (p84) in Addis Ababa and the notebook scam on the historical circuit (see p157), are pretty transparent and rather easily avoided.

You'll also hear many 'hard luck' stories, or those soliciting sponsorship for travel or education in Ethiopia or abroad. Although most are not genuine, some stories are sadly true, so don't be rude.

Also look out for fake antiques in the shops.

## Self-Appointed Guides

High unemployment has spawned many self-appointed and unofficial guides. You will be approached, accompanied for a while, given unasked-for information and then charged. Be wary of anyone who approaches you unasked, particularly at the exit of bus stations etc. Unfortunately, there's almost always an ulterior motive. Be polite but firm and try not to get paranoid!

## Shiftas

In some of the more remote areas, such as the southeast's Ogaden Desert, near the Kenyan border, along the Awash–Mille road at night, and in the far west, *shiftas* (bandits) are sometimes reported. However, most of these places lie far from the main tourist trails. In fact, tourists are very rarely targeted; indeed they are positively avoided for fear of government repercussions.

## Theft

Pickpocketing is the biggest concern, but is a problem mainly in Addis Ababa and other large towns, in particular Shashemene, Nazret and Dessie. For tips on thieves' tactics, see Addis Ababa's Dangers & Annoyances section (p84).

Keep an eye on your belongings at bus stations and be wary of people offering to put your bags on the bus roof. Be aware that professional thieves sometimes operate at major festivals and markets (such as Bati), targeting Ethiopians as well as foreigners.

A money belt is best for your passport and cash stash, but not for your daily spending money – keep that separate so you don't have to yank out your money belt each time you spend. It's also a good

## GUIDELINES FOR GUIDES

Although more official guides exist in Ethiopia today, particularly in the cities along the historical circuit, there are still countless unofficial 'guides' waiting at every corner.

Some of them resort to aggression, hysterics or sulking to extract money from tourists; others resort to hard-luck stories or appeals for 'sponsorship'. Others claim special expertise and that this and other guidebooks are wholly or partly 'wrong'. Some 'guides' in Addis Ababa have even conned apprehensive first-time travellers into taking them along for the entire historical circuit, at a cost of US\$20 per day!

Even if the unofficial guide is friendly, they'll know little in comparison to those who've been trained and will likely charge the same fee. Their lack of actual knowledge takes away from your trip and encourages unhealthy migration of potential 'guides' to towns.

Hiring children may seem like a nice way to help, but you're only giving them reason to miss school, and like unofficial guides, they have little knowledge that will benefit your trip.

If you don't want to be one of the many people writing to us with stories of a guide ruining your trip, here are a few tips:

- If possible, hire licensed guides.
- Choose a guide you're comfortable with. Test their knowledge of English and of the sites in advance, perhaps over a coffee.
- Before starting ensure that your expectations are clearly understood, such as what you want to see and how much time you have.
- Negotiate a fee in advance. Be aware that some may ask initially up to five times the going rate or more. Professional licensed guides' fees are set at Birr150 per day (one to four people) in Gonder and Lalibela. For a knowledgeable guide elsewhere, Birr10 per hour (minimum total fee of Birr20) is very fair. Check this book for quotes.
- If the service has been good, it's fair and polite to tip a bit extra at the end, but don't be pressured into it, particularly if the tour was poor. See the boxed text, p264.

idea to keep an emergency stash of US\$100 hidden somewhere.

## EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

### Ethiopian Embassies & Consulates

Ethiopia has diplomatic representation in the following countries:

**Australia** (☎ 03-9417 3419; www.consul.com.au/index.html; 38 Johnston Street, Fitzroy, Victoria 3065)

**Belgium** (☎ 02 77 132 94; etebru@brutele.be; 231 Ave de Tervuren, 1150 Brussels)

**Canada** (☎ 613-235 6637; Suite 210, 151 Slater St, Ottawa, K1P 5H3)

**Egypt** (☎ 02-335 3693; 6 Abdel Rahman Hussein St, El-Gomhuria Sq, Mohandiseen)

**France** (☎ 01 47 83 83 95; embeth@starnet.fr; 35 ave Charles Floquet, 75007, Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 030-772 060; Boothstr 20a, 12207, Berlin)

**Ireland** (☎ 01-677 7062; info@ethiopianembassy.ie; 1-3 Merrion House, Fitzwilliam St Lower, Dublin 2)

**Italy** (☎ 06 440 36 53; embethrm@rdn.it; 16-18 Via Andrea Vesalio, 00161, Rome)

**Kenya** (☎ 020-2732050; State House Ave, Nairobi)

**Sudan** (☎ 471156; Plot 4, Block 384 BC, Khartoum South)

**Sweden** (☎ 08-665 6030; ethio.embassy@telia.com; 17 Lojtnantsgatan, 115 50, Stockholm)

**UK** (☎ 020-7589 7212; 17 Prince's Gate, London, SW7 1PZ)

**USA** (☎ 202-364 1200; info@ethiopianembassy.org; 3506 International Drive, NW Washington DC 20008)

### Embassies & Consulates in Ethiopia

The following list isn't exhaustive (almost every African nation has representation in Addis Ababa), but it covers the embassies most of you will likely need.

**Australia** See Canada.

**Belgium** (Map p76; ☎ 0116 611643; embel.et@ethionet.et; Fikremariam Abatechan St)

**Canada** (Map p76; ☎ 0113 713022; addis@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; Seychelles St) Also represents Australia.

**Djibouti** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 613006; PO Box 1022) Off Bole Rd.

**Egypt** (Map p76; ☎ 0111 553077; egyptian.emb@ethionet.et; Madagascar St)

**Eritrea** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 512844; Ras Mekonen Ave) Currently closed.

**France** (Map p76; ☎ 0111 550066; amba.france@ethionet.et; PO Box 1464)

**Germany** (Map p76; ☎ 0111 550433; german.emb.addis@ethionet.et; PO Box 660)

**Italy** (Map p76; ☎ 0111 553042; italembadd@ethionet.et; PO Box 1105)

**Kenya** (Map p76; ☎ 0116 610033; kenigad@ethionet.et; Fikremariam Abatechan St)

**Netherlands** (Map p76; ☎ 0113 711100; netherlands.emb@ethionet.et) Off Ring Rd.

**Somaliland** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 635921; btwn Bole Rd & Cameron St)

**Spain** (Map p76; ☎ 0115 550222; embaespet@mail.mae.es; Botswana St)

**Sudan** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 516477; sudan.embassy@ethionet.et; Ras Lulseged St)

**Sweden** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 511255; sweden.embassy@ethionet.et; Yared St)

**Switzerland** (Map p76; ☎ 0113 711107; vertretung@add.rep.adm.ch; Ring Rd)

**UK** (Map p76; ☎ 0116 612354; britishembassy.addisababa@fco.gov.uk; Fikremariam Abatechan St)

**USA** (Map p76; ☎ 0115 174000; http://addisababa.usembassy.gov; Algeria St)

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Islamic holidays are not particularly conspicuous in Ethiopia but they are important events for the Muslim population. Festivals include Ras as-Sana (Muslim New Year), Mawlid an-Nabi (Prophet's birthday), Lailat al-Mira'ji (Prophet's Ascension), Eid al-Fitr (marking Ramadan's end) and Eid al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice).

Major Ethiopian Orthodox festivals include the following:

### January

**Leddet** (also known as Genna or Christmas) 6–7 January. Although less important than Timkat and Meskel, Leddet is still significant. The faithful attend all-night church services, often moving from one church to another. On Christmas day, the traditional games of *genna* (a kind of hockey) and sometimes *gugs* (a kind of polo) are played, along with horse racing. Priests don their full regalia. Lalibela is one of the best places to experience Leddet; Addis Ababa is also good.

**Timkat** (Epiphany, celebrating Christ's baptism) 19 January. This three-day festival is the most colourful of the year. The church *tabots* (replicas of the Ark of the Covenant) are taken to a nearby body of water on the afternoon of the eve of Timkat. During the night, the priests and faithful participate in a vigil around the *tabots*. The following morning, the crowds gather around the water, which is blessed, then splashed onto them; religious vows are renewed. The *tabot* is then paraded back to the church accompanied by much singing and dancing. Gonder is considered the best place to be for Timkat; Addis Ababa is also good (head for Jan Meda; p103).

### March–April

**Good Friday** March/April. From Thursday evening before Good Friday, the faithful fast until the Easter service, which ends at 3am on Easter Sunday.

**Fasika** (Orthodox Easter) March/April. Fasika marks the end of a vegetarian fast of 55 days, in which no animal product is eaten. Officially, nothing should be consumed until the daily church service finishes at around 3pm. In the past, many of Ethiopia's enemies took advantage of the fasting period to inflict heavy casualties on its weakened armies.

### September

**Kiddus Yohannes** (New Year's Day) 11 September. Ethiopian New Year (also known as Enkutatash) is an important family and social event. Traditionally, new clothes are bought for the occasion, particularly for the children, and relatives and friends are visited. Special feasts are prepared. The traditional game of *gugs* can sometimes be seen.

**Meskel** (Finding of the True Cross) 27 September. This two-day festival is the most colourful festival after Timkat. Bonfires are built topped by a cross to which flowers are tied, most commonly the Meskel daisy. After the bonfires are blessed, they are lit, and dancing and singing begins around them. Priests don their full regalia. Addis Ababa, Gonder and Aksum are good places to experience Meskel.

### November

**Festival of Maryam Zion** 30 November. This is one of Ethiopia's largest festivals, though it's only celebrated in Aksum. See p141 for details.

### MAJOR ISLAMIC HOLIDAYS

Islamic year	New Year	Prophet's Birthday	Prophet's Ascension	End of Ramadan	Festival of Sacrifice
1428	20 Jan 07	31 Mar 07	10 Aug 07	13 Oct 07	20 Dec 07
1429	10 Jan 08	20 Mar 08	31 Jul 08	02 Oct 08	9 Dec 08
1430	29 Dec 09	09 Mar 09	20 Jul 09	21 Sep 09	28 Nov 09

**December**

**Kulubi Gabriel** 28 December. Although not on the official religious holiday list, large numbers of Ethiopians make a pilgrimage to the venerated Kulubi Gabriel church near Dire Dawa in the east (see the boxed text, p225). If you're in the area, don't miss it.

**FOOD**

For information on what you'll find heaped atop your *injera*, see p68. What's *injera*? Turn to p68! Get the picture?

Eating out in Ethiopia is ridiculously cheap, with local meals in remote areas costing you less than US\$1. In large regional cities a local meal will ding you US\$1.50, while a Western meal will rob you of an extra 50¢. If you pull out all the stops and dine on succulent braised lamb with caramelised onions, lentils, lemon and *raison orange* couscous in Addis Ababa's best restaurant, you'll be out about US\$8.

In this book restaurants are listed solely in order of author preference, with Addis Ababa being the only exception. There, restaurants are ordered first by style of food (Ethiopian, Italian, Indian etc), second by neighbourhood and lastly by author preference.

If cafés are more known for their pastries and cakes, they'll fall under Eating. Conversely, if it's their coffee or juices that shine, you'll find them under Drinking.

**GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS**

In Ethiopia and Eritrea, homosexuality is severely condemned – traditionally, religiously and legally – and remains a topic of absolute taboo. Don't underestimate the strength of feeling. Reports of gays being beaten up aren't uncommon. In Amharic, the word *bushti* (homosexual) is a very offensive insult, implying immorality and depravity. One traveller wrote to us to report expulsion from a hotel and serious threats just for coming under suspicion. If a hotel only offers double beds, rather than twins, you and your companion will pay more or may even be refused occupancy.

Women may have an easier time: even the idea of a lesbian relationship is beyond the permitted imaginings of many Ethiopians! Behave discreetly, and you will be assumed to be just friends.

Note that the Ethiopian penal code officially prohibits homosexual acts, with penalties of between 10 days' and 10 years'

imprisonment for various 'crimes'. Although gay locals obviously exist, they behave with extreme discretion and caution. Gay travellers are advised to do likewise.

Information on homosexuality in the Horn is hard to come by, even in the well-known gay publications. Try the **International Lesbian & Gay Association** (ILGA; www.ilga.org) for more information.

**HOLIDAYS**

Ethiopia's public holidays can be divided into three categories: national secular holidays, Christian Orthodox festivals (p261) and Islamic holidays (see the boxed text, p261). During the Christian Orthodox festivals, accommodation is hard to come by in Gonder, Aksum and Lalibela, as are open seats on internal flights. While prices rise for rooms during these times, transportation costs remain the same. It's best to book flights as far in advance as possible to avoid problems. See the relevant towns' sections for more details.

National holidays include the following:  
**Victory of Adwa Commemoration Day** 2 March  
**International Labour Day** 1 May  
**Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day** (also known as Liberation Day) 5 May  
**Downfall of the Derg** 28 May

**INSURANCE**

A travel-insurance policy for all medical problems is essential for travel in Ethiopia, while one to cover theft and loss really is helpful but not vital. For information on medical insurance, see p369.

Vehicle insurance is covered on p280.

Worldwide cover to travellers from over 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\_services.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

Internet in Ethiopia is like a pimple on your wedding day – it's always found where everyone looks and never where nobody can see. In English? Internet is everywhere in Addis Ababa, pretty easy to spot in major towns and nonexistent in places that see few tourists. Most are open 8am to 8pm Monday to Saturday. Some open limited hours on Sunday.

Connections are still on the slow side and costs range from Birr0.20 to Birr0.30 per minute in most places. The exceptions

are Aksum (Birr1 per minute) and Lalibela (Birr2 per minute).

For those with laptops, only the Sheraton and Hilton in Addis Ababa have facilities for you to go online.

See also Internet Resources, p17.

**LEGAL MATTERS**

Remember that when in Ethiopia, you're subject to Ethiopian laws. If you're arrested, you must in theory be brought to court within 48 hours. You have the right to talk to someone from your embassy as well as a lawyer. For the most part, police in Ethiopia will show you as much respect as you show them. If confronted by the police, always maintain your cool, smile and be polite. Compared with some other African nations, police here rarely, if ever, ask for bribes (we've yet to experience it).

**Alcohol**

Alcohol cannot be served to anyone under 18 years of age in Ethiopia. Disturbance caused by those under the influence of alcohol is punishable by three months' to one year's imprisonment. Driving while under the influence attracts a fine of around Birr150.

**Drugs**

Penalties for possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs (including hashish) are strictly enforced in Ethiopia. Convicted offenders can expect both fines and long jail sentences.

Consumption of the mildly stimulating leaf *chat* is permitted in Ethiopia, but not in Eritrea.

**MAPS**

For simply travelling around the country on public transport, the maps in this guidebook should suffice. For those of you venturing off into the nether regions with 4WDs, a good map is essential. Since trekking without a scout is illegal in the Simien and Bale Mountains, additional maps aren't necessary, though topographic maps (see the parks' relevant sections for details) can help you plan your routes with more precision.

In Ethiopia, the map produced by the defunct Ethiopian Tourism Commission (1987; 1:2,000,000) isn't bad and can be picked up in some Addis Ababa hotels or

in the gift shop (p104) next to the Tourist Information Centre in Addis for Birr61.

A more accurate map (although it lacks distance labels between cities) of the same scale is available from the Ethiopia Mapping Authority (p78) in Addis Ababa for Birr28.75.

Of the maps currently available outside the country, the best is that produced by International Travel Maps (1998; 1:2,000,000). It's much more up to date than both maps available in Ethiopia.

The Cartographia map of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti (1996; 1:2,500,000) comes second, and isn't a bad choice for the region.

Most major map suppliers stock maps produced outside Ethiopia, including **Stanfords** (☎ 020-7836 1321; www.stanfords.co.uk) in London.

**MONEY**

Ethiopia's currency is the birr. It's divided into 100 cents in 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 cent coins, and there are 1, 5, 10, 50 and 100 birr notes. Despite a weekly auction determining exchange rates, the birr is one of Africa's most stable currencies.

See the inside front cover for exchange rates and p14 for details about the costs of travel.

According to National Bank of Ethiopia regulations, all bills in Ethiopia must be paid in birr. This isn't enforced and Ethiopian Airlines, most major hotels, most travel agencies and even the Department of Immigration accept (and sometimes demand!) US currency.

One regulation that's strictly enforced is the conversion of birr to US dollars or euros; this transaction can only be done for people holding onward air tickets from Ethiopia. This means people leaving overland must budget accordingly. There are black-market traders around the borders, but rates are poor and it's risky (see below).

**ATMs**

There are no ATMs in the country that accept foreign cards.

**Black Market**

The black market is in decline as the official and free rates for the Ethiopian birr converge. It's rare to be offered a rate much above 10% more than that offered by the banks.

### TIPS FOR TIPPING

Tipping can be a constant source of worry, hassle or stress for travellers. This guide has been compiled with the help of Ethiopians.

- In the smaller restaurants in the towns, service is included, and Ethiopians don't tip unless the service has been exceptional (up to 10%).
- In bars and cafés, sometimes loose coins are left. However, in the larger restaurants accustomed to tourists, 10% will be expected.
- In Addis Ababa's midrange and top-end hotels, staff will expect a minimum Birr10 per service.
- Outside Addis Ababa, midrange and top-end hotels' luggage handlers will expect a tip of around Birr2 to Birr5 per bag, and people acting as impromptu guides around Birr10.
- For the assistance of a child, Birr1 or Birr2 is plenty.
- At traditional music and dance shows in bars, restaurants and hotels, an audience shows its appreciation by placing money (around Birr10) on the dancers' foreheads or in their belts.
- Taxi drivers in Addis Ababa expect around Birr2 added to the fare; car 'guards' (often self-appointed) expect the same.
- Drivers of 4WD rental vehicles make around Birr70 per day in salary, so a tip of Birr30 to Birr50 per day is generous for quality service.
- If the service has been good at the end of the trek, a rule of thumb for tipping guides/scouts/mule handlers might be an extra day's pay for every three days' work.
- Professional English-/German-/Italian-speaking guides hired from Addis Ababa travel agencies for multiday 4WD tours make around Birr200 per day, so a nice tip would be Birr50 to Birr70 per day.

The black market is illegal; penalties range from hefty fines to imprisonment. If you do indulge, stick to the shops, and be wary of other places, particularly Merkato and the Piazza in Addis Ababa, where's there's a good chance of being swindled or robbed.

### Cash

As with many African countries the US dollar is the preferred foreign currency in Ethiopia. You'll have no trouble exchanging US cash wherever there are forex facilities. Euros are gaining in popularity, but they're still more of a hassle to change and less banks accept them. The same can be said for pounds sterling.

Although more banks in Ethiopia change cash than travellers cheques, you will usually end up getting slightly worse rates for cash.

### Credit Cards

Credit cards (Visa and MasterCard) are only mildly useful in Addis Ababa and completely useless (with the exception of some Ethiopian Airlines offices) outside it. The travel agencies, airline offices and major

hotels that do accept cards typically ding you 5% extra for the privilege of plastic.

Cash advances are only possible at a couple of branches of the Dashen Bank in the capital (5.5% commission). Only Addis Ababa's Sheraton can give you US dollars instead of birr.

### Tipping

Tips (*gursha* in Amharic) are considered a part of everyday life in Ethiopia, and help supplement often very low wages. The maxim 'little but often' is a good one, and even very small tips are greatly appreciated. It's a great mistake to overtip: it unfairly raises the expectations of locals, undermines the social traditions and may spoil the trips of future travellers. Local guides can start to select only those tourists who look lucrative, and can react very aggressively if their expectations aren't met.

If a professional person helps you (or someone drawing a regular wage), it's probably better to show your appreciation in other ways: shaking hands, exchanging names, or an invitation to have a coffee and pastry are all local ways of expressing gratitude.

Furnishing yourself with a good wad of small notes – Birr1 and Birr5 – is a very good idea. You'll need these for tips, taking photographs etc. You should budget around Birr50 for tips per week.

### Travellers Cheques

Most banks in Addis Ababa and the larger towns (but not smaller ones) exchange travellers cheques. In the capital, a few major hotels and travel agencies also accept them. Like cash, travellers cheques are best carried in US dollars.

Almost all of the banks charge from 0.5% to 1.0% commission for travellers cheques, plus around Birr8 per cheque. In general, the Commercial Bank levies the lowest charges, with private banks charging slightly more. It's always worth asking what the 'fixed fees' are (this term is better understood than 'commissions') before signing your cheques.

### PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

With the boom of digital photography, some Internet cafés now offer to burn your images to CD through a USB connection. They charge between Birr4 and Birr15 for the service, Birr10 more if you need a CD. We've noted which cafés offer this service in their respective reviews.

Decent print film is quite widely available in the capital and costs around Birr40 for a 36-exposure Kodak film. Some slide film is also available. Outside Addis Ababa, it's difficult to find film except in the larger towns, and products may not always be fresh.

For some helpful advice on photography in the region, see the boxed text, p266.

### POST

Ethiopia's postal system is reliable and reasonably efficient. Airmail costs Birr2 for postcards; Birr2 for a letter up to 20g to Africa, Birr2.45 to Europe and the Middle East, and Birr3.45 to the Americas, Australia and Asia. Letters should take between five and eight days to arrive in Europe; eight to 15 days for the USA or Australia.

International parcels can only be sent from the main post office in Addis Ababa. Surface mail takes between five and seven months to reach Europe. Posting a small parcel of between 1kg and 2kg costs Birr13.90 worldwide.

Prices of airmail parcels are different for each country, with a 1kg parcel to Australia/Canada/UK/Italy costing Birr190.50/209.65/205.55/170.55. For each extra 500g to the same countries you'll pay approximately Birr50/51/38/24. All parcels are subject to a customs inspection, so leave them open until you've had their contents inspected at the counter.

Express courier service is available in Addis Ababa, with Express Mail Service (EMS) and DHL. See p83 for more information on this.

There's a free poste restante service in Addis Ababa (address mail to 'Poste Restante, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia') and in many of the larger towns. When you collect it, it will likely be under your first name instead of your surname.

### SHOPPING

Ethiopia has rich history of arts and crafts. To get an idea of what will be sold throughout the country see p58. To see the top end of quality and artistry, visit the Ethnological Museum in Addis Ababa (p84) before hitting the markets and shops.

Good souvenir shops are found in the capital as well as major towns on the historical circuit. Quality and creativity ranges from poor to very high, so it's worth comparing shops and wares. Prices always depend on your skills of negotiation. Don't forget the export regulations (see the boxed text, p256). While not illegal, you should try and avoid buying crafts made from indigenous woods.

The *gabi* (white cotton toga worn by the highlanders) makes a great (albeit bulky) travelling companion. It serves as a blanket, pillow, mattress, cushion (on long bus journeys) and wrap against the cold.

### Bargaining

Prices are usually fixed in Ethiopia. Haggling over prices can sometimes greatly offend Ethiopians. All the usual discounts apply for long stays in hotels, low season, extended car hire etc though, and you shouldn't hesitate to ask for them in these instances.

The few exceptions, where haggling is almost expected, are at the local markets and with the local taxi and *gari* (horse-drawn cart) drivers. Don't forget that haggling is meant to be an enjoyable experience. Just remember the aim is not to get the lowest

### TIPS FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS IN ETHIOPIA

Many Ethiopians, particularly outside Addis Ababa, are unused to tourists pointing the camera at them. Many feel seriously threatened or compromised, especially women. Be sensitive. Always try and ask permission, even if it is only using basic sign language. Best of all, use a local as an interpreter or go-between. Never take a photo if permission is declined.

In other areas, where people are starting to depend on tourists for income, the opposite is true. In the Lower Omo Valley, you'll be chased by people demanding their photo be taken! However, their eagerness has to do with the fee they'll claim for each snap of the shutter (around Birr1 to Birr2 per person per picture). Always agree to an amount first. The whole mercenary and almost voyeuristic affair can be rather off-putting for many travellers.

People with guides typically have a more enjoyable time, as the guides can usually sort out fees for individual photos, or better yet, a lump sum for unlimited (and unpestered) shots. Some people recommend giving their camera to the guide, who'll usually have an easier time getting shots while you happily wander. Remember that the local people have a right to benefit from tourism. In fact, it's money bargained for photos instead of money bargained for crops. Tourism may even help to preserve the groups and their traditions by assisting them economically.

Be aware that it's strictly forbidden to photograph 'sensitive areas', including military and police installations and personnel, industrial buildings, government buildings, residences and royal palaces; and major 'infrastructure' such as bridges, dams, airports. Penalties for contravening this law range from confiscation of film and camera, to between three months' and one year's imprisonment!

Following is some less social and more technical advice.

- Never leave equipment or film in a car or in the hot Ethiopian sun. High temperatures can wreck equipment and play havoc with film colour.
- The morning and late afternoon are the best times to take photos in Ethiopia, ideally before 8am and after 4pm. The light is gentler and there's less contrast between light and shade.
- Spot-metering – if you have it – is great for photographing faces, particularly dark ones in difficult conditions.
- Ethiopia's many hours of sun each day permit the use of slow film (such as ISO50 for slide film or ISO100 for print film), which can yield clear, fine-grained and colour-saturated pictures.
- A flash is useful for indoor scenes such as the *azmaris* (wandering minstrels) or dance spectacles in Addis Ababa.
- A small zoom lens of some sort is great, both for wildlife and for photographing Ethiopia's colourful people (but don't forget to show sensitivity and tact).
- Bring plenty of batteries with you. Outside the capitals, batteries are often old, and of very poor quality.
- Beware dust which can wreak havoc with the electronics. A UV filter on each lens is essential as a protector as well as a filter. A dust blower (either compressed air or manual) is a must, as is a decent lens cloth.
- For the full monty on travel photography, pick up Lonely Planet's *Travel Photography*.

possible price, but one that's acceptable to both you and the seller. If you're light-hearted and polite about it, you'll end up with a much better price!

### SOLO TRAVELLERS

Travelling solo in Ethiopia can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be more expensive. There are no cheap organised tours for solo travellers to just sign up for

in Ethiopia. If you have a group, you can do a trip together and share costs. If you're alone, you'll have to find people to share with or cover all the costs yourself. The biggest cost issue is transport. If you have limited time and still want to explore areas such as the Lower Omo Valley and remote rock-hewn churches of Tigray, you'll have to shoulder the cost of an expensive 4WD hire yourself.

Similar problems arise for boat trips onto Lake Tana and the Rift Valley lakes as well as with treks into the Simien and Bale Mountains, where transport, guide fees, tent rental etc must be borne individually. However, in the cases of Lake Tana and the Simien Mountains, you'll usually have an easy time locating people to share costs in Bahir Dar and Gonder respectively.

Few hotels offer single occupancy rates, so you'll be paying double what you'd be paying if you were sharing. It should be noted that double rates are still very inexpensive!

Although travelling alone puts you at greater risk for petty theft (which still isn't high), it also increases the number of Ethiopians who'll be looking out for your welfare. For specific details about travelling alone as a female, see p270.

The biggest benefit of travelling solo is that you'll unintentionally be more open to conversing with locals. A distant second-place finisher would have to be all the times you manage to get the last seat on the last bus heading somewhere special.

### TELEPHONE

Ethiopia's telecommunications have started to turn the corner; there are now a couple of options for making local and international calls. In the past, the only way to make an international call was through the telecommunications offices located in almost every Ethiopian town. These offices are still the cheapest option (Birr50.50 for the first three minutes and Birr10 for each minute after, plus 15% tax), but these operator-assisted centres can have waits of up to an hour.

Now countless shops also operate as 'telecentres' and can quickly connect you anywhere worldwide for Birr15 to Birr25 per minute. These telecentres also usually boast more flexible opening hours. Some hotels offer phone services but they are usually at least 20% more expensive.

When calling abroad from Ethiopia, use ☎ 00 followed by the appropriate country code. Collect calls are only available at the telecommunications offices and can be made to the UK, USA and Canada only (Australia, Germany and France should be possible in the near future); you still have to pay a 'report charge' of Birr5 to Birr8, plus a Birr10 (refundable) deposit.

Cheap local calls can also be made from telecommunications offices, telecentres and public phone boxes. Most boxes take both coins and cards (sold at the telecommunications offices in denominations of Birr25, Birr50 and Birr100).

Note: all Ethiopian numbers were changed in 2005 to have 10 digits. The old six-digit numbers now trail a new four-digit area code that must always precede the old number, no matter where you're calling from.

Important telephone numbers and Ethiopia's country code are inside this book's front cover.

### Mobile Phones

The speed with which Ethiopia's mobile phone network has expanded would make Starbucks blush. It now covers most Ethiopian cities. Depending on which mobile network you use at home, your phone may or may not work while in Ethiopia. Your best plan is to call your mobile network provider and ask. If your network isn't compatible, you can bring your phone and try to pick up a SIM card while in Addis Ababa.

### TIME

Ethiopia is three hours ahead of GMT/UTC.

Time is expressed so sanely in Ethiopia that it blows most travellers' minds! At sunrise it's 12 o'clock (6am our time) and after one hour of sunshine it's 1 o'clock. After two hours of sunshine? Yes, 2 o'clock. The sun sets at 12 o'clock (6pm our time) and after one hour of darkness it's...1 o'clock! Instead of using 'am' or 'pm', Ethiopians use 'in the morning', 'in the evening' and 'at night' to indicate the period of day.

The system is used widely, though the 24-hour clock is used occasionally in business. Be careful to ask if a time quoted is according to the Ethiopian or 'European' clock (*Be habesha/faranji akotater no?* – Is that Ethiopian/foreigner's time?). For the purposes of this book, all times quoted are by the European clock.

### TOILETS

Both sit-down and squat toilets are found in Ethiopia, reflecting European and Arab influences respectively. You'll usually only find squat jobs in the bottom end of the budget hotel bracket.



**MISSED THE MILLENNIUM PARTY?**

Another great Ethiopian time-keeping idiosyncrasy that confounds many a traveller is the calendar. It's based on the old Coptic calendar, which has its roots in ancient Egypt. Although it has 12 months of 30 days each and a 13th month of five or six days, like the ancient Coptic calendar, it follows the Julian system of adding a leap day every four years without exception.

What makes the Ethiopian calendar even more unique is that it wasn't tweaked by numerous popes to align with their versions of Christianity, like the Gregorian calendar (introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582) that we Westerners have grown up on.

What does this all mean? It means the Ethiopian calendar is 7½ years 'behind' the Gregorian calendar, making 11 September 2006 to 10 September 2007 '1999' in Ethiopia. If you hurry, you can say goodbye to the 1990s and ring in the year 2000...AGAIN!

If you're late, at least you can still consider yourself seven years younger!

Public toilets are found in almost all hotels and restaurants, but may not form your fondest memories of Ethiopia. In small towns and rural areas, the most common arrangement is a smelly old shack, with two planks, a hole in the ground, and all the flies you can fit in between. You may suddenly find that you can survive the next 1000km after all.

Toilet paper is very rare in any toilet; you're best advised to carry your own.

**TOURIST INFORMATION**  
**Local Tourist Offices**

In 2005 the Ethiopian government unceremoniously sacked the heads of the Ethiopian Tourism Commission (ETC) and created the new Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Thankfully, this ministry will continue to keep open the ETC's ever-helpful Tourist Information Centre in Addis Ababa's Meskal Sq (see p83).

The offices of the Tigray Tourism Commission in Aksum, Mekele and Wukro have to be the most helpful and prepared. Other tourist offices exist elsewhere, but few are worth the effort of visiting (Konso's and Arba Minch's being the exceptions).

While in Addis Ababa, the most accurate information on travel outside the capital region is available through tour operators (see p282), though naturally they will expect to sell you something. Outside Addis Ababa, hotel managers and the traveller grapevine are your best sources for up-to-date information.

**Tourist Offices Abroad**

No national tourist office exists abroad. The Ethiopian embassies and consulates try to

fill the gap, but generally just hand out the usual tourist brochures.

An active, nonpolitical organisation in the UK is the **Anglo-Ethiopian Society** ([www.anglo-ethiopian.org](http://www.anglo-ethiopian.org); PO Box 55506, London SW7 4YP), which aims 'to foster a knowledge and understanding of Ethiopia and its people'. Membership costs from £12 annually. The society holds regular gatherings, including talks on Ethiopia. A well-stocked library on Ethiopia and Eritrea is open to members. There's a tri-annual Newsfile.

**TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES**

There's no reason why intrepid disabled travellers shouldn't visit Ethiopia. The recent civil war left many soldiers disabled, so you should expect to find at least some degree of empathy and understanding.

For those with restricted mobility, all the sites on the historical route are easily reached by internal flights. Passengers in wheelchairs can be accommodated. Car rental with a driver is easily organised (though it's expensive). Be aware that some roads can be rough, and hard on the back.

Taxis are widely available in the large towns and are good for getting around. None have wheelchair access. In Addis Ababa a few hotels have lifts; at least two (the Sheraton and Hilton hotels) have facilities for wheelchair-users. Kerb ramps on streets are nonexistent, and potholes and uneven streets are a hazard.

Outside the capital, facilities are lacking, but many hotels are bungalow affairs, so at least steps or climbs are avoided.

For those restricted in other ways, such as visually or aurally, you'll get plenty of offers of help. Unlike in many Western

countries, Ethiopians are not shy about coming forward to offer assistance.

A valuable source of general information is the **Access-Able Travel Source** ([www.access-able.com](http://www.access-able.com)). This site has useful links.

Before leaving home, visitors can get in touch with their national support organisation. Ask for the 'travel officer', who may have a list of travel agents that specialise in tours for the disabled.

**VISAS & DOCUMENTS**

Be aware that visa regulations can change. The Ethiopian embassy in your home country is the best source of up-to-date information.

Currently, all visitors except Kenyan and Djiboutian nationals need visas to visit Ethiopia.

Nationals of 33 countries can obtain tourist visas on arrival at Bole International Airport. These include most of Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Israel. Although the process upon arrival can occasionally be tiresome, the one-month tourist visa is only US\$20, substantially less than that charged at some Ethiopian embassies abroad. Some people arriving without US dollars have managed to pay the visa in euros. Immigration officials in Addis Ababa told us that they don't require onward air tickets, though some people have been asked for them.

Ethiopian embassies abroad may require some or all of the following to accompany visa applications: an onward air ticket (or airline itinerary), a visa for the next country you're planning to visit, a yellow fever vaccination certificate and proof of sufficient funds (officially a minimum of US\$50 per day). Ethiopian embassies in Africa are usually less strict.

Presently, the only multiple-entry visas issued are business visas (except for US citizens who can get two-year multiple entry tourist visas for US\$70). To acquire a one- to three-month business visa at an embassy you'll need a letter from your employer in addition to the items mentioned earlier. One-month business visas (US\$20) are available upon arrival at the airport, but only if your company has made arrangements (in person) with the Department of Immigration in Addis Ababa prior to your arrival.

If your citizenship isn't one of the 33 that can acquire a visa at Bole and there's also no Ethiopian diplomatic representation in your country, you may be able to ask Ethiopian Airlines or a tour operator to order you a visa before your arrival. Visas cannot be obtained on arrival without prior arrangement at immigration.

Travellers of all nationalities can obtain transit visas on arrival or at the embassies abroad; these are valid for up to seven days.

Visas (tourist and business) can be extended to a maximum of three months (see Visa Extensions, p83).

**Other Documents**

In theory a yellow fever vaccination certificate is mandatory as is a vaccination against cholera if you've transited through a cholera-infected area within six days prior to your arrival in Ethiopia. These are rarely checked, but you probably wouldn't want to risk it.

Documentation needed to bring a vehicle into Ethiopia is covered on p279.

All important documents (passport data page and visa page, credit cards, travel insurance policy, air/bus/train tickets, driving licence etc) should be photocopied. Leave one copy with someone at home and keep another with you, separate from the originals.

**Visas for Onward Travel****DJIBOUTI**

Bring US\$30 and two passport photos to the **Djibouti Embassy** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 613006; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-4.30pm Mon-Fri) and you'll usually have your visa the same day. It's off Bole Rd.

**KENYA**

The **Kenyan embassy** (Map p76; ☎ 0116 610033; kenigad@ethionet.et; Fikremariam Abatehan St; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) charges US\$50 or Birr438 for three-month tourist visas. One passport photo is required. Applications are taken in the morning only, with visas being ready the following afternoon. Visas are also easily obtained at the Moyale border (p275) and at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi.

**SOMALILAND**

The **Somaliland office** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 635921; btwn Bole Rd & Cameroon St; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2-3.30pm Mon-Fri) produces tourist visas for

US\$40. They require one passport photo and it takes 24 hours or less to process. The office is unmarked, so call ahead and they'll send someone to meet you.

### SUDAN

Obtaining a visa at the **Sudan embassy** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 516477; sudan.embassy@ethionet.et; Ras Lulseged St; ☒ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) is no longer an easy task. All applications are sent to Khartoum for approval, so the process can take over a month to complete. Note that many applications come back denied. A letter of introduction from your own embassy may speed things along. Tourist visas cost US\$61 and one passport photo is required.

### WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Compared with many African countries, Ethiopia is pretty easy-going for women travellers. The risk of rape or other serious offences is likely lower than travelling in many Western countries. The best advice is to simply be aware of the signals your clothing or behaviour may be giving off and remember these unspoken codes of etiquette.

Drinking alcohol, smoking, and wearing excessive make-up and revealing clothes are indications to the male population of 'availability', as this is also the way local prostitutes behave. Apart from the young of the wealthier classes in Addis Ababa, no 'proper' woman would be seen in a bar.

Many cheap hotels in Ethiopia double as brothels. Ethiopian men may naturally wonder about your motives for staying here, particularly if you're alone. While there's no cause for alarm, it's best to keep a low profile and behave very conservatively – keep out of the hotel bar for example, and try and hook up with other travellers if you want to go out.

Also be aware that accepting an invitation to an unmarried man's house, under any pretext, is considered a latent acceptance of things to come. Dinner invitations often amount to 'foreplay' before you're expected to head off to some seedy hotel. Even a seemingly innocent invitation to the cinema can turn out to be little more than an invitation to a good snog in the back row!

Be aware that 'respectable' Ethiopian women (even when they're willing) are expected to put up a show of coyness and modesty. Traditionally, this formed part

### FEMALE PHOBIA

In some of the monasteries and holy sites of Ethiopia and Eritrea, an ancient prohibition forbids women from setting foot in the holy confines. But the holy fathers go strictly by the book: the prohibition extends not just to women but to all female creatures, even she donkeys, hens and nanny goats.

of the wedding night ritual of every Amhara bride: a fierce struggle with the groom was expected of them. Consequently, some Ethiopian men may mistake your rebuttals for encouragement. The concept even has a name in Amharic: *maqderder* (and applies equally to feigned reluctance for other things such as food). If you mean no, make it very clear from the start.

If there aren't any other travellers around, here's a quick trick: pick a male Ethiopian companion, bemoan the problems you've been having with his compatriots and appeal to his sense of pride, patriotism and gallantry. Usually any ulterior plans he might have been harbouring himself are soon converted into sympathy or shame and a personal crusade to protect you!

Adultery is quite common among many of Ethiopia's urban population, for men as well as women. For this reason, a wedding ring on a woman traveller (bogus or not) has absolutely no deterrent value. In fact, quite the reverse!

The one advantage of Ethiopia being a relatively permissive society is that Western women (in particular white women) aren't necessarily seen as easier than local women, something that's common in many developing countries due to Hollywood cinematic 'glamour'.

With all this talk of keeping Ethiopian men's potential advances at bay, it's odd that the biggest actual hindrance to women travellers is priests! See the boxed text, above.

### WORK

Travellers in Ethiopia on tourist visas are forbidden from working. If you're planning to work, you'll have to apply to the **Ministry of Labour & Social Affairs** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 517080; Josif Tito St, Addis Ababa) for a work permit, and to the **Department of Immigration** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0111 553899; Addis Ababa), off Zambia St.

# Ethiopia Transport

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## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights, tours and rail tickets can be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

### ENTERING ETHIOPIA

Entering Ethiopia by air is painless, even if you have to pick up your visa upon arrival at Bole International airport. Important visa and document information is found on p269.

Ethiopian border officials at land crossings are more strict but equally fair. You *must* have a valid visa to enter overland as none are available at borders. Those entering with vehicles should have all the necessary paperwork (p274) and expect a lengthier process.

### Passport

Make sure your passport's expiry date is at least six months past your intended departure date from Ethiopia. For visa and other document information, see p269.

### AIR

#### Airports & Airlines

Addis Ababa's **Bole International Airport** (code ADD) is the only international airport in Ethiopia. Although modern, upon arrival there's little more than a 24-hour bank, a

restaurant and a few cafés; baggage carts are free. When departing, there's an Internet lounge, a bar and duty-free shops.

Ethiopia's only international and national carrier, **Ethiopian Airlines** (airline code ET; [www.flyethiopian.com](http://www.flyethiopian.com)), is rated as one of the best airlines in Africa and has a good record (the US Federal Aviation Authority gave it a No 1 rating for compliance with international aviation safety standards). Ethiopian Airlines is also one of the largest African carriers, with a modern fleet of 737s, 757s and 767s. There are 50 or so offices worldwide, which sell both international and domestic tickets directly. Reconfirmation of bookings is essential.

Other international airlines currently serving Ethiopia:

**British Airways** Addis Ababa (airline code BA; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 505913; [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com); Hilton Hotel, Menelik II Ave) Hub Heathrow Airport, London.

**Daallo Airlines** Addis Ababa (airline code D3; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 534688; [www.daallo.com](http://www.daallo.com); Bole Rd) Represented by Abadir Travel & Tours. Hub Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport, Djibouti City.

**Djibouti Airlines** Addis Ababa (airline code D8; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 633702; fax 0116 614769; Rwanda St) Hub Djibouti-Ambouli International Airport, Djibouti City.

**EgyptAir** Addis Ababa (airline code MS; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0111 564493; [www.egyptair.com.eg](http://www.egyptair.com.eg); Churchill Ave) Hub Cairo International Airport, Cairo.

**KLM** (airline code KL; [www.klm.com](http://www.klm.com)) Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa (Map p76; ☎ 0116 650675; Bole Rd); Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 525541; Menelik II Ave) Hub Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.

**Kenya Airways** (airline code KQ; [www.kenya-airways.com](http://www.kenya-airways.com)) Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa (Map p76;

### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

☎ 0116 650507; Bole Rd); Hilton Hotel, Addis Ababa (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 525548; Menelik II Ave) Hub Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi.

**Lufthansa** Addis Ababa (airline code LH; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0111 551666; www.lufthansa.com; Gambia St) Hub Frankfurt International Airport, Frankfurt.

**Saudi Arabian Airlines** Addis Ababa (airline code SV; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 512637; www.saudiairlines.com; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah.

**Sudan Airways** Addis Ababa (airline code SD; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 504724; www.sudanair.com; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub Khartoum International Airport, Khartoum.

**Yemenia** Addis Ababa (airline code IY; Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 526441; www.yemenia.com; Ras Desta Damtew St) Hub Sanaa Airport, Sanaa.

Ethiopian Airlines isn't usually the cheapest to fly into Ethiopia, but does offer some good perks: a generous baggage allowance; the option of changing your return date as many times as you wish at no extra charge; and if there's two or more of you, 50% off domestic flights (see p276).

## Tickets

For Ethiopia, travel during the month of August and over Easter, Christmas and New Year should be booked well in advance. Ethiopians living abroad tend to visit their families during this time, and tour groups often try to coincide with the major festivals. Ticket prices are highest during this period.

Numerous travel agencies and online ticket sources are mentioned in the following sections under the region or country they each are located in. One truly international website that can't be categorised is [www.flights.com](http://www.flights.com).

## INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

It's possible to include Addis Ababa as part of a round-the-world (RTW) ticket. Check with one of the major airlines that form the

**Star Alliance** ([www.staralliance.com](http://www.staralliance.com)) or **One World** ([www.oneworldalliance.com](http://www.oneworldalliance.com)).

It's also possible (and usually cheaper) to arrange these tickets online; try [www.airtreks.com](http://www.airtreks.com).

## Africa

Ethiopian Airlines flies to 25 African countries including Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and South Africa. It also offers regular flights to eight West African countries. Fares on Ethiopian Airlines and other African couriers vary drastically throughout the year, depending on the high seasons of each individual country.

**Rennies Travel** ([www.renniestravel.com](http://www.renniestravel.com)) and **STA Travel** ([www.statravel.co.za](http://www.statravel.co.za)) have offices throughout Southern Africa. Check their websites for branch locations. In Nairobi, **Let's Go Travel** (☎ 020-444 7151; [www.lets-go-travel.net](http://www.lets-go-travel.net)) is reliable. **Egypt Panorama Tours** (☎ 2-359 0200; [www.eptours.com](http://www.eptours.com)) in Cairo is also good.

## Australia

There are no direct flights from Australia to Ethiopia. **Qantas** ([www.qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au)) and its code-sharing partner **South African Airways** (SAA; [www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)) fly to Johannesburg, from where you can connect to Nairobi. You'll have to book the Nairobi-Addis Ababa flight separately. This is typically cheaper than buying separate Australia-Johannesburg and Johannesburg-Addis Ababa tickets.

Via the Middle East is usually slightly cheaper; try **Emirates Airlines** ([www.emirates.com](http://www.emirates.com)) via Dubai to Nairobi. Other routes include via Mumbai (Bombay) on Qantas, or via Mauritius on **Air Mauritius** ([www.airmauritiu.com](http://www.airmauritiu.com)). Note, these all still only get you to Nairobi.

**STA Travel** (☎ 1300 733 035; [www.statravel.com.au](http://www.statravel.com.au)) and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133; [www.flightcentre.com.au](http://www.flightcentre.com.au)) have numerous offices throughout Australia and are worth checking out.

For online bookings try [www.travel.com.au](http://www.travel.com.au); they found us a cheap Sydney-Bangkok-Addis Ababa flight using a combination of British Airways and Ethiopian Airlines.

## Canada

There are no direct flights between Canada and Ethiopia. Currently British Airways, KLM and Lufthansa offer the easiest connections, through London, Amsterdam and Frankfurt respectively.

Canadian discount air ticket agencies tend to have fares around 10% higher than those sold in the USA. **Flight Centre** (☎ 877-967 5302; [www.flightcentre.ca](http://www.flightcentre.ca)) is usually reliable and has 1500 Canadian outlets. **Travel Cuts** (☎ 800-667 2887; [www.travelcuts.com](http://www.travelcuts.com)) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try [www.expedia.ca](http://www.expedia.ca).

## Continental Europe

Numerous weekly Ethiopian Airlines flights serve over two dozen European cities (many directly), including Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris, Frankfurt and Rome. KLM and Lufthansa have daily flights to Addis Ababa, but most flights make stops en route.

## FRANCE

Recommended agencies:

**Anyway** (☎ 08 92 89 38 92; [www.anyway.fr](http://www.anyway.fr))

**Lastminute** (☎ 08 92 70 50 00; [www.lastminute.fr](http://www.lastminute.fr))

**Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 08 25 00 07 47; [www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr](http://www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr))

**OTU Voyages** ([www.otu.fr](http://www.otu.fr)) This agency specialises in student and youth travellers.

**Voyageurs du Monde** (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; [www.vdm.com](http://www.vdm.com))

## GERMANY

Recommended agencies:

**Expedia** ([www.expedia.de](http://www.expedia.de))

**Just Travel** (☎ 089 747 33 30; [www.justtravel.de](http://www.justtravel.de))

**Lastminute** (☎ 01805 284 366; [www.lastminute.de](http://www.lastminute.de))

**STA Travel** (☎ 01805 456 422; [www.statravel.de](http://www.statravel.de)) For travellers under the age of 26.

## ITALY

One recommended agent is **CTS Viaggi** (☎ 06 462 0431; [www.cts.it](http://www.cts.it)), specialising in student and youth travel.

## THE NETHERLANDS

One recommended agency is **Airfair** (☎ 020-620 51 21; [www.airfair.nl](http://www.airfair.nl)).

## SPAIN

Recommended agencies include **Barcelo Viajes** (☎ 902 116 226; [www.barceloviajes.com](http://www.barceloviajes.com)) and **Nouvelles Frontières** (☎ 902 17 09 79; [www.nouvelles-frontieres.es](http://www.nouvelles-frontieres.es)).

## Middle East

EgyptAir, Saudi Arabian Airlines and Yemenia serve the Middle East and combine to link Ethiopia with Lebanon, Israel, Saudi

Arabia (Jeddah and Riyadh), the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

In Dubai, **Al-Rais Travels** ([www.alrais.com](http://www.alrais.com)) is a good travel agent, while the **Israel Student Travel Association** (ISTA; ☎ 02-625 7257), in Jerusalem, is helpful. For Cairo, see Africa (opposite).

## New Zealand

The story for New Zealand is much the same as that for Australia, with code-sharing partners Qantas and SAA only getting you as far as Nairobi. However, if you go through agents (in person or online), they should be able to combine airlines to get you straight to Addis Ababa via Bangkok.

Both **Flight Centre** (☎ 0800 243 544; [www.flightcentre.co.nz](http://www.flightcentre.co.nz)) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; [www.statravel.co.nz](http://www.statravel.co.nz)) have branches throughout the country. The site [www.travel.co.nz](http://www.travel.co.nz) is recommended for online bookings.

## UK & Ireland

British Airways and Ethiopian Airlines both have daily flights between London and Addis Ababa.

Discount air travel is big business in London. Advertisements for many travel agencies appear in the travel pages of the weekend broadsheet newspapers, in *Time Out*, the *Evening Standard* and in the free online magazine **TNT** ([www.tntmagazine.com](http://www.tntmagazine.com)). The website [www.cheapflights.co.uk](http://www.cheapflights.co.uk) is helpful in finding deals.

Recommended travel agencies:

**Flight Centre** (☎ 0870 499 0040; [flightcentre.co.uk](http://flightcentre.co.uk))

**Flightbookers** (☎ 0800 082 3000; [www.ebookers.com](http://www.ebookers.com))

**North-South Travel** (☎ 01245 608 291; [www.northsouthtravel.co.uk](http://www.northsouthtravel.co.uk)) Donates part of its profit to projects in the developing world.

**STA Travel** (☎ 0870 160 0599; [www.statravel.co.uk](http://www.statravel.co.uk)) For travellers under the age of 26.

**Travel Bag** (☎ 0800 082 5000; [www.travelbag.co.uk](http://www.travelbag.co.uk))

## USA

Ethiopian Airlines only serves Washington DC, so you'll likely have to fly through Europe on British Airways, KLM or Lufthansa (or their American code-sharing partners).

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

### DEPARTURE TAX

The international departure tax is US\$20, which must be paid at the airport. It's supposed to be paid in dollars, but we had no problem paying it in birr. Either way, try and have the exact amount as change isn't always available. Travellers cheques in US dollars are accepted, but commissions are charged.

Peruse the following websites for the cheapest flight options:

**CheapTickets** (www.cheaptickets.com)

**Expedia.com** (www.expedia.com)

**Orbitz** (www.orbitz.com)

**STA Travel** (www.sta.com) Better for travellers under the age of 26.

**travelocity** (www.travelocity.com)

## LAND Djibouti

Border formalities are usually pretty painless crossing between Djibouti and Ethiopia, but you *must* have your visa prior to arriving as none are issued at the border (see Visas for Onward Travel on p269).

### ROAD

There are two current road routes linking Djibouti and Ethiopia: one via Dire Dawa and Gelille, and one via Awash and Galafi.

The Gelille route is best for those without vehicles as daily buses link Djibouti City and Dire Dawa. The journey takes 10 to 12 hours, though it involves changing buses at the border. In Djibouti City, **SPB** (☎ 826573, 828838) buses depart at dawn from Ave 26; tickets cost DFr2700. In Dire Dawa, **Shirkada Gaadidka Dadweynaha Ee Yaryar Dhexe Iyo Xamuulkaa** (☎ 0251 118455) buses depart daily at a painful 3.30am from its office northeast of the 'old town' of Megala; tickets cost Birr120. In either direction, it's important to buy tickets at least a day in advance.

Although longer, the Galafi route accessed from Awash is best for those driving, as it's sealed the entire way. Even locals with 4WDs prefer this route over the Gelille

route, which is only sealed on the Djibouti side. For those coming from northern Ethiopia, this route can be accessed via a shortcut at Dessie.

Those without vehicles can also travel via Galafi. A sporadic evening bus (DFr2000) from Djibouti City reaches Galafi (5km from the border) in the morning after over-nighting in Yoboki. From Galafi, you must rely on hitching a lift with one of the many trucks heading into Ethiopia. The first town with regular buses to Awash or Dessie is Mille (p221). Those using this route to leave Ethiopia can hitch a lift with trucks over-nighting in Logiya (p221) right to Djibouti City (Birr150 to Birr200, eight hours).

### TRAIN

A dilapidated, hot and painfully slow train also covers the Djibouti City–Dire Dawa route. Trains are supposed to leave every second day, but they're notoriously behind schedule and delays of days are common. First-class tickets cost around Birr80 in Dire Dawa and DFr3900 in Djibouti City; 2nd class' cost about half. First class is by no means comfortable, but it's a world above 2nd class. Tickets should be bought the day before travel.

In theory the train is supposed to run all the way to Addis Ababa, but this leg is currently out of commission.

### Eritrea

There are three traditional entry points from Eritrea into Ethiopia: Asmara to Adwa and Aksum via Adi Quala; Asmara to Adigrat via Senafe; and Assab to Addis Ababa via Serdo and Dessie. However, all

these border crossings have been indefinitely closed since the 1998 war.

With relations on their current path, it seems sadly infeasible that the borders will be reopened during the lifetime of this book. See p290 for details about reaching Eritrea through Djibouti.

### Kenya

There are usually few problems crossing between Ethiopia and Kenya. The most used crossing is at Moyale, 772km south of Addis Ababa by road. Moyale has two incarnations, one on either side of the border.

The northern version is well connected to the north and Addis Ababa by bus, along a pretty good, but often potholed section of sealed road (transport details are found on p195).

The southern side is truly in the middle of nowhere, some 600km north of the nearest sealed road and over 1000km north of Nairobi. That said, a daily bus connects Moyale with Marsabit (KSh600, 8½ hours) and Isiolo (KSh1200, 17 hours). Trucks servicing the same destinations pick up passengers near the main intersection. From Isiolo there's regular transport to Nairobi (KSh500, 4½ hours).

For those of you in your own vehicles, the road between Moyale and Marsabit is long and hard (on you and your 4WD – bring at least two spare tires), but thankfully the banditry problems of the past seem to be under control and armed convoys are no longer used along this route. The Wajir route south is still not considered safe. Either way, be sure to check the security section before setting out from Moyale. Also make sure you fill up before leaving Ethiopia as the petrol is half the price.

The Ethiopian and Kenyan borders at Moyale are open daily. Kenyan three-month visas are painlessly produced at **Kenyan immigration** (☎ 6.30am–6pm) for the grand sum of US\$50. It's payable in US dollars (some have managed to pay in euros), but not birr. Transit visas cost US\$20 (valid for seven days). **Ethiopian immigration** (☎ 8am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–11am & 3–5pm Sat & Sun) cannot issue Ethiopian visas; these must be obtained at an Ethiopian embassy prior to arrival at the border.

If you're heading south and have a serious 4WD, there's a more adventurous crossing well west of Moyale near Omorate in the

Lower Omo Valley. Although there's now an **Ethiopian immigration post** (☎ 7.30am–5pm) in Omorate that can stamp you out, there's still no Kenyan post to issue you a visa, so you must obtain one from the Kenyan embassy in Addis Ababa beforehand (see Visas for Onward Travel on p269). Once you reach Nairobi you'll have to get it stamped; immigration officials are used to this.

The remote and sandy track to Kenya is accessed along the road to Turmi, 13km north of Omorate. A long day of driving should get you to Sibiloi National Park and the Koobi Fora research base. From there, it's a tricky seven-hour drive south to Loyangalani. This route will reward you with one of East Africa's greatest sights, Lake Turkana, but it's only for the truly well-prepared and should never be attempted in wet season.

This route isn't technically possible heading north because Ethiopia requires a Kenyan exit stamp in your passport. If you don't mind being turned back, you could always try your luck – bring lots of fuel.

### Somaliland

There are now daily buses running along the dusty desert track between Jijiga and the border town of Wajale (Birr15, 1½ to two hours). Get stamped out at Ethiopian immigration (look for the MAO building on the main street) before walking to the gate where customs will perform their perfunctory search. From there, cross no-man's-land (about 200m) to Somaliland's immigration shack, where they'll stamp your passport and check your visa. The visa must have been acquired in advance, as none are issued at the border (see Visas for Onward travel on p269 for details).

Contract taxis (Birr300) and minibuses (about Birr40) run from the border to Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital, which is about 90km to the southeast. Fares can be paid in US dollars.

### Sudan

The only border currently open with Sudan is the Metema crossing, 180km west of Gonder. It's imperative that you've obtained your Sudan visa in Addis Ababa (see p270) before heading this way.

From Gonder one bus leaves daily for Shihedi (Birr23, five to six hours). Buy the ticket early in the morning (around 7am)

### ENTERING ETHIOPIA OVERLAND

The overland route from South Africa through southern Africa and East Africa to Ethiopia is quite well trodden, and should present few problems, though the last section through northern Kenya is the toughest and still suffers from sporadic banditry.

The only routes currently open from West Africa and North Africa are much rougher and relatively less travelled; they both enter Ethiopia from Sudan at Metema, west of Gonder.

Border officials can be lax or stringent, but they're usually not unfair. If you're travelling with a vehicle, make sure you have a valid international driving license, a *carnet de passage* (a guarantee issued by your own national motoring association that you won't sell your vehicle in the country you are travelling), the vehicle's registration papers and proof of third-party insurance that covers Ethiopia (see the Car & Motorcycle section on p279 for details about driving licences, road rules, road conditions etc).

For important visa and documentation information see p269.

of the previous day, as the route is popular. From there, pick-up trucks (Birr8) cover the last 40km or so to Metema. Stay overnight at Shihedi, as it has better facilities than Metema. Several travellers have also written of being harassed and robbed in Metema, so keep your guard up.

After reaching Metema the next morning, you can walk across the border into the Sudanese town of Gallabat. From Gallabat, you can catch a truck to the nearest large town of Gedaref (Dinar 1500, eight to 10 hours).

If you're driving your own 4WD, put on supportive underwear before you reach the border – it's rough going on the Sudan side! In wet season even trucks get stuck between Gallabat and Gedaref, so be prepared.

If you're coming from Sudan, stay overnight in Gedaref (better than Gallabat) then catch a dawn truck straight though to Shihedi via Gallabat. The bus from Shihedi to Gonder departs at around 7am.

Formerly, it used to be possible to travel by bus from Gambela into Sudan. However, because of the current ethnic tensions in the area, the border is closed and the Gambela

area is considered unsafe. Check the current situation when you arrive in Ethiopia.

## GETTING AROUND

### AIR Airlines in Ethiopia

The national carrier, **Ethiopian Airlines** ([www.flyethiopian.com](http://www.flyethiopian.com)), uses five Fokker 50s and three DHC Twin Otters to provide the only regular domestic air service. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, they have a solid safety record.

It's well worth considering a domestic flight or two, even if you're travelling on a budget. Most flights are very reasonably priced and cut out days spent on the road. With the lower-altitude flying of the domestic planes, and the usually clear Ethiopian skies, you'll still see some stunning landscapes, too. If you want a window seat, check in early.

Standard security procedures apply at all airports, though there'll be more polite groping than screening at the remote ones. The baggage limit is 20kg on domestic

flights. Don't bring bulky hand luggage as the interiors are quite small.

Most flights leave from Addis Ababa, but they are rarely nonstop, which means you can also jump from one town to another. For instance, the daily Addis Ababa–Aksum flight stops at Bahir Dar, Gonder and Lalibela en route.

If there's two or more of you, and if you fly into Ethiopia from outside Africa on Ethiopian Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines offers you 50% off the standard domestic rates. These flights must be booked at the same time as your international ones, but you can change the exact dates later without penalty. Although you'll find Ethiopian domestic flights available for purchase at online brokers like **Expedia** ([www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com)), they can charge up to 300% more than the standard fares. For domestic schedules and the standard fares see the pertinent city's Getting There & Away section.

If buying tickets in Ethiopia, standard rates always apply, whether buying the ticket a month or three hours in advance. However, booking early to ensure a seat is particularly important on the historical circuit and during major festivals.

It's *essential* to reconfirm all flights. Officially, this should be done 72 hours in advance. In practice, you can normally get away with 48 hours in advance, but never leave it less than 24 hours. If you're visiting the historical route and are not spending more than 72 hours in any one place, you don't need to reconfirm each leg.

Beware that schedules are occasionally forced to change due to weather or mechanical difficulties, so try to not to plan an itinerary that's so tight it doesn't make allowances for these changes.

### BICYCLE

Bicycling in Ethiopia offers a smooth way to navigate sprawling towns, and a painfully rewarding way to explore the country. If you're only interested in the first option, you'll find reasonable bikes for hire in most large Ethiopian towns (Birr3 to Birr5 per hour). If want to cycle across the country, come well prepared with a sturdy bike, plenty of spare parts, a good repair kit and the capacity to carry sufficient amounts of water. Cycles new and secondhand can be bought in Addis Ababa, but they are not

generally the type of bike you'd wish to conquer the historical circuit with!

In the past, irregular terrain and brutal roads have scared off most adventure addicts and their bicycles, but with today's greatly improving road network it may just be the right time for you to give it a try. For general road conditions see p280.

Cyclists should show the usual caution when travelling around the country: never travel after dark, be wary of thieves and keep the bicycle well maintained. Brakes need to be in good working order for the mountainous highland roads.

Be particularly wary of dogs (and the risk of rabies); sometimes it's best to dismount and walk slowly away. Cycling in the rainy season can be very hard going.

Punctures are easily repaired: just head for any *gommista* (tyre repairer) or garage. Many mechanics are also more than happy to help with cycle problems, and often turn out to be ingenious improvisers.

Note the customs regulation regarding the importation of a bicycle. A deposit must usually be left (amounting to the cycle's worth) at customs at the port of entry on arrival. When you leave, this will be returned. This is to deter black-market trading.

Cycles are accepted aboard Ethiopian Airlines international flights. On domestic flights you'll need to check first in advance as it depends on what type of plane is covering the route on that given day.

Finally, a few tips from a seasoned African cyclist: check and tighten screws and nuts regularly, take a spare chain, take a front as well as rear pannier rack, and pack a water filter in case you get stuck somewhere remote.

More advice can be found at [www.owen.org/cycling/ethiopia](http://www.owen.org/cycling/ethiopia).

### BUS

A good network of long-distance buses connects most major towns of Ethiopia. One government bus association and around a dozen private ones operate in Ethiopia, though you'll rarely be able to tell the difference between any of them. The biggest differentiating trait between government and private buses is the predeparture rituals.

Government buses sell seat-specific tickets in advance and passengers must wait in line while the bus is loaded. After that's

### ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES' DOMESTIC DESTINATIONS



### THE JOYS OF BUS TRAVEL

Riding the buses around Ethiopia can provide some real highs and some real lows.

There are astounding cliff-top views. There are butt-clenching moments when you think you and your bus are about to be quickly introduced to that cliff's bottom.

There's the joy and honour of holding an Ethiopian's baby in your arms. There's the pleasure of cleaning that baby's bodily fluids off your only pair of trousers.

There's the common decency of everyone keeping their windows closed on a cold morning. There's the moment when it reaches 40°C inside and you realise that wasn't common decency, but rather an innate fear of deadly moving air that keeps those windows shut.

There's the smell of fresh oranges permeating through the bus after a quick stop at street-side sellers. There's the moment when you plug your nose and officially bestow upon the bus the title of *Vomit Comet*.

To enjoy your memorable bus jaunts, bring a sense of humour, a lot of patience and a little understanding. Oh, and if you're fond of kids, don't forget some wet wipes!

completed, the queue is paraded around the bus before tickets are checked and the boarding barrage occurs. Private buses simply open the doors and start selling tickets to the flood of passengers as they cram in. Needless to say, private buses are usually the first to leave. They also tend to be slightly more comfortable than government ones (though that's not saying much!).

In most cases when you arrive at the bus station there'll only be one bus heading in your direction, so any thoughts about it being private or government are a waste of time – get on and get going!

Once on the road, you'll realise that all buses are slow. On sealed roads you can expect to cover around 50km/h, but on dirt roads 30km/h or less. In the rainy season, journeys can be severely disrupted. Thankfully, rapid road construction to the tune of US\$500 million is turning many troublesome dirt sections into slick sections of sealed road. The one drawback so far has been the increase in road accidents due to speed (though the rate is still low by African standards).

Unlike most African countries, standing in the aisles of long-distance buses is illegal in Ethiopia, making them more comfortable (note that we've said more comfortable, which is a far cry from saying comfortable!) and safer. On the longer journeys, there are usually scheduled 20-minute stops for meals. There are no toilets on board.

The major drawback with bus travel is the size of the country. For the historical circuit alone, you'll spend a total of at least 10 days sitting on a bus to cover the 2500km.

Although most long-distance buses are scheduled to 'leave' at 6am or earlier, they don't typically set out before 7am as most are demand driven and won't leave until full. To be safe you should make an appearance at the prescribed departure time. Remember that the Ethiopian clock is used locally (see p267), though Western time is used when quoting bus times in this book.

In remote areas long waits for buses to fill is normal – some may not leave at all. In general, the earlier you get to the bus station, the better chance you have of catching the first bus out of town.

On those journeys quoted in this book with durations longer than one day, there are overnight stops en route (Ethiopian law stipulates that all long-distances buses must be off the road by 6pm). In many cases you won't be allowed to remove luggage from the roof, so you should pack toiletries and other overnight items to take with you in a small bag on the bus.

Smaller and more remote towns are usually served by minibuses or Isuzu trucks (see p281).

### Costs

Buses are very cheap in Ethiopia. Both government-run and private buses work out at around US\$1.50 per 100km. There's just one class of travel.

### Reservations

Tickets for most long-distance journeys (over 250km) can usually be bought in advance. If you can, do: it guarantees a seat (though not a specific seat number on

private buses) and cuts out the touts who sometimes snap up the remaining tickets to resell for double the price to latecomers. Most government ticket offices are open daily from 5.30am to 5.30pm. For short distances (less than 250km), tickets can usually only be bought on the day.

If you would like a whiff of fresh air on your journey, get a seat behind the driver as he tends to buck the trend and keep his window cracked open.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE Bringing Your Own Vehicle

If you're bringing your own 4WD or motorcycle, you'll need a *carnet de passage* (a guarantee issued by your own national motoring association that you won't sell your vehicle in the country you are travelling), the vehicle's registration papers and proof of third-party insurance that covers Ethiopia.

### Driving Licence

Although Ethiopian law recognises international driving licences, it fails to do so for longer than seven days. Officially, once you reach Addis Ababa you're supposed to acquire an Ethiopian-endorsed licence. To acquire one you must take a certified (by your embassy) copy of your domestic licence (or certified English translation) to the Protocol Service Division of the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 506561; Yohannis St), where you'll pay Birr300 for an official stamp. From there, head to the **Transport & Communications Bureau** (Map p76; Equatorial Guinea St) with all your paperwork, plus two passport photos, a copy of your passport and Birr30. After a lot of waiting and signing some things, you'll have your Ethiopian-endorsed licence.

This is rarely enforced and most overlanders we met hadn't bothered with this convoluted process and had yet to encounter any problems – roll the dice if you so please.

### Fuel & Spare Parts

Fuel (both petrol and diesel) is quite widely available, apart from the more remote regions such as the southwest. Unleaded petrol is not available. Diesel costs from around Birr4.35 to Birr4.80 per litre, while petrol costs around Birr5.50 to Birr5.90 per litre. These prices are government subsidised and may leap in the near future if those in power

change policy. When this recently happened in Kenya, prices almost doubled. Note that your vehicle's fuel consumption will be 25% higher in Ethiopia than at sea level because of the increased altitudes.

While there are helpful garages throughout the country (ask your hotel to recommend one), spare parts are not abundant outside Addis Ababa. It's wise to take stock while in Addis and acquire all that you may need for the journey ahead, whether it be Sudan or Kenya. Thanks to Toyota Land Cruisers being the choice of most tour operators, their parts are more plentiful and less expensive than those for Landrovers.

### Hire

Even with the recent road improvements, you still really need a 4WD to explore the country. Despite competition between the numerous tour agents in Addis Ababa (see p282) that hire 4WDs, prices are steep and range from US\$90 per day for older vehicles to US\$180 for luxurious newer models. Most companies include unlimited kilometres, a driver, driver allowance (for their food and accommodation), fuel, third-party insurance, a collision damage waiver and government taxes in their rates; check all these details and ask if service charges will be added afterwards and if there are set driver's hours.

Know that prices are always negotiable and vary greatly depending on the period of rental and the season. Despite the hassle, you'll always pay much less organising things yourself in Ethiopia rather than hiring an agency at home to arrange it.

Though expensive, the chief advantage of 4WD hire over bus travel is the time that can be saved. Trip durations are at least halved and there's no waiting around in remote regions for infrequent and erratic buses. Note also that some national parks can only be entered with a 4WD.

The mandatory drivers (currently no agency offers self-drive 4WD) can be very useful as guides-cum-interpreters-cum-mechanics. Although tips are expected afterwards (see the boxed text, p264), a nice gesture during the trip is to share food together (which costs very little).

Some Addis Ababa-based agencies have branch offices in towns on the historical route and can rent 4WDs, but only by prearrangement. Increasingly, private individuals

rent to tourists. Be aware of the risks, particularly regarding insurance and the condition of the car.

Self-drive cars are only hired by a couple of agencies in Addis Ababa (see Galaxy Express Services, p282, and Rainbow Travel, p283), but these companies aren't happy if their vehicles leave the capital and they forbid them to travel off sealed roads. If you're still interested in hiring one to toot around the capital you must have a valid international driver's licence and be between 25 and 70 years old. Vehicles cost between US\$35 and US\$50 per day with 50km to 70km free kilometres. They usually require a deposit of Birr1000 to Birr2000.

Motorcycles are not currently rented.

### Insurance

Third-party vehicle insurance is required by law. Thankfully, unlike some other African countries, which demand that vehicles are covered by an insurance company based in that country, Ethiopia only requires your insurance from elsewhere is valid in Ethiopia. Although not mandatory, we'd also recommend comprehensive coverage.

If you don't have either, the numerous offices of **Ethiopian Insurance Corporation** ([www.eic.com.et](http://www.eic.com.et)) sell third-party/comprehensive insurance from Birr70/600 per year.

### Purchase

If you're looking to buy a quality second-hand vehicle, expect to pay a minimum of US\$12,000 to US\$20,000. With the large expat community that's resident in Addis Ababa, vehicles are usually easy to find there. Start by looking in the local English-language newspapers.

### TRAVELLERS LORE

Once there was a dog, a goat and a donkey. They wanted to go on a journey together, and decided to take a taxi. The donkey paid and got out, the dog paid, got out but never got his change, and the goat got out but never paid.

To this day, and whenever a vehicle passes, the dog still chases his change, the goat still scatters at the first approach, and the donkey just plods tranquilly on.

*Ethiopian folk tale*

### Road Conditions

There are 17,000km of all-weather roads and about 35,000km of dry-weather roads in Ethiopia. About one-quarter of the all-weather roads are currently sealed and an ambitious US\$500-million project is either adding more sealed sections or upgrading those that are in rough shape.

From Moyale on the Kenyan border north to Awasa, and from Arba Minch to Shashemene, the roads are sealed but rather potholed, while the stretch from Awasa to Addis Ababa is much better. The unsurfaced roads connecting Jinka and the Lower Omo Valley to Arba Minch and Yabelo range from bad to tolerable. The same can be said for the roads heading east from Shashemene to Bale Mountains National Park.

Two new sections of sealed road are spreading west from Addis Ababa and should reach Nekemte and Jimma in the life of this book. The lowland roads can be diabolical in the rains.

Decent sealed roads all but link Addis Ababa to Gonder, with only the Blue Nile Gorge section still in rough shape. New sealed sections have also all but linked Woldia, Mekele and Adigrat on the historical circuit. The sealed section connecting Woldia to Addis Ababa is currently being upgraded. The rest of the northern historical circuit ranges from finely graded gravels to course corrugations.

Harar and Dire Dawa, both 525km east of Addis Ababa, are connected to the capital with good sealed roads.

### Road Hazards

In the outskirts of the towns or villages, look out for people, particularly children playing on the road or kerbside. Night driving is not recommended. *Shiftas* (bandits) still operate in the more remote areas. Additionally, some trucks park overnight in the middle of the road – without lights.

In the country, livestock is the main hazard; camels wandering onto the road can cause major accidents in the lowlands. Many animals, including donkeys, are unaccustomed to vehicles and are very car-shy, so always approach slowly and with caution.

Land mines still pose a threat throughout the country; drivers should always stay on sealed roads or existing dirt tracks. During the rainy season, some roads, particularly in the west and southwest, become

impassable. Check road conditions with the local authorities before setting out.

### Road Rules

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road. The speed limit for cars and motorcycles is 60km/h in the towns and villages and 100km/h outside the towns. The standard of driving is generally not high; devices such as mirrors or indicators are often disregarded. On highland roads, drive defensively and beware of trucks coming fast the other way. Also keep a sharp eye out for a row of stones or pebbles across the road; it marks roadworks or an accident. Most vehicles don't have seatbelts, though we should say that people would be crazy not to use them if they are available – simply for safety reasons.

### HITCHING

In the past, if someone asked for a ride in Ethiopia, it was usually assumed that it was because they couldn't afford a bus fare and little sympathy was spared for them. Many Ethiopians also suspected hitchhikers of hidden motives such as robbery.

However, for some towns not readily served by buses or light vehicles, hitching is quite normal, and you will be expected to pay a 'fare'. Negotiate this in advance. The best place to look for lifts is at the hotels, bars and cafés in the centre of town.

Be aware that the density of vehicles on many roads is still very low in Ethiopia; on the remote roads, you'll be lucky to see any. Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) vehicles sometimes oblige, but you'll be expected to contribute towards fuel.

### LOCAL TRANSPORT

In many of the larger towns, a minibus service provides a quick, convenient and cheap way of hopping about town (from

### HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe, and it's not recommended. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. Hitching is safer in pairs. Additionally, try and let someone know where you're planning to go. Women should never hitch alone.

around Birr0.75 for short journeys). 'Conductors' generally shout out the destination of the bus; if in doubt, ask.

Taxis operate in many of the larger towns including Addis Ababa. Prices are reasonable, but foreigners as well as well-heeled Ethiopians are always charged more for 'contract services' (see the boxed text, below). Fares are usually between Birr10 and Birr20 depending on the distance. If in doubt, ask your hotel for an estimate.

*Garis* (horse-drawn carts) are a popular local means of getting about town. They're cheap (usually no more than Birr1 to Birr2) and are useful to travellers in two ways particularly: as cheap transport to hotels from bus stations, and for city tours. Be aware that in many towns now they are banned from operating on the principal roads and must stick to the back ones. Most drivers speak little or no English; you may have to enlist a local to act as interpreter.

### MINIBUSES & ISUZU TRUCKS

Minibuses are now commonly used between towns connected by sealed roads or to cover short distances. They cost slightly more than buses, but they leave more often and cover the distances more quickly. You'll usually find them at bus stations.

In more remote regions where the roads aren't conducive to buses, like the Lower

### TAXI TERMINOLOGY

In the towns, villages and countryside of Ethiopia and Eritrea, taxis offer two kinds of service: 'contract taxis' and 'share-taxis'. Share-taxis ply fixed routes, stop and pick people up when hailed and work to all intents like little buses. They become 'contract taxis' when flagged down (or 'contracted') for a private journey. The fare is then split between all passengers.

Though not really 'taxi' at all, minibuses, trucks, 4WDs and various other kinds of cars can all be contracted in this way. Contracting a large minibus for yourself is seen as perfectly normal if you should want to. Before hiring a contract taxi, always negotiate the fare before you get in, or you may be asked far above the going rate at the end of the journey.



Omo Valley, Isuzu flatbed trucks carrying goods between villages are often the best way to get around. A seat in the cabin usually costs twice as much as riding in the back. Prices are always negotiable. Petrol stations or market areas are commonly the collection points.

## TOURS

For the independent traveller, incorporating an organised tour into your travels in Ethiopia is useful for four things: specialised activities such as white-water rafting; access to remote regions with limited public transport such as the Lower Omo Valley or the Danakil Depression; 'themed trips' (such as bird-watching) with expert guides; and to help those with limited time who are keen to see as much as possible.

If you're interested in taking a tour, contact the agencies in advance and compare itineraries and prices. Most now have websites that you can visit first.

To reduce the cost of tours (few are cheap), hook up with a group of other travellers, or contact the agency far in advance to see if there are pre-arranged tours that you can tag onto. You'll need to be flexible with your dates.

NTO, the government-owned travel agency, once had a monopoly. Its drivers and guides have excellent reputations, but its prices remain uncompetitive. A cluster of much more competitive private operators has sprung up in the past 10 years, all based in Addis Ababa.

Agencies offer all or some of the following: guides, 4WD hire, camping-equipment hire, historical route tours, bird-watching and wildlife-viewing, white-water rafting, fishing, Omo Valley tours, photo safaris, Simien and Bale Mountain trekking, Rift Valley lake trips, and Danakil and Afar excursions. Some have branches in towns outside Addis Ababa, from where (if pre-booked) you can hire a 4WD or guide or take a tour.

Some agencies also have very attractive, 'ecofriendly' lodges and campsites, including Ethiopian Rift Valley Safaris (in the Omo Valley); Green Land Tours (Swayne's Hotel at Arba Minch and Wenney Eco-Lodge at Lake Langano, with Yemrha Hotel opening soon in Lalibela); and Village Ethiopia (in Bilen, near Awash).

Though prices are officially fixed, most are very open to negotiation, particularly during the low season. Many agencies now accept credit cards.

All 4WD hire prices listed here include mandatory driver, driver allowance and insurance. Most charge extra for guides and camping equipment, and some tack on extra fees for mileage and fuel. It's always worth negotiating, especially in the off-season.

The following list is far from exhaustive, but it includes those recommended by travellers and Ethiopians in the tourism industry.

**Abyssinian Tours & Travel** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 519293; www.abyssiniantours.com; Ethio-China Ave) Friendly and reasonably priced, Abyssinian runs trips across the country. Prices for a 4WD with driver range from US\$110 to US\$130 per day depending on the state of the vehicle and distance being travelled.

**Bahir Dar Tour & Travel Agency** (Map p85; ☎ 0111 550546; bdta@ethionet.et; Churchill Ave) This long-standing company offers personalised tours of northern and southern Ethiopia. Its daily rate for a new-model Land Cruiser, including fuel and mileage, is US\$100. It's also an International Air Transport Association (IATA) approved flight-ticketing agent.

**Ethio-Der Tour & Travel** (Map p85; ☎ 0111 571157; www.ethio-der.com; Itegue Taitu Hotel, Piazza) Ethio-Der charges US\$100/120 per day for an old/new 4WD, including fuel and mileage. Professional guides cost US\$30 to US\$50 per day, depending on the number of people. Camping equipment is US\$5 per day.

**Ethio-Fauna Safaris** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 505301; ethfauna@ethionet.et) One of the most respected agencies, with top-notch vehicles, equipment and service. A basic trip will start at US\$160 per day for the 4WD. Off Gambia St.

**Ethiopian Rift Valley Safaris** (Map p85; ☎ 0111 552128; www.ethiopianriftvalleysafaris.com) Unlike the other agencies listed, this elite operation only offers package tours, including guides, meals and accommodation in hotels. Prices typically range from US\$160 to US\$200 per person per day. Count on sublime service. It's off Cunningham St.

**Four Seasons Travel & Tours** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 613121; fsta@ethionet.et; Bole Rd) A reasonable outfit charging Birr950 per day for a 4WD. Prices include mileage, but fuel is extra.

**Galaxy Express Services** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 510355; www.galaxyexpressethiopia.com; Gambia St) This well-run agency offers various Ethiopia tour packages. Travel is in new Land Cruisers, which cost US\$170 per day including unlimited mileage, driver and insurance. It's also an Avis agent and rents self-drive cars for use in and around Addis Ababa (US\$49 per day with 50km free; each additional kilometre is 45¢).

**Green Land Tours & Travels** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 185875; www.greenlandethiopia.com; Cameroon St) Green Land is one of the biggest agencies, with various hotels and camps set up throughout southern Ethiopia. It also runs trips north. Prices for 4WD, guide, fuel and mileage range from US\$130 to US\$150 per day.

**Hess Travel Ethiopia** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 520955; www.hesstravel.com; Bole Rd) A popular agency with a great reputation, Hess offers trips starting from US\$130 per vehicle. Prices include mileage, fuel and equipment. It has French-, German- and English-speaking guides.

**NTO** (www.nto.com) Hilton Hotel (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 151722; Menelik II Ave); Ras Desta Damtew St (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 514838; Ras Desta Damtew St) This government travel agency is the most experienced and is one of the few that takes credit cards. A 4WD with 100 free kilometres per day costs US\$126. Each excess kilometre costs 75¢. Well-spoken guides are US\$43 per day. With offices in many cities, it can organise tours for those wishing to fly between major sights. It accepts Visa and American Express (7% surcharge).

**Rainbow Travel** (www.rainbowtravelplc.com) Bole Rd (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0116 615414; Bole Rd); Meskal Sq (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 513755; Ras Biru Wolde Gebriel St); Sheraton Hotel (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 173697; Itegue Taitu St) This agency organises 4WD tours with new Nissan Patrols for Birr750 per day, which includes 75 free kilometres. Each excess kilometre costs Birr2.85. Small self-drive cars can be rented for trips in and around Addis Ababa for around Birr300 per day with 75 free kilometres (Birr1 to Birr2 each additional kilometre). It also caters to those wishing to fly between major sights. Visa and MasterCard are accepted (6% surcharge).

**Red Jackal Tour Operator** (Map p85; ☎ 0111 560559; www.redjackal.net; Itegue Taitu Hotel, Piazza) Prices for tours to Ethiopia's south and north range from US\$80 to US\$120 per vehicle per day. These include fuel and mileage.

**Rocky Valley Safaris** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 516408; Gambia St) This company sits within the Ras Hotel and offers 4WD tours for Birr750 per vehicle per day (fuel is

extra). It doesn't offer professional guides, but its drivers can arrange local guides en route.

**Sunrise Travel & Tour** (Map p85; ☎ 0111 578921, 0911 223246; www.sunrisetours.com; Cunningham St) This agency runs Ethiopia tours with older 1989 Land Cruisers. Prices are the lowest you'll find, with 4WD, mileage and fuel costing Birr750 per day.

**Tour Ethiopia** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 510168; www.travelethiopia.net) This agency sits below the parking lot of the Ghion Hotel and offers Ethiopia tours starting from US\$150 per vehicle per day. Trips in newer Land Cruisers cost US\$180 per day. Tent rental is included. It's off Ras Desta Damtew St.

**Travel Ethiopia** (www.travelethiopia.com) Ghion Hotel (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0911 206976); National Hotel (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 525478; Menelik II Ave) A self-professed 'ecominded' tour company with multilingual guides (English, French, Italian and German) and quality 4WD vehicles. The Ghion Hotel is off Ras Desta Damtew St.

**T-Tam Travel & Tour** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0111 578921, 0911 223246; www.ttamtour.com; Bole Rd) This established agency charges Birr900 per day for 4WDs, but 15% VAT and fuel are not included. It's also an IATA ticketing agent.

**Village Ethiopia** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 523497; www.village-ethiopia.net; National Hotel, Menelik II Ave) This agency offers everything from bird-watching and ethnic tours in the south to rock climbing in Tigray. It also specialises in the Danakil Depression and has a lodge near its toasty confines.

**Yumo Tours** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 0115 513783; www.yumo.net; Ras Mekonen Ave) This refreshingly honest operator told us they're not very good at tours of the Lower Omo Valley. However, if birding in the south is your thing, they are your people.

## TRAIN

The Addis Ababa–Dire Dawa train is indefinitely out of action, though the Dire Dawa–Djibouti City section is still chugging along (see p274).

# Health

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One who hides his illness has no medicine; one who hides his problem has no remedy.

*Ethiopian proverb*

As long as you stay up to date with your vaccinations and take some basic preventive measures, you'd have to be pretty unlucky to succumb to most of the health hazards covered in this chapter. Africa certainly has an impressive selection of tropical diseases on offer, but you're much more likely to get a bout of diarrhoea (in fact, you should bank on it), a cold or an infected mosquito bite than an exotic disease such as sleeping sickness.

## BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for vaccinations or if you have a pre-existing illness, will save you a lot of trouble later. Before a long trip get a checkup from your dentist, and from your doctor if you have any regular medication or chronic illness, eg high blood pressure or asthma. You should also organise spare contact lenses and glasses (and take your optical prescription with you); get a first-aid and medical kit together; and arrange necessary vaccinations.

It's tempting to leave it all to the last minute – don't! Many vaccines take several

doses over a period of up to six weeks, so you must visit a doctor six to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is necessary as proof of yellow-fever (and possibly cholera) vaccination is mandatory in Ethiopia.

Travellers can register with the **International Association for Medical Advice to Travellers** (IMAT; [www.iamat.org](http://www.iamat.org)). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor who has recognised training. Those heading off to very remote areas might like to do a first-aid course (contact the Red Cross or St John's Ambulance) or attend a remote medicine first-aid course, such as that offered by the **Royal Geographical Society** ([www.wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk](http://www.wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk)).

If you're bringing medications with you, carry them in their original containers, clearly labelled. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing all medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

How do you go about getting the best possible medical help? It's difficult to say; it really depends on the severity of your illness or injury and the availability of local help. If malaria is suspected, seek medical help as soon as possible or begin self-medicating if you're off the beaten track (see p373).

## INSURANCE

Medical insurance is crucial, but many policies differ. Check that the policy includes all the activities you want to do. Some specifically exclude 'dangerous activities' such as white-water rafting, rock climbing and motorcycling. Sometimes even trekking is excluded. Also find out whether your insurance will make payments directly to providers or will reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in Ethiopia and Eritrea many doctors expect payment in cash). Ensure that your travel insurance will cover the emergency transport required to get you to

a hospital in a major city, to better medical facilities elsewhere in Africa, or all the way home, by air and with a medical attendant if necessary. If you need medical help, your insurance company might be able to help locate the nearest hospital or clinic, or you can ask at your hotel. In an emergency, contact your embassy or consulate.

Membership of the **African Medical & Research Foundation** (Amref; [www.amref.org](http://www.amref.org)) provides an air evacuation service in medical emergencies in many African countries, including Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. It also provides air ambulance transfers between medical facilities. Money paid by members for this service goes into providing grassroots medical assistance for local people.

## RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The **World Health Organization** ([www.who.int/en](http://www.who.int/en)) recommends that all travellers be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as for hepatitis B, regardless of their destination. The consequences of these diseases can be severe, and outbreaks of them do occur.

According to the **Centers for Disease Control & Prevention** ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)), the following vaccinations are recommended for all parts of Africa: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, meningococcal meningitis, rabies and typhoid, and boosters for tetanus, diphtheria and measles. Proof of yellow-fever vaccination is mandatory for travel to Ethiopia and Eritrea. Depending on where you've travelled from, cholera vaccination may also be required.

## MEDICAL CHECKLIST

It's a very good idea to carry a medical and first-aid kit with you, to help yourself in the case of minor illness or injury. Following is a list of items you should consider packing.

- Acetaminophen (paracetamol) or aspirin
- Acetazolamide (Diamox) for altitude sickness (prescription only)
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions (prescription only)
- Antibiotics (prescription only), eg ciprofloxacin (Ciproxin) or norfloxacin (Utinor)
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)

- Antihistamines (for hayfever and allergic reactions)
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antimalaria pills
- Bandages, gauze, gauze rolls
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Oral rehydration salts
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents, and bed nets
- Pocket knife
- Scissors, safety pins, tweezers
- Sterile needles, syringes and fluids if travelling to remote areas
- Steroid cream or hydrocortisone cream (for allergic rashes)
- Sunblock
- Syringes and sterile needles
- Thermometer

Since falciparum malaria predominates in Ethiopia, consider taking a self-diagnostic kit that can identify malaria in the blood from a finger prick.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

There's a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. For further information, **LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) is a good place to start. The World Health Organization publishes a superb book called *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost at [www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith). Other websites of general interest are **MD Travel Health** ([www.mdtravelhealth.com](http://www.mdtravelhealth.com)), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost; the Centers for **Disease Control and Prevention** ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)); and **Fit for Travel** ([www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk)), which has up-to-date information about outbreaks and is very user-friendly.

It's also a good idea to consult your government's travel health website before departure, if one is available.

**Australia** ([www.dfat.gov.au/travel](http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel))

**Canada** ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/index.html))

**UK** ([www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/index.htm))

**USA** ([www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel))

## FURTHER READING

- *A Comprehensive Guide to Wilderness and Travel Medicine* by Eric A Weiss (1998)

- *Healthy Travel* by Jane Wilson-Howarth (1999)
- *Healthy Travel Africa* by Isabelle Young (2000)
- *How to Stay Healthy Abroad* by Richard Dawood (2002)
- *Travel in Health* by Graham Fry (1994)
- *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan (2004)

## IN TRANSIT

### DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Blood clots can form in the legs during flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. This formation of clots is known as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), and the longer the flight, the greater the risk. Although most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some might break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they could cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it could cause chest pain and breathing difficulty. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol.

## IN ETHIOPIA & ERITREA

### AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

Health care in Ethiopia and Eritrea is varied: Addis Ababa and Asmara have good facilities with well-trained doctors and nurses, but outside the capitals health care is patchy at best. Medicine and even sterile dressings and intravenous fluids might need to be purchased from a local pharmacy by patients or their relatives. The standard of dental care is equally variable, and there's an increased risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment. By and large, public hospitals in the region offer the cheapest service, but will have the least

up-to-date equipment and medications; mission hospitals (where donations are the usual form of payment) often have more reasonable facilities; and private hospitals and clinics are more expensive but tend to have more advanced drugs and equipment and better trained medical staff.

Most drugs can be purchased over the counter in the region, without a prescription. Try to visit a pharmacy rather than a 'drug shop' or 'rural drug vendor' as they're the only ones with trained pharmacists who can offer educated advice. Many drugs for sale in Africa might be ineffective: they might be counterfeit or might not have been stored under the right conditions. The most common examples of counterfeit drugs are malaria tablets and expensive antibiotics, such as ciprofloxacin. Most drugs are available in larger towns, but remote villages will be lucky to have a couple of paracetamol tablets. It's strongly recommended that all drugs for chronic diseases be brought from home. Although condoms are readily available (sometimes boxes – yes boxes! – are in hotel rooms), their efficacy cannot be relied upon, so bring all the contraception you'll need. Condoms bought in Africa might not be of the same quality as in Europe or Australia, and they might have been incorrectly stored.

There's a high risk of contracting HIV from infected blood if you receive a blood transfusion in the region. The **BloodCare Foundation** ([www.bloodcare.org.uk](http://www.bloodcare.org.uk)) is a useful source of safe, screened blood, which can be transported to any part of the world within 24 hours.

## INFECTIOUS DISEASES

It's a formidable list but, as we say, a few precautions go a long way...

### Cholera

Cholera is usually only a problem during natural or artificial disasters, eg war, floods or earthquakes, although small outbreaks can also occur at other times. Travellers are rarely affected. It's caused by a bacteria and spread via contaminated drinking water. The main symptom is profuse watery diarrhoea, which causes debilitation if fluids are not replaced quickly. An oral cholera vaccine is available in the USA, but it's not particularly effective. Most cases of cholera can be avoided by close attention

to good drinking water and by avoiding potentially contaminated food. Treatment is by fluid replacement (orally or via a drip), but sometimes antibiotics are needed. Self-treatment isn't advised.

### Dengue Fever (Break-bone Fever)

Spread through the bite of the mosquito, dengue fever causes a feverish illness with headache and muscle pains similar to those experienced with a bad, prolonged attack of influenza. There might be a rash. Mosquito bites should be avoided whenever possible. Self-treatment: paracetamol and rest. Aspirin should be avoided.

### Diphtheria

Found in all of Africa, diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact. It usually causes a temperature and a severe sore throat. Sometimes a membrane forms across the throat, and a tracheostomy is needed to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas. More important for long stays than for short-term trips. The vaccine is given as an injection alone or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

### Filariasis

Tiny worms migrating in the lymphatic system cause filariasis. The bite from an infected mosquito spreads the infection. Symptoms include localised itching and swelling of the legs and/or genitalia. Treatment is available.

### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice and, although it's rarely fatal, it can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. If you've had hepatitis A, you shouldn't drink alcohol for up to six months afterwards, but once you've recovered, there won't be any long-term problems. The first symptoms include dark urine and a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes. Sometimes a fever and abdominal pain might be present. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year, and a booster after a year gives 10-year protection. Hepatitis A and typhoid

vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine, hepatyrix or viatim.

### Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is spread through infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse. It can also be spread from an infected mother to the baby during childbirth. It affects the liver, causing jaundice and occasionally liver failure. Most people recover completely, but some people might be chronic carriers of the virus, which could lead eventually to cirrhosis or liver cancer. Those visiting high-risk areas for long periods or those with increased social or occupational risk should be immunised. Many countries now give hepatitis B as part of the routine childhood vaccinations. It's given singly or can be given at the same time as hepatitis A (hepatyrix).

A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks or six months.

### HIV

HIV, the virus that causes AIDs, is an enormous problem throughout Ethiopia and Eritrea. The virus is spread through infected blood and blood products, by sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth and breastfeeding. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contacts, such as with contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and other body-piercing procedures, and through sharing used intravenous needles. At present there's no cure; medication that might keep the disease under control is available, but these drugs are too expensive for the overwhelming majority of Africans, and are not readily available for travellers either. If you think you might have been infected with HIV, a blood test is necessary; a three-month gap after exposure and before testing is required to allow antibodies to appear in the blood.

### Leishmaniasis

This is spread through the bite of an infected sandfly. It can cause a slowly growing skin lump or ulcer (the cutaneous form) and sometimes a life-threatening fever with anaemia and weight loss. Dogs can also be carriers of the infection. Sandfly bites should be avoided whenever possible.

### Leptospirosis

It's spread through the excreta of infected rodents, especially rats. It can cause hepatitis and renal failure, which might be fatal. It's unusual for travellers to be affected unless living in poor sanitary conditions. It causes a fever and sometimes jaundice.

### Malaria

Malaria is a serious problem in Ethiopia and Eritrea, with one to two million new cases reported each year. Though malaria is generally absent at altitudes above 1800m, epidemics have occurred in areas above 2000m in Ethiopia. The central plateau, Addis Ababa, the Bale and Simien Mountains, and most of the northern historical circuit are usually considered safe areas, but they're not risk-free.

For short-term visitors, it's probably wise to err on the side of caution. If you're thinking of travelling outside these areas, you shouldn't think twice – take prophylactics.

The disease is caused by a parasite in the bloodstream spread via the bite of the female Anopheles mosquito. There are several types of malaria; falciparum malaria is the most dangerous type and makes up 70% of the cases in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Infection rates vary with season and climate, so check out the situation before departure. Unlike most other diseases regularly encountered by travellers, there's no vaccination against malaria (yet). However, several different drugs are used to prevent malaria, and new ones are in the pipeline. Up-to-date advice from a travel health clinic is essential as some medication is more suitable for some travellers than others. The pattern of drug-resistant malaria is changing rapidly, so what was advised several years ago might no longer be the case.

Malaria can present in several ways. The early stages include headaches, fevers, generalised aches and pains, and malaise, which could be mistaken for flu. Other symptoms can include abdominal pain, diarrhoea and a cough. Anyone who develops a fever in a malarial area should assume malarial infection until a blood test proves negative, even if you have been taking antimalarial medication. If not treated, the next stage could develop within 24 hours, particularly if falciparum malaria is the parasite: jaundice, then reduced consciousness and coma (also known as cerebral malaria) followed by death. Treatment in hospital is essential, and

the death rate might still be as high as 10% even in the best intensive-care facilities.

Many travellers are under the impression that malaria is a mild illness, that treatment is always easy and successful, and that taking antimalarial drugs causes more illness through side effects than actually getting malaria. In Africa, this is unfortunately not true. Side effects of the medication depend on the drug being taken. Doxycycline can cause heartburn, indigestion and increased sensitivity to sunlight; mefloquine (Larium) can cause anxiety attacks, insomnia and nightmares, and (rarely) severe psychiatric disorders; chloroquine can cause nausea and hair loss; and atovaquone and proguanil hydrochloride (malarone) can cause diarrhoea, abdominal pain and mouth ulcers.

These side effects are not universal, and can be minimised by taking medication correctly, eg with food. Also, some people should not take a particular antimalarial drug, eg people with epilepsy should avoid mefloquine, and doxycycline should not be taken by pregnant women or children younger than 12.

If you decide that you really do not wish to take antimalarial drugs, you must understand the risks, and be obsessive about avoiding mosquito bites. Use nets and insect repellent, and report any fever or flulike symptoms to a doctor as soon as possible. Some people advocate homeopathic preparations against malaria, such as Demal200, but as yet there's no conclusive evidence that this is effective, and many homeopaths don't recommend their use.

People of all ages can contract malaria, and falciparum causes the most severe illness. Repeated infections might result eventually in less serious illness. Malaria in pregnancy frequently results in miscarriage or premature labour. Adults who have survived childhood malaria have developed immunity and usually only develop mild cases of malaria; most Western travellers have no immunity at all. Immunity wanes after 18 months of nonexposure, so even if you have had malaria in the past and used to live in a malaria-prone area, you might no longer be immune.

If you're planning a journey through a malarial area, particularly where falciparum malaria predominates, consider taking stand-by treatment. Emergency stand-by treatment should be seen as emergency treatment aimed at saving the patient's life and not as routine

### THE ANTIMALARIAL A TO D

- **A** – Awareness of the risk. No medication is totally effective, but protection of up to 95% is achievable with most drugs, as long as other measures have been taken.
- **B** – Bites – avoid at all costs. Sleep in a screened room, use a mosquito spray or coils, sleep under a permethrin-impregnated net at night. Cover up at night with long trousers and long sleeves, preferably with permethrin-treated clothing. Apply appropriate repellent to all areas of exposed skin in the evenings.
- **C** – Chemical prevention (ie antimalarial drugs) is usually needed in malarial areas. Expert advice is needed as resistance patterns can change, and new drugs are in development. Not all antimalarial drugs are suitable for everyone. Most antimalarial drugs need to be started at least a week in advance and continued for four weeks after the last possible exposure to malaria.
- **D** – Diagnosis. If you have a fever or flulike illness within a year of travel to a malarial area, malaria is a possibility, and immediate medical attention is necessary.

self-medication. It should be used only if you'll be far from medical facilities and have been advised about the symptoms of malaria and how to use the medication. Medical advice should be sought as soon as possible to confirm whether the treatment has been successful. The type of stand-by treatment used will depend on local conditions, such as drug resistance, and on what antimalarial drugs were being used before stand-by treatment. This is worthwhile because you want to avoid contracting a particularly serious form such as cerebral malaria, which affects the brain and central nervous system and can be fatal in 24 hours. As mentioned earlier, self-diagnostic kits, which can identify malaria in the blood from a finger prick, are also available in the West.

The risks from malaria to both mother and foetus during pregnancy are considerable. Unless good medical care can be guaranteed, travel throughout Africa when pregnant – particularly to malarial areas – should be discouraged unless essential. Self-treatment: see stand-by treatment (earlier) if you're more than 24 hours away from medical help.

### Meningococcal Meningitis

Meningococcal infection is spread through close respiratory contact and is more likely in crowded situations, such as buses. Infection is uncommon in travellers. Vaccination is recommended for long stays and is especially important towards the end of the dry season. Symptoms include a fever, severe headache, neck stiffness and a red rash. Immediate medical treatment is necessary.

The ACWY vaccine is recommended for all travellers in sub-Saharan Africa. This vaccine is different from the meningococcal meningitis C vaccine given to children and adolescents in some countries; it's safe to be given both types of vaccine.

### Onchocerciasis (River Blindness)

This is caused by the larvae of a tiny worm, which is spread by the bite of a small fly. The earliest sign of infection is intensely itchy, red, sore eyes. Travellers are rarely severely affected. Treatment in a specialised clinic is curative.

### Poliomyelitis

Generally spread through contaminated food and water. It's one of the vaccines given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue) or as an injection. Polio can be carried asymptotically (ie showing no symptoms) and could cause a transient fever. In rare cases it causes weakness or paralysis of one or more muscles, which might be permanent.

### Rabies

Rabies is spread by receiving the bites or licks of an infected animal on broken skin. It's always fatal once the clinical symptoms start (which might be up to several months after an infected bite), so postbite vaccination should be given as soon as possible. Postbite vaccination (whether or not you've been vaccinated before the bite) prevents the virus from spreading to the central nervous system. Animal handlers should be

vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of postbite vaccine isn't available within 24 hours. Three preventive injections are needed over a month. If you have not been vaccinated you'll need a course of five injections starting 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. If you have been vaccinated, you'll need fewer postbite injections, and have more time to seek medical help.

### Schistosomiasis (Bilharzia)

This disease is spread by flukes (minute worms) that are carried by a species of freshwater snail. The flukes are carried inside the snail, which then sheds them into slow-moving or still water. The parasites penetrate human skin during paddling or swimming and then migrate to the bladder or bowel. They're passed out via stool or urine and could contaminate fresh water, where the cycle starts again. Paddling or swimming in suspect freshwater lakes or slow-running rivers should be avoided. There might be no symptoms. There might be a transient fever and rash, and advanced cases might have blood in the stool or in the urine. A blood test can detect antibodies if you might have been exposed, and treatment is then possible in specialist travel or infectious disease clinics. If not treated the infection can cause kidney failure or permanent bowel damage. It's not possible for you to infect others.

### Tuberculosis (TB)

TB is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccination is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population, although it gives only moderate protection against TB. It's more important for long stays than for short-term stays. Inoculation with the BCG vaccine isn't available in all countries. It's given routinely to many children in

### TAPE WORMS

These parasites are relatively common in Ethiopia and the Horn. Eating Ethiopian traditional food like *kitfo* and *tere sega* (raw meat dishes) in rural areas is usually the cause. Consider having your stool tested when you get home to avoid future health problems.

developing countries. The vaccination causes a small permanent scar at the site of injection, and is usually given in a specialised chest clinic. It's a live vaccine and should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals.

TB can be asymptomatic, only being picked up on a routine chest X-ray. Alternatively, it can cause a cough, weight loss or fever, sometimes months or even years after exposure.

### Trypanosomiasis (Sleeping Sickness)

Spread via the bite of the tsetse fly. It causes a headache, fever and eventually coma. There's an effective treatment.

### Typhoid

This is spread through food or water contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually a fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Sometimes septicaemia (blood poisoning) can occur. A typhoid vaccine (typhim Vi, typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available. Antibiotics are usually given as treatment, and death is rare unless septicaemia occurs.

### Yellow Fever

Yellow fever is spread by infected mosquitoes. Symptoms range from a flulike illness to severe hepatitis (liver inflammation) jaundice and death. The yellow-fever vaccination must be given at a designated clinic and is valid for 10 years. It's a live vaccine and must not be given to immunocompromised or pregnant travellers.

Travellers must carry a certificate as evidence of vaccination to obtain a visa for Ethiopia and Eritrea, though Eritrea only requires one if you're arriving within six days of visiting an infected area. You may also have to present it at immigration upon arrival. There's always the possibility that a traveller without a legally required, up-to-date certificate will be vaccinated and detained in isolation at the port of arrival for up to 10 days or possibly repatriated.

### TRAVELLERS' DIARRHOEA

Although it's not inevitable that you'll get diarrhoea while travelling in Ethiopia and Eritrea, it's certainly very likely. Diarrhoea is the most common travel-related illness:

figures suggest that at least half of all travellers will get diarrhoea at some stage. Sometimes dietary changes, such as increased spices or oils, are the cause. To help prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water (see opposite). You should also only eat fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked or peeled, and be wary of dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Although freshly cooked food can often be a safe option, plates or serving utensils might be dirty, so you should be highly selective when eating food from street vendors (make sure that cooked food is piping hot all the way through). If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing water (lots), and some salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment but, if you start having more than four or five stools a day, you should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinoline drug, such as ciprofloxacin or norfloxacin) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide) if you're not within easy reach of a toilet. If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, seek medical attention.

### Amoebic Dysentery

Contracted by eating contaminated food and water, amoebic dysentery causes blood and mucus in the faeces. It can be relatively mild and tends to come on gradually, but seek medical advice if you think you have the illness as it won't clear up without treatment (which is with specific antibiotics).

### Giardiasis

This, like amoebic dysentery, is also caused by ingesting contaminated food or water. The illness usually appears a week or more after you have been exposed to the offending parasite. Giardiasis might cause only a short-lived bout of typical travellers' diarrhoea, but it can also cause persistent diarrhoea. Ideally, seek medical advice if you suspect you have giardiasis, but if you're in a remote area you could start a course of antibiotics.

## ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

### Heat Exhaustion

This condition occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt, and is particularly common in hot climates when taking

unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty; aim to drink sufficient water to produce pale, diluted urine. Self-treatment: fluid replacement with water and/or fruit juice, and cooling by cold water and fans. The treatment of the salt-loss component consists of consuming salty fluids as in soup, and adding a little more table salt to foods than usual.

### Heatstroke

Heat exhaustion is a precursor to the much more serious condition of heatstroke. In this case there's damage to the sweating mechanism, with an excessive rise in body temperature; irrational and hyperactive behaviour; and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is ideal. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement is usually also required by intravenous drip.

### Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes might not always carry malaria or dengue fever, but they (and other insects) can cause irritation and infected bites. To avoid these, take the same precautions as you would for avoiding malaria (see p373). Use DEET-based insect repellents. Excellent clothing treatments are also available; mosquitoes that land on treated clothing will die.

Bee and wasp stings cause real problems only to those who have a severe allergy to the stings (anaphylaxis). If you're one of these people, carry an 'epipen': an adrenaline (epinephrine) injection, which you can give yourself. This could save your life.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates. They can cause a painful bite that is sometimes life-threatening. If bitten by a scorpion, take a painkiller. Medical treatment should be sought if collapse occurs.

Fleas and bed bugs are often found in cheap hotels. Fleas are also common on local and long-distance buses and in the rugs of some remote churches. They lead to very itchy, lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with crawling insect killer after removing bedding will get rid of them.

Scabies is also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. The

itch is easily treated with malathion and permethrin lotion from a pharmacy; other members of the household also need treating to avoid spreading scabies, even if they do not show any symptoms.

### Snake Bites

Basically, avoid getting bitten! Do not walk barefoot, or stick your hand into holes or cracks. However, 50% of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed). If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (such as a stick) and apply a bandage over the site, with firm pressure, similar to bandaging a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the

bite. Get medical help as soon as possible so antivenin can be given if needed.

### Water

Never drink tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (such as with iodine tablets). Never drink from streams, rivers and lakes. It's also best to avoid drinking from pumps and wells: some do bring pure water to the surface, but the presence of animals can still contaminate supplies.

Bottled water is available everywhere, though it's better for the environment if you treat/filter local water. If bottled water is obtained, always crush the bottle to minimise waste.

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