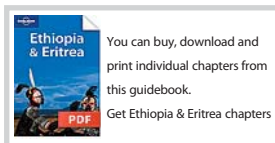


# Getting Started



There's no denying that travelling in Ethiopia and Eritrea is not easy going. The roads, though improving, still batter your bottom for hours on end and hotels (both budget and midrange) are known to host a flea or two. Cheap internal flights can add years to your backside's life, but they can't save you from everything. Expecting to see the sights between lazing in first-class hotels? Please put this book gently back on the shelf for those willing to take some doses of displeasure with the bounty of treasure these countries have to offer.

Besides perusing this skookum guidebook and dreaming up an adventurous itinerary, your only compulsory pretrip planning need involve sorting visas and vaccinations (some jabs are required five or six weeks before travel). Unless you plan on coordinating your stay with one of the major Orthodox festivals (see p261), there's no point in prebooking hotels (they are best hand-picked).

## WHEN TO GO

### Ethiopia

There's some truth in the old Ethiopian Tourism Commission slogan '13 Months of Sunshine'. Although the famed historical circuit and the rest of the highlands receive rain between mid-March and September, most days during this period still see their fair share of sunshine. The far east and northern highlands see even more sun with significant rain only falling in July and August.

Early October, just after the rains is a particularly good time to visit. The country is wonderfully green, the wildflowers are stunning and there are fewer visitors. Trekking during this time is especially sublime, though it's pretty amazing throughout the entire dry season (October through mid-March).

If you're planning a trip to the tremendous tribes of the Lower Omo Valley, you should avoid travelling in April, May or October, when rain makes most roads impassable.

Finally, you'd do well to coincide with one of Ethiopia's very colourful festivals (p261), particularly Timkat or Meskel. Be aware, however, that domestic flights and hotels often fill up far in advance of Ethiopian festivals and European Christmas.

### Eritrea

Although it is possible to visit Eritrea any time of year, the ideal time climatewise is September to October and March to April. If you are able to, avoid travelling during June to August, when it's the rainy season in the highlands and western lowlands and hot and torrid in the eastern lowlands.

With many Ethiopian Orthodox Christians in Eritrea, it's worth planning your trip to coincide with their religious festivals (see Holidays, p359). Like in Ethiopia, Timkat and Meskel are particularly special.

## COSTS & MONEY

### Ethiopia

For most day-to-day costs, Ethiopia is very inexpensive. Those who're willing to battle fleas in their nether regions and eat nothing but simple Ethiopian food can easily survive and get around on US\$10 per day

See Climate Charts (p257) for more information.

See Climate Charts (p357) for more information.

## DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Small torch (headlamps are best) for finding your shoes during power failures. Oh, it's helpful exploring amazing rock-hewn churches too!
- Batteries (torch and camera).
- Updating your vaccinations (p370).
- Sun block, sunglasses and hat.
- Folding umbrella for the sun (like most Ethiopians do) or for occasional downpours.
- Flip-flops for those toe-curling bathrooms.
- Fleece sweater for chilly highland evenings.
- Mosquito repellent.
- Flea powder for cheap hotels' beds and for socks when visiting remote churches.
- Women's hygiene items.
- High-energy bars for vegetarians or those who don't take to local food.
- A water bottle and water-purification materials, needed for trekking and useful in reducing plastic waste while travelling.
- Binoculars to spot that walia ibex dancing on a distant Simien slope.
- Earplugs in case you don't agree with the bus driver's music selection.
- Sink plug – water is very precious.
- Checking visa requirements (p269 & p363).
- Saying goodbye!

(particularly outside the capital). The cheapest hotels and meals cost around US\$3 and US\$1 respectively.

Those keen on cleanliness and who're still on a budget can get by on US\$15 per day.

On top of this are guides' fees and admissions at the national parks and historic sites, as well as one-off transportation costs such as boat trips. Even with these extra costs, budget travellers who share some expenses and ride public transport shouldn't need more than US\$15 to US\$20 per day in Ethiopia.

Those staying in midrange hotels and eating at hotel restaurants can expect to pay around US\$50 per day. This should cover admissions, guides etc, but not internal flights or private transportation costs.

Internal flights aren't really out of anyone's budget range, costing between US\$37 and US\$131 – good value considering some flights save a few days of bus travel! The same can't be said for 4WD rental, which costs at least US\$90 per day.

### Eritrea

Although prices have more than doubled in a few years, Eritrea travel is pretty cheap too – at least by Western standards. At the budget level, plan on US\$20 to US\$25 per day in the capital for a decent room, meals in restaurants and public transport. Outside Asmara, you can get by on US\$15 per day. Midrange travellers seeking some mod cons should plan on US\$35 to US\$50 in the capital, depending on the type of room you want.

More problematic are the costs of 4WD rental, which you might need to go to a number of places of interest, and the boats to the Dahlak Islands.

## HOW MUCH?

Steaming *macchiatto*  
US\$0.15

100km by bus US\$1.50-3

Minibus across town  
US\$0.15

Internet per hr US\$2-3

Tip for helpful priest  
US\$0.75-1

See also Lonely Planet  
Index (inside front cover).

## TOP TENS

### Orthodox Churches

Ethiopian Orthodox churches are everywhere, rising from Addis Ababa's skyline to dotting desolate and dramatic cliffs. Here's some you'll never forget.

- Bet Giyorgis (p160)
- Debre Berhan Selassie (p122)
- Abuna Aregawi (p145)
- Bet Medhane Alem (p157)
- Bet Amanuel (p160)
- Old St Mary of Zion (p135)
- Yemrehanna Kristos (p163)
- Abuna Yemata Guh (p149)
- Narga Selassie (p116)
- Holy Trinity Cathedral (p86)

### Festivals

Ethiopia and Eritrea have a phenomenal mix of vibrant festivals, both Orthodox Christian and Islamic. For additional information, see p261.

- Leddet, 6–7 January
- Timkat, 19 January
- Mawlid an-Nabi, March
- Good Friday, March/April
- Fasika, March/April
- Kiddus Yohannes, 11 September
- Meskel, 27 September
- Eid al-Fitr, September/October
- Festival of Maryam Zion, 30 November
- Kulubi Gabriel, 28 December

### Coffee-Table Books

Whether delving into the striking people of the Horn or classic Italian Art Deco architecture, these books are all laden with gorgeous photographs of this unique region. Since we're a modest bunch, we'll abstain from ranking our wildly colourful, witty, authoritative and comprehensive coffee-table book that covers each and every country on the continent. *The Africa Book* hits shelves April 2007. Did we say modest?

- *Don McCullin in Africa* by Don McCullin
- *Touching Ethiopia* by J Golzábez and D Cebrián
- *Journey Through Ethiopia* by M Amin, D Willetts and A Matheson
- *Eritrean Beauty* by Anne Alders
- *Africa Ark* by C Beckworth and A Fisher
- *Bless Ethiopia* by K Nomachi
- *Asmara Beloved* by Sami Sallinen and Haile Bizen
- *Old Tracks in the New Flower* by M Batistoni and P Chiara
- *Asmara: Africa's Secret Modernist City* by E Denison, G Yu Ren and N Gebremedhin
- *Ethiopia Photographed* by R Pankhurst and D Gerard

If you're solo, this will blow your budget. Your best bet is to join a group or other travellers and share costs.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Michela Wrong's *I Didn't Do It for You* is a compelling and at times comedic account of Eritrea's contemporary history; it helps to understand the national psyche and the failure of democracy.

In *Eating the Flowers of Paradise*, Kevin Rushby travels the old trade route from Ethiopia's highlands to Yemen. By chewing *chat* (mildly

intoxicating leaf that's consumed primarily in eastern Ethiopia; it's illegal in Eritrea) at every invitation, Kevin gives a dangerously funny look into this unique drug's culture.

Part personal crusade, part celebration of all that is Ethiopia, *The Chains of Heaven* chronicles Philip Marsden's return to Ethiopia, a land that changed his life when he first visited in the early 1980s.

In *Prester Quest*, Nicholas Jubber entertainingly voyages from Venice to Ethiopia on his quest to deliver – albeit 824 years late – Pope Alexander III's famed letter to Prester John, the mythical Christian king of the East.

*Sheba: Through the Desert in Search of the Legendary Queen* by Nicholas Clapp successfully blends personal travel accounts with thorough academic research to shed light on one of history's most famous and least understood characters.

By following the footsteps of 19th-century French literary legend Arthur Rimbaud through Egypt, Ethiopia, Djibouti and elsewhere, Charles Nicholl's *Somebody Else* isn't only an award-winning biography, but an interesting piece of travel literature too.

Wilfred Thesiger's classic *Life of My Choice* includes reminiscences of the author's childhood and early adult years in Ethiopia, including the coronation of Haile Selassie and his renowned six-month journey through the Danakil in 1933.

Robert Kaplan's *Surrender or Starve* paints a disturbing but realistic picture of the Horn during the 1980s. Although showing some political bias, he manages to link the devastation of Ethiopia's famines to the Derg's policies.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Abyssinia Gateway** ([www.abyssiniacybergateway.net](http://www.abyssiniacybergateway.net)) Provides an exhaustive list of helpful and historical links for Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland and Somalia.

**All Africa** ([www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com)) This site collates daily news and helpfully sorts it into country profiles.

**Asmera** ([www.asmera.nl](http://www.asmera.nl)) A comprehensive site on Eritrea with lots of tourist information, compiled by an individual.

**CyberEthiopia** ([www.cyberethiopia.com](http://www.cyberethiopia.com)) Like an Ethiopian Yahoo!, CyberEthiopia has quite useful information categorised into different sections.

**Eritrean Beauty** ([www.eritreanbeauty.com](http://www.eritreanbeauty.com)) Information on all the ethnic groups in Eritrea, with numerous photos.

**LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Includes summarised information on travelling to Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti, the Thorn Tree bulletin board, travel news and helpful web links.

**'The Chains of Heaven chronicles Philip Marsden's return to Ethiopia, a land that changed his life when he first visited in the early 1980s.'**

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### ETHIOPIA'S HISTORICAL CIRCUIT

Three to five weeks by road  
(10 to 20 days by plane)

After a few days revelling **Addis Ababa's** (p75) chaos, head north to bustling palm-fringed **Bahir Dar** (p112) for a day. Spend the next day at **Lake Tana** (p115) exploring some of the lake's centuries-old island monasteries.

Next wander the extensive ruins of crenulated 17th-century castles in **Gonder** (p118). Looming 100km north, the **Simien Mountains** (p125) are home to easily visible wildlife, and days of East Africa's best trekking.

Take the long road north to **Aksum** (p131), where pre-Christian tombs underlie splendid 1800-year-old stelae (obelisks). After two days, wrangle up a 4WD and venture to the 3000-year-old ruins of Ethiopia's first capital, **Yeha** (p143), and to the cliff-top monastery of **Debre Damo** (p144).

If you didn't get your fill of heights at Debre Damo, head south and search out Tigray's precarious and stunning **rock-hewn churches** (p147).

After a short stop south in **Mekele** (p151) to view its moving museums, visit **Lalibela** (p155). Its 11 astounding rock-hewn churches and myriad of tunnels have poignantly frozen 12th- and 13th-century Ethiopia in stone. After three or so days here, it's back to Addis Ababa.



The historical sights along this loop are undeniably monumental in both scale and detail. The journey, is spectacularly scenic, covering at least 2500km. If 10 solid days of bumpy bus time aren't your backside's idea of a holiday, fear not! Ethiopian Airlines has cheap flights linking Bahir Dar, Gonder, Aksum and Lalibela.

### FROM HIGH TO LOW: ESSENTIAL ERITREA

Ten days to two weeks/  
Asmara to Massawa

Start by spending two full days in fascinating **Asmara** (p308), visiting its mind-blowing collection of colonial-era architectural wonders – not to mention its tantalising pastry shops. Beeline for the **National Museum** (p315) in preparation for Eritrea's archaeological sites and take a day trip to the **Debre Bizen Monastery** (p327), which offers breathtaking views.

Next, push onto **Keren** (p328), whose attractive architecture, active markets and cheerful ambience deserves a day or two. Back to Asmara, and it's time to head south. You might make a half-day stop in **Dekemhare** (p332) to recharge the batteries before spending the night in **Adi Keyh** (p333). The next day, explore the poignant ruins of **Qohaito** (p333) and expand your knowledge of Eritrea's mysterious past.

From Qohaito it's a short hop to **Senafe** (p334), where you can immerse yourself in the nearby ancient ruins of **Metera** (p336), one of Eritrea's most significant archaeological sites.

If it's not off limits to travellers (enquire in Asmara), it's well worth making an excursion to the **Monastery of Debre Libanos** (p335). It offers stunning scenery of dramatic peaks and valleys and proffers views south into Ethiopia. Having sampled the highlands' delights, head north to Asmara before proceeding east. Take the big plunge to **Massawa** (p339), on the coast, and mosey around Zanzibar-esque **Massawa Island** (p340).

Fancy a dip? Massawa is a jumping-off point for the pristine **Dahlak Islands** (p346), which are blessed with good diving and snorkelling opportunities. When you've run out of sunscreen, it's time to return to the highlands!



This is a great trip for any first-time visitor to Eritrea, taking in the country's star attractions. It's a busy but satisfying 800km journey that combines various landscapes, atmospheres and even climates. Starting off in Asmara the trip moves on through captivating sights in the highlands and ends with a sojourn in Massawa, right on the coast.

## ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

### LAKES, MOUNTAINS & MURSI: SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

Two and a half to five weeks/  
Addis Ababa to Omo Valley

Do what few others do in Ethiopia and point the compass south. En route from Addis Ababa to **Lake Ziway** (p171), and its hippos, birdlife and island monasteries, stop at **Tiya** (p171), a World Heritage site and one of southern Ethiopia's most important stelae fields. More impressive birdlife is found just south at **Lake Langano** (p172) and **Lake Abiata-Shala National Park** (p173).

Next it's a night lakeside at **Awasa** (p176) or up in the lush hills at **Wondo Genet** (p175), before travelling east to **Dodola** (p179) for some multiday mountain horse treks, or further east to the bounty of **Bale Mountains National Park** (p181). Treks here offer unparalleled viewing of the endangered Ethiopian wolf and mountain nyala, and countless rare bird species.

Backtrack west through Shashemene before looping south to the southern Rift Valley lakes and **Arba Minch** (p196), where gargantuan crocodiles, zebras and the odd Abyssinian lion roam nearby **Nechisar National Park** (p199).

Slip south and visit intriguing **Konso villages** (p202) around **Konso** (p201), at the gateway to the cultural riches of the **Lower Omo Valley** (p204).

Foray on the back of a truck into Hamar and bull-jumping territory at **Turmi** (p208) and into Galeb territory at **Omorate** (p209), which sits on the banks of the mighty Omo River itself. It's north from here for a respite from remoteness in **Jinka** (p202). Those with 4WDs can also descend into **Mago National Park** (p210), the home of the famed Mursi lip-stretchers.

This journey south from Addis Ababa, though the Rift Valley lakes, the Bale Mountains, Arba Minch and the Lower Omo Valley, offers some of Africa's most unique peoples and Ethiopia's best wildlife. This 1500km foray is a tough slog, and takes almost twice as long using public transport. A cheap flight from Jinka saves a two-day drive back to Addis Ababa.



**DANKALIA DESOLATION** Three to five days/Asmara...or Djibouti Starting off from **Asmara** (p308), you could either take the rickety old bus that plies the route three times weekly between the capital and Assab (ouch!) or hire a 4WD with a driver; for more freedom of movement the latter is strongly recommended. This trip will also take you through the heart of Afar country, which will yield fascinating encounters with Afar herders.

Once you've had your fill of Asmara's joys, forge east to **Massawa** (p339). Allow at least a day to visit **Massawa Island** (p340) and to stock up for your journey off the beaten track. From here you'll be leaving the asphalt on a bumpy jaunt due south. First you'll cross the town of **Foro** (p349), a base for visiting the modest, ancient Aksumite ruins of **Adulis** (p349). Continue due south to the little fishing village of **Irafayle** (p350), where Afar territory begins. The more you progress to the south, the more hauntingly bleak the landscape becomes. Take a detour to the **Buri Peninsula** (p350), where you can spot gazelles and baboons. Next is **Marsa Fatma** (p350), then **Thio** (p350), another ramshackle fishing village where you can overnight. Make it to **Edi** (p350), where you can slake your thirst before exploring the **Bay of Beraesoli** (p351) and its stunning lunar landscape. When you reach **Beylul** (p351), it's customary to share a cup of *doma* (palm wine) with Afar herders before setting off for **Assab** (p351). In Assab, at the southern extremity of the desolate Dankalia, treat yourself to a comfy room in a good hotel – you've earned it. Then decide whether Assab is your final destination or just another staging post on the way to Obock (Djibouti)...

For those with a strong sense of exploration, this itinerary is seventh heaven: you'll cross the Horn's far-flung corners and reach some of the most inhospitable areas in the world. Be prepared for an exciting, albeit arduous, 750km ride that can take anything from three to five days – or even more, if you find the lure of Dankalia irresistible.



## TAILORED TRIPS

### ORTHODOX MONASTERIES

Ethiopian Orthodox monasteries hold some of the region's greatest treasures, whether they're brilliant illuminated manuscripts, precious crosses or vibrant murals. In most cases the monks are happy to show them off.

Unfortunately women are forbidden to visit several monasteries.

Surrounded by cliffs, atop an *amba* (flat-topped mountain), is the celebrated **Debre Damo** (p144). If you like heights, getting here is half the fun.

The **monasteries of Lake Tana** (p115) are some of the most impressive and historic. Of them, Kebran Gabriel, Ura Kidane Meret, Dega Estefanos and Narga Selassie are the most atmospheric and rich in church treasures. Although there's little to see now, Lake Tana's Tana Cherkos monastery was rumoured to house the Ark of the Covenant for over 800 years.

**Debre Tsion** (p171), an island monastery on Lake Ziway, is also thought to have housed the Ark in the 9th century.

Other monasteries of note in Ethiopia are **Abba Pentalewon** (p139) and **Abba Liqanos** (p139) near Aksum, **Abba Garima** (p143) near Adwa, **Ashetan Maryam** (p164) near Lalibela and **Mt Zuqualla Maryam** (p216) near Debre Zeyit.

In Eritrea, **Debre Bizen** (p327) is renowned for containing over 1000 manuscripts and other church relics. **Debre Libanos** (p335), which sits in a rather stunning location, houses Eritrea's oldest church; inquire in Asmara if it's still off limits to travellers.



### WILDLIFE

A visit to the **Bale Mountains** (p181) offers you a great chance to spot the endangered Ethiopian wolf (the world's rarest canid) and mountain nyala. Sixteen of the park's 260 bird species are also endemic.

The savannahs of **Nechisar National Park** (p199) offer up Burchell's zebras, Grant's gazelles and the endemic Swayne's hartebeests, while greater kudu and the odd hyena and Abyssinian lion are also spotted. Some of Africa's most impressive crocodiles bathe along the shore of **Lake Chamo** (p196), within the park.

The **Simien Mountains** (p125) are known for their gelada 'bleeding heart' baboons, and for the massive Lammergeyer vultures. The critically endangered and endemic walia ibex (goat species) is routinely spotted by trekkers here.

Beisa oryxes, Soemmerring's gazelles, kudus and colobus monkeys are found in the volcanic landscapes of **Awash National Park** (p217), along with hundreds of bird species.

If bountiful underwater Red Sea species are also up your alley, take the plunge at **Dahlak's diving sites** (p347).

Ethiopia's astounding birdlife warrants its own section (see p62).





# The Authors



## MATT PHILLIPS

**Coordinating Author, Addis Ababa, Northern, Southern & Western Ethiopia**

In 2001 Matt fell in love with Ethiopia in 1994. Strange, but according to the Ethiopian calendar, true! He'd never planned to visit but while travelling north from Cape Town he kept hearing the word 'Ethiopia' from the lips of those heading south. He aborted his Nairobi–Cairo flight and dove in. 'Ethiopia' has been leaping from his lips ever since! Matt has returned to Africa four times since then and has now been thoroughly enlightened by 22 of its amazing countries. He's co-authored Lonely Planet's *Kenya* and *West Africa* guidebooks and was thrilled to take on *Ethiopia & Eritrea*, his sixth title for Lonely Planet.

### Matt's Favourite Trip

Why, with an innate fear of heights, do my favourite spots always involve big drops? With dramatic precipices and endless abysses, the Simien Mountains (p125) are my favourite. Now there's standing near cliffs and then there's hanging from them – astounding Debre Damo (p144) definitely lends itself to the latter. The priestly pull up its 15m bluff is unforgettable. Thankfully, what's on top never lets you down! Despite a narrow ledge over a 200m drop stopping me 3m short of Abuna Yemata Guh (p149), one of Tigray's amazing rock-hewn churches, the stunning climb is something I'll never forget. Beauty overcomes gravity at Lalibela, where I let the sun sink with my legs over the ledge at Bet Giyorgis (p160).



## JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET

**Eastern Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea**

A Paris-based freelance writer and photographer, Jean-Bernard is a die-hard Africa-lover. He has visited 14 nations in western, eastern and southern Africa. For this edition, he travelled from Addis Ababa to Eritrea via Somaliland and Djibouti – an epic journey in the Horn. Eritrea, his final destination, broke his heart: he found a radically different-feeling country but comfortingly unchanged people, with a fabulous inner strength. He can't think of a more agreeable city than Asmara, where he sipped more *macchiatos* than he cares to remember.

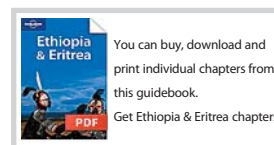
Jean-Bernard coauthored the previous edition of this book as well as Lonely Planet's *Africa on a Shoestring* and *West Africa*.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the Internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).

### Jean-Bernard's Favourite Trip

I base myself in Asmara (p308) for a couple of days. Once I have my fill of frothy *macchiatos*, Art Deco buildings and late nights in the capital, I proceed south to Qohaito (p333) and Metera (p336) for some cultural sustenance. Back to Asmara, I jump on a bus to Keren (p328) to check out its architecture and markets before stopping again in Asmara en route to Massawa (p339). After soaking up the ambience on Massawa Island and filling my tummy with Yemeni fish, I take a boat to the Dahlak Islands (p346) for some snorkelling in warm waters. From there, the lure of talismanic Dankalia (p350) is irresistible; I journey on to Assab (p351) and fly back to Asmara.



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