

Ethiopia Historic Route with Simiens and Tigray

Explore the length and breadth of Ethiopia's geographical and historical landscape on this 2-week tour of the famous Historic Route, visiting Addis Ababa, Tigray, Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, Bahir Dar, Lake Tana and the Simien Mountains.



Day 1: Arrival Addis Ababa (L, D)

You will be met on arrival at Bole International Airport and driven approx. 20 mins to your hotel in central Addis Ababa, the Saro Maria.

Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, **Addis Ababa** is located 2,500m above sea level in the Entoto mountain chain. It enjoys a warm climate all-year round, with an average temperature of 25°C. It is a pleasant city, with wide avenues of jacaranda trees, interesting museums and one of the largest open-air markets in Africa. It also boasts Ethiopia's best restaurants!

Depending on time of your arrival, we'll arrange for a short tour of the city this afternoon, starting with the **Holy Trinity Cathedral** – the final resting place of Haile Selassie, and Ethiopia's second most prominent place of worship after Axum's Temple of St Mary of Zion – followed by a visit to the National Museum, where cultural and archaeological relics, including a plaster cast of "Lucy," the 3.2 million-year-old Hominid, are displayed.

Your Financial Protection

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

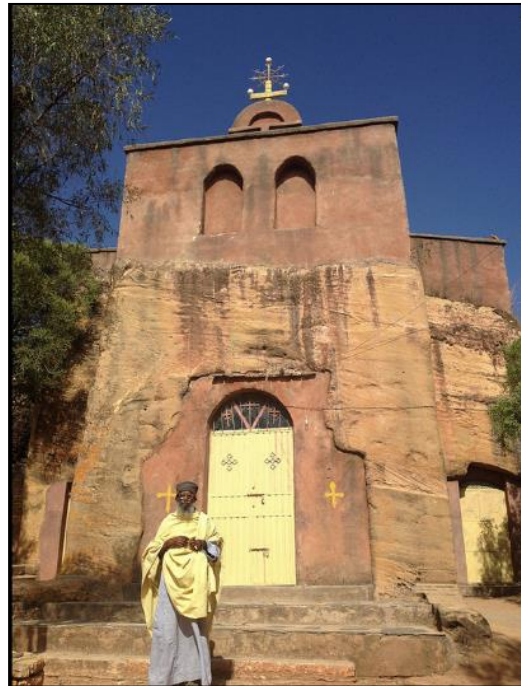
For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

Time-permitting, the tour will typically end with a visit to Addis Ababa's central market, the largest of its kind in East Africa.

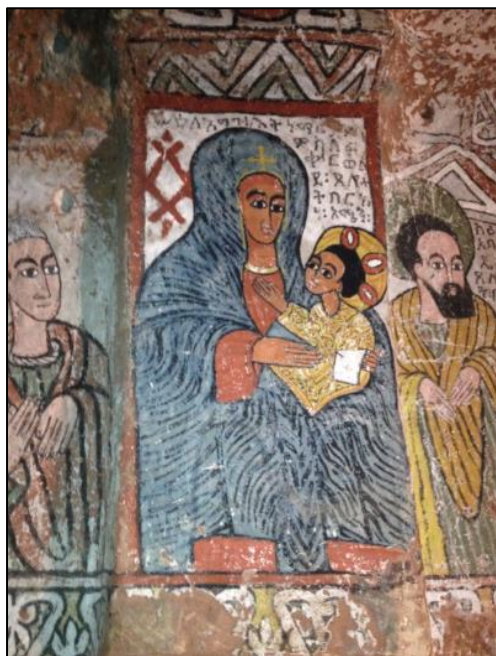
Day 2: Addis Ababa – Tigray (B, L, D)

Transfer to the airport after breakfast to catch the morning flight to Mekele (07:45-09:10), where you will be met on arrival by your guide and driver.

Your tour of Tigray begins with a visit to the dramatic **Church of Michael Imba**, an early cruciform and semi-monolithic church that is typical of the churches found in the region. Situated on a small hill, reaching Michael Imba involves an easy walk up a rocky incline, followed by a short climb down to the church entrance, which is carved into the rock below surface level.



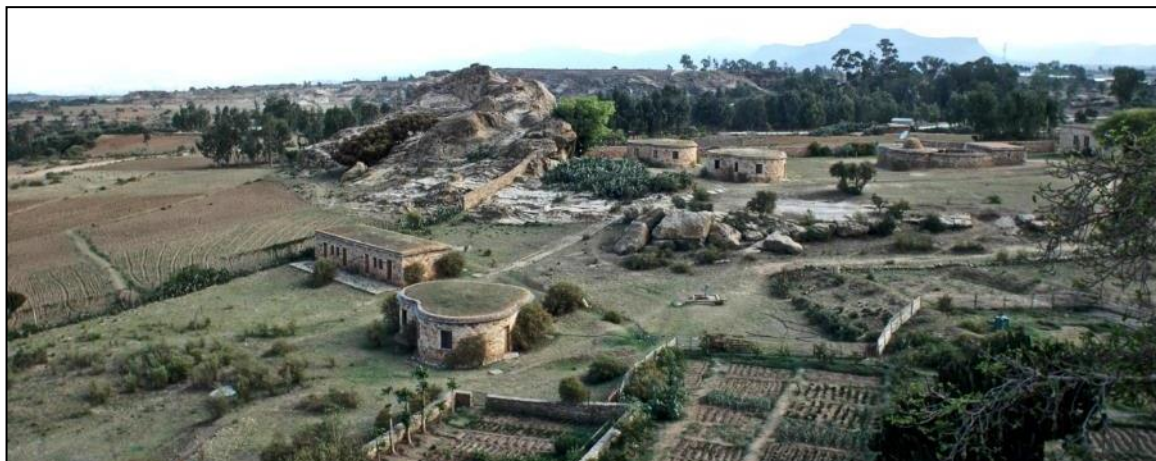
From Michael Imba, continue to **Wukro**, stopping for a leisurely lunch at a local restaurant, and then on to **Abreha & Atsbeha**, one of the most dramatic of the rock-hewn churches of Tigray. Dedicated to the famous kings of Axum, the two brothers and 4th-century Christian converts Abreha & Atsbeha, this church is renowned for its magnificent 17th-century murals.



The tour will typically end with a visit to **Wukro Churkos**, to the north of Wukro town – an early cruciform and semi-monolithic church with remarkable interior adornments, similar in style to Michael Imba. All three churches share Axumite architectural qualities that support the claim that these are the earlier of the rock-hewn Ethiopian churches and certainly pre-date the rock churches of Lalibela. Your guide will explain more about their history, and the debate surrounding the precise date of their construction, during the visits.

NB. The number of holy places visited during the day will depend on group dynamics and fitness levels as well as time spent at preceding churches.

Later in the afternoon, check-in and supper at Gheralta Lodge. This boutique, Italian-owned lodge is set on a high hill overlooking the Gheralta plains. Constructed in the local Tigrayan-style, its stone, wood and thatch huts blend in effortlessly with the wild, rural surrounds.



Gheralta Lodge, Tigray

For those interested in exploring further, there is a small cave church, **Teklehaimanot Hawzen**, within easy walking distance of the lodge.

Day 3: Exploring Gheralta region (B, L, D)

After breakfast at Gheralta Lodge, drive and walk to several nearby rock churches, including Debre Maryam Korkor and Abune Yemata (optional). **Maryam Korkor** is located on a high hill and involves a lengthy trek to reach its summit (approx, 1 and a half hours up, one hour down), but it's worth it for the marvellous view. Built into the cliff-face, **Abune Yemata** is known as the most difficult church to reach in Ethiopia and possibly in the world, involving a steep rock climb. If you choose to visit Abune Yemata, we shall place a safety rope on the climb section but extreme caution must also be taken on the exposed ledges at the top.

In the afternoon, you may like to stop for a simple coffee ceremony in a local coffee bar, then visit a village market or school. Lunch will be at a local restaurant between the church visits. Late afternoon, return to Gheralta Lodge.



Gheralta landscape, Tigray

Day 4: Gheralta region and on to Yeha and Axum (B, L, D)

After breakfast at Gheralta Lodge, depart with your guide and driver for Axum, stopping en route to visit the ancient **Temple of Yeha**.



A Sabean construction, Yeha is reputedly the oldest standing stone structure in Ethiopia, dating back to around 700BC. Though little of Yeha remains, it provides a crucial insight into Ethiopia's earliest known history. Several days a week, there is also a colourful market at Yeha.

On arrival in Axum check into Yared Zema, or similar. Evening at leisure.

Day 5: Axum (B, L, D)

Ethiopian tradition holds that the royal city of Axum was founded in the 10th-century BC as the royal seat of the Queen of Sheba. Around this time, the tradition continues, Menelik, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, brought the Ark of the Covenant to Axum where it remains to this day, preserved in a sanctuary within the church of St Mary of Zion. Whatever the veracity of this legend (archaeologists prefer to date the origins of Axum to the 5th century BC), Axum has played a crucial role in Ethiopia's history, and remains very much the religious and cultural centre of the country to this day.

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



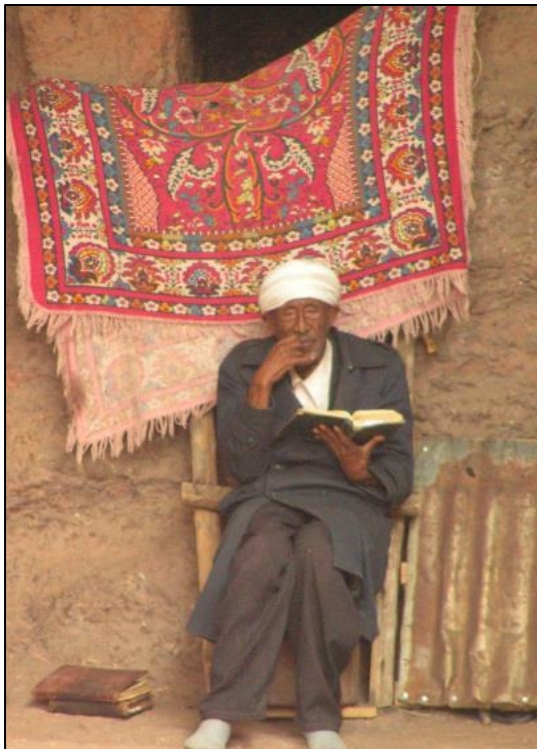
Obelisk of Axum

Commence your tour of the ancient city this morning with a visit to its most famous site, the dramatic **Stellae Field**. These granite monoliths almost certainly pre-date the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia, and their symbolic engravings – the meaning of which remains a mystery – provide a possible insight into early Ethiopian religious culture. (The stellae also figure in Ethiopia's more recent history, as during the Italian occupation Mussolini had one of the obelisks removed to Rome. It has since then been returned, restored and re-erected in Axum, its status as a national monument reaffirmed.)

Finish your explorations of Axum with a visit to the **Church of St Mary of Zion**, Ethiopia's holiest site. The Church is said to house the Ark of the Covenant. Visitors aren't allowed to see the Ark, but there are a number of other treasures on display, including the royal crowns of successive Ethiopian kings. Afterwards return to the guesthouse.

Day 6: Axum – Lalibela (B, L, D)

This morning, catch the early flight from Axum to Lalibela.



Located at an altitude of 2,600 metres above sea level, the mountain city of Lalibela is remote even by Ethiopian standards. It has long been a holdout for the Orthodox Ethiopian Church, untouched by the Islamic conquests of the 16th-century and later European attempts at colonisation. For Orthodox Ethiopians, pilgrimage to the churches of Lalibela, where services are still held daily, is as important as the pilgrimage to Mecca is to devout Muslims. Nowhere in Ethiopia does the spirituality of its people echo louder than in Lalibela.

Lalibela is of course most famous for its 12th-century monolithic churches, of which there are 11, each carved out of pink granite rock and collectively considered to be one of the wonders of the world. Each of the churches has a unique architectural style, though they share many features; most notably, each has been carved from the top-down, a technique not

practiced anywhere else in the world. They are also beautifully decorated. Looked at in isolation, each of the temples is remarkable, but taken together they are a wonder; the entire city has been described as a sculpture dedicated to the glory of God, and as you wander the complex network of tunnels and subterranean passageways that connect its underground structures, you'll quickly come to appreciate why.

On arrival you will visit the Monastery of Nakuto Leab named after its constructor, the nephew and successor of King Lalibela, it is a small church carved into the mountain. The temples at Lalibela are loosely divided into two groups. Today you'll take your time visiting the first group of temples.

You stay tonight in Tukul Village, a cosy lodge offering private cottage rooms close to the main Lalibela rock churches.

Day 7: Lalibela (B, L, D)

This morning you will visit the monastery of Asheton Maryam - a small and, in its interior, somewhat nondescript church, but one with an incredible setting, carved into the cliff-face in the high mountains overlooking the town.

In the afternoon you will explore the second group of churches.

Day 8: Gondar (B, L, D)

Leave Lalibela on the late morning flight to **Gondar**, arriving early afternoon. After lunch, begin your tour of the medieval city.

Famous for its late medieval fort and stunning mountain setting, Gondar was founded in the early seventeenth century (the precise dates are unclear) as the capital city of the Ethiopian Empire during the reign of Fasilides.

Today you'll have the chance to visit the city's historic centrepiece, **Gondar Castle**, built by Emperor Fasilidas and his descendant, Yohannes I. You will also visit Fasiladas' Bath, built outside of the city is thought to have been a holiday home.

You stay in town tonight in the Goha Hotel, or similar.



Day 9: Simien Mountains Excursion (B, L, D)

Wake for an early breakfast, and then begin your drive into the **Simien Mountains**, stopping for coffee en route. The drive time from Gondar to the Simiens is approximately two hours but may vary depending on the weather and traffic. Altitude sickness is a risk, as you will be ascending to approx. 3,500m, though your time spent at Lalibela will have provided some altitude acclimatisation. Nevertheless, drink lots of water before you reach the Simiens to ensure you don't dehydrate while in the mountains.

The Simien Mountains, which include Ras Dshen (Ethiopia's highest mountain), are located in the north-western corner of the country. Now a world heritage site, the Simiens are home to rare and endemic flora and fauna – walia ibex, gelada baboon, Simien fox, bearded vulture, thick-billed raven and eagle – and

scenery of such splendour that many travellers consider the range to be the most beautiful mountain country in all of Africa.



Many gelada baboon can be seen on the escarpment. There are currently an estimated 2,700 baboons in the park, their numbers fairly static. Although their predators have declined, increased farming in the park means that the gelada do not have the same extent of grasslands and woodland to roam as they once had.

Gelada live in family groups made up of a dominant male and up to 8 females with their respective young. They come together in large bands, which, during the dry season, can number as many as 800.

If lucky, you may also spot the endemic Walia Ibex as you explore the Simiens.

You stay tonight at the Simien Mountain Lodge, which enjoys a fabulous position right on the edge of the escarpment.

Day 10: Simiens to Gondar (B, L, D)

This morning there will be time to further explore the escarpment, before returning to Gondar in the afternoon. On reaching Gondar, check into the Goha Hotel for one night.



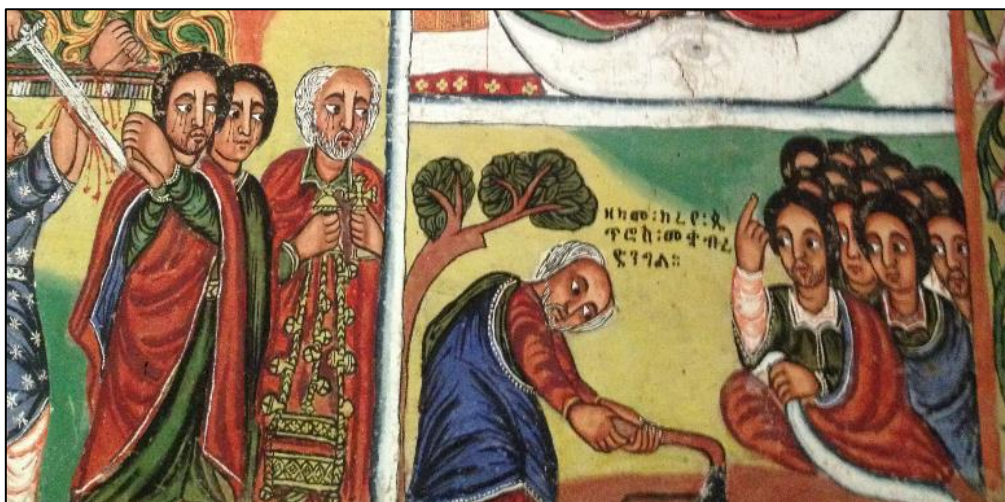
Day 11: Bahir Dar (B, L, D)

This morning you will visit the fascinating **Debre Birhan Selassie Church**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. With its walls and ceilings decorated with scenes of Biblical lore and medieval history, Birhan Selassie serves as one of the best examples of the religious art of the Gondarian period.

Afterwards drive to Bahir Dar (180km; approx. 3-4 hours), a lovely city located at 1,800m above sea level on the shore of **Lake Tana**, the largest lake in Ethiopia. Check in at the Avanti Blue Nile Hotel.

Day 12: Lake Tana (B, L, D)

This morning enjoy a half-day boat trip on Lake Tana to explore some of its iconic island monasteries.



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

In the afternoon, visit the **Blue Nile Falls**, some 30km downstream from Lake Tana. 40 metres high, the Blue Nile Falls are among Ethiopia's most impressive natural wonders.

Return to your hotel in Bahir Dar late afternoon. Evening at leisure.

Day 13: Bahir Dar – Addis Ababa (B, L, D)

After breakfast, transfer to the airport to catch the morning flight to Addis Ababa.



The afternoon is at leisure. If flying out this evening, we will arrange for you to have access to a day-room at a hotel in the city. In the evening enjoy a traditional dinner with live music and dance, before transferring to the airport.

Day 14: International departure (-)

Transfer to the airport to catch your return flight home.

Price Guide:

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£3,095** per person, based on two sharing a twin/double room.*

For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

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

Excludes:

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