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CST Permit #2057026-40

Historic Ethiopia & Wild Omo Valley
January 15-February 3, 2012 with Timket Festival
September 25-October 14, 2012 with Meskel Festival
November 21-December 10, 2012 with Hidar Tsion

Ethiopia is the home of some of the most exotic ancient civilizations in the world and the land where some of our earliest human ancestors have been discovered. The country's landscape is littered with old ruins and wonders -- ancient sculpted towers, Arab-influenced walled towns and early churches carved from solid rock. It also has its share of wild places -- of lions and hippos and untamed rivers. On the Omo Valley extension, we encounter the tribal cultures of the Hamar, the Mursi and the Dorze.

Tourist infrastructure is still minimal. While flexible, adventurous travelers will be enchanted nonetheless, others may find traveling in Ethiopia too stressful. Omo Valley is really "off-the-beaten-track." The roads are in rough condition (if there is a road at all), and you should be prepared for some bumpy drives.

Day 1 Arrive in Addis Ababa / Jupiter Hotel

If your flight arrives between midnight and early am, book arrival date one day after our tour start date to avoid charges for an extra hotel night. We cannot guarantee early check-in before 12 noon, without additional cost. You will be met on arrival and transferred to hotel.

In Amharic, Addis Ababa means "new flower." Founded in 1886 by Menelik II, the city is located 2,500m (8,200ft) above sea level in one of the highest parts of the Entoto mountain chain, which rises to 3,000m (9,800ft) above sea level. It enjoys an excellent climate all year round, with an average temperature of 25C (77F). Addis Ababa is a pleasant city with wide avenues of jacarandas, interesting museums and one of the largest open-air markets in Africa, known as the "Mercato."

Day 2 Addis Ababa /Jupiter Hotel (B)

Late morning start on the city tour: visit of the Trinity Cathedral (built 1941), Addis Ababa University campus and the Ethnological Museum in the same compound, the Mercato, Martyrs' Monument Square. Afternoon visit to the National Museum which exhibits many archaeological and historical findings. Its' collection is considered one of the most important in sub-Saharan Africa. View the palaeontology exhibit, including two remarkable casts of Lucy. The real bones are preserved in the archives of the museum. You will have a chance to soak up the atmosphere of the Mercato and its environs.

September Tour: Attend Meskel Festivities, celebrated in Ethiopia by dancing, feasting and lighting a massive bonfire known in Ethiopian tradition as "Damera." Meskel commemorates the finding of the True Cross in the fourth century when Empress Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, discovered the True Cross on which Christ was crucified. The feast is celebrated in Ethiopia on September 17 Ethiopian calendar (September 27 Gregorian calendar). The Meskel celebration includes the burning of a large bonfire, or Demera, based on the belief that Queen Eleni had a revelation in a dream. The firewood is decorated with daisies prior to the celebration. Afterwards, charcoal from the remains of the fire is collected and used by the faithful to mark their foreheads with the shape of a cross (compare Ash Wednesday).

North: Historic route to Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibella and Axum

Day 3 Bahir Dar / Kuriftu Resort (B)

Transfer to the airport for 55 min flight to Bahir Dar departing at 0700 am. Bahir Dar is a pleasant city located on the southern shore of Lake Tana, the largest lake in Ethiopia with 37 islands and 20 of them have churches and monasteries of considerable historical and cultural significance.

After hotel check-in, tour of Bahar Dar, including the market, one of the most colorful African markets. Visit the Bezawit Palace of the former Emperor Haile Selassie; and Woyito Village where craftsmen specialize in making fishing boats (called tank was) from papyrus reeds.

Afternoon, a half-day boat trip on Lake Tana to the Zeghe Peninsula, known for its 14th century, round, grass-roofed churches with their magnificent wall murals. Visit the monastery churches, including Baeta Mariam and Ura Kidane Mihret. Ura Kidan Mihret is the best known of the monasteries and has an important collection of religious icons from the 16th to 18th centuries. Azoa Mariam is known for its paintings. You will walk through dense forest with prolific bird life. A performance of Amhara dancing, if available.

Day 4 Bahir Dar-Gondar / Goha Hotel (B) -Timket Festival January

Morning drive about 30 km south of Bahir Dar to the Blue Nile waterfalls: 100m wide, the water plunges for 45 meters, giving rise to steam clouds and rainbows. We cross the Blue Nile River in a papyrus boat (traditionally known as a "Tankwas"). Descend to the base of the falls (about 20 minutes walk), climb back up the other side.

Afterwards drive to Gondar (175 km/2 hrs) enroute visit the unique Awra-amba people in the Amhara regional state, their village and culture.

January Tour: Attend Timket Procession starts around 2 pm. We go to a church in to accompany the Tabot to its resting site for overnight with the local people.

Afternoon exploration of the splendid Gondar Royal castles, churches and other sites in and around Gondar town. Gondar was the first capital city of the Ethiopian empire, which began in 1632 with the reign of King Fasilledes. In Gondar there are dozens of castles built by various emperors over the course of 236 years. The city is more European than African and has various Islamic influences. Visit to the palaces, residences and open air baths of King Fasilledes; the monasteries of Qusquom, the church of Debre Berhan Sellassie (Light of the Trinity) with its 16th century paintings and frescoes, which is located at the summit of a hill and surrounded by fortified walls. Debre Berham Selassie is rumored to once have been the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant.

Day 5 Gondar-Semien National Park / Simien Lodge (B, L, D)

January Tour: This is the date on which the Ethiopian Orthodox church commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ in the river of Jordan. Early morning attend Timket festivities, begins at 7 am. All the "Tabots" or tablets will be taken to the open-air bath of King Fasil where the ceremony takes place. Babies will be baptized and young men will swim in the pool.

Morning visit any sites in Gondar not visited the day before. Then drive (130km/2 hours-gravel road). We stop at Sankaber for the best views and walk along the cliffs. En route, at the high point of the road, there are superb views across the weirdly eroded foothills of the range and you may also see the endemic Gelada (or 'bleeding heart') baboons.

Day 6 Semien National Park - Gondar / Goha Hotel (B, L)

The Simien Mountains National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and contains some of the most dramatic scenery in Africa - great volcanic plugs, formed some 40 million years ago and eroded over the eons into fantastic crags, pinnacles and flat-topped mountains. The 'chess pieces of the gods', as one writer described them, tower over precipitous gorges, river valleys and plains stretching all the way to Eritrea. There are many peaks over 4000 meters. At 4620 m, Ras Dashen is the highest in the country and the fourth highest in Africa.

Visit the park with a little bit of hiking (adjusted to the abilities of the group). Those who do not wish to hike can enjoy the views.

Wildlife: There are currently about 2700 animals in the park and this number is fairly static. Although the predators have declined, increased farming in the park means that the gelada do not have the same grasslands and woodlands as previously. Gelada live in family groups made up of a dominant male and up to 8 females with their respective young. They come together in larger bands and during the dry season these bands can be as large as 800 animals. Gelada can be seen from Simien Lodge right up to Bwahit. Sit in their migration path to get some incredible pictures. There are a few leopards in the Simiens. They live in the wooded valley areas of the north escarpment and sometimes venture onto the plateau to hunt although they prefer the cover of the trees. The best place to find leopard is around Sankabur although generally their activity is nocturnal. Hyenas are still found in some parts of the Simiens although their number are depleted by locals who consider them a pest. Likewise the jackal numbers are not as large as they used to be but jackal can be viewed, especially at night. Walia ibex numbers are increasing. They were once a threatened species but protection and reduction in predators has meant that their numbers are increasing. They are easily recognised by their long curved serrated horns and it is possible now to get within 100 meters of these beautiful animals. Chennuk is the best place to see them. Dusk or dawn are the best times to see the very rare serval cat. The number of Simien Wolf or Red Fox in the park are officially 77 animals but the number could be lower than this since they are very susceptible to rabies brought in by domestic dogs. They are the descendants of the European wolf and they became stranded in the mountainous areas of Ethiopia after when the last ice age retreated. This endemic creature is now in great danger of extinction.

Late afternoon, return drive to Gondar, enroute we visit the former Felasha (Ethiopian Jew) village at Wolkayit, where you can purchase characteristic pottery.

Day 7 Lalibela / Mountain View Hotel (B,D)

Morning transfer to airport for a 30 min flight to Lalibella to tour the famous eleven rock-hewn churches. At the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th centuries, King Lalibela of the Zaghwe dynasty built a series of rock hewn churches, now classified as UNESCO World Heritage Site and rightly acknowledged as one of the wonders of the world. Even from the air, the churches, carved into the rugged mountainsides, are a breathtaking spectacle. There are 11 monolithic churches in the town named after him, with others in the surrounding countryside. All are still in use. Each church (Bet) has a unique architectural style; all are superbly carved and most of them are decorated with well-preserved paintings. It is estimated that it took 25 years to construct the churches. For the kingdom to have kept a large work force engaged in economically unproductive labor for such a period means it was very wealthy. The area was fertile and agriculturally productive then, whereas deforestation

and ecological degradation have since made it barren.

Tour the first group of churches.; return to hotel for lunch, then resume touring. Bet Medihanialem is the largest, supported by 72 pillars and houses the 7kg (15 lbs) gold Lalibela Cross. We go through a tunnel from Bet Medihanialem to Bet Mariam, in which there is a pillar that it is said Jesus Christ leaned against when he appeared in a vision to King Lalibela. Bet Mariam also contains fabulous carvings of various birds and animals. We also visit Bet Danaghel; a chapel built in honor of martyred nuns. Bet Golgotha and Bet Mikael are twin churches and many believe that a visit to Bet Golgotha alone can guarantee your place in heaven! The twin churches also contain many important religious items and some of the best examples of early religious art in the country. The last church we visit is Bet Giyorgis, one of the more recent churches and best preserved.

Day 8 Lalibela / Mountain View Hotel (B,D)

Morning drive to visit Na'akuto La'ab cave church. In the afternoon we will proceed visiting the second group of churches. As the city contains 11 monolithic churches that were built in the twelfth century and carved out of the pink granite rock; each church has a Unique architectural style: all are superbly carved and most of them are decorated with well-preserved paintings. The entire city may be described as a sculpture dedicated to the glory of God.

Day 9 Fly to Axum / Yeha Hotel (B,D)

Early morning attend mass at one of the Lalibella churches (6am-7 am). Return to hotel for breakfast. Afterwards transfer to airport for flight to Axum. Axum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and holy city of Ethiopia, dating back over 2000 years and the cradle of Ethiopian civilization. Famous long before the time of Christ, Axum was the capital of the long Axumite reign, one of the oldest African empires and represented a crucial connecting point between Africa and Asia for almost a thousand years. The legends narrated in the *Kebre Negest* ('Book of Kings') recount how the city of Axum as early as the 10th century BC was the city where the Queen of Sheba resided. It is rumored that the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon brought the Ark of the Covenant to Axum and it remains there to this day, preserved in a sanctuary.

Visit the Queen of Sheba's Bath & Palace. This large reservoir is an excellent place to observe the local women collecting water for washing. Both the reservoir and the palace post-date the Queen, but the names persist. The palace area has been fully excavated and worth a short look. Afterwards, a visit to the church of Saint Mary of Zion (Tsion), which contains the crowns of various Ethiopian kings and other treasures. A chapel in the church is believed by many to contain The Ark of the Covenant. Culminate the day with a visit to the steles, granite monoliths dating from pre-Christian times and decorated with symbolic engravings. In ancient times, there were seven steles, now there are six as Mussolini took one of them during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Time permitting, visit the Axumait Handicraft Center to observe local artists.

The South: Omo Valley

Day 10 Addis Ababa-Awasa / Haile Resort (B, L)

Nov Tour only-Hidar Tsion Celebration: Rise early to attend the annual celebration of Saint Mary. Enjoy the spectacle of the priests chanting church music and beating drums as crowds cheer.

Morning transfer to airport for a flight to Addis Ababa. **Those departing today will transfer to hotel for day room.**

Those continuing, drive to Awassa (4-5 hrs on good road) through the Rift Valley. The Rift Valley is a deep fission that extends for over 6,000 km (3,800 miles) from the Middle East to Mozambique- testimony to the massive shifting of the earth's tectonic plates. The rift contains a marvelous series of lakes, which are teeming with fish and provide a habitat for hundreds of species of birds. On the way we pass 4 of the lakes. Awassa is located on the edge of Lake Awassa, surrounded by mountains. Picnic lunch enroute. We leave dinner open for you to select on your own, as there are a few good restaurant choices in Awasa including Pinna Hotel and Post Rendez-Vous for western food and National Hotel for traditional Ethiopian dishes.

Day 11 Arba Minch / Swaynes, Paradise or Bekele Molla Hotel. (B, L, D)

Rise early if you want to stroll about the local fish market in Awasa (open 8 am-10 am). A scene of colorful boats, massive storks, pelicans and other birds and, of course, a great people-watching place. After breakfast, drive to the famous lakeside town of Arbaminch (4-5 hrs, dirt road). En route visit the villages of Gurage for their staple food of Kocho made from the false banana. We drive through one of the most colorful and scenic areas of Southern Ethiopia, a land that is inhabited by the Sidamo and Alaba people, who were once nomads but are now farmers. A long section of the road offers magnificent views of lake Abaya, surrounded by mountains. The lake has volcanic origins and is almost pink in color. We also visit the Wolayita people, one of the many small groups in Southern Ethiopia.

Day 12 Dorze-Chencha Villages / Swaynes, Paradise or Bekele Molla Hotel (B, L, D)

Morning drive 40kms northwest of Arba Minch to Guge Mountains to visit the Dorze and Chencha villages. Once warriors, the Dorze have now turned to farming and weaving to earn a living. Their success in the field of weaving has been phenomenal and the Dorze name is synonymous with the best woven cotton cloth. The "elephant huts" of the Dorze are unique and worth seeing. Each Dorze bamboo house has its own small garden surrounded by beds of spices, cabbage and tobacco. Some of Ethiopia's best woven cottons come from Chencha, which is located 8 km northwest of Dorze Village. Men weave and women spin. We visit the weaving cooperative at Gambela Doko village, 1.2 km from Chencha (open 10am-5pm).

Afternoon a boat trip on clear blue waters of Lake Chamo to see the crocodiles, hippos & aquatic bird species. The northern shores of Lake Chamo are famous for its large crocodiles, which can be seen in great numbers lounging in the heat. The Guji

tribe can be seen plying the waters in their elegantly carved ambatch boats (similar to those depicted on the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs), not only fishing but also transporting cattle! Return to Arba Minch for overnight. Dinner in the Soma Restaurant, famous for its fresh fish dishes.

Day 13 Arba Minch-Konso-Jinka / Jinka Resort, Orit or Goh Hotel (B, L, D)

Early morning drive to Konso where colorfully costumed dress, impressive terracing of the land and unusually engraved wooden statues used as grave markers can be seen. The Konso, a pagan people, erect eerie wooden totems (called waka) replete with phallic symbols over the graves of the dead and have numerous cults based around the breeding and veneration of serpents. The cornerstone of Konso culture, however, is a highly specialized and successful agricultural economy, that, through terracing buttressed with stone, enable these people to extract a productive living from the infertile hills and valleys that surround them. An excellent day to meet the people, take photographs and learn of a culture that has had very little outside influence. Should the Chief of Konso be in residence, we may be granted an audience. We can stop at the local market in Konso 2km west along the ridge. In addition to fruits and vegetables, tea and incense, locally woven blankets can be found here and look for the old Konso glass beads. Further along the route visit the Woi to people live in the area around Woi to River and Tsemay village.

We will stop in village Key Afer, as there is a colorful market today and visit the villages of Ari and Benna people. Continue driving to Jinka .

Day 14 Mago National Park & Mursi Highlands / Jinka Resort, Orit or Goh Hotel (B, L, D)

Morning drive to Mago National Park, sitting on the eastern bank of the Omo River. Rising in the highlands southwest of Addis Ababa, the Omo River charts its course southwards for almost 1000 kms (620 miles) but never reaches the sea and instead pours into Lake Turkana, East Africa's fourth largest lake. Over millions of years its flood waters have cut deep gorges into the mountains, creating exciting opportunities for white-water rafting. The park, together with its sister park, Omo National Park, are some of the least visited game parks in the world and what a joy it is not to see another vehicle in the vicinity.

From here, visit the Mursi highlands where the most illustrious of Ethiopia's unique tribes lives. The Mursi are known all over the world, for their decorative lip plates that adorn the lower lips of the Mursi women. The plates stretch the lower lip beyond imagination and the women's beauty and desirability is determined in direct proportion to the size of the plate. The Mursi men and women may appear gracious but the Mursi warriors are not to be sneezed at. On their arms are deep crescent incisions that represent each enemy they have killed in battle. The various cultural aspects of the tribe will be explained and you will be able to take their photographs (not free) and interact with them. It is truly fascinating. Drive back through Mago National Park to Jinka for overnight.

Day 15 Jinka-Dimeka-Turmi / Buska Lodge (B, L, D)

Drive to Dimeka (3 hrs) visiting the villages of Benna and Hamer tribal groups. Today is the colorful main market day for Hamer tribe at Dimeka. Picnic lunch. Enjoy spectacular scenery as the road crosses soft rolling hills. Today and for the next few days we enjoy some of the most magnificent sunsets from a vantage point that overlooks the mountains of Kenya and Sudan. Late afternoon continue to Turmi.

Day 16 Turmi - Murulle - Turmi / Buska Lodge (B, L, D)

We continue through the savannah along tracks that are barely visible, passing through a vast meadowland with shrubs and umbellifers ('umbrella' acacia trees) for an excursion to the Murulle area. We arrive at Korcho village with beautiful views over the Omo River to see the Karo ethnic group, experts in body painting, using clay and locally available vegetable pigments to paint fantastic patterns on each other's faces, chests, arms and legs. These designs have no special symbolic significance, but are created purely for fun and aesthetic effect, each artist vying to out-do their fellow artists. Karo men also sculpt and shave their hair into extravagant shapes, with special ochre "caps" of hair usually containing several ostrich feathers. En route have a picnic lunch. Visit the villages of Dus and Kolcho. Visit also Kngate, a settlement for the Bume people. Return to Turmi for overnight.

Day 17 Drive Turmi-Yabello (7 hrs) /Yabello Motor Hotel (B, L, D)

Afer breakfast, we drive to Omo Rate, the final border zone of Ethiopia and Kenya. Cross the Omo River and visit the Dasenech (formerly known as Geleb) people. Return to our lodge for lunch out then head out to the Monday market of Turmi.

The weekly market of the Hamer people is a highlight of Omo Valley where all the ethnic tribes come to shop. The Hamer women are simply stunning. They wear their hair in dense ringlets smeared with mud and clarified butter and topped off with a head-dress made out of an oblong aluminum plate. Their necks and chests are adorned with string upon string of cowrie shells and colorful beaded necklaces of varying lengths. Chunky metal wristlets and armbands, shiny nails appended to skirts, multiple earrings and simple leather garments are all so a la mode. This tribe is an inspiration to all. The market is exciting and you may have the opportunity to buy some of the tribal regalia and artifacts. If lucky, we may be able to see a spectacle called 'cattle jumping,' a ceremony that constitutes rite of passage for young men.

Afterwards we start the return north towards the lakes of the Rift Valley; enroute cultural encounters with different tribes at Erbore and Borena villages.

Day 18 Yabello-Elsod Crater Lake / Yabello Motor Hotel (B,L,D)

Excursion to Elsod Crater Lake where the Borena people traditionally extract salt for their cattle and for their consumption. This day, you will also have a chance see the "singing well" practice where young Borena men fetch water from a deep well for their cattle. Visit Borena Oromo villages. The Borena Oromo practice the Geda system, which is democratic.

Day 19 Yabello-Langano / Sabana Beach Resort, on the shores of Langano Lake, one of the Rift Valley lakes (B)
We proceed to Langano, approx 6-7 hrs total driving with many stops enroute observing the Guji, Gedio, and Sidama people culture & their traditions; enjoying the surrounding scenery and the coffee plantations.

Day 20 Addis Ababa / Jupiter Hotel (B)
Enjoy more of the Rift Valley landscape and the stunning views over the Lakes of Abijata and Shala on the drive back to Addis Ababa (approx 5 hours including stops). We have the possibility of visiting the Ostrich farm at Abijata Shala National Park. We will arrive in Addis Ababa around 2 pm. Transfer to hotel. Shared rooms for wash/change. Farewell Dinner at traditional restaurant with music program. Transfer to airport for flight home. The schedule is almost always late night departure.

Prices

Historic North & Omo Valley Full Tour \$4225 per person, single room supplement \$660
Plus domestic airfares (estimate): if flying internationally on Ethiopia Air, \$510; if flying other carriers, \$665.

Historic North Only: \$2255 per person based on min 6 people; single room supplement \$360.
Plus domestic airfares (subject to change): if flying internationally on Ethiopia Air, \$510; if flying other carriers, \$665.

Omo Valley Only: \$2560 per person based on min 6 people; single room supplement \$300

Includes: accommodations, all meals, accompanying escort, land transport, portorage at domestic airports, bottled water in the vehicle during the drives, entrance fees.

Does Not Include: International flight, flights within Ethiopia (quoted separately), trip cancellation/travel insurance, tips, visa fee, camera fees (3-4 birr/ approx .40), personal expenses such as phone calls, laundry services

NOTES:

Vehicles: For the Historic Route: 2005 ac minibus; For Omo Valley: 4WD 2006 Toyota Land Cruiser and 2007 Nissan Patrols, 3 people per car/everyone has a window seat. The drivers all speak very good english. The guide will ride in one of the cars and both cars will stop together at sites to hear the guide's talk.

Simien Lodge is a deluxe property, considered highest accommodation in Africa. Because nights can be chilly, there is an under floor heating system which works by solar energy. During the day, hot water is pumped under floor and stored in the thick concrete floor. This raises the temperature by about ten degrees. This is not like a steel radiator that warms up and gives off its heat quickly. With a concrete floor it is an inertia system. www.simiens.com

Hotels in Omo Valley: where available we use the top hotels; the rest are best available, clean, with hot running water and good, safe food. Subject to change due to availability and if new ones open that are better we will always upgrade to the higher quality hotel. Kurifu Resort in Bahir Dar is one of the best in the country; Haile Resort in Awassa also an upmarket category and Mountain View Hotel in Lalibella is best.

Meals: if you have a special diet, do let us know. We can arrange in advance.

The day-to-day itinerary sequence may change slightly to coordinate with any local events or changes in road conditions and domestic flight schedules. We will sequence the itinerary in Omo Valley to coordinate with visits to at least two of the market days. Tours are planned a year in advance, but local activity schedules are often not available or are subject to change. We may see unscheduled events/ceremonies such as weddings and bull jumpings, if we are lucky!