

Travel Information (updated October 2019)

Visa and Immigration

Visa are required for all foreign visitors to Ethiopia, with the exception of nationals of Djibouti and Kenya.

Citizens of all countries can apply prior to arrival online (<https://www.evisa.gov.et>) for a 30 or 90 days visa issued on arrival at Bole International Airport.

Citizens of the following countries are eligible for a 30 or 90 days visa on arrival in Ethiopia at Bole International Airport:

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, North Korea, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Visa on arrival at Bole International Airport is available at a fee of USD 50 for 30 days and USD 70 for 90 days, also payable in EUR or GBP.

Make sure you have 2 empty pages in your passport and it should be valid for at least 6 months when leaving Ethiopia. Photographs are not needed.

Custom Regulations

Professional video camera's need a permit from the Government Communication Affair Office. Small modern consumer camcorders are usually not targeted but some older bigger models might be questioned. When needed we can assist you in obtaining a permit.

Visitors are allowed to import an unlimited amount of foreign currency but they have to declare foreign currency in excess of 3000 USD, or equivalent. To export foreign currency in excess of 3000 USD, or equivalent, the custom declaration of foreign currency has to be produced. Any traveler entering or exiting Ethiopia is only allowed to carry a maximum of 200 birr.

Duty free imports are permitted for up to:

- 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars or 250 gram of tobacco;
- 2 liters of alcoholic beverages;
- 1/2 liter of perfume.

Visitors may export goods obtained in Ethiopia, up to a value 500 birr. For the export of skins and hides and any kind of antique artifacts (e.g. crosses, paintings, bibles, etc.) an export certificate is required.

Health

Vaccination against cholera is required if you have visited a cholera infected area within 6 days prior to arrival in Ethiopia. A yellow fever certificate is no longer mandatory for Ethiopia but it might be required when you arrive from a country where the disease is endemic.

Malaria is absent from big parts of Ethiopia due to high altitude but it does occur in lower areas like Awash Valley, Rift Valley, Omo Valley and Gambella. Outbreaks of malaria are also known from around Bahir Dar, but the town itself is usually malaria free. Addis Ababa, Gondar, Simien Mountains, Axum, Lalibela, Harar and the Danakil are reported Malaria free.

Consult your doctor for detailed advice about malaria prophylactics prescription and recommended immunizations.

There are private clinics in most major towns but in general the standards of treatment are limited. Pharmacies carry a range of medicines but we recommend to bring all required medicines with you.

Don't forget a simple first aid pack, which could include: different size plasters and bandages, antiseptic cream, anti-histamine cream and/or tablets for insect bites, preferred painkiller, anti diarrhea tablets (e.g. containing loperamide), high factor protection sunscreen and insect repellent.

Safety

Ethiopia is a relative safe country. Violent crimes are very rare. Tourists should be aware of pickpockets and other petty thefts in the bigger towns. Be extra alert at crowded places like markets, around mini bus stands and at big public gatherings.

Boys selling chewing gum, sweets and the likes from a card box tray are notorious pickpockets in some parts of Addis Ababa using the tray as a cover. Be aware of situations when someone tries to distract you by spitting on you and offer to clean it, drops some coins, pushing you, etc.

In some remote areas separatist movements have been active in recent years. Boundless Ethiopia Tours will only operate tours to areas permitted by (local) Ethiopian authorities and follow its guidelines. Contact your own government for detailed travel advice from their side.

Security in towns and at airports is tight, frisking or body scanning and inspection of bags when entering a building is common. Strict regulations are followed for domestic flights.

When to visit

Most of the country has the main rainy season from June until September with some short rains in March. Although it might drizzle for quite some time, most of the time it's just a heavy shower (or downpour) after which the sun will come out again. In the north it is perfectly possible to travel all year round except for serious hiking tours. Southern Ethiopia (Omo Valley) however has a main rainy season during April and May and short rains in October/ November. Although infrastructure improved quite a bit in recent years, when traveling to the south in rainy season might be interrupted due to seasonal rivers and bad roads. Even unseasonal rains cause sometimes problems in this region.

Because of the altitude the temperature in most of Ethiopia is moderate, seldom exceeding 25 degrees Celsius. The altitude combined with the proximity to the equator make the sun very strong and it feels considerably hotter when the clouds are gone.

In the lower areas of the country (Danakil, Awash, Rift Valley, Omo Valley, Gambella) it is considerable hotter with temperatures going (far) over 30 degrees Celsius.

The best time to visit the Danakil Depression is in the 'cooler' season between November and March.

What to bring

Pack light clothes for daytime and a jacket or (fleece) sweater for the early morning and evening. Remember Ethiopians are conservative dressers, it is appreciated to cover at least your knees and shoulders. Don't bring too many cloths, laundry service is available in most hotels.

When you go out on trekking please bring soft bags as your luggage will be transported by mules. Most trekking is done at higher altitude (Simien Mountains/ Bale Mountains/ Lalibela), make sure you carry warm cloths. Day time temperatures are very pleasant but nights and early mornings can be freezing. We recommend to bring your own sleeping bag. As facilities are often very basic it is good to bring wet baby wipes.

A good pair of walking shoes is advisable even if you don't go for serious hiking. Pathways around many (historical) sites are rocky and uneven. Most people prefer to wear more sturdy hiking boots with ankle support while out on hiking. If you are comfortable with (nordic) walking stick you should bring.

You might like to carry a small folding umbrella which is handy in case of rain and sun. Light rain gear is advisable and essential in rainy season (June- September), although you often will find shelter to let the shower pass. Trekking is not recommended during rainy season, if you do come well prepared. Outside the long rainy season, you should also be prepared for (un) seasonal rains.

If you travel in malaria infected area a mosquito net might come handy in some hotels. Although in most hotels clean sheets are offered, some people prefer to travel with a sleeping bag liner. Toilet paper is often missing and comes handy for a 'bush' toilet.

Sunglasses, a cap and high factor sunscreen are advisable to protect against (strong!) sunlight. Remember to drink a lot of water too.

A good torch is useful in case of power cuts but it is also very helpful to find your way and have a better view in and around some churches and tombs. For visitors to Erta Ale volcano a head torch is advisable for the hike in the dark. Also, for Erta Ale a scarf or handkerchief comes handy to cover your mouth and nose for obnoxious fumes and it is better not to wear open shoes and shorts once you reach the crater rim, as the young lava crumbles easily and is razor sharp.

If you are a light-sleeper you might want to bring earplugs. If your hotel is in the neighborhood of an Ethiopian Orthodox Church, prayers may start very early morning and last for several hours.

As wake up calls are not available everywhere, you better bring a small alarm clock if you leave your mobile home.

Don't forget to bring a pair of binoculars. Even a small one stashed away in your backpack will be appreciated to enjoy stunning birds, wildlife and scenery.

Last but not least as mentioned under health before, bring a first aid kit.

Outside Addis it is difficult to find special items you might need, it is better to bring these from your home country.

Photo and video

Ethiopia has a lot to offer for photographers and video makers. Possibilities are boundless and you will most probably record much more than expected.

Bring sufficient memory cards as it might be difficult to find in Ethiopia. Also bring spare batteries, although charging is possible in every hotel. Power cuts are common but mostly for a short time only. Electric supply is 220 V 50 Hz, sockets are suitable for 2 pin euro plugs. Charging batteries while camping is limited to a few places, but our vehicles do have 12 V cigar lighter sockets. While on trekking, you'll find seldom electricity.

Using video camera on historical sites, around churches and some other places (like Blue Nile Falls) might be charged extra, usually between 50 and 100 birr (USD 2-3) for Lalibela 300 birr (USD 10).

In the south it is custom to pay 5-10 birr (USD 0,15-0,30) per person per picture although events with an all-inclusive entrance fee are becoming more common available.

Communication

Telephone, fax and internet are available in or near most hotels which are used by tourists. International roaming is unpredictable and SMS is not always possible or delivered. Data roaming is not possible, but most tourist hotels offer WiFi services. Although progression is made, connections are often slow and unreliable.

Ethiopia's only telecom provider is Ethio Telecom. A sim card for your sim-lock free handset is available in selected shops for 30 birr (USD 1). Your passport details and a photo are taken in the shop. 4G service is only available in Addis Ababa. Usually the shop is able to cut the sim card to the size you need. Sim cards are not available at the airport.

Recharge vouchers are widely available in different nominations.

Balance enquiry: *804# then dial.

Recharge: *805*thirteen digits pin# then dial.

Mobile data is charged at 0.20 birr per MB (USD 6.5 per GB) 'out of bundle'. Daily, weekly and monthly bundles are available with roughly 40-70% discount. Dial *999# and follow instructions to buy a bundle. You might need to choose option 3 first to change the language.

To configure your mobile for internet access, enter etc.com as APN, no username or password required.

International SMS (unreliable and not possible to every provider) is charged about 2.99 birr (USD 0.10).

International calls to most destinations are between 7 and 11 birr (USD 0.25-0.40). There is a special tariff of 23 birr (USD 0.80) to Diego Garcia, Ascension Islands, St. Helena, Tokelau, Norfolk Island, Sao Tome, Antarctica, Wallis and Futuna, Solomon Islands, East Timor, Nauru, Cuba, Falkland Islands, Niue Island, Maldives, Cook Islands, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, Madagascar, Tuvalu, Kiribati and Comoros.

Money

The local currency is the Ethiopian Birr (ETB) which comes in 1, 5, 10, 25, 50 cents and 1 birr coins. Notes are available in 1, 5, 10, 50 and 100 birr denominations. In October 2019 the exchange rate is ETB 29.3 for USD 1, ETB exchange rate to other major currencies is based on prevailing rate of that currency to the USD.

Credit card acceptance is growing but still limited. The number of ATM are rapidly increasing with Visa cards more widely accepted but Mastercard (Maestro) is accepted at a growing number of banks. As most ATM only can produce 40 notes, a single transaction is limited to 4.000 birr. Or 2.000 birr when the ATM is loaded with 50 birr notes. Don't rely completely on ATM's and bring enough cash as backup. Please note that old series USD banknotes are not accepted, they have to be of the series after 2000!!

When changing cash, the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia is accepting more foreign currencies than other banks: AED, CAD, CNY, DKK, EUR, GBP, JPY, NOK, SAR, SEK, USD and CHF.

Be aware it might be not so straightforward to change your birr back to your own currency. You need to keep your exchange slip and have to go to the same bank as where you exchanged your money in the first place. Sometimes they might not be able to produce enough cash. Your best bet might be one of the banks at Sheraton or Hilton Hotel. Besides this your driver/ guide doesn't mind to get his tip in foreign currency, this might help you to balance your budget.

It is advisable to carry enough small notes (10 birr notes are very handy) for small payments and tipping. For southern Ethiopia you need to carry enough 5 and 10 birr notes to pay for photographs. Only reasonable new notes are accepted.

Local spending varies greatly from person to person, depends on personal preferences and of course what is included in the tour price. For an average spending pattern calculate around 600 - 900 birr (USD 20 -30) per person per day on additional spending. When you stay at the high-end accommodation and take your meals there it will be more. This amount includes lunches, dinners, drinks and small personal spending. It does not

include breakfast, excursions, entrance fees, etc. which are usually included in our tour price. Tips and expensive souvenirs are also not included as this is very personal.

Some average prices:

	birr	USD
1 course lunch	150-300	5-10
2 course dinner	250-400	10-15
Coffee	15	0,5
Water (1l)	15	0,5
Soft drink	20	0,75
Local beer	25	1
Wine (bottle) from	300	10

High-end accommodation and Addis Ababa are more expensive, local restaurants cheaper.

A guideline for tipping:

- 'Ferenji' ('foreigner') restaurants: about 10% if service charge is not already included.
- Local restaurants: rounding up the bill, about 5%
- Porter: 10 birr (USD 0,30) per piece of luggage, more for considerable distances at lodges or ie to the cultural guesthouses in Harar.
- Small service (ie taking you somewhere): 20-30 birr (USD 1).
- Local guides: This is very personal and should be based on satisfaction, our suggestion 150 - 300 birr (USD 5 - 10) for half day to 300-450 birr (USD 10-15) per day. Needless to say, higher tips are greatly appreciated.
- Driver/ guide and escort guide: Even more personal, you are spending a lot of time with them. You share special moments and you learn about their life. You can follow the suggestions above but we very much encourage you to follow your own feeling and budget.

Public Holidays

Public holidays are celebrated according to Ethiopia's very own calendar based on (but not the same as) the Julian calendar. It consists of 12 months of 30 days and 1 month of 5 days (6 days in a leap year). New year is celebrated on September 11th (12th in a leap year) and the calendar is between 7 and 8 years behind the Gregorian calendar. September 12th 2019 is the start Ethiopian year 2012, a leap year. Some confusion might occur up to February 29th 2020 as the dates according to the Ethiopian calendar are one day off to the Gregorian calendar, ie Meskel on September 28th and Timket on January 20th. To add to the confusion, Genna (Ethiopian Orthodox Christmas) is always celebrated on January 7th, except in Lalibela where it is January 8th in a leap year.

Public Holidays 2019

- January 7: Ethiopian Christmas (Genna)
- January 19: Ethiopian Epiphany (Timket)
- March 2: Victory of Adwa
- April 26: Ethiopian Good Friday *
- April 28: Ethiopian Easter (Fasika) *
- May 1: International Labour Day
- May 5: Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day
- May 28: Downfall of the Derg Regime
- June 4: Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan) *
- August 11: Eid al Adha (Sacrifice) *
- September 12: Ethiopian New Year
- September 28: The finding of the True Cross (Meskel)
- November 9: Birthday of Prophet Mohammed (Mawlid) *

* movable holidays

Public Holidays 2020

- January 7: Ethiopian Christmas (Genna), but January 8 in Lalibela!
- January 20: Ethiopian Epiphany (Timket)
- March 2: Victory of Adwa
- April 17: Ethiopian Good Friday *
- April 19: Ethiopian Easter (Fasika) *
- May 1: International Labour Day
- May 5: Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day
- May 24: Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan) *
- May 28: Downfall of the Derg Regime
- July 31: Eid al Adha (Sacrifice) *
- September 11: Ethiopian New Year
- September 27: The finding of the True Cross (Meskel)
- October 29: Birthday of Prophet Mohammed (Mawlid) *

* movable holidays

Public Holidays 2021

- January 7: Ethiopian Christmas (Genna)
- January 19: Ethiopian Epiphany (Timket)
- March 2: Victory of Adwa
- April 30: Ethiopian Good Friday *
- May 1: International Labour Day
- May 2: Ethiopian Easter (Fasika) *
- May 5: Ethiopian Patriots' Victory Day
- May 13: Eid al Fitr (End of Ramadan) *
- May 28: Downfall of the Derg Regime
- July 20: Eid al Adha (Sacrifice) *
- September 11: Ethiopian New Year
- September 27: The finding of the True Cross (Meskel)
- October 18: Birthday of Prophet Mohammed (Mauwlid) *

* movable holidays