

# WILD PHOTOGRAPHY HOLIDAYS



## NORTHERN ETHIOPIA

### HOLY FESTIVALS IN THE ROOF OF AFRICA

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Timkat Festival at Bahir Dar
- The Simien Mountains UNESCO
- Wildlife including Gelada Baboons
- Axum, the capital of an ancient empire UNESCO
- The Royal Enclave of Gondar UNESCO
- Birdlife including the Lammergeier
- Lalibela, the centre of pilgrimage and a dozen underground churches UNESCO
- Traditional villages off the beaten track
- Lake Tana source of the Blue Nile
- Ancient monasteries
- The largest street market in East Africa
- Stunning desert-scapes

- Gherlata Mountains
- Hidden cave churches
- Local festivals

#### INTRODUCTION

Our exciting new Africa holiday takes us through 4 UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela, the ancient city of Axum, the Simien Mountains and the Royal Enclosure of Gondar. As well as these unique sites we will explore traditional villages off the beaten track locations and photograph a variety of wildlife including the Gelada baboons. We have chosen January for this tour as it is one of the best months to visit Ethiopia with warm, sunny weather, low rainfall and

the dates coincide with many celebrations and local festivals. We will witness Ethiopians dressed in their finest traditional costumes, laying on lavish feasts to pray and give thanks during this time. The holy festivals often last two or three days and pilgrims flock to religious sites in their thousands during the festival period, using every available method of transport to get there.

The Northern Highlands of Ethiopia are as old as history and the birthplace of coffee! The country has spent much of its past in isolation, and it is culturally, historically and linguistically quite different from the rest of Africa. It was only country in the continent never to be colonised. It is often difficult to separate history from myth in Ethiopia, for example it is said to have been



founded by Etiopik, the great grandson of Noah and a dynasty of rulers followed, the greatest being the Queen of Sheba who travelled to Jerusalem to meet King Solomon, bringing with her great treasures. Traditions, unchanged since biblical times, continue to take place across ancient landscapes. This is also home to three million year old Lucy, the oldest fossilised human skeleton. Throughout the tour we will stay in lovely hotels that are all well placed for our photographic locations.

## PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE

[Chris Roche](#) has spent the last five years working on 'Devotion' a project exploring ancient and disappearing faith traditions around the world, and has published two books on the theme, one of these is [about Ethiopia](#).

## DAILY ITINERARY

### Day 1: Addis Ababa (2355m)

Today we arrive Addis Ababa, the fourth highest capital in the world. A transfer to the hotel is included. You will have the option to explore the city before we

meet in the evening, this could include one of Africa's largest street markets, a wild and sensory photographic introduction to Ethiopia! For those that enjoy a more tranquil start to their journey the Holy Trinity Cathedral is an interesting photographic possibility. We will meet at the hotel around 18:00 for introductions, a trip briefing followed by dinner.

Capital Hotel (B,L,D)

### Day 2,3: Bahir Dar and Lake Tana (1800m)

After breakfast we take the short flight to Bahir Dar, a city resting on Lake Tana and home to many medieval monasteries. We are here to experience and photograph the Timkat festival which celebrates the baptism of Jesus. This is one of the most vibrant and important festivals in the Orthodox calendar. The festivities begin on the Eve of Timkat with colourful processions and ceremonies. A myriad of traditional dishes are prepared, the customary beverages Tella and Tej are brewed and a special bread called 'Ambasha' is baked. Sheep will also be slaughtered to mark this grand three-day celebration. Lake Tana itself boasts picture perfect azure waters fringed by lush tropical vegetation, it is Ethiopia's largest



body of water and the principal source of the Blue Nile. Serviced by the attractive lakeshore port of Bahir Dar, which doubles as the regional capital, the lake is important thanks to its rich birdlife, a wealth of historic island monasteries and its proximity to the Blue Nile Falls, ranking among the most spectacular in Africa when they are in full flow. During our first afternoon we will sail across the lake by boat following a flotilla carrying the holy 'Tabots' from churches to their resting places, a unique and striking photographic opportunity. On our second day after a morning lakeside sunrise, we will head across Lake Tana to the forested Zege Peninsula where we visit a remote monastery founded in the 6th Century. Of all the monasteries, Ura Kidhane Mihret is reputed to be the most beautiful and it sits in the heart of a glade surrounded by a forest of coffee trees. There's a certain whimsical style to the spiritual paintings in Ethiopian monasteries giving them an almost child like charm. During our return boat journey we will photograph the abundant birdlife, vervet monkeys and locals making papyrus canoes. We will also glide by the source of the





Blue Nile and possibly see hippos wallowing in the lake before returning to our base. We will stay for two nights in a beautifully located hotel with its own swimming pool overlooking the lake.

Kuriftu Resort (B,L,D)

#### **Day 4,5: Simien Mountains (3200m)**

This morning we make the spectacular drive to the striking Simien mountains with a stop in Gondar for lunch. Along the way we will photograph some of the various festivities celebrating St Mikael's day. The National Park is an exotic setting with breath-taking views on a landscape shaped by nature and traditional agriculture.

Ethiopians know the Simien area as the roof of Africa, it is an awesome afro-alpine plateau of grassy meadows and ericaceous moorlands rising to the lofty heights of Ethiopia's highest mountain, Mount Ras Dejen 4,533m. The Simien mountains abound with deep gorges and precipitous cliffs, some as high as 1500m, created by millions of years of erosion. The range and its national park are now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Free from light pollution the mountains offer a great opportunity us to shoot the African night sky and experiment with astro-photography. For biologists, this area is the most important biodiversity hotspot in northern Ethiopia, it is popu-

lated by an alluring wealth of endemic plants and animals. There will be opportunities to photograph wildlife such as the imperious Walia Ibex, the golden-maned Gelada Baboon and perhaps a sighting of the rare Ethiopian wolf. Birders and photographers know this area as the best place in the world to see the mighty Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture) which is regularly seen soaring overhead displaying its 2-meter wingspan. The traditional lifestyle of the rural population and their survival in a rather harsh climate with scarce natural resources make for some striking photographic impressions. A forty five minutes hike from our hotel we encounter the village of



Limalimo where we will experience and photograph rural Ethiopian life including traditional beer brewing, cooking, bee keeping and coffee making. incidentally the coffee in Ethiopia is renowned. Our beautiful accommodation for the two night stay in the Simien Mountains is exclusive and perched on an edge of a cliff with panoramic views over pristine and untouched nature. Limalimo Lodge (B,L,D)

### Day 6,7: Gondar National Park (2133m)

This morning we will continue exploring the Simien Mountains and enjoy lunch at the hotel before driving back through to Gondar where we will check into our hotel. Street and architecture photography will be our focus for the afternoon as we walk around the town experiencing the local life, children returning home from schools and photographing the legacy of Mussolini's Abyssinian adventures in the art deco architecture. In the evening's light we can wander out of town to 'King Fasilidas' a ceremonial bath complex surrounded by lush vegetation. Following breakfast on our second day we will

head out to visit the key sites of this ancient capital including the Debre Birhan Selassie church (Light of Trinity) with its wonderful murals. We'll also visit the Royal Enclosure, a UNESCO Site with its medieval castles which are all architecturally unique and unlike anything else found in Sub-Saharan Africa. A walled compound that dominates the city centre, its high enclosure walls contain six castles and a myriad of tunnels and raised walkways. Here we see Fasilida's Castle, the most impressive in the complex, the Royal Archive building, and also three churches.

Gondar Hills Lodge (B,L,D)

### Day 8,9: Lalibela (2630m)

This morning we fly to Lalibela, also known as the 'New Jerusalem'. The small town of Lalibela is home to one of the world's most astounding sacred sites, it is the spiritual heartland for Ethiopian Christianity, a place a place of pilgrimage and devotion and historically fascinating. In the 12th century the Christian King of Lalibela ordered the building of a second Jerusalem on Ethiopian soil when the original was captured in a 1187 AD raid by



a Muslim faction. The result of his vision is eleven interconnected churches carved into the rose-gold mountain rocks and dug into the ground by hand, an extraordinary feat with or without the angels that, legend has it, lent a hand. These churches are perfectly preserved today, both delicate and monumental, impossible to detect at a distance but utterly majestic up close. These ages old structures are central to the spiritual life of the Ethiopia. Situated amongst the craggy slopes of Ethiopia's northern highlands they are surely one of the great wonders of the world and have been compared favourably to Machu Picchu but without the tourists! They are carved straight out of the rock at ground level, rather than built upwards, some are more than ten metres deep and decorated in intricate detail. Bet Medhane Alem is the largest monolithic church in the world and many of the churches are connected by a warren of tunnels clustered into two groups on either side of the River Jordan, each is quite different in design and character. We will spend two days exploring the churches and the surrounding villages where traditional life is vibrant and intrinsically woven



into the daily rituals and spirituality of the churches. The traditional villages are well known for their unusual two-story round stone houses with thatch roofs.

Tukul Village Hotel (B,L,D)

#### **Day 10: Axum (2131m)**

This morning we will walk up to the Lalibela churches before sunrise to hear the haunting singing and chanting together with some energetic ceremonial dancing which is all part of the celebration of Sebara Atsimu Giorgis. Following breakfast we fly to Axum. The ruins of this ancient city are found close to Ethiopia's northern border. They mark the location of the heart of ancient Ethiopia when the Kingdom of Aksum was the most powerful state between the Eastern Roman Empire and Persia. In command of the ivory trade with Sudan, its fleets controlled the Red Sea trade through the port of Adulis and the inland routes of North Eastern Africa. Axum is believed to be the ancient site of the Queen of Sheba's palace and today still makes claim to be the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. The massive ruins, dating from between the 1st and the 13th century A.D. include monolithic obelisks, giant stelae, royal tombs and the ruins of ancient castles. Long after its political decline in the 10th century, Ethiopian emperors continued to be crowned in Aksum. We will spend the afternoon exploring this magnificent area.

Atranos Hotel (B,L,D)

#### **Day 11,12: Gheralta & Tigray mountains**

Today we drive through the Adwa Mountains to the Gheralta region which is a magnificent desert like landscape, often resembling Monument Valley in the USA. It is the



home to innumerable mountain top monasteries and the iconic hidden cave churches. As we make our way across the valleys it is not uncommon to be invited to a wedding, there seems to be rather a lot of these. We have two days to explore the region taking in the area's majestic landscape at both sunrise and sunset. We will visit hidden churches housing reclusive priests in seemingly impossible locations. The energetic will walk to visit the isolated churches of Daniel and Miriam Korkor, both sit atop a steep rock offering astounding views with fine paintings. This location is very rewarding and quite an adventure. Our accommodation for the two nights is Korkor, a newly established eco-lodge. It is situated next to the traditional village of Megab and within close range to many of the historic, archaeological and traditional cultural locations. The Lodge offers a dash of luxury in the heart of the Tigray mountains with marvellous vistas of the Gheralta Escarpment and surrounding mountains. Korkor Lodge (B,L,D)

#### **Day 13: Fly to Addis Ababa (2355m)**

This morning, our last in the Tigray we rise early for sunrise in the mountains to witness the Asteryo Mariam an annual celebration that takes place at one of the most accessible and rewarding locations in the area. Here we will witness swelling numbers of pilgrims, priests and musicians as they sing, dance and drum their way through this deeply moving celebration. Following breakfast we will check out of our hotel to take a leisurely drive visiting other worthwhile locations en route to Mekelle the economic, cultural and political hub of Northern Ethiopia. Here we take the short flight back to Addis Ababa where we will celebrate our adventure and



present some of our favourite images to each other. Capital Hotel. (B,L,D)

#### Day 14: Departure

This morning there will be an included transfer to the international airport for homeward flights. WPH services finish at the airport.

(B)

#### JOINING ARRANGEMENTS AND TRANSFERS

Participants generally arrive at different times since they will book their own flights. The first-night hotel in Addis Ababa will be available for check-in at midday on Day 1. If participants arrive several hours before this, they may prefer us to book them in for an extra night in order to get some valuable rest. Please ask us if you would like us to book an extra night for you.

#### WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All meals
- 4 Internal flights

- All accommodation
- An English-speaking Ethiopian guide
- Private vehicles for transport in country
- Photography tutor
- All entrance & camera fees, except for video equipment
- Transfers to and from the international airports of Addis Ababa on Day 1&14
- All internal transfers

#### WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- International flights
- Travel and medical insurance
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, snacks between meals
- Tips for local staff
- Ethiopian visa

#### ACCOMMODATION

Our accommodation Hotels/lodges are all of a good standard with private bathrooms. We have chosen accommodation carefully to allow us both access to some exciting locations and peaceful retreats from the vibrant



hustle and bustle of daily life Ethiopia. All accommodation is allocated on a twin-sharing basis. If you are travelling by yourself, you will be paired up with another single client of the same sex. If you wish to have a room to yourself, ask us about the single-room supplement fee.

#### FOOD

Ethiopian and western continental-type food will be available. The standard of Ethiopian cuisine will be of a good standard and is often nicely spiced. We will always take care to eat in establishments that have a high standard of hygiene. Bottled water is readily available.

#### SPENDING MONEY

This always depends on personal spending habits. Prices in Ethiopia tend to be cheaper than the West. £150 should be allowed for miscellaneous expenses, including approximately £70 tips for local staff who we encounter on our holiday. This will allow money for soft drinks and/or beer and any non-included lunches. If you are intending to buy expensive souvenirs, there are cash machines





in the cities although often they are not functioning. Sellers, for a small additional cost, can often ship bulky items and some places take credit cards although the connections of the machines can be spasmodic.

#### **GUIDANCE ON TIPPING**

Tipping is an accepted and expected part of Ethiopia culture, although you should only tip for services that are performed well. The total amount that you can expect to pay in tips for your local guide, drivers, as well as hotel

staff etc. is around £70 We will offer advice on tipping once you have arrived in Ethiopia.

#### **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

It is recommended that you take out appropriate insurance to cover personal accident, medical costs, repatriation, and loss of baggage and holiday cancellation. We will need a copy of your travel insurance at the time of booking.

#### **VACCINATIONS**

You should visit your own doctor and dentist for a check-up prior to departure. Please make sure that your fillings are solid as sometimes the change in air pressure can cause toothache. Your doctor will have access to the most up-to-date information on the required vaccinations for Ethiopia. A very good online resource is the National Health Travellers website at [fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://fitfortravel.nhs.uk)





### PASSPORT AND VISAS

You will need a passport for your visa application which is valid for at least 6 months from the intended date of entry to Ethiopia. You can get a visa either [on arrival](#) or [apply online](#) before you travel.

### HEALTH

We will have a first-aid kit available at all times. Please bring your own small personal first-aid kit, along with any medication for personal use. Hand wash that can be applied without water is always useful for getting rid of germs and removing greasy traces from fingers that will be taking photographs!

Nowadays it is relatively easy to stay fit and healthy in Ethiopia. We will be giving you full health advice in our introduction and briefing on Day 1.

### CLIMATE & CLOTHING

The January weather in Ethiopia is dry, sunny and pleasant. Temperatures will be 19–25°C sinking to maybe 2–12°C during the nights in the mountains. We can ex-

pect it to be dry with plenty of sunshine. This is probably the most comfortable time to visit Ethiopia. Rain is not common, but does occasionally occur. As we are sometimes travelling at high altitudes, the sun will be stronger. A good sunscreen, along with a hat and scarf for the neck are vital. It will also be important to drink a lot of water. During the evenings when the sun disappears, it becomes chilly and a light jumper will be necessary. Higher up the nights can be cold. A warm and windproof jacket, along with a hat and gloves, are often worn, particularly when standing around for morning or evening photography. Otherwise, bring loose lightweight clothing of natural fibres such as cotton and silk. These are cool, comfortable, and easy to move around in. Skimpy clothes, particularly for women, are not really appropriate, especially in the more remote areas. Ethiopia is a great place for buying inexpensive clothing suited for the climate and the cultural norms. In addition you should bring sun cream, sunglasses and a small torch or head torch.



### CURRENCY

Ethiopian Birr. Money can be obtained from the ATM at the airport or ATMs outside banks in the cities. Ethiopia is mainly a cash economy and money can be obtained from a variety of money changers.

### LANGUAGE

Amharic is one of the country's principal languages and is native to the central and northwestern areas. Gurage and Hareri are spoken by relatively few people in the south and east. The most prominent Cushitic languages are Oromo, Somali, and Afar. Learning some basics such as common greetings will pay dividends in terms of the warm reaction you receive from the people you meet along the way.

### DAILY ROUTINE

You will need to have an adventurous approach in both mind and body. The occasional high altitude location will require participants to take things slowly and steadily. We will be walking through towns and villages, along





well-defined trails and lakesides. We may traverse some rough terrain. We will often photograph when and where opportunities arise. This requires a certain degree of spontaneity and flexibility from participants. There will also be opportunities for some early-morning rises to make the best of the dawn light, conditions and locations. The sun sets early and dramatically around 18:00, so evenings will be relaxed and focused on being sociable, dinner and will provide an opportunity to work on

and view the day's images. There will be plenty of opportunity for reviewing images with each other and the photographic tutor.

#### **MOBILE PHONES**

These don't always work in Ethiopia. You can purchase a local sim card: 60 Birr for 3G (about \$3) and 300 Birr for 4G (about \$15). You can buy sim cards from Ethio telecom offices which are in most commercial areas.

You may need a photocopy of your passport and two passport photos. Your guide will advise.

#### **PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT AND INFORMATION**

- Camera bag or backpack such as the Flipside or Trekker series designed by LowePro.
- A camera with interchangeable lenses such as a digital SLR or a mirrorless system camera.



- A set of lenses to cover the whole range from wide-angle to telephoto, for example...  
For full-frame cameras: 16–35mm wide-angle, 24–105mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom. For crop format cameras: 10–20mm wide-angle, 17–50mm mid-range and a 70–200mm or longer tele zoom.
- Spare camera
- Sturdy travel tripod for low light photography
- Cable release – mechanical or electronic remote to avoid shake on long exposures.
- Neutral density, graduated filters and polariser, if you use these.
- Lens cloth
- Sensor cleaning device (optional)
- Sufficient memory cards for the whole holiday as it may not be possible to buy more during the trip.
- Film users should bring enough film, as it may not be possible to buy in many places.
- A laptop or tablet with the image editing applications of your choice, essential for checking and presenting images during the trip and for one-on-one sessions with the tutor.
- Backup storage device (optional)
- Spare batteries and chargers
- All the electrical sockets are European two-pin compatible, so you might need a travel plug adapter.



## INTERNET

Whilst all our hotels claim to have WiFi, this does not always hook up to the internet. Regarding technology, this is changing rapidly and we will update you closer to the time of departure.

## ELECTRICITY

For Ethiopia there are two associated plug types, types C and F. Plug type C is the plug which has two round pins and plug type F is the plug which has two round pins with two earth clips on the side. Ethiopia operates on a 220V supply voltage and 50Hz. You might need a travel plug adapter.

## PARTNERS

Although this is primarily a photography holiday, non-photographer partners will be very welcome as there are many options and interesting possibilities in addition to taking photographs. The price will be the same.

## MORE QUESTIONS?

While we hope that this information has answered most of your questions about the holiday, we know it will not give you all the information you need. If you have any more questions, please get in touch. Talking to us on the phone (we will always call you back) can often be a quick way of sorting out individual questions. It also helps us to get to know each other before the holiday.

## BOOKING THIS HOLIDAY

Fill in the [online booking form](#), or give us a call on +44 (0)1270 440222.





## LINKS

View [images and information for this tour](#) on the website.

Read about [our approach to teaching photography](#)