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# Tour Notes

Eritrea Discovery

Tour Duration – 10 Days



## Tour Rating

Fitness ●●○○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●●○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

## Tour Pace

Moderate

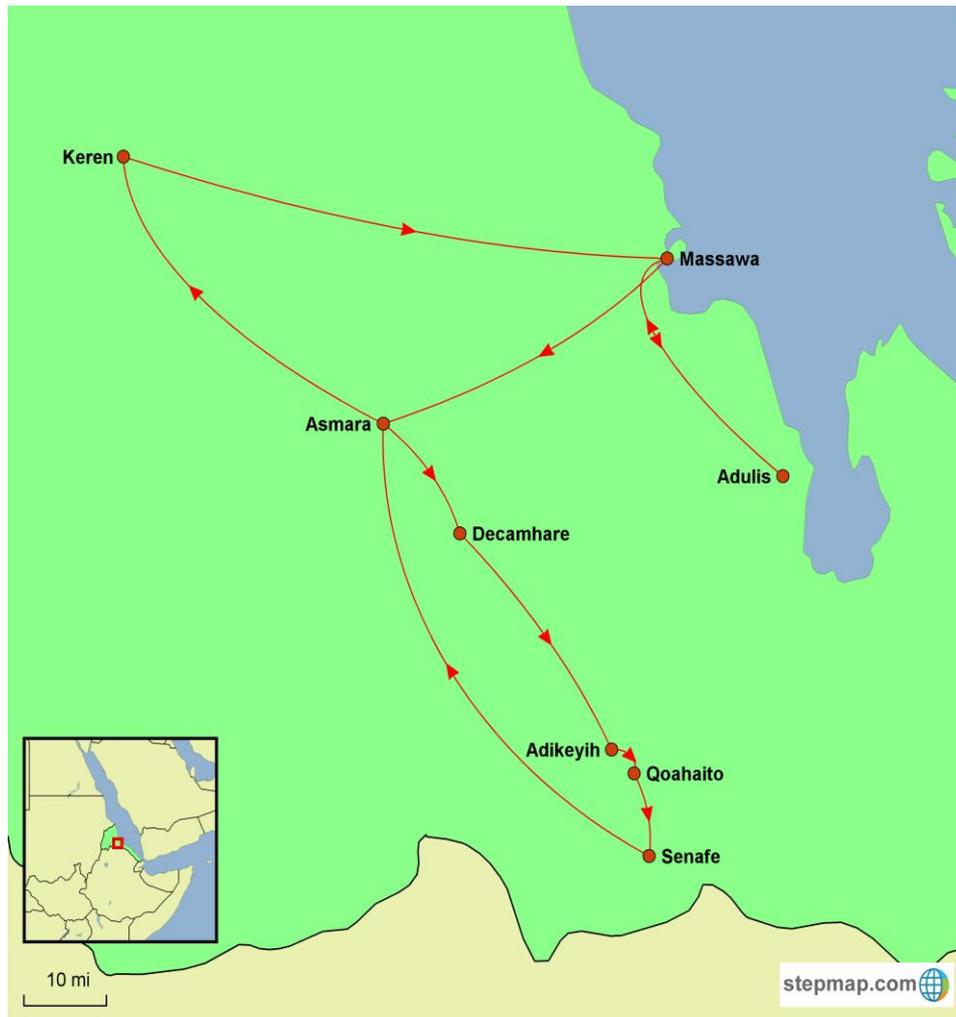
## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Discover the amazing Art Deco architecture of Asmara, one of the most charming cities on the African continent
- ✓ Visit the highland town of Keren and its famous camel market and a British War Cemetery
- ✓ Travel to the Red Sea coast and evocative Massawa with its Ottoman heritage
- ✓ Visit the archaeological site of Quohaito which legends say was built during the time of Queen Sheba, in approximately 750BC.



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## Tour Map – Eritrea – Eritrea Discovery



### Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Comfortable hotels
- Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary.
- Group Size:** Maximum of 12
- Start Point:** Asmara
- End Point:** Asmara
- Transport:** 4WD vehicles and/or saloon cars. For larger group sizes we may use minibuses.
- Country Visited:** Eritrea



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### Eritrea Discovery

Eritrea has been lazily described as Africa's North Korea. It isn't. Though suffering a dearth of political freedoms that once seemed so precious at independence, there's more to this proud nation state than the paranoid isolationism of its current leadership. The colonial architectural and cultural legacy embodied in Asmara is fascinating to experience, as is the jarringly different feel of Keren which these days owes more to Sudan than to Italy. In Massawa, through its access to the Red Sea, lies the future for Eritrea. Though clothed in stifling humidity and embodied by languid decay, right now the future can seem more distant each day. While acknowledging their debt to the heroes of the War of Independence younger Eritreans are hungry for change. Rapprochement with Ethiopia leading to the official end of conflict has started the process.

### Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

### Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour.

## Itinerary

### Day 1 – Arrival in Asmara

Arrive in Asmara and transfer to hotel accommodation. Overnight Sunshine Hotel or similar.

### Day 2 – Asmara

Today, a city tour of Asmara reveals its remarkable colonial architectural legacy. Recently having gained World Heritage status, over 4,000 buildings have been inscribed as possessing special architectural value. Art Deco and Modernist cinemas, theatres, cafes and even petrol stations characterise a city playground for pre-WW2 designers in their quest to fulfil Mussolini's vision of a fitting capital for Italy's new African Empire. Asmarinos maintain vestiges of Italian lifestyle too. Café culture thrives in the comfortable year-round climate, so grab a cappuccino or order a pizza, you are after all in Piccola Roma. Overnight Sunshine Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Please note:** Depending on arrival times of clients some of the city tour may also be done on Day 1.

### Asmara

Asmara is renowned as one of the most pleasant cities in Africa, situated on the edge of an escarpment on the Rift Valley and Eritrean Highlands. Founded in the 12th century, it originally consisted of four villages, and by the 16th century had become a significant city. Its name derives from these original villages, being an Italianised version of the 'four united' villages. It gained prominence when in the 19th century, a local governor appointed by the Ethiopian ruler moved his capital there and established an important marketplace. In 1889 Asmara was occupied by Italian forces bent on creating an African empire, and was developed greatly, later with many superb examples of Art Deco architecture, many of which remain today. Asmara in the 1930s had





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a sizeable Italian community, but almost nothing of it remains today. After the Italians were pushed out of the country during the Second World War, Asmara was administered by the British before Eritrea was effectively transferred to the rule of Ethiopia. Asmara today, with its elegant palm lined streets, is a great place to wander around, taking in the old Art Deco buildings as well as admiring the numerous other styles of early 20th century architecture, such as the futuristic Fiat Tagliero building. You can also take a ride on one of the traditional horse and carts that still ply the streets. It also has a great market and is dotted with small Italian style cafes where it is possible to grab a cappuccino and lazily watch the world go by. Unlike many other towns in Eritrea, it was largely undamaged during the thirty year war for independence against Ethiopia.

### **Day 3 – Asmara to Keren** (Approximate driving time 3 hours)

Leaving Asmara, head north through the highlands, past steep terraces of coffee and orange groves, to Keren. Set on a plateau at 1,392m and surrounded by dusty ochre mountains, this is one of the country's most attractive towns. Holding a strategic position, Keren saw heavy fighting during WW2 and the Eritrean War of Independence. Sudanese influence is very apparent these days, in the way people dress, their language, and food – aromatic Sudanese tea is excellent. At the heart of Eritrea's agricultural community, the town's Friday livestock market is an unmissable spectacle. Camels, cattle, goats, sheep and donkeys all have their place on an extensive hillside site. The town centre market also offers a colourful sensory overload, with vegetables, fruits and all manner of other goods piled high for crowds of shoppers. Overnight Sarina Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Keren**

Keren, whose name means 'highland', was once a small town, but developed quickly with the advent of the railway linking it to Asmara. Known as one of Eritrea's prettiest towns, it wasn't all roses for Keren – during both World War Two and the war for independence, Keren was the scene of much conflict including one of the fiercest battles of Britain's fight against fascist Italy. Today it contains an interesting British War Cemetery as well as the Italian style railway station, and is overlooked by an old Egyptian fort dating back to the 19th century. It has an overtly Muslim feel to the town and is inhabited by a number of Eritrea's different ethnic groups. The pace of life here is best reflected in the way that camels and donkeys still outnumber cars.

### **Day 4 - Keren**

Today, we continue our tour of Keren, this time focusing on the historical and architectural areas of the town. Visits include the Mariam Dearit shrine where a statue of the Virgin Mary inside an ancient baobab tree is the focus for a regular Christian festival. Elsewhere, British and Italian WW2 cemeteries see the graves of hundreds of young men who died during the Battle of Keren in 1941. If there's time we'll climb a lookout tower atop a former Italian administrative building for overview of the town. Overnight Sarina hotel or similar. (BLD)

### **Day 5 – Keren to Massawa** (Approximate driving time: 4.5 hours)

Driving now to the Red Sea coast, our destination is Eritrea's main port city of Massawa. The route passes through Filfil, where a last remnant of tropical forest forms part of the Semenawai Bahri or 'Green Belt' area and where there's a good to see vervet monkeys and hamadryas baboons. Elsewhere, the landscape is stark and arid, and as the road descends towards the sea, temperature and humidity rise markedly. Overnight Grand Dahlak Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Massawa**

Massawa has very much of an Arab feel to it, reflecting its trading links with the Arabian Peninsula. It consists of two islands connected to the mainland by a causeway, and is the largest natural deep-water port on the Red Sea. With its strategic position on the Red Sea Coast, it was much coveted by foreign powers and has been occupied by the Portuguese, Arabs, Egyptians, Turks, British and Italians. Originally it was the capital of Italian Eritrea, before a decision was taken to move it to Asmara. It gained prominence back in the 16th century when it was captured by Ottoman forces, who developed the old town using traditional Ottoman



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architectural styles, often with coral instead of bricks. Many of these old buildings remain today. One of the delights of Massawa is exploring its narrow streets, chancing upon old mosques, tombs and merchants' houses dating back several centuries, and giving you a real feel for what the town was like in its heyday.

#### **Day 6 – Massawa /Excursion to Adulis and the Gulf of Zula**

For centuries an important seafaring centre, today we visit the archaeological site of Adulis - among the greatest ports of the ancient world, linking the Roman, Egyptian and Greek Empires. Later, we continue to the Gulf of Zula - a deep cleft in Eritrea's coastline, part of Africa's Great Rift Valley system. We return to Massawa at lunchtime and spend the rest of the day exploring the town. Among sleepy atmospheric streets, Ottoman, Egyptian and Italian buildings characterise the central port district. Destruction wrought during the War of Independence is still clearly visible, in the case of the former Governor's Palace, left as a reminder of conflict, elsewhere as a testament to years of underinvestment. In the evening, we investigate the simple and decidedly ill-lit harbour-front restaurants that still manage to serve up delicious seafood – take a torch. Overnight Grand Dahlak Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 7 – Massawa to Asmara (Approximate driving time: 3 hours)**

Return to Asmara, with more time to explore the capital. Overnight Sunshine Hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 8 –Decamhare – Senafe - Adikeyih (Approximate driving time: 4 hours)**

This morning we travel to Decamhare, a town south east of Asmara that served as the industrial hub for Italian Eritrea, and once rivalled Asmara to be the colony's capital. At its peak in 1938 almost half the town's 12,000 inhabitants were Italian citizens. Known for its vineyards (Do try Eritrean white wine – well-chilled) and flour mills, despite considerable fighting in the War of Independence, Decamhare still has good examples of colonial architecture. We continue to Adikeyih through a valley of beautiful sycamores. Overnight Central hotel or similar. (BLD)

#### **Day 9 – Adikeyih – Qohaito – Asmara (Approximate driving time: 3 hours)**

Qohaito is an pre-Axumite archaeological site about 20km from Adikeyih, located at 2,600m on the edge of the Great Rift Valley. Legend says it was constructed in 750BC, during the time of Queen Sheba. However, to date little authoritative investigation of the site has been completed. Relics include an engraved stele 4-5 metres high, and buildings of Axumite period, and many much older cave writing and tombs. Later, we continue farther north to the town of Senafe, close to the Ethiopian border, from where a rough 20km track leads to the country's second highest mountain, Emba Soira 3,018m. After taking in views of the mountainscapes we return to Asmara, arriving late afternoon. Overnight Sunshine hotel. (BLD)

#### **Day 10 – Departure from Asmara**

Time for a last cappuccino before transfers to the airport for onward flights. (B)

## *Inclusions/Exclusions*

#### **Inclusions:**

Arrival and departure transfers  
All accommodation  
Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader  
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)  
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary





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**Excluded:**

International flights  
Any airport taxes  
Travel Insurance  
Visas  
Drinks

## Important Information

### Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not advise against travel to any of the areas within Eritrea that we visit on our tours. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or if you would like to know in detail what measures are being taken to ensure visits remain trouble free and without incident.

It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

### Accommodation and Meals

#### Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.

It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

#### Accommodation Rating

On this tour we use comfortable mid-range small hotels with private bathrooms. Air Conditioning will be provided when necessary. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

#### Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash



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### **Dietary Requirements**

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

### **Budgeting for your Tour**

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

### **Food**

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch USD 20

Dinner USD 30

### **Drink**

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Bottle of Beer USD 2

Water USD 2

### **Tipping – Guide and Drivers**

Tipping is common practise in Africa. If your local guide/tour leader has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you, but we would recommend that you allow around USD 50 for this tour. When tipping a driver the amount can be less.

### **Foreign Exchange**

**ATM Availability:** We recommend that you bring cash as ATM machines generally only work if you have a local bank account

**Credit and Debit Card Acceptance:** Cards are not widely accepted

**Local Currency:** Nakfa (NfA).

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** US Dollars

**Where to Exchange:** There are banks and money exchange offices in Asmara, but few if any facilities outside of the capital. Further information will be given by your local guide. We recommend that you do not attempt to exchange money on the black market.

### **Joining your Tour**

#### **Flight Information**

Our advertised prices do not include the cost of international flights. Please contact us if you would like a quotation to book a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

#### **Joining Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive a free airport transfer, both on arrival and departure. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we



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have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

### **Travel Insurance**

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

### **Visa Information**

Most nationals, including those from the UK, EU and US require a visa for entry into Eritrea. At the time of writing the Eritrean embassy in London requires all applications to be submitted in person by the traveller. We understand that applications cannot be made via an agency or third party.

You will need to make an appointment with the London Embassy, and we understand you will require a passport photo, a character reference from your employer and a letter of invitation.

It should also be noted that the embassy must obtain authority from the country's Immigration Office (Foreign Ministry) in Asmara before the visa can be issued. This typically takes about 2 to 4 weeks, during which time the applicant can retain their passport; the embassy will make a copy. A letter of invitation is not required. Please ensure that you are given a dated receipt after submitting your application. It is important that you remain in contact with the embassy by telephone to check on the status of your application. If after 3 weeks the embassy has not received the required authorisation from Asmara please contact us. We will then ask our local representative in Eritrea to make enquiries directly with the Immigration Office.

This above information applies specifically to the London embassy. For those travellers who will be making their application in another country, please contact the embassy concerned to check on the latest requirements and processing time. If you require a letter of invitation and/or any other support with your application please contact us for assistance.

In all cases, wherever you apply for your visa, it is important to allow plenty of time - we would suggest a minimum of 5 weeks.

### **Passports**

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

Your passport should be valid for a minimum period of six months from the date of entry to Eritrea and have at least two clear pages adjoining one another in your passport.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice).

### **Vaccinations & Protection**

As with travel to most parts of Africa, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations. For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. Anti-malaria medication is also required and the use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.



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The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on [best practice when travelling with medicines](#). For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

## Preparing for your tour

### Climate

Eritrea can be visited anytime during the year. Much of the interior of the country, including the capital Asmara is at altitude, so there is not a huge range in temperatures. However to the far south in the Dankalia region temperatures can hit more than 45°C during the summer.

### Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

### Equipment

The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must.

Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have. If you will be using a camera which needs film, it is recommended that a supply is taken with you, as it is not always available in Eritrea. For those with digital cameras, we would advise you to take a spare battery if you are travelling to the Dankalia, as recharging can sometimes be difficult.

### Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Comfortable walking shoes/boots are recommended.

### Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large suitcase/rucksack, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

### Service Standards

Service Standards Please note that standards of service in much of Africa are not comparable to those of more developed countries, especially in the more off the beaten track locations. Service is often slow and lacks the same attention to detail, and your patience and understanding will be appreciated.

### Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V/50 Hz and plugs have two-pronged connection with round rather than flat pins holes.

Electricity supplies are intermittent and supply across the country is only available for 3-4 hours per day. Internet availability is rare and Wi-Fi virtually unknown.



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### **Tour Itinerary Versions**

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were updated on 17 January 2020

