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# Tour Notes

Ethiopia – Omo Valley Explorer

Tour Duration – 12 Days



## Tour Rating

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

## Tour Pace

Busy

## Tour Highlights

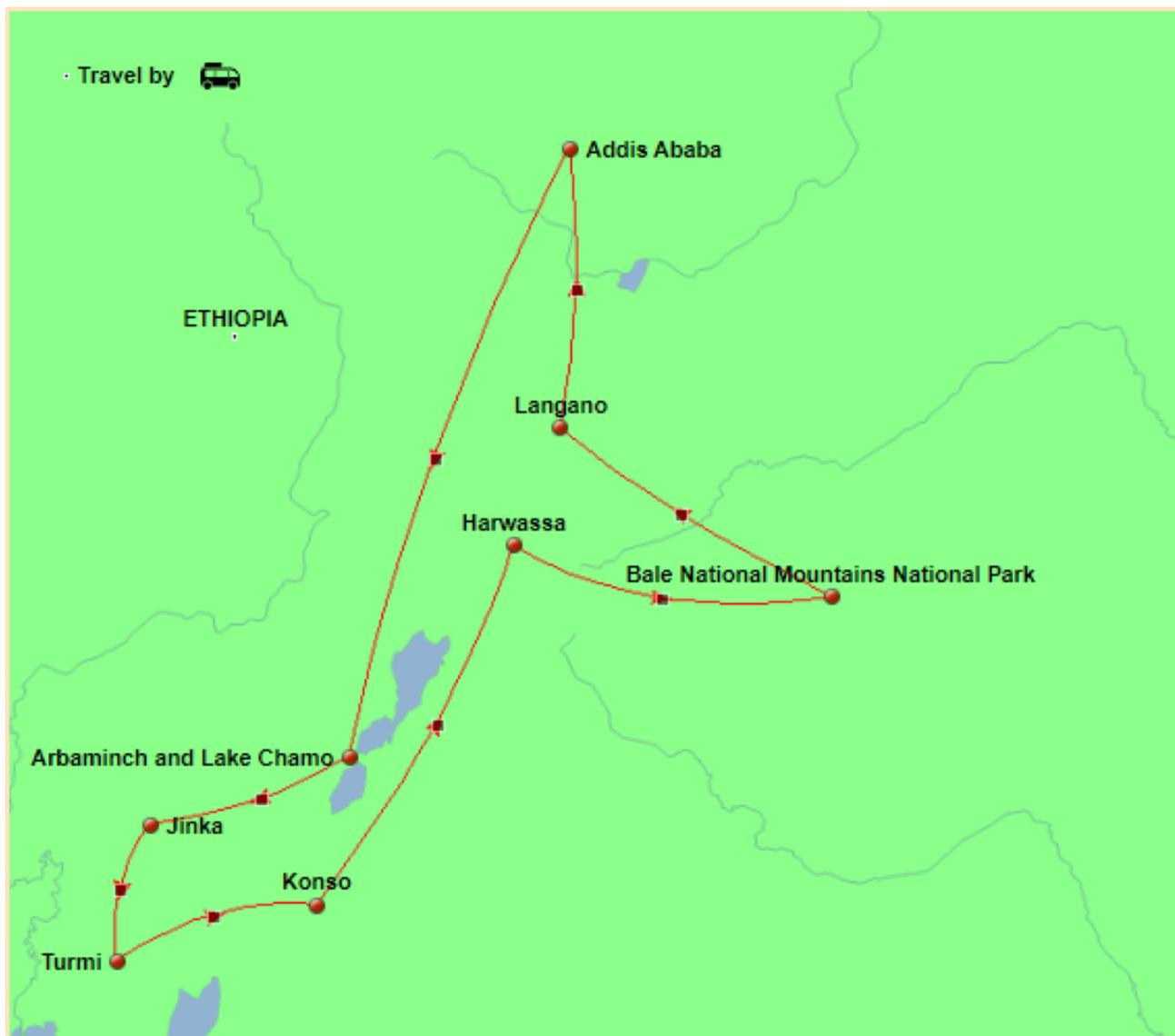
- ✓ The national parks with their many species of birds and their endemic mammals
- ✓ The lively markets which act as a meeting place for people from miles around
- ✓ The chance to observe the many tribes with their enduring traditions and ways of life





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## Tour Map Ethiopia – Omo Valley Explorer



### Tour Essentials

- Accommodation:** Mix of simple but comfortable hotels and lodges  
**Included Meals:** Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary  
**Group Size:** Maximum of 12  
**Start Point:** Addis Ababa  
**End Point:** Addis Ababa  
**Transport:** Minibus for 1-7 people or Coaster bus 8-12 people  
**Country Visited:** Ethiopia



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### **Ethiopia - Omo Valley Explorer**

*Travelling among the eight different tribes of the Omo Valley provides an Africa refreshingly at odds with a safari chic fantasy that's long promoted the continent as an up-market zoological park for well-heeled westerners. This tour aims to engage with the Omo's different ethnic groups and facilitate understanding of their centuries-old traditions. As Ethiopia develops, pressures brought by hydroelectrical projects and land appropriation threaten these lifestyles. In a small way, to highlight the Konso region and the Omo Valley – already both recognised by UNESCO, may counter some of the negative developments and help preserve a unique African cultural heritage.*

### **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. Groups of 1-4 people will have different guides in each place visited, rather than one guide accompanying the trip throughout. Groups of 5-12 people will have the same guide throughout.

## *Itinerary*

### **Day 1: Arrive in Addis Ababa**

Arrive in Addis Ababa and transfer to hotel accommodation. This afternoon visit some of the capital's key sights including the Entoto Mountains with great views over the city, the Ethnological Museum and Holy Trinity Cathedral. Overnight stay at Nexus Hotel or similar. No meals are included today.

### **Addis Ababa**

Addis Ababa was founded in 1887 by Emperor Menelik II, and its name means 'new flower' in Amharic. A large city, it is the third highest capital in the world sitting at an altitude of 2400m. It hosts East Africa's largest market, the Mercato, a sprawling mass of stalls where one can find just about anything for sale, including the much favoured national drug qat, and is well endowed with other sights. Churches such as St George's Cathedral and the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity give a great insight into Ethiopia's particular brand of Christianity. The Cathedral of St George, named after Ethiopia's patron saint (the famed dragon slayer who also serves as patron saint for England) was built by Emperor Menelik to commemorate his victory over Italian forces at Adwa, and houses a small museum with a collection of important religious paintings, books and artefacts. A good National Museum holds an interesting selection of artefacts from Ethiopia's wide and varied history. Ethiopia was the only African nation never to be fully colonised, although the Italians occupied parts of it for a while in the first half of the twentieth century, and it is still possible to see remnants of their legacy in Addis, particularly in the Piazza area which is a great place to walk around and soak up the atmosphere.



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### **Day 2: Addis Ababa – Arba Minch (508 km, Approximate driving time: eight hours)**

After a relaxing breakfast we begin the journey to Arba Minch, visiting the Dorze people en route, learning about their distinct traditions and architecture. Overnight at Paradise Lodge or similar. (BLD)

#### **Dorze people**

This region is known for the Dorze people, who in turn are known for their unusual beehive shaped houses, constructed from wood and bamboo. These towering, re-locatable structures can reach as high as 12 metres, and last from 60-80 years, so will generally be used by one family for their lifetimes. Traditionally the bamboo that is used as frames for the huts is cut during moonlight. The Dorze are farmers and are also known for weaving fine quality shamas, the shawl type cloths that are worn throughout Ethiopia

### **Day 3: Lake Chamo- Jinka (240km, Approximate driving time: five hours)**

This morning we take a boat trip on Lake Chamo. As well as hippos, the lake is noted for crocodiles of unusual size – the largest recorded in recent years was over 5.5m., before continuing to Jinka, travelling through the lands of the Derase, Tsemay and Bena people. On arrival in Jinka we will visit the Jinka museum. Overnight at Eco Omo Lodge or similar. (BLD)

#### **Jinka**

A small mountain town set apart from the rest of the country, Jinka feels both remote and rustic, which is accentuated by the grass airstrip in the middle of town.

### **Day 4: Jinka- Mago National Park- Turmi (120km, Approximate driving time: three hours)**

This morning we travel to Mago National Park to visit the Mursi pastoralist people, characterised by the practice of extending their lips with clay plates. After lunch we begin the journey to Turmi, which takes us through the lands of the colourful Hamar people, renowned for women's red clay-braided hairstyles and the unique tradition of young men who test themselves by bull jumping during festivities. Overnight at Turmi Lodge or similar. (BLD)

#### **Mursi people**

The Mursi are perhaps the best known of the Omo Valley tribes, due to the distinctive custom among women of wearing clay plates through their lips. When a woman reaches the age of about 20, a small cut is made in the lower lip and a clay plate inserted, which is then extended each year. The Mursi people live in one of the least accessible areas of Ethiopia - when a British anthropologist visited them for the first time in the early 1970s, they had never heard of the country of Ethiopia where they live. They are a relatively small ethnic group, comprising of about 7-10,000 people.

#### **Hamer people**

The 15,000 to 20,000 members of the Hamar make their living as successful cattle herders and farmers. Once they hunted, but the wild pigs and small antelope have almost disappeared from the lands in which they live; and until 20 years ago, all ploughing was done by hand with digging sticks. Hamar men come of age by leaping over a line of cattle in a ceremony which qualifies them to marry, own cattle and have children. They must leap over the cattle four times – only then are they considered to be men. At this time, the female relatives of the men leaping will line up to be whipped by the maza, a group of men who have performed the leap themselves and live separately to the rest of the tribe. This whipping is said to create a strong bond between the jumper and his female relations, as he now owes them a debt and they can call upon him during times of hardship

### **Day 5: Dassenach and Hamer people**

We spend today visiting villages of both the Dassenach and Hamer people and hope to learn a little about their lifestyles first-hand. Overnight at Turmi Lodge or similar. (BLD)



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**Day 6: Turmi- Konso** (185km, Approximate driving time: four hours)

The highland settlements of Konso were inscribed by UNESCO in 2011 as Cultural Landscapes. This morning we leave Turmi for Konso where we will visit the Thursday Key Afar market, attended by the Derase, Tsemay and Bena people. Later we will visit a Konso village and the Konso museum. Overnight stay at Kanta Lodge or similar. (BLD)

**Konso people**

The Konso are known for their custom of erecting wooden grave markers, which mark the resting place of important leaders and warriors. These markers are carved with the exaggerated features of the dead person. In a similar fashion, the Konso also erect poles to signify the coming of age of a generation, and these poles can be found in their village squares.

**Tsemay people**

The Tsemay are one of the lesser known of Ethiopia's ethnic groups, with numbers not exceeding 10,000 people. Their neighbours include the Konso to the east, the Banna - Bashada group to the west, the Male to the north, and the Arbore to the south.

**Day 7: Konso-Harwassa** (340km, Approximate driving time: eight hours)

The journey today passes through coffee plantations, and we may stop to try the freshest of brews. We also stretch our legs at the stelae fields of Tutu Fella where the origins and significance of prehistoric carved stone monuments remain uncertain. Overnight at Haile Resort or similar. (BLD)

**Day 8: Harwassa - Bale Mountains National Park** (270km, Approximate driving time: six hours)

En route from Harwassa we pass through further coffee plantations and fruit growing villages set among verdant countryside. Overnight at Goba Wabe Shebele Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Day 9: Bale Mountains National Park**

After an early breakfast we head onto the Sanetti Plateau, passing through Harena forest from where we can see the peak of Tulu Dimtu 4377m, the country's second highest mountain. We'll explore the plateau, and if lucky may spot critically endangered Ethiopian Wolf. Overnight at Goba Wabe Shebele Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Note:** It can get very cold at night so you should bring warm clothes to wear.

**Day 10: Bale Mountains National Park- Rift Valley Lakes** (250km, Approximate driving time: five hours)

Today we continue to the Rift Valley lakes of Shala, Abyata and Langano. The lakes attract flocks of flamingos, pelicans and many other bird species. On the shores of Lake Langano, near to Munessa Forest, there are options for hiking, horse-riding, cycling, boating, or birdwatching. Overnight at Sabana Beach Resort or similar. (BLD)

**Rift Valley Lakes**

The cluster of lakes – Shala, Abyata and Langano – that are found in this area are a great spot for birdwatching, with many of Ethiopia's numerous species of birds found here. Langano in particular is also popular with local tourists, as it is the only lake in Ethiopia without bilharzia, making it safe to swim in. The nearby Abyata-Shala National Park incorporates the two Rift Valley lakes it is named after, and borders Lake Langano. The two lakes could not be more different - Shala lies in a crater 265m deep, studded with volcanic islands. Lake Abyata, in contrast, is large and shallow, no deeper than 14m. These lakes are part of the Rift Valley, an enormous fissure that stretches from Syria all the way down to Mozambique, culminating in Lake Malawi and nearly 4000 miles in length. The Rift Valley has been an excellent source of well-preserved fossils, exemplified in Ethiopia by the skeletons of human ancestors that have been unearthed within the last fifty years.



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**Day 11: Abyata Shala National Park- Addis Ababa** (207 km, Approximate driving time; three hours)

We begin our drive back to Addis Ababa stopping to visit Lake Abiata, known for its population of wading birds, and Lake Shala, the largest by volume in Ethiopia. Overnight stay at Nexus Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Day 12: Addis Ababa - City Tour and Departure from Ethiopia** (Final day of main tour / Day 1 of Harar extension)

After breakfast there may be time for a last-minute city tour. Visits include St George's Cathedral, the National Museum and the Merkato, reputedly the Africa's largest open-air market. The tour concludes with transfers to Bole International Airport for onward flights. (BL)

Those taking the Harar extension will not have time to take the city tour of Addis Ababa.

## Post tour Harar Extension - 5 days/4 nights

**Day 1: Addis Ababa - Awash** (Approximate driving time: six hours)

A morning drive takes us from Addis Ababa to Awash National Park, one of the most beautiful in Ethiopia. The River Awash runs through a spectacular gorge and the park itself is home to oryx, gazelles, hamadryas baboons, and over 453 bird species, including ostrich. On arrival we will take a game drive in the park. Overnight stay at Genet Hotel or similar. (LD)

**Day 2: Awash - Harar** (Approximate driving time: eight hours)

Early morning is often the best time to see wildlife. We return to the park to search out birdlife close to hot springs and the Awash Waterfalls. Afterwards, we continue to the walled city of Harar. Here, 368 alleyways are squeezed into one square kilometre – its old-world atmosphere more reminiscent of Fez in Morocco than any other Ethiopian city. Within crumbling walls, countless mosques, shrines, coffee-scented streets, and busy markets stalls combine to make Harar Ethiopia's most colourful city. Overnight stay at Heritage Plaza Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Day 3: Harar**

Today we further explore the Old City on foot and visit the house where French poet Arthur Rimbaud lived between 1880 and 1891. In Harar, Rimbaud found an escape from European sophistication and it became his favourite city. Unusually for a poet, Rimbaud set himself up as an arms dealer and sold weapons to Emperor Menelik. In the evening, we visit Harar's renowned 'hyena men' who have made it their habit hand feed wild, spotted hyenas each night on the city's outskirts. Overnight stay at Heritage Plaza Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Day 4: Harar - Dire Dawa** (Approximate driving time: one-and-a-half-hours)

From Harar, the road climbs to 3,000m among the Cercer Mountains, offering magnificent panoramas of the surrounding countryside. Along the route we begin to see crops of 'chat', a bush whose leaves are chewed in vast wads as a stimulant. We have lunch on arrival in Dire Dawa and in the afternoon explore the city. Overnight stay at Samrate Hotel or similar. (BLD)

**Day 5: Dire Dawa - Addis Ababa** (Approximate driving time: eight hours)

After breakfast we drive to Addis Ababa and transfer to the international airport for onwards flights. (B)

**Note: Our Historic Ethiopia tour taking in the historic sights of the north of the country directly precedes the Omo Valley Explorer tour so you can experience these amazing trips back-to-back!**



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## Tour inclusions/exclusions

### Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation

Services of English-speaking guide / tour leader (please note that groups of 1-4 people will have a driver and different guides in each place visited, rather than one guide accompanying the trip throughout. Groups of 5-12 people will have the same guide throughout)

Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)

Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

### Excluded:

International flights

Any airport taxes

Travel Insurance

Visas

Drinks

Expenses of personal nature

Tips (discretionary)

## Important Information

### Foreign Office Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign, Development and Commonwealth Office (FCDO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At the time of writing there is no Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice against travel to the areas we visit on this tour. The same applies to the Harar extension. Please feel free to contact us should you have any specific concerns or 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.

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.





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### Accommodation Rating

On this tour you will be staying in simple but comfortable hotels and lodges. Please have realistic expectations with regard to the accommodation in Ethiopia. You can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom. However, the hot water supply may be unreliable on occasion, or water pressure low. 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 & Drinks

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

### 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 \$5-6 / Dinner \$5-6

### Drinks

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 (Imported) \$2 / Bottle of Water \$1

### Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practise in Africa. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. This amount can obviously be left to you. When tipping a driver, a guide or hotel staff a few dollars will always be gratefully received.

### Foreign Exchange

**ATM Availability:** There are a growing number of ATM machines across the country but we recommend that you bring cash

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

**Local Currency:** Birr (ETB)

**Recommended Currency for Exchange:** Sterling, Euros and US Dollars are all easy to change. However please note that smaller towns often have very limited or no exchange facilities

**Where to Exchange:** It's relatively easy to exchange money in Ethiopia, either at the airport on arrival or in one of the many banks



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## 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 Your 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 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 and Altitude

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.

Please note that your tour involves some walking at altitude. Some travel insurance policies may exclude walking and trekking above a certain altitude. Please ensure that your travel insurance is valid for walking at altitude and if you have any doubts please contact your insurance provider.

### Visa Information

Most nationals, including those from the UK, EU and US require a visa for entry into Ethiopia. These can be obtained before travel, but it is also now possible to obtain a visa on arrival for many nationalities, at a cost of \$50. The embassy website also states that you should have two photos with you although a photo is taken by Immigration officials in Addis Ababa. Regulations do frequently change though so we advise that you check the current requirements with your nearest embassy.

### 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 your country.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

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 may also be 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 the 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

Most of Ethiopia is blessed with a fairly pleasant temperature year-round, but like much of Africa it has wet and dry seasons. In the north most of the rain falls between June and early October, while in the Omo Valley the rains typically arrive between March and June but climate change is making the weather more difficult to predict. (The improved condition of the roads used in this area means that tours are not affected by this.) The temperature in the south, including the Omo Valley, can be quite hot, while the altitude of the north means that temperatures are typically more moderate and it can be cold in the mountains at night.

### Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, with a jumper or fleece for the nights. It is advisable to wear a hat 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. It is advisable to take a torch, as the electricity supply can be erratic. Honey is a popular purchase in the north of Ethiopia but the containers in which it is sold are not efficiently sealed. If you are considering purchasing some you may wish to take a container with you.

### Footwear

Footwear is a main priority on this tour. Sturdy but comfortable walking shoes are recommended. Lighter shoes and sandals are fine when travelling.

### Luggage on tour

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

### 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 usually have two round pins.



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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 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

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