

# BIG FIVE®

TOURS & EXPEDITIONS

*Enriching Lives Through Distinctive Journeys*

## Destination Information Guide

# Ethiopia



*The following general outline offers practical information, suggestions and answers to some frequently asked questions. It is not intended to be the definitive guide for your trip.*

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## Welcome to the World of Big Five!

Big Five Tours & Expeditions is pleased to welcome you on this exciting adventure. We take great care to insure that your travel dreams and expectations are well met. Our distinctive journeys allow you to experience the finest aspects each destination has to offer. We also aim to provide you with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the places you'll visit and the people you'll meet.



<b>Addis Ababa, Ethiopia</b>												
<i>Elevation: 7724 feet</i>				<i>Latitude: 08 59N</i>				<i>Longitude: 038 48E</i>				
<b>Average Temperature</b>												
°F	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	61	63	64	64	65	63	60	61	61	62	60	60
<b>Average Precipitation</b>												
in.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
	0.7	1.5	2.7	3.4	3.4	5.2	10.5	11.1	7.3	1.1	0.4	0.4

## WEATHER

The mountainous regions of Ethiopia see a consistently warm temperature all year round, with temperatures rarely rising above 86°F during the day and plunging sometimes to almost freezing at night. The eastern lowlands exhibit drier desert-like conditions and more sporadic rain during the wet April-September season. The Denakil Desert in the northeast and Ogaden in the southeast are very hot and dry.

## TIME ZONE

Ethiopia is GMT + 3 hours.

## PASSPORT/VISA

**Passports:** For international travel, a U.S. passport valid for at least six months from date of departure, containing at least two blank pages is necessary.

**Visas:** U.S. and Canadian citizens are allowed to get entry visa to Ethiopia upon arrival at the Addis Ababa Airport; cost USD\$20. **One photo is needed.** Many countries require that travelers obtain visas prior to arrival. Big Five Tours & Expeditions has appointed Zierer Visa Service ([www.ZVS.com](http://www.ZVS.com)) to process required visas for our passengers. The Visa Application Kit is included with your pre-trip confirmation packet.

You can also download the necessary forms from the website, where you will enter the visa section for Big Five Tours & Expeditions. Here you will find a list of country-specific forms. You will also discover useful hints such as how to obtain a passport, adding passport pages, and other tips.

**Important:** Please look at your passport before you submit it to ZVS to insure that:

- 1) Your passport is valid for at least six months after the date of travel.
- 2) You have sufficient blank pages for visa stamps that will be added as you travel in and out of various countries.

**Please note:** Pages reserved for amendments and endorsements cannot be used for visas.

## AIRPORT FORMALITIES

Upon arrival, proceed through immigration and baggage claims and customs. Big Five personnel or their representatives will assist you with your baggage and escort you to your hotel. They will assist with check-in formalities. **Departure tax:** No departure tax at this time.

## ETHIOPIA CUSTOMS

**Duty Free:** The following goods may be imported into Ethiopia without incurring customs duty: 200 cigarettes or 50 cigars or one-half pound of tobacco; 1 liter of alcoholic beverages; 2 bottles of perfume. Visitors may

export souvenirs with a value not exceeding Birr 500, although some articles (such as antiques) require an export permit.

## US CUSTOMS

Returning U.S. residents are allowed to bring back \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. There are limits on some items. For more information you can write U.S. Customs Service at Box 7407, Washington, DC 20044, or check on the Customs and Border Protection homepage at [www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml](http://www.customs.gov/xp/cgov/home.xml).

## HEALTH

Visitors to Africa should be in generally good health. Talk with your personal physician about any shots or boosters recommended depending on your personal health profile and your itinerary. **PLEASE NOTE: THE HIGH ALTITUDE AND LOW OXYGEN LEVEL OF MUCH OF ETHIOPIA REQUIRES TIME TO ACCLIMATIZE.** Those who suffer from heart ailments or high blood pressure should consult a doctor before traveling. Tetanus and polio vaccines should be up to date. Be prepared to take precautions against sunburn with sunscreen and lip balm.

**Yellow Fever:** Yellow fever inoculation is NOT required to enter Ethiopia even you are visiting one or more African countries.

**Hepatitis A or immune globulin (IG).** Transmission of hepatitis A virus can occur through direct person-to-person contact; through exposure to contaminated water, ice, or shellfish harvested in contaminated water; or from fruits, vegetables, or other foods that are eaten uncooked and that were contaminated during harvesting or subsequent handling.

**Hepatitis B,** especially if you might be exposed to blood or body fluids (for example, health-care workers), have sexual contact with the local population, or be exposed through medical treatment. Hepatitis B vaccine is now recommended for all infants and for children ages 11–12 years who did not receive the series as infants.

**Malaria:** your risk of malaria may be high in all countries in East Africa, including cities. See your health care provider for a prescription anti-malarial drug. For details concerning risk and preventive medications, see Malaria Information for Travelers to East Africa.

**Meningococcal (meningitis)** if you plan to visit countries in this region that experience epidemics of meningococcal disease during December through June, (see Map 4-9 on the Meningococcal Disease page).

**Rabies:** pre-exposure vaccination, if you might have extensive unprotected outdoor exposure in rural areas, such as might occur during camping, hiking, or bicycling, or engaging in certain occupational activities.

**Typhoid:** Typhoid fever can be contracted through contaminated drinking water or food, or by eating food or drinking beverages that have been handled by a person who is infected. Large outbreaks are most often related to fecal contamination of water supplies or foods sold by street vendors

**Other:** As needed, booster doses for tetanus-diphtheria, measles, and a one-time dose of polio vaccine for adults.

**Please note:** If you are on medication, be sure to bring enough for the duration of the trip. Prescription medicines should always be carried in their original containers in your hand luggage.

**Health insurance is strongly advised during any foreign travel.** Please check the latest regulations with your local health office or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention hotline for international travelers at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax: 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or their main telephone number in Atlanta, 404-332-4559. Or, visit the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

## CLOTHING

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

The lightest possible clothing in lowland areas; medium- or lightweight in the hill country. Warm clothing may be needed at night to cope with the dramatic temperature change. Dress for comfort and ease, with loose clothing for both men and women. Knit shirts, T-shirts, or cotton tops, jeans, khakis, and shorts are satisfactory. Bring along a couple pairs of long pants and a sweater or a jacket. Comfortable walking or athletic shoes are a must.

## LUGGAGE

*For general clothing information, please review the **Travel Handbook** in your pre-departure materials. See pre-departure information for general packing check list.*

## FOR INTERNAL FLIGHTS

Flights within the country may have weight restrictions that may vary from 27 lbs to 44 lbs, depending on several factors, including type and size of aircraft, destination, etc. Specific weight limitations will be noted in your pre-departure information or itinerary.

## MONEY

**Currency:** Ethiopian Birr (Birr) = 100 cents. Notes are in denominations of Birr100, 50, 10, 5 and 1. Coins are in denominations of 50, 25, 10, 5 and 1 cents.

**Currency exchange:** US Dollar bills are the most convenient currency to exchange.

**Please note that it is best to bring dollars (in small denominations) and travelers' checks.**

**Debit/Credit Cards:** Visa Card is accepted in big hotels in Addis Ababa, Ethiopian Airlines and big shops in Addis. Master Card is rarely accepted. You can withdraw from certain banks in Addis Ababa cash using your Visa Card or Master Card a maximum of \$500 per day, with sometimes a payment of 3 - 10% service charge. But the best way to pay things is with Cash.

**Travelers' checks:** To avoid additional exchange rate charges, travelers are advised to take travelers checks in US Dollars or Pounds Sterling.

**Currency restrictions:** The import of local currency is limited to Birr100. The export of local currency up to Birr100 is permitted, provided the traveler holds a re-entry permit. The import and export of foreign currency is unlimited, subject to declaration on arrival.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Ethiopia's official language is Amharic. Tigrinya and Oromo and Arabic is widely spoken. About 80 other native tongues are spoken. English is widely used, Italian and French are also spoken.

## ELECTRICITY

220 volts AC, 50Hz. You will need a converter or transformer.

## FOOD & DRINK

All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth, making ice and using on contacts should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Choose bottled water and other liquids that have clean seals. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised, but make sure that it is reconstituted with pure water. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish, preferably served hot. Pork, salad and mayonnaise may carry increased risk. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Menus in the best hotels offer international food and Addis Ababa also has a number of good Chinese, Italian and Indian restaurants. Ethiopian food is based on dishes called we't (meat, chicken or vegetables, cooked in a hot pepper sauce) served with or on injera (a flat spongy bread). Dishes include shivro and misir (chick peas and lentils, Ethiopian style) and tibs (crispy fried steak). There is a wide choice of fish including sole, Red Sea snapper, lake fish, trout and prawns. Traditional restaurants in larger cities serve food in a grand manner around a brightly colored basket-weave table called a masob. Before beginning the meal, guests will be given

soap, water and a clean towel, as the right hand is used to break off pieces of injera with which the we't is gathered up. Cutlery is not used.

Ethiopian coffee from the province of Kaffa, with a little rue added for extra aroma, is called 'health of Adam'. Local red and dry white wines are worth trying. Talla (Ethiopian beer) has a unique taste and European-style lager is widely available. Kaitaka (a pure grain alcohol), cognac (a local brandy) and tej (an alcoholic drink based on fermented honey) are unique.

### **TIPPING**

In most hotels and restaurants, a 10 per cent service charge is added to the bill. Tipping is a fairly frequent custom, but amounts are small.

### **SHOPPING**

Special purchases include local jewelry (sold by the actual weight of gold or silver), woodcarvings, illuminated manuscripts and prayer scrolls, wood and metal crosses, leather shields, spears, drums and carpets. In marketplaces, a certain amount of bargaining is expected, but prices at shops in towns are fixed.

### **AREAS IN ETHIOPIA**

**Addis Ababa:** Ethiopia's capital is located at an altitude of 2440m (8000ft) in the central highlands. Places of

interest include the university, St George's Cathedral, the Ethnology Museum, the Menelik Mausoleum, the Trinity Church, the Old Ghibi Palace and the market, one of the largest in Africa.

**Aksum:** The ancient royal capital of the earliest Ethiopian kingdom lies in the north of the country. It is renowned for multi-storied ancient carved granite obelisks, for important archaeological remains and for the church, which claims to house the Lost Ark of the Covenant.

**Blue Nile Falls:** (also called Tissisat) are one of the most spectacular waterfalls in Northern Africa. They are situated about 35km (22 miles) from Bahar Dar. Gondar was the capital of Ethiopia from 1632 to 1855 and is the site of many ruined castles. Close by is Lake Tana, on which 37 islands stand and is the largest lake in Ethiopia. Lalibela is famous for its 12th-century, rock-hewn churches.

**Harar:** a famous Muslim walled city and the centre for the coffee trade. Dire Dawa, near Harar, is an important trading centre on the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway line.

**The Rift Valley Lakes** in Ziway, Langano, Awasso, Abiyata, Shalla, Abaya and Chamo offer unique scenery and beautiful beaches. Langano is one of the most popular lakeside resorts.

## SUGGESTED READING LIST

Many comprehensive and readily available guides produced by Lonely Planet, Fodor, Insight, The Rough Guide, etc., many books relating this destination. Here are a few selections we thought might interest you. Longitude Books at <http://www.longitudebooks.com> has an extensive collection of books, searchable by country.

### **AFRICAN ZION:**

#### **THE SACRED ART OF ETHIOPIA**

**Marilyn Eiseman Heldman, Roderick Grierson (Editor), with Stuart C. Munro-Hay**

A handsome survey of the art of highland Christian Ethiopia--icons, metalwork, gold coins, and illuminated manuscripts--from the fourth through the 18th centuries, with an emphasis on the political, social, economic, and religious history of the region.

### **ETHIOPIA, THE UNKNOWN LAND:**

#### **A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDE**

**Stuart C. Munro-Hay, S. C. Munro-Hay**

A result of a lifetime's study of the mysterious country, this book is the first truly comprehensive work on the monuments and art of Ethiopia, as well as a literary companion to its land and history. Stuart Munro-Hay provides a valuable guide to the country's architecture, geography, peoples, art, and history which covers all the major sites of the land from ancient times to the present.

### **FIRE FROM THE ASHES: A CHRONICLE OF THE REVOLUTION IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA, 1975-1991 - Jenny Hammond**

*Fire From the Ashes* tells the extraordinary story of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) revolution, from its beginning in February 1975 by a handful of students, its expansion into the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, and their victory in May 1991 over the Soviet-backed military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile-Mariam. The story accumulates slowly through multiple voices and perspectives. It is presented from the point of view of an external observer learning as she goes along. The book is based on three journeys through the war zone, which not only show different points in the process of revolution, but different states in the author's understanding of the history, causes and evolution of this struggle. Jenny Hammond unlocks the hitherto hidden history of the EPRDF liberation movement. She provides the reader with a unique insight into the origin and evolution of the movement and describes the social and political transformations of the society during the war period. For the first time, the author unveils the unique record of this important historical movement through taped interviews with the EPRDF leadership, including the present Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi.

### **MOON GODDESS: THE QUEEN OF SHEBA**

**Janice L. Dennie**

Review by Harriet Klausner: "In 950 BC Ethiopia, a numbed Princess Makeda wanders among the sea of dead bodies, including her mother, Queen Zenobia, that flood the courtyard. Makeda has no time to grieve as she is now the Queen of Sheba and must find a way to protect her people and their wealthy lands from the invading tribes who covet them. *Moon Goddess* is a fabulous retelling of the biblical romance between Solomon and Sheba. The story line is fast-paced and filled with a genuine feel for the era. The characters seem genuine without losing or changing what the bible describes of them. Dennie demonstrates that she is a major talent within the biblical historical fiction sub-genre."

### **ECCENTRIC GRACES: ERITREA AND ETHIOPIA THROUGH THE EYES OF A TRAVELER - Julia Stewart**

There are some places that hound the imagination of a traveler years before they actually have the opportunity to visit. This is how the ancient lands of Eritrea and Ethiopia beckoned to author Julia Stewart. Breathtaking landscapes, attractive citizens, intricately spiced foods, a gentle culture and rich history - it was all waiting for her. All of these things, Stewart came to experience and appreciate with abundance. What she did not predict were several mysterious happenings: harassment at the hands of "union busters", an impromptu running of the bulls, coming face to face with abject poverty, and her own reactions to these unpredictable events. Stewart's travels to Eritrea and Ethiopia are of a current vintage, unlike those of famous explorers of an earlier period such as Richard Burton and James Bruce. Her travels took place during a post-war era when tremendous changes were occurring in the political and social lives of the people.

### **ETHIOPIA, THE UNKNOWN LAND: A CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDE**

**Stuart C. Munro-Hay, Pamala Taor (Photos)**

A result of a lifetime's study of the mysterious country, this book is the first truly comprehensive work on the monuments and art of Ethiopia, as well as a literary companion to its land and history. Stuart Munro-Hay provides a valuable guide to the country's architecture, geography, peoples, art, and history which covers all the major sites of the land from ancient times to the present.

## **BLACK LIONS: THE CREATIVE LIVES OF MODERN ETHIOPIA'S LITERARY GIANTS AND PIONEERS**

**Reidulf Knut Molvaer**

A fascinating portrait of Ethiopian fiction writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in-depth analysis of the history of the development of Amharic literature and those who shaped it. The range of writers covered varies from aristocrats, educators and pioneers to current revolutionary writers. The book gives a vivid picture of personal development and progress of the writers, and their impact on Ethiopian society at large in changing old ideas, contributing towards modernization of the country and revolutionizing educational, social and political systems. This volume presents portraits and sketches of thirty-two Ethiopian writers, including such notable literary giants as Hiruy Welde-Sillase, Girmacchew Tekle-Hawariyat, Kebede Mikael, and Haddis Alemayehu.

## **THE SEVENTH SCROLL**

**Wilbur Smith**

The Seventh Scroll, an ancient papyrus written by the slave Taita, holds the secret to the location of the Pharaoh's hidden tomb and his staggering untold wealth. Untouched for thousands of years, the scroll is accidentally discovered and instantly becomes something people will kill to obtain. In a race against an unknown enemy, Royan Al Simma, a beautiful Egyptologist who has deciphered the scrolls, and Nicholas Quentin-Harper, an English adventurer who risks his fortune, search the Ethiopian highlands for the whereabouts of the Pharaoh's treasure. As they close in on the tomb, the brilliant Taita's ancient traps become deadly while their enemy brings his ruthlessness and power to bear.

## **HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA**

**Harold G. Marcus**

In this readable and concise history of Ethiopia, Harold Marcus surveys the evolution of the oldest African nation from prehistory to the present. Based on a thorough reading of post-World War II scholarship, Marcus demonstrates that there is more to Ethiopia's existence than the ambitions of any one group. While Ethiopia has from time to time separated into component parts, it has

never disappeared as an idea and has always reappeared in fact. Marcus concludes that now, as in the past, geography, economics, and culture will, in the end, prevail in uniting Ethiopia's diverse peoples against the forces of ethnic and religious factionalization.

## **LAYERS OF TIME: A HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA**

**Paul B. Henze**

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world. Beginning with the Aksumite Empire, this book traces the country's expansion southward during medieval times, its resistance to Muslim invasion, and, under energetic leaders, the defense of its independence during the European colonization of Africa. Rather than exploring only the major figures--kings, princes, and politicians--this volume also includes insights on daily life, art, architecture, religion, culture, customs, and observations by travelers.

## **THE SIGN AND THE SEAL: THE QUEST FOR THE LOST ARK OF THE COVENANT**

**Graham Hancock**

This major work of historical detection and true adventure reveals how Graham Hancock located the Ark of the Covenant after a search that began in 1983. Acting on the traditional beliefs of millions of Ethiopian Christians and Jews that the Ark was somewhere in their country, Hancock embarked on a quest that would take him through archives in Europe, and to remote corners of the Third World as well as Israel and Egypt. In the course of his investigation he discovered vital connections between this awesomely powerful sacred object and the Knights Templar, the legends of the Holy Grail, Parsifal, and the saga of the Falasha Jews in Ethiopia. The Bible, in more than two hundred detailed references, describes the Ark of the Covenant and delineates its whereabouts up until the time of Solomon (970-931 B.C.). After that it vanishes from the Bible and from the temple built by Solomon to house the Ark. In this engrossing book Hancock reveals what the Ark was and explores its frightening and real power. Readers will be taken step-by-step through the research and travel that led Hancock ultimately to the ancient sanctuary in Ethiopia where the Ark rests today.