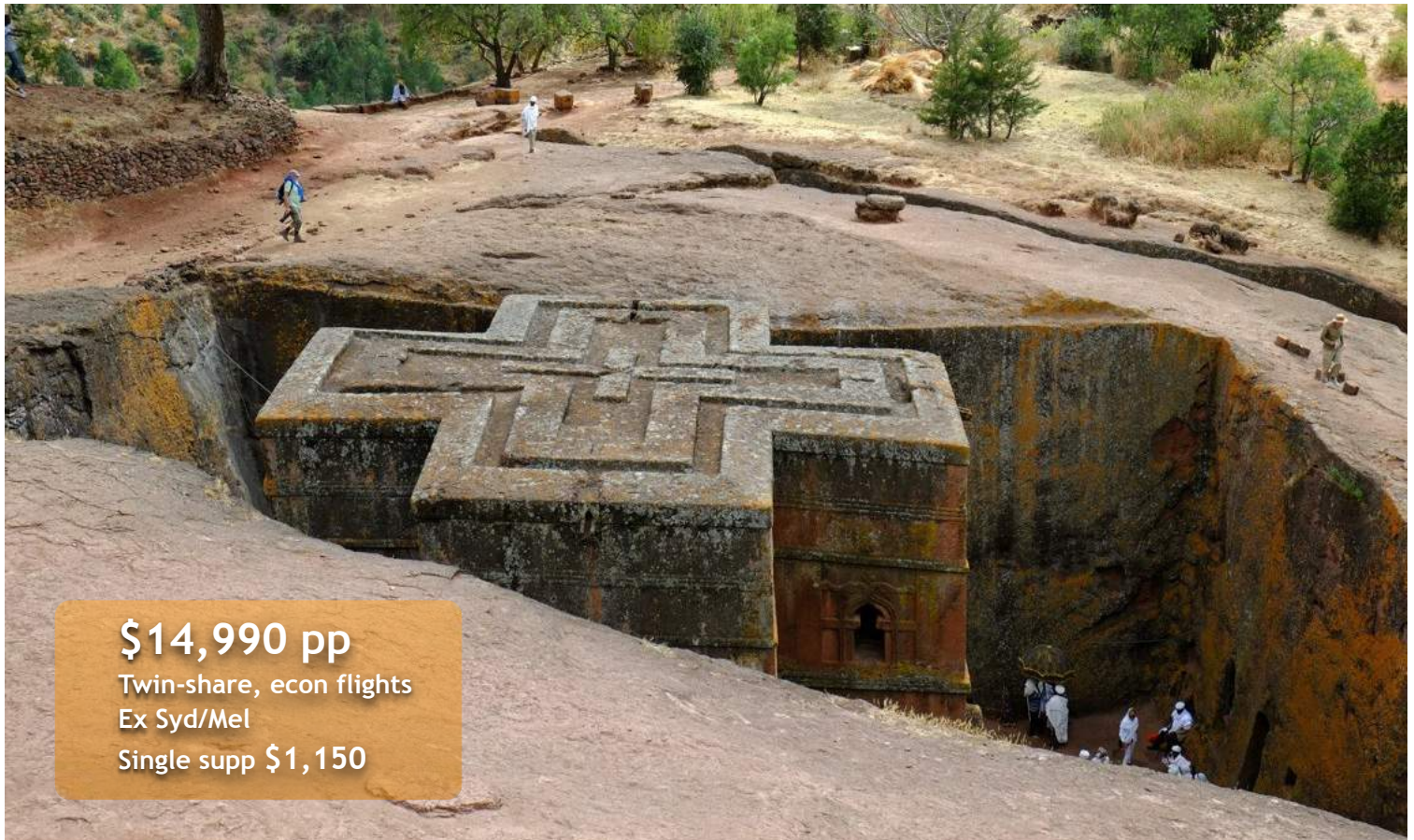


Blue Dot Travel

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Ethiopia
Private Tour





\$14,990 pp

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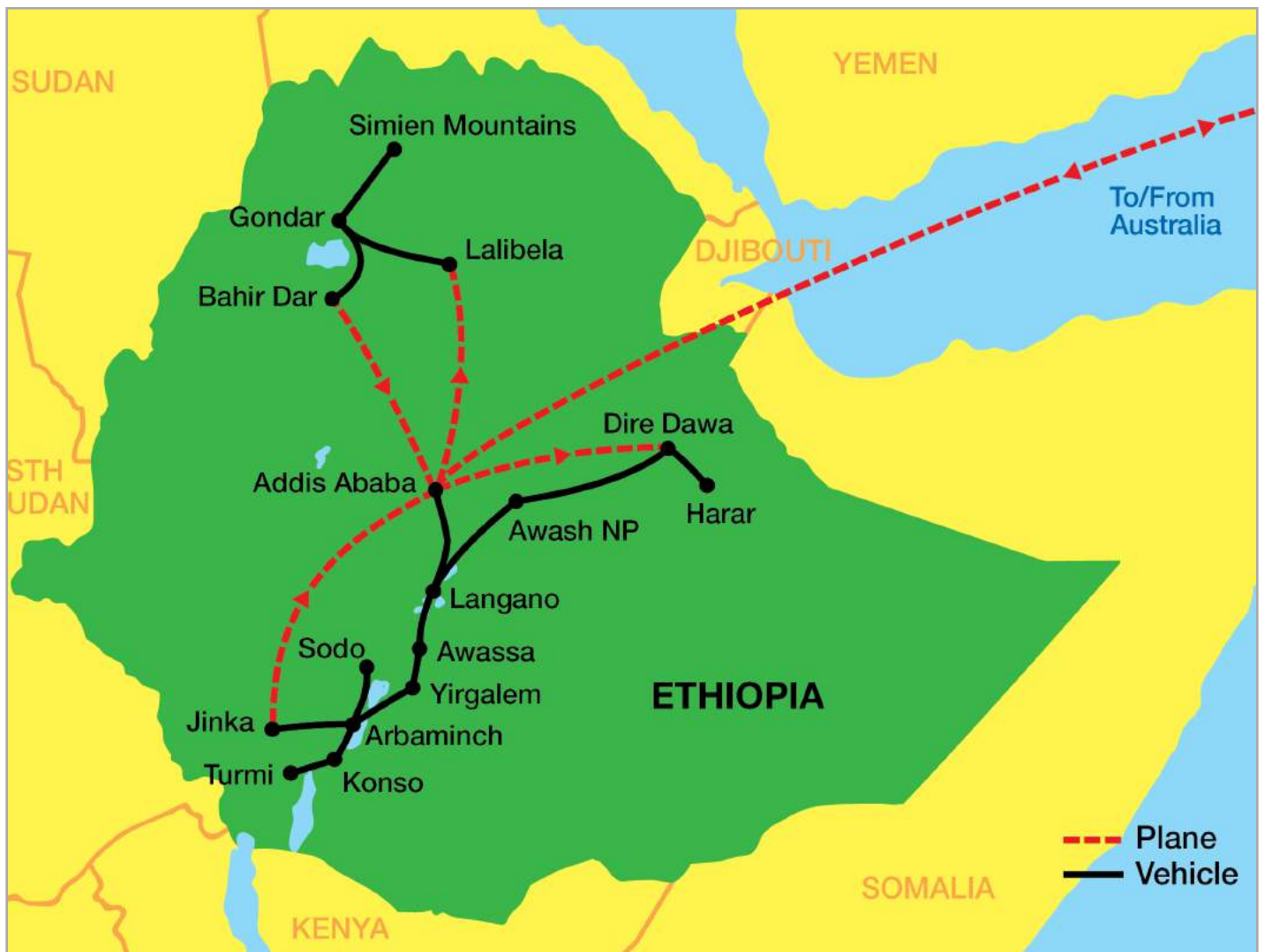
ETHIOPIA - INCLUDING THE OMO VALLEY

With its fabulous 3,000-year history, diverse peoples, vibrant culture, varied wildlife and fauna, and magnificent scenery embracing every landform from high mountain plateaus to parched deserts, Ethiopia is a destination without peer. Add to this the one of the finest climates in Africa ("thirteen months of sunshine!") and you have so many reasons to visit this incredible country. Located in the northeast Horn of Africa, Ethiopia is the oldest nation in Africa. A country with one of the richest histories on the African continent, Ethiopia has extraordinary archaeological sites. In the North of the country are the seventeenth century castles and the Imperial Compound of Gondar, the monasteries of Lake Tana and the thirteenth century monolithic rock-hewn churches of King Lalibela in the Wollo Region – the Eighth Wonder of the World. In the East, the 1000-year-old city of Harar, with its 99 Mosques, is the fourth holiest city in Islam, after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

Ethiopia is one of the largest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, covering over one million square kilometres. It has every variety of scenery, from the peaks of the Simien Mountains in north Gondar to the deep Dalol depression in the west. The landscape is dominated by a volcanically formed central plateau, referred to as the Ethiopian Highlands, with an average altitude of 2,000 metres, including twenty peaks of 4,000 metres or higher. These Highlands form the source of four major river systems, the best known being the Blue Nile, which rises in Lake Tana in the northwest. The same outpouring of lava also contributed to a giant tear across the surface of the Earth that can be seen from space, known as the Great Rift Valley. Extending nearly 6,000 kilometres from Syria, through the Red Sea, Ethiopia, and down to Mozambique, this spectacular and abrupt cutting away of the land never fails to strike a traveller with surprise and awe. The Rift Valley is also home to seven large and beautiful lakes in the heart of the country, caused by the millennia of heavy rainfall that deluged Africa at the same time that northern Europe was going through its 'Ice Age'.

The wildlife found in Ethiopia is quite different from that of the rest of East Africa, showing some affiliations with the Middle East, and includes the native Walia ibex, Gelada baboon, Simien fox and mountain nyala. However, it is the people of Ethiopia who truly round out the character of this land of enormous ethnic diversity. Communities originally of Semitic, Hamatic, Nilotic and Omotic stock make up more than 80 ethnic groups (with as many languages). The majority of the population is Christian while a third of its population is Muslim. About 90% of the large population of 91 million earn their living from the land, mainly as subsistence farmers.

Finally, no trip to Ethiopia is complete without witnessing the remarkable Timkat ceremonies, celebrating the Baptism of Jesus. The colours are nothing short of spectacular, and it ranks as one of the world's greatest street festivals.



**Day 1, Saturday 15th January
IN TRANSIT**

Depart Australia for Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, situated in the centre of the country. Arrive into Addis Ababa early in the morning on 15/1. *Meals in flight.*

**Day 2, Sunday 16th January
ARRIVAL INTO ADDIS ABABA**

We will be met at the airport by our guide and transferred to the the Nexus Hotel. Our guide will help us with money exchange. Later, visit the Hamlin College, just out of town. The balance of the day is for rest after a long flight. *B/D*

**Day 3, Monday 17th January
ADDIS ABABA**

Today we will enjoy a full day tour in Addis Ababa. We'll start at the National Museum where the replica of "Lucy" resides. Lucy's bones were found in Ethiopia in 1974. She is the oldest known upright standing hominid dating back more than three million years. The group will drive to the top of Mt. Entoto for a panoramic view over the city and then walk through the fabulous Merkato before visiting the Trinity Cathedral. Finally, we will visit the Hamlin Fistula Hospital to see the wonderful work that Australian doctor Catherine Hamlin and her team do – and have done for many years. Overnight at the Nexus Hotel. *B/D*

**Day 4, Tuesday 18th
January
ADDIS - LALIBELA**

After an early breakfast, we'll transfer to the airport to fly to Lalibela (ET 122, departing 10:05, arriving 10:45). This fabulous city was once the thriving capital of a medieval dynasty, known as Roha, it is now the site of the "Eighth Wonder of the World", the churches carved out of solid red basalt. On your way from the airport to Lalibela town, you will have a stop to visit the cave church of Ne'akuto Le'Ab. In the afternoon you will visit the first group of rock churches, Golgotha, Mikael, Maryam, Meskel, Danaghel, Medhane Alem. Overnight at Top 12 hotel where we will stay for three nights. *B/D*



**Day 5, Wednesday 19th January
LALIBELA**

Cameras ready... today we are privileged to witness the famous celebration of Timkat (or Epiphany), which is Ethiopia's most important religious festival, and the main reason for setting the tour date. This colourful ceremony lead by priests in their vibrant regalia is both fascinating and very photogenic. In the morning we'll visit the second group of the rock churches, Amanuel, Merkorios, Abba

Libanos and Gabriel- Rufael and the separate, remarkable Bet Giyorgis (St. George's Church). At 15.00hrs we will return to Bet Giyorgis to watch the start and to follow the procession from the churches to the overnight site. We return to the Top 12 hotel late in the afternoon. **B/D**

Day 6, Thursday 19th January LALIBELA

An optional tour this morning; - a very rise early to visit the site where the clergy spent the night and where a ceremonial "baptism" will take place. The cost for this option



is additional but for those willing to stand for a few hours, its well worth it! (The guide will collect money the day before). After breakfast, the group will return to the best vantage point to watch the spectacular procession of the tablets,

back to their churches. At a number of places along the way the procession stops for a dance that involves lines of red and white garbed priests swaying and chanting to a heavy drumbeat. Last night at the Top 12 hotel. **B/D**

Day 7, Friday 21st January LALIBELA – BAHIR DAR

After breakfast, we'll be driving from Lalibela to Gondar through the breathtaking mountains of Lasta. This is a very interesting drive and you will have several stops for enjoying the wonderful views and to meet the local people. Upon arrival, you visit the town markets, Lake Tana to see papyrus boats, and drive to the former Haile Selassie Palace to see its exterior and the high view over the Blue Nile, Lake Tana and the town. Overnight, Jacaranda Hotel. **B/D**

Day 8, Saturday 22nd January BAHIR DAR

This morning we will cross the lake to visit the Ura Kidane Mihret Monastery on the Zeghe peninsula, which is decorated with highly colourful frescoes dating back to the 15th century. Return back to Bahir Dar for lunch. After lunch we will drive to the Tis Isat "Smoke of Fire" - the Blue Nile Falls (35 km taking about 1 hour), once the most dramatic spectacle on either the White or Blue Nile Rivers, walking from the village over a 17th century Portuguese stone bridge. Return to Bahir Dar for overnight at the Jacaranda Hotel. **B/D**

Day 9, Sunday 23rd January BAHIR DAR – GONDAR

This morning we start the next leg of our adventure by driving from Bahir Dar to Gondar (300 km, 3 hours). After lunch, a tour of Gondar and the Royal Enclosure to view the remains of the 17th century castles of King Fasiledes and his family. These dramatic castles, built between 1632 and 1855, are often referred to as the "Camelot of Africa". Other sites to be visited in the afternoon are King Fasiledes Bath, the Palace of Empress Mintiwab and her daughter and the finest of the Gondarian churches, Debre Birhan Silassie with its ceiling of winged angels. Overnight at the Zobel Hotel. **B/D**

Day 10, Monday 24th January GONDAR – SIMIEN MOUNTAINS

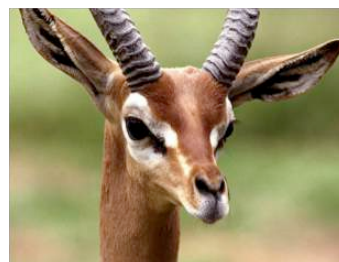
After a relaxed breakfast, drive into the Simien National Park as far as Sankaber Camp (3 hrs, 137km). From here you can see of the breathtaking topography as well as many birds and, if you are lucky, some of the animals for which this Park is renowned, the easiest to see being the Gelada Baboons. Overnight at Limalimo Lodge. **B/D**

Day 11, Tuesday 25th January SIMIEN MOUNTAINS

After a relaxed breakfast we will head into the park to enjoy some walks, the scenery and the wildlife. The afternoon will be free to enjoy the beautiful grounds of the hotel. Overnight at Limalimo Lodge. **B/D**

Day 12, Wednesday 26th January SIMIEN MOUNTAINS – GONDAR

After a relaxed breakfast, we will drive back to Gondar. In the afternoon, you'll visit the Palace of Empress Mintiwab Born in the Qwara province west of Lake Tana and thought to have a Portuguese ancestor, Mentewab rose from these origins to become one of the most powerful women in Ethiopian history. Overnight at the Zobel Hotel. **B/D**



Day 13, Thursday 27th January GONDAR – ADDIS – DIRE DAWA

Today is a day of transfers. After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight to Addis (ET 122, departing 09:00, arriving 10:00 hrs) and connect to Dire Dawa (ET 326, departing 16:00, arriving 17:10 hrs). The group will be met at the airport and then transferred to the hotel. Overnight at Hotel Samarat. **B/D**

Day 14, Friday 28th January DIRE DAWA – HARAR

After breakfast, drive from Dire Dawa to Harar. Harar, a walled city high in the Ahmar Mountains, founded in the 7th century, came to prominence in the 16th century when it was the base from which the Muslim leader Ahmed Gragh conducted a jihad against the Christian kingdoms in the west. In 1543, he was defeated and the



stout walls that surround the city today were built by the successor to his conqueror. Once around the walls by bus to see the five gates, then on foot into the narrow lanes to see the markets, the museums, the restored Rimbaud House, the people and their highly decorated homes. After dark, we'll be are taken to see the city's unique attraction, the Hyena Men - kitsch but entertaining. Overnight at Grand Gato Hotel. **B/D**

Day 15, Saturday 29th January HARAR – AWASH NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast, a lovely drive northwest across the Hararghe Mountains to Awash National Park (270 km,

about 6 hours). The journey is really interesting and scenic. We will have overnight accommodation in the park, which has an amazing view of the Awash River Valley and falls. Time permitting; we can take a stroll down the river (make sure you have your camera!). The falls are really something. Overnight at Awash Falls Lodge. *B/D*

Day 16, Sunday 30th January AWASH NATIONAL PARK – LAKES REGION

After an early breakfast, the group will drive through the game park to spot wild animals prior to heading south into the "Land of the Lakes". Then we'll continue down the highway that goes to Kenya for about 8 -9 hours (around 370km). We will visit the shores of Lake Ziway, where water birds - geese, pelicans and storks can be seen and photographed. We will make stop at a viewing point overlooking Lakes Shalla and Abijatta. Your first overnight stop will be on the shores of Lake Langano, at the Sabana Beach Resort. *B/D*

Day 17, Monday 31st January LANGANO – YIRGALEM

After a relaxed breakfast we visit the fish market in Awassa and then explore the beauties of Lake Awassa and the vibrant township. Later, drive to the Aregash Lodge where we will overnight. *B/D*

Day 18, Tuesday 1st February SIDAMA PEOPLE

After breakfast we drive for about an hour to Yirgalem and check in to your beautiful lodge. Immediately start your amazing walks in to the at the dense natural forest to reach one of the nearby villages to see the Sidama people and the coffee farms. Return back to Aregash Lodge overnight. *B/D*

Day 19, Wednesday 2nd February YIRGALEM – ARBAMINCH

After breakfast, drive southwest to Arbaminch (280km that takes about 5 hours), situated on the ridge - known as the "Bridge of Heaven" between the two largest Rift Valley lakes, Chamo and dark-red Abaya. The town commands panoramic views both over the lakes and the Guge Range of mountains to the west. On the way visit the Wolaita people and their village. Your hotel the Haile Resort Arbaminch, has a spectacular position on the edge of the bluff above the lakes. *B/D*

Day 20, Thursday 3rd February ARBAMINCH – KONSO

After breakfast, drive to the shores of Lake Chamo for the amazing boat ride to see the crocodile market. Also, in abundance are the crocodiles basking on the shores of Lake Chamo. After lunch, drive to Konso. Overnight at Kanta Lodge or similar. *B/D*

Day 21, Friday 4th February KONSO – DIMEKA - TURMI (OMO VALLEY)

Early in the morning, visit the Konso people, their terracing (UNESCO World Heritage Site) and their villages, if possible meet the traditional king of the Konso and visit his compound. Then we'll drive south to Turmi with a stop at Dimeka. Here we will enjoy one of the most colourful markets you will ever see where the Hammer people come together for trading. In the afternoon, we'll drive to Turmi for overnight stay at the Buska Lodge. *B/D*

Day 22, Saturday 5th February TURMI – OMORATE – TURMI (OMO VALLEY)

Early in the morning the group will drive to Omorate to experience life in this remote part of Ethiopia. You'll visit the Dassenech people crossing the river Omo, some kilometres before it disappears in lake Turkana on the Ethiopian Kenyan border. Then we'll drive back to Turmi for lunch. After lunch, we will be visiting one of the Hammer villages to learn about their lifestyle. Overnight Buska Lodge. *B/D*

Day 23, Sunday 6th February TURMI MARKET – JINKA (OMO VALLEY)

After a relaxed breakfast we will visit Turmi to see another colourful market of the Hammer people, varying from buying and selling of livestock to different spices and much in between. Later we drive to Jinka where we will overnight at the Jinka Wilderness Lodge. *B/D*



Day 24, Monday 7th February JINKA – MAGO NP – ARI VILLAGE – JINKA

In the morning, we'll head off on an excursion to the Mago National Park to visit the distinctive pastoralist Mursi people where the women are known for wearing lip plates. We'll be visiting Mursi villages in the middle of one of the most remote areas of the continent. We will make a stop at the Ari village to see these fascinating people and their way of living. Late afternoon we'll return to the Jinka Wilderness Lodge. *B/D*

Day 25, Tuesday 8th February JINKA – ADDIS ABABA (FLIGHT)

After breakfast, we will visit the cultural museum in Jinka and then transfer to the airport for our flight to Addis (ET 135, departing 15:15, arriving 17:30 hrs). Overnight at the Nexus Hotel. *B/D*.

Day 26, Wednesday 9th February ADDIS ABABA

After breakfast, we'll finish our Addis experience by shopping along Churchill Road. Later we'll transfer to the airport for the flight back home. *B/Meals in flight*

Day 27, Thursday 10th February TRANSIT *Meals in flight*

Day 28, Friday 11th February ARRIVE HOME



Icon indicates a day where there is **moderate physical exertion**. A basic level of fitness is required: eg. A trek over 'mostly flat' terrain or climbing several flights of steps without the support of handrails or elevators.



Icon indicates a day where there is a **particularly active section**. A good level of fitness is required: eg. A longer trek over non-groomed, uneven terrain, or ascending to reach a panorama. May also include exposure to higher altitude. **An alternate activity may be offered if you choose to sit out an active section.** Please call - we are happy to discuss each tour in more detail.