



Origins: Ethiopia

January 2-19, 2020



The Simien Mountains, Ethiopia. Photo by WIRI – stock.adobe.com

Ethiopia is a land of extraordinary scientific research and ground-breaking discovery, spectacular color with awe-inspiring physical beauty, ancient culture, unique traditions, and glorious festivals with incredible food and coffee. Home to the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Africa, Ethiopia is not short of poignant tales. A truly unique journey awaits you.

Ethiopia is the 3.18-million-year-old site of “Lucy” and the 3.3-million-year-old resting place of the earliest child ancestor discovered so far, named “Selam.” It is the spiritual home of the Rastafarians, where Selassie is the incarnation of God, and it is also a country where monolithic Christian churches have been carved from rock and mountain.

With tourism still in its infancy, your experience amongst the astonishing landscapes and ancient wonders will be wholly authentic. Throughout the journey, you will be joined by scholars, scientists and surprise guests who will provide private access and expertise. It is a privilege to discover the secrets of a nation like no other, seldom explored by tourists and a country in transition. Ethiopia is not a destination for those who seek thrills; it is a destination for those who wish to be moved.

Itinerary

Begin this once-in-a-lifetime tour with a few days in London, England.

(Provided meals for each day are indicated with the letter B for breakfast, L for lunch, and D for dinner).

January 2

Greeted at London Heathrow with a private transfer from the airport to the [Thistle Piccadilly Hotel](#) (or similar) for three nights with breakfast daily.

January 3

B,L,D

Guided Tour and Lunch - Darwin's home, Down House

Down House belonged to the great scientist Charles Darwin, who lived here for 40 years until his death in 1882. After moving to the house in 1842, Darwin and his wife, Emma, remodeled the house and its extensive gardens, which Darwin used as an open-air laboratory. It was here that Darwin developed his theory of evolution by natural selection and wrote his groundbreaking work *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859). Enjoy a pub lunch nearby with invited guests and a group dinner in London with local scholars.

Overnight: Thistle Piccadilly or similar

January 4

B

Guided Tour with special guests - British Natural History Museum

This an exciting time for human evolution research. Intriguing fossil and archaeological discoveries, combined with innovative techniques and DNA research, are transforming scientists' understanding of our ancient past. Museum scientists are at the forefront of research on the migration, characteristics and capabilities of these early human relatives, and the origin and cultural development of our species, *Homo sapiens*. Star specimens and exhibits:

- 3.5-million-year-old Laetoli canine, the oldest hominin fossil in the museum's collection
- Gibraltar 1 skull, the first adult Neanderthal skull ever found
- 420,000-year-old Clacton spear, the oldest preserved wooden spear in the world
- Cheddar Man skeleton and fascinating insights into the cultural practices of early modern humans in Britain, including a human skull shaped into a cup

Overnight: Thistle Piccadilly or similar

January 5**B**

Private transfer from hotel accommodation to London Heathrow Airport for flight to Ethiopia. Day at leisure.

January 6**B****Arrive in Addis Ababa from London around 6:35 am.**

Welcome to Ethiopia! On arrival at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, you will be transferred to the Sheraton Hotel, located in the heart of the Ethiopian capital. You have the day to relax and rejuvenate; the hotel has a wide range of facilities, including pools, restaurants, and the Aqva Club, which offers a variety of massages.

Overnight: [Sheraton Hotel](#)- rooms booked for the evening before to guarantee early check-in.

January 7**B,L,D****Addis Ababa**

AM: In the morning, you will visit the [Zoma Museum](#), an environmentally conscious art center. The concept was developed by Meskerem Asseged (a cultural anthropologist and curator) and is constructed and co-directed by both Meskerem and Elias Sime (an artist). The Zoma Museum is an art sanctuary that embraces nature while rearranging contemporary art as we know it. In 2009, the *New York Times* wrote, "Its organic, circular structure, intricately carved walls and woven roof appear like a voluptuous dream, a swirl of ancient techniques and ecstatic imagination."

Afternoon: Ethnological Museum

Set within Haile Selassie's former palace, and surrounded by the beautiful gardens and fountains of the university's main campus, is the enthralling Ethnological Museum. It's easily one of the finest museums in Africa, showing the full sweep of Ethiopia's cultural and social history across two floors. After you've lapped up the treasures in the museum, stop by the double-decker London bus next to the university entrance gates. Brought to Addis by Haile Selassie, it's now a bar and packed with students.

Late Afternoon: Ethiopia Space Program with sunset canapes and cocktails.

Situated on top of the towering Mount Entoto, near the capital Addis Ababa, the center consists of two telescopes sheltered within large dome structures. Opened a few months ago, the goal of the program is to bring "a society with a highly developed scientific culture that enables Ethiopia to reap the benefits accruing from space science and technology."

Welcome dinner at Yod Abissinia.

Overnight: Sheraton Hotel

January 8

B,L

Addis Ababa

Tour the National Museum of Ethiopia with special guests.

The museum houses Ethiopia's treasures, including many fossilized remains, the most famous being “Lucy,” the partial skeleton of a specimen of *Australopithecus afarensis*. Recently added to the gallery is a display on “Selam,” found between 2000 and 2004.

The current NME grew from the establishment of the Institute of Archaeology, which was founded in 1958 to promote and facilitate the archaeological research mission in the northern part of Ethiopia by French archaeologists. With the establishment of the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Administration in 1976, the idea was proposed to open a National Museum, which was supported by the government.

The NME has four main exhibition sections: 1) archaeological and paleoanthropological, 2) ancient and medieval periods, 3) secular arts and crafts, 4) ethnographic, which gives an overview of the cultural richness and variety of the peoples of Ethiopia.

Afternoon: Lunch at Lucy's by the National Museum

Optional: City bus tour to see highlights of the city.

Overnight: Sheraton Hotel

January 9

B,L,D

Transfer to airport and fly to Bahirdar

Meet and transfer to airport to Bahirdar. There we will be greeted and driven to Kuriftu Lodge. After which we will board the private boat for a ride on Lake Tana to the Zege Peninsula and its famous monasteries. Keep an eye out for a variety of bird species and the traditional tankwa crossing the lake. After a short hike through local villages and coffee farms, you will reach the monastery of Ura Kidane Meret. The monastery is home to important collections of crosses and crowns dating back to the 16th century. The painted maqdas, colorful and well-preserved, tell stories of the Ethiopian saints.

Overnight: [Kuriftu Lodge & Spa](#)

January 10

B,L,D

Simien Mountains

The five-hour drive to the Simien Mountains is beautiful, passing rural villages while traveling through mountain passes with stunning vistas. The Simien Mountains National Park is situated between 6,200-4,500 feet. It boasts varied flora with three marked botanical areas. The highest parts have meadows with little vegetation, characteristic of afro-alpine zones.

Overnight: [Simien Eco Lodge](#)- the highest lodge in Africa at 10,695 feet.

January 11

B,L,D

Simien Mountains

After breakfast, set out for the Simien Mountains, often called the Grand Canyon of Africa. Simien is home to Ras Dejen, the highest mountain in Ethiopia (14,872 feet) as well as some unique and endangered species including the gelada baboon, sometimes called the bleeding-heart monkey. It is a species of Old World monkey found only in the Ethiopian Highlands. (Geladas are the only living members of the genus *Theropithecus*.) We will spend the day with **Leakey Foundation grantees** who are studying these gelada monkeys.

We will set out in the early morning with the researchers for a few hours while the geladas socialize on the top edge of the cliff - this social time can vary from 1-3 hours. The geladas sit and groom and fight and are just - well - geladas! For those who might be seeking extra exercise, you can follow along with the researchers for longer if you like. We'll drive back to Simien Lodge for lunch and an eco-talk by our crew.

In the evening we will enjoy a leisurely trek (mostly downhill) to the waterfall before departing back to the lodge at about 5:30 pm (no one is allowed to drive in the park after dark).

Overnight: Simien Lodge

January 12

B,L,D

Gondar

After breakfast, travel by road to Gondar. Enjoy the landscape and passing villages along the way. This afternoon, we will enjoy a sightseeing tour of Gondar, the first capital of the Ethiopian Empire, founded in 1635 by the Emperor Fasilidas. Gondar is famous for its collection of 17th century castles and palaces.

We will explore the Royal Enclosure and its buildings. The fortress, which is surrounded by a 300-foot-long wall, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The oldest and most impressive structure in the compound is the two-story palace of Emperor Fasilidas, built of solid basalt stones. Other royal buildings of interest include the library of Emperor Yohannes I, the House of Song where royal

ceremonies took place, the elegant reception and banquet hall of Emperor Bakaffa, and the palace of the king's wife. We will also visit the nearby bath of King Fasiledes, where modern-day Timkat ceremonies are performed. View the Church of DebreBirhan Selassie, an imposing structure with a bright colored ceiling.

Overnight: [Goha Hotel](#)- ideally situated in the hills of the city and a short distance away from the mysterious castles of the 17th century royal enclosures.

January 13

B,L,D

Gondar / Lalibela

After an early breakfast, we will be transferred to the airport for our 9:50am flight to Lalibela. Upon our arrival we will be transferred to the hotel.

Lalibela is arguably one of the most important religious and historical sites in all of Africa and the entire Christian world. Ethiopia was the first country to adopt Christianity as a state religion (although the Armenians have claimed this for themselves, as well). The Ethiopian Orthodox religious practices roots lie in Judaism. There are no less than 200 churches in the Lasta Region of Lalibela, some hidden in enormous caves, but it's exceptional to find 11 churches of such master craftsmanship in one locale. These brilliant feats of engineering are often referred to as the "Eighth Wonder of the World."

The churches are said to have been constructed during King Lalibela's reign during the 12th and 13th centuries when Lalibela (then known as Roha) was the capital of the Zagwe Dynasty. Many different theories exist on how they were built and by whom, including angels and the Knights Templar. Some claim that King Lalibela was exiled in Jerusalem and returned to Ethiopia to build a new Jerusalem. Others claim it was supposed to be the new Jerusalem as the old one had been captured.

PM: Visit the First Group of Churches

In the afternoon we will visit the first group of the churches that represent the earthly Jerusalem. This group includes Bete Medhanialem (Saviour Church), Bete Maryam, Bete Denagel, Bete Meskal, Debra Sina, and Bete Golgotha. Standing 38 feet tall with seventy-two pillars, Bete Medhanialem is not only the largest in Lalibela, but it is the largest monolithic rock-hewn church in the world. The oldest of the churches, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Bete Maryam is the only Lalibela monolith with a porch. The remains of exquisite early frescoes can be seen on the ceiling and upper walls, and there are many elaborately carved details on the piers, capitals, and arches. Bete Golgotha houses remarkable reliefs of figures and early Christian art rarely seen in other parts of Ethiopia.

Overnight: Mezena Lodge

January 14

B,L,D

Lalibela

AM: Visit the Second Group of Churches

After breakfast at the hotel, we will visit the second group of the churches representing the heavenly Jerusalem. In this group are the Bete Gabriel and Raphael, Bete Merquorios, Bete Emmanuel, and Bete Abba Libanos. Visit the most interesting cross-shaped church of Bete Giorgis (St. George), which is said to symbolize Noah's Ark. The cruciform-shaped Bete Giorgis is the most perfect and beautiful church, and its interior is dominated by depictions of St. George killing the dragon.

PM: This afternoon we head out of Lalibela to visit the Cave Church or Yemrehane Christo's.

Overnight: Mezena Lodge

January 15

B

Addis Ababa

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for the flight back to Addis Ababa for a day at leisure. We can suggest a variety of shopping locations, museums and cultural activities.

Overnight: Sheraton Hotel.

January 16

B,L,D

Afar Region/Semera

After breakfast at the hotel you will be transferred to the airport for your flight to the Afar region. Here we will have 4-wheel drive vehicles to visit **Leakey Foundation grantee Dr. Yohannes Haile-Selassie** at his Woranso-Mille Paleontological Project. (About an hour and a half from Semera).

The Woranso-Mille paleontological study area is a recently identified paleontological treasure trove in eastern Africa. It is located in the central Afar region of Ethiopia, about 325 miles northeast of Addis Ababa, and 18 miles north of Hadar, the site where the famous Lucy was discovered.

The paleontological significance of the area was first identified in 2004 when Yohannes Haile-Selassie and his collaborators surveyed the area under a survey and exploration permit issued to Haile-Selassie in 2002 by the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) of what is now the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Ethiopia. Shortly after its discovery, Haile-Selassie organized an international team of scientists and launched a permanent project, the Woranso-Mille Paleontological Research Project.

Overnight: [Kiruftu Resort](#)

January 17

B,L,D

Visit the site of “Lucy”

Hadar is the site of paleoanthropological excavations in the lower Awash Region valley in the Afar region. It lies along the northernmost part of Africa’s Eastern Great Rift Valley. The lower valley of the Awash River—i.e., the Hadar area—was designated a UNESCO World heritage site in 1980.

Major paleontological work began at Hadar in the early 1970s and was led by **Leakey Foundation grantee Don Johanson**. His team discovered a 40% complete female skeleton of *Australopithecus afarensis* that became popularly known as “Lucy.” Dated to 3.2 million years ago, the remains provided further evidence that, in human evolution, walking on two legs preceded increased brain size. The *A. afarensis*-bearing levels at Hadar range from 3.4 to 2.9-million-years-old and include more than 200 fossils from a single site (Afar Locality 333), representing at least nine adults and four juveniles deposited at the same time.

Overnight: Kiruftu Resort

January 18

B

This morning you will be transferred to the airport for your 9:45am flight to Addis Ababa. Day rooms have been reserved until our late night check-out and transfer to the airport for our 1:30 am flight

Overnight: [Jupiter International Hotel-Bole](#)

January 19

B

Fly back to the United States at 1:30am.

This tour has been prepared exclusively for The Leakey Foundation by Rothschild Safaris



With any questions, please contact:

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The Leakey Foundation
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Cost

\$10,889 per person Paying by check or wire (3% discount)
\$1,669 Single Supplement paying by check or wire

\$11,226 per person Paying by credit card
\$1,721 Single supplement paying by credit card

Costs Include *15 person minimum*

- 4 flights (in Ethiopia) and private coaches (London and Ethiopia)
- 16 hotel nights (London and Ethiopia)
- Airport meet-and-greet with private transfers
- Breakfast, lunches and dinners as listed in the above itinerary
- A local, English-speaking scholar as our guide; a representative from The Leakey Foundation; and a representative from Rothschilds Safaris

These tour costs do not include

- International airfare to/from London, to/from Ethiopia. **(Rothschild Safaris recommend talking with your travel agent or airline for your best options for round-trip airfare to Ethiopia with a layover in London.)**
- Gratuities, incidentals (laundry, etc.)
- Travel insurance or visas

IMPORTANT This is an active program with frequent transfers between cities and hotel changes. For most activities, a relatively moderate level of exertion is required. You must be able to walk distances of one to three miles, sometimes over uneven surfaces, and climb stairs that may not have handrails, especially when visiting the churches of Lalibela. Please note that the elevation of Addis Ababa is over 7,500 feet, and some individuals may experience altitude sickness. Most of the stops on this expedition will be set at high elevations. Away from the main cities, the infrastructure is poorly developed, and there may be delays and/or changes to the published itinerary. Some days will require long drives over unpaved, bumpy roads. All accommodations are the best available in the area. There will be days with numerous religious sites where you will need to remove your shoes several times. Familiarize yourself with health and vaccination requirements at the Centers for Disease Control's website.

Reservation Request

Please use this link to sign-up for the tour. You will need to provide the exact name as it appears on your passport and your date of birth. You will also need to provide a copy of your front pages of your passport. Participation is limited in size and subject to first-come, first served.

https://rothschildsafaris.formstack.com/forms/registration_confirmation_other

Your reservation will be considered official only after you complete this form and full payment has been received (on a first come-first served basis.) Should you cancel after your reservation has been received, the cancellation penalties apply.

The payment policy:

- Submit a non-refundable 25% deposit upon booking per person
- The balance is due 90 days prior to departure (October 1, 2019) for each person

Cancellation policy: **Figures are expressed as percentages of the total trip cost.*

The per person cancellation on the land costs are as follows:

- 90+ days prior to departure the 25% non-refundable deposit is forfeited
- 89 - 60 days prior to departure 50% of tour price is forfeited
- 59 - 31 days prior to departure 75% of tour price is forfeited
- Within 30 days prior to departure 100% of the tour price is forfeited

Make checks payable to: Rothschild Safaris (note The Leakey Foundation on the memo line)

Mail to: Rothschild Safaris 600 South Cherry Street, Suite 711 Denver, CO 80246

OR call Caren Banks for wiring information

OR if you will be paying by credit card, let Caren Banks know, and she will send you a secure link to pay online (credit card payments includes the 3% fee- see above.) You may attach your passport pages using the link.