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Travel

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Highlands & Highlights of **Ethiopia** with Sue Verrall



26 day Escorted Tour 24 April - 19 May, 2020

Your tour highlights:

- 12th and 13th century Rock Churches of Lalibela
- Yemrehanna Kristos – best preserved Axumite cave church
- Gelada Baboons, Simien Mountains National Park and Giant Lobelias
- Royal Castles of Gondar
- Rural village life and the chaos and beauty of Africa's largest markets
- Ethnological Museum of Addis Ababa
- Lake Tana – source of the Blue Nile
- UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including Debre Berhan Selassie Church
- Unique landscapes and eco-systems of Bale Mountains National Park
- Ethnic immersion into Dorze and Konso tribal life

Ethiopia, a beautiful country enriched with an intriguing history, extraordinary wildlife and some of Africa's most soulful people.

Join Sue Verrall and travel to one of the world's oldest civilisations, where the calendar pre-dates the Gregorian and 88 languages give rise to over 200 dialects! Walk with the Gelada baboons high above the spectacular plugs and chasms of the Simien Mountains, while in the vast high-altitude moors of the southern Bale Mountains, known for centuries as Middle Earth, search for the Mountain Nyala and the Simien Fox.

Visit the tiny city of Lalibela located in the heart of the highlands and explore ancient 12th-century rock churches; walk through the royal castles of Gondar and travel through diverse agricultural areas, the foundation of Ethiopia's economy. Experience the fringe of the Danakil Desert, from your secluded bush lodge in the Afar region where birdlife is abundant and is especially prolific in the drier southern areas, where you'll visit some of the lesser-known people - the tribes of Mursi, Karo, and Konso.

A varied destination offering photogenic wildlife and landscapes that set the country apart from the rest of Africa, Ethiopia is also considered the birthplace of coffee, its richness of culture reflected in every cup!



Your Tour Itinerary

Fri 24 April Arrive Addis Ababa

You are met at the airport and taken to your hotel where we stay for two nights. Please arrive by 14:00.

The city of Addis Ababa, known as “New Flower”, in Amharic, nestled into the surrounding Entoto Mountains, lies between 2,300 -2,500 metres above sea level. A fast-developing city of Ethiopian character with modern influences from the west, its wide avenues of jacaranda trees, interesting museums, cobbled streets and many pedestrians, may surprise its visitor. Rest as you adjust to high altitude, gently acclimatising to your new, culturally diverse surroundings.

Sat 25 April Addis Ababa

After a leisurely breakfast depart on a walking tour of the “Mercato”, one of Africa’s largest open-air markets. Selling a range of wares from handicrafts to computers, our guide takes us through this



fascinating and extremely busy hub of activity.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before returning to the hotel to relax. This evening you’ll enjoy a vibrant night of Ethiopian hospitality at the Yod Abyssinian cultural restaurant – an opportunity to sample an interesting selection of well-prepared local food and watch the energy of traditional dancing. Every dance tells a story and the later we stay the faster the dancing becomes!

Sun 26 April Addis Ababa / Fly to Bahir Dar

Today, a visit to the Ethnological Museum provides an insight into this land of many diverse cultures. Lunch is at Makush Gallery, an Italian restaurant which has an inspiring art gallery, after which we transfer to the airport to take an hour’s flight to Bahir Dar, where

palm-lined avenues are splashed orange with vibrant foliage. Bahir Dar is situated on the southern shore of Lake Tana, Ethiopia’s largest lake and is your base for two nights.

Mon 27 April Bahir Dar

Lake Tana is the source of the Blue Nile and famous for its monasteries, located on 20 of the 37 islands situated on this inland sea. As the sun rises, watch from the terrace as fishermen cast their nets from their papyrus boats, while plenty of colourful birds chirp in song as the day begins. After breakfast, take a boat trip across the lake to the Zeghe peninsula to visit the 13th and 14th century churches of Ura Kidane Mehret and Azuwa Mariam respectively, both noted for their colourful murals. In the afternoon, begin a drive of approx. 30km, followed by a 20-minute walk across the moors to the Blue Nile Falls, situated near the start of the Blue Nile. The Blue Nile contributes 80% of the water in the Nile, as it journeys through Sudan and Egypt on its way to the Mediterranean Sea.

Tue 28 April Drive to Simien Mountains, approx. 360km

Departing Bahir Dar in the morning, drive across the wide plateau to Gondar, stopping for lunch and a visit to the Awra Amba village community project, before reaching your eco-lodge late afternoon. There is an opportunity to watch a family cooking their “injera”, the staple bread of Ethiopians, from a tiny grain called “teff”. Upon arrival at the lodge, you’ll immediately notice a change in temperature due to the higher altitude. A large fire is always lit in the lounge, which is also the highest bar in Africa!

Wed 29 April Simien Mountains

Before breakfast take a short walk along the escarpment, watching the sun filter through the rugged peaks and chasms as the mist swirls. After breakfast, drive through incredible farming landscape, crossing undulating valleys to the remote Chenek area, where a picnic lunch will be enjoyed. Chenek is situated on the escarpment among the Giant Lobelia plants and offers panoramic views of the land far below. There is a chance of seeing the elusive Walia Ibex here and perhaps an opportunity to sit with Geladas, the glossy lion-like, grass-eating baboon, also known as “bleeding heart baboon”, seemingly quite happy for us to admire them quietly from nearby. At times their troops number over two hundred in size - quite something if you can spot that many hurtling down the cliffs in the evenings to the night-prowling hyenas – a wonderful enactment!



Thu 30 April Gondar

We leave the mountains early, stopping briefly at Debark to observe the grinding of teff and other daily activities, en-route to Gondar (also spelled Gonder). We’ll visit the Debre Berhan Selassie Church, appealing as it is on the outside with its stone walls, arched doors and two-tiered thatch roof, it’s the inner sanctuary with its glorious frescos, that really shines. The ceiling’s mural, adorned with rows of cherubs, has become a popular design feature of Ethiopian textile production. Gondar, original capital and the centre of commercial trade until the 19th century, is steeped in history. We’ll explore the remains of this fortified city, the group of castles built for Emperor Fasilides as his imperial seat in 1636, and Fasilides’ Bath, which is still used as a baptismal during Timkat, the Ethiopian Epiphany festival.

Fri 1 May Fly to Lalibela

An early start today as we fly across to the relatively isolated mountain city of Lalibela, largely known for its pilgrimage sites for Coptic Christians. Until the late 1950s, the only access to Lalibela was on foot or by mule.

Dwellings, called Tukuls, dot the landscape - built in the traditional vernacular, these 2-storey high round stone huts were once inhabited by priests. Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1978, the area’s most historic rock-hewn churches, their glory carved in detail from living rock, some almost 900 years ago, still exude a mystical presence. It is said that, “at the end of the 12th and the early 13th centuries, King Lalibela of the Zagwe Dynasty, built a series of ‘monolithic churches’ leaving a spiritual city to his successors”. This awesome site of eight massive rock-hewn churches and two palaces, all with differing

architecture, and more in the surrounding hills, leaves one baffled as to just how they were built and why. Our accommodation, Maribela Hotel, means Lalibela in Amharic and translates as “honey eater”. The name was given to King Lalibela, a saint and the builder of this magical little city. Built on the escarpment with a vast swathe of biblical landscape below, you can relax and enjoy the views from your balcony as the sun sets or stroll in the garden as you absorb the history of this mountain city.

Sat 2 May Lalibela - Drive to village of Bilbala

Heading forty kilometres north to the village of Bilbala, walking 20 minutes along a well-maintained pathway through tall juniper, we'll arrive at the cave church of Yemrehanna Kristos, Ethiopia's best-preserved late Axumite church. This church is different because it's built rather than excavated and is also believed to pre-date Lalibela's churches by up to 80 years. Seeing the stepped exterior facade, created from alternating wood and stone layers, you'll understand why so many of Lalibela's rock-hewn churches look like they do.

As we drive back to Lalibela, we'll stop to walk through a local livestock market, a great photographic opportunity, before returning for lunch and later, witness a traditional coffee ceremony.

Sun 3 May Drive to Kembolcha, approx 325 km.

An early start to a long day of travel across the high plateau, through mountain valleys and varied farming activities, to the bustling small highland cities of Woldiya & Dessie. Throughout the journey we will stop to visit rural places of interest, including a visit to a traditional home to witness village life.

Mon 4 May Kembolcha - Bati Market - Awash

Today, attend the vibrant, exotic, dusty Bati Monday Market – an important cultural crossroad and gathering place for over 10,000 Afar, Oromo and Amhara, and even some from Djibouti, people. Afar have elaborated their pastoral life into semi-nomadism, their subsistence economy depends on livestock especially goats, some camels, and, more rarely, cattle. They also mine and export salt. The gathering of colourful cultures and produce, makes this marketplace epic! Continuing along the main Djibouti-Addis Ababa highway, we stop for lunch at a traditional truck stop - an interesting experience of modern trucking in Ethiopia and an opportunity to observe the everyday life of a trucker, arriving at our peaceful bush camp early evening.

Tue 5 May Rest Day at Camp

A day to relax – sleep, enjoy the vigorous hot springs, take a row on the lake, listen to the birds, read a book or just enjoy the silence. An afternoon visit to a nearby Afar village takes place before we enjoy “sundowners” and dinner.

Wed 6 May Awash - Dire Dawa

Our destination today is Dire Dawa, stopping to enjoy a picnic lunch en-route. Dire Dawa, established as a crossroad for trade in 1902 after the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway reached the area, is situated on the eastern edge of the African Rift Valley. Dire Dawa's slow-burn delights are easily overlooked and throughout the flame tree-lined streets, a mix of Arabic, French, Italian and Greek architecture reflects its history – a rare combination in the only African country that was never really colonised.

Thu 7 May Day trip to Harar

Heading towards the northern Somali border to the town of Babille, we make an early start in time to arrive at the fascinating, robust camel market. It's one of Ethiopia's biggest, attracting buyers of camels, cows, donkeys and goats from as far as Djibouti and Somaliland. Returning for lunch, we later set off on a walking tour of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the ancient walled city of Harar.

Upon entering one of the impressive arched gates in the 5m-high walls, the 21st century quickly vanishes. Harar is known as the “Mecca” of Africa, with its 368 cobbled alleys squeezed into one square kilometre, eighty-two mosques and over one hundred shrines. Expect your senses to be heightened by the aromas of spices, myrrh and frankincense as you're guided through the many streets; feel the buzz of “sewing machine street” as tailors work their craft and observe bunches of the narcotic leaf, “khat”, which is sold on every corner. This is also where you might see Harari women in traditional dress. Later, visit a traditional Harari home and witness their unique style of furnishings, and wander through the photographic museum where, on the first floor, there are various photo assortments that reflect the view of this ancient city. The walls and ceilings of the second floor are decorated with mosaic art, and the wooden building itself, encased by many stained-glass windows, was once thought to be the home of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud who lived here from 1875-84, before becoming a gun runner and coffee trader.

Fri 8 May Dire Dawa - Nazret

Today, we drive through changing landscape of geological formations, passing evidence of volcanic activity in the northern section of the Rift Valley, on our way to Nazret. Arriving in time to wander the town's streets and top up any personal supplies, the overnight stop in Nazret is the pre-cursor to your visit to the Bale Mountains.

Sat 9 May Nazret - Bale Mountains, approx. 300km

Today we drive to Bale Mountains National Park – a scenic journey as we criss-cross through forests, fields, villages and banana groves, witness diverse farming practices from the ancient to the modern. As we ascend into the ranges, gaining altitude, notice the change in vegetation. Juniper forests and giant bushes of St John's Wort, give way to heather moorlands and alpine lakes before arriving at the high-altitude plateau (4543m). This area hosts the Giant Lobelia with flowers that soar several metres above the surrounding valley, tiny alpine flora of Helichrysum, Sedum and Kniphofia (also known as Red Hot Pokers). The Sanetti Plateau is silent, known as “Middle Earth”, its stillness only broken by wildlife - watch for the Simien Fox, giant mole-rats, White-backed Tit, Abyssinian catbird, Abyssinian Longclaw, Verreaux's Eagle, Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted plover, White collared pigeon and the Thick-billed raven. Stopping briefly at the top, absorbing the change in



altitude, we continue down the Harenna escarpment to our accommodation at a charming eco-lodge, nestled in the cloud forest – and possible respite from the contrast of the dry desert plains experienced previously.

Sun 10 May Bale Mountains - Rest Day

Enjoy the scenery and wildlife of this spectacularly diverse region. More than 250 species of birds have been noted throughout the Bale Mountains – spot a few of your own on a suggested early guided bird walk. Enjoy a slow breakfast, explore the Hagenia abyssinica (African redwood), Rosa abyssinica and Schefflera forests, dripping with lichen from where giant Colobus monkeys watch from above. Perhaps hire a guide to drive you to the bottom of escarpment to view giant coffee trees. Or relax and recharge at your peaceful mountain lodge.



Mon 11 May Bale Mountain - Awasa

Departing early, we explore the high Sanetti Plateau, aiming to spot the giant mole-rat and elegant Ethiopian wolf, before setting off in the direction of Awasa, a journey of over 300km. A stop for lunch will be made along the way, proceeding through more fertile soils to Awasa, where our day's journey concludes at a modern hotel resort, located on the lake shore.

Tue 12 May Chencha Hills - Dorze village - Arba Minch

Departing after breakfast, heading towards Arba Minch, our drive takes us through the rolling-hill landscape of Wolaita, before stopping for lunch in Sodo. We skirt the reddish-brown waters of Lake Abaya and blue waters of Lake Chamo en-route to our next stop - a Dorze village. This ethnic group live in tall beehive-shaped homes, some several hundred years old, which are reputed to be the most distinctive style of traditional home in Africa. The community is known for its use of the ‘false’ banana (“enset”) for food and fibre, and as the most prestigious cotton weavers of the Shama cloth, they produce the traditional robes (Gabbi) and brilliant scarves, which are sold along the





Your Tour Itinerary (continued)

roadside, and are a great shopping opportunity. Tonight, we stay at Arba Minch known as "Forty Springs" on the lake shore between Lake Abaya and Lake Chamo.

Wed 13 May **Lake Chamo – Konso village - Konso**
Lake Chamo is the southernmost lake of the Ethiopian Rift Valley lakes. We'll take a boat trip onto the lake to discover its large group of crocodiles and hopefully spot some of the languid hippopotamuses basking in its waters. Our journey continues towards the isolated Konso region nestled in the basalt hills, noted for its historic terraced farming methods, and now acknowledged by UNESCO as a sustainable farming system. Experience the fascinating Konso culture in a walk around the architecturally inspired villages, with their stone walls, terraced fields and ceremonial structures, comprising a unique lifestyle.

Thu 14 May **Turmi**

We now enter the dry southern districts and yet again witness the changing lifestyles along our drive to Turmi.

Time permitting, we'll visit Key Afar's market, another crossroad village on the road to Jinka. Relax at your lodge tonight, in well-built, stone-and-thatch green tukuls and rooms, amid plenty of trees and flowers.

Fri 15 May **Karo visit**

This morning's trip through the dry plains with outcrops of aloes and acacia, takes you to visit the Karo village situated on the banks of the wide, deep Omo River. The villagers are noted for their face and body paintings and are on the cusp of change, as large developments of cotton and sugar cane are increasing, nearby. This evening, we visit a Hamar village where women with their short-plaited hair, oiled in red ochre mud and wearing traditional garments made from animal skins, are visually outstanding.

Sat 16 May **Jinka**

Today, we stop at the market at Dimeka, which has a

great crafts section with jewellery, woodcarvings, masks and pottery, on the way to the delightful town of Jinka. Surrounded by fertile hills, the climate here is much cooler. Time permitting, we'll visit the museum which showcases a display of the surrounding tribes' tools and clothing, before settling into our accommodation.

Sun 17 May **Mursi – Fly to Addis Ababa**

An early start as we drive through the Mago National Park to visit the Mursi tribe, known for their ancient customs of body scarification and the wearing of lip plates, residing near the Sudanese border. Witness once again, how the development of cotton and sugar industries is rapidly changing these lifestyles, this being our last opportunity to meet people living their lives in traditional, rural and rustic ways. Later, we fly to Addis Ababa returning to our original central hotel.

Mon 18 May **Full day in Addis Ababa**

Our day starts with a morning visit to the Fistula Hospital, followed by a gemstone establishment. The Fistula Hospital was established in 1974 by NZ/Australian doctors, Reg and Katherine Hamlin, who perfected an intricate operation to cure women suffering from a fistula. A fistula affects many women, and this expertise has enabled training to be shared worldwide, with many specialist fistula hospitals subsequently having been established. Later, visit a small gemstone-making factory, producing for both the local and export markets. A newly established trade in gems - opal, beryl, garnet, quartz, tourmaline and distinctive emerald - is thriving.

Tue 19 May **Depart Addis Ababa**

Conclude your tour with a last-minute shopping opportunity or relax at the hotel. Your hotel room is yours until 6pm.

Tour price from \$16,295

per person twin share*

\$17,995 per person solo occupancy*

Price includes:

- Tour escort ex Addis Ababa
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner daily
- All transport
- 25 nights' accommodation
- All sightseeing tours in all locations
- Accompanying and local guide, scouts, elders and village visit fees
- All entrance fees
- Bottled water and snacks
- Porterage
- Gratuities
- Domestic flights within Ethiopia.

Not included: International flights ex New Zealand, alcoholic beverages, laundry services, telephone expenses, any applicable visas, compulsory travel insurance, items of a personal nature.

To secure your place:

Send your \$2,500 non-refundable deposit per person with completed Booking Form to Discover Travel.

For more details and to book:

Phone: 03 364 3400 or 0800 747 737
Email: ideas@discovertravel.co.nz
Mail: PO Box 2477, Christchurch.

Discover Travel

We are the premier boutique travel agency within the House of Travel Group; we are New Zealand owned and operated. Specialising in travel to far-flung places, we have travelled extensively around Africa and we return regularly to ensure our knowledge is current. We aim to experience those places through your eyes, and then return with our knowledge and passion to share with you. Consequently, we like to think our clients come back home with the stories that everyone else misses; our goal is to genuinely connect you with the location and its culture.

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***CONDITIONS:** Price – The price of \$16,295 per person is based on twin-share. Single Supplement: for those travellers wanting their own room, the tour price is \$17,995pp. This is a "Land Only" price – Should you wish to combine Africa with Europe or extend elsewhere in Africa, e.g. to see the Mountain Gorillas, please talk to us. A Christchurch to Addis Ababa return economy class airfare is approx. \$2,700-\$3,000 per person. **Payments** - The price quoted is for payment by cash, cheque or direct bank transfer. Cheques: Should be made payable to 'Discover Travel'. Our postal address is PO Box 2477, Christchurch. **Bank Transfer:** 06 0801 0495605 02 - Discover Travel Worldwide Ltd, using 'Ethiopia' as a reference. **VISA or Mastercard payments** will incur a 2% convenience fee and American Express a 3% fee. **Deposit:** In order to confirm your booking, a non-refundable deposit of \$2,500 per person is required. Final payment will be due no later than 07 February 2020. Prices are based on a minimum group size of 8 (maximum 16). Should the group size be less than 8, a small group surcharge may be applied. Pricing is in NZD and based on an exchange rate of USD\$1 = NZD\$0.65 and we reserve the right to apply a currency surcharge should the NZ Dollar weaken significantly against the US Dollar before final payment is due.