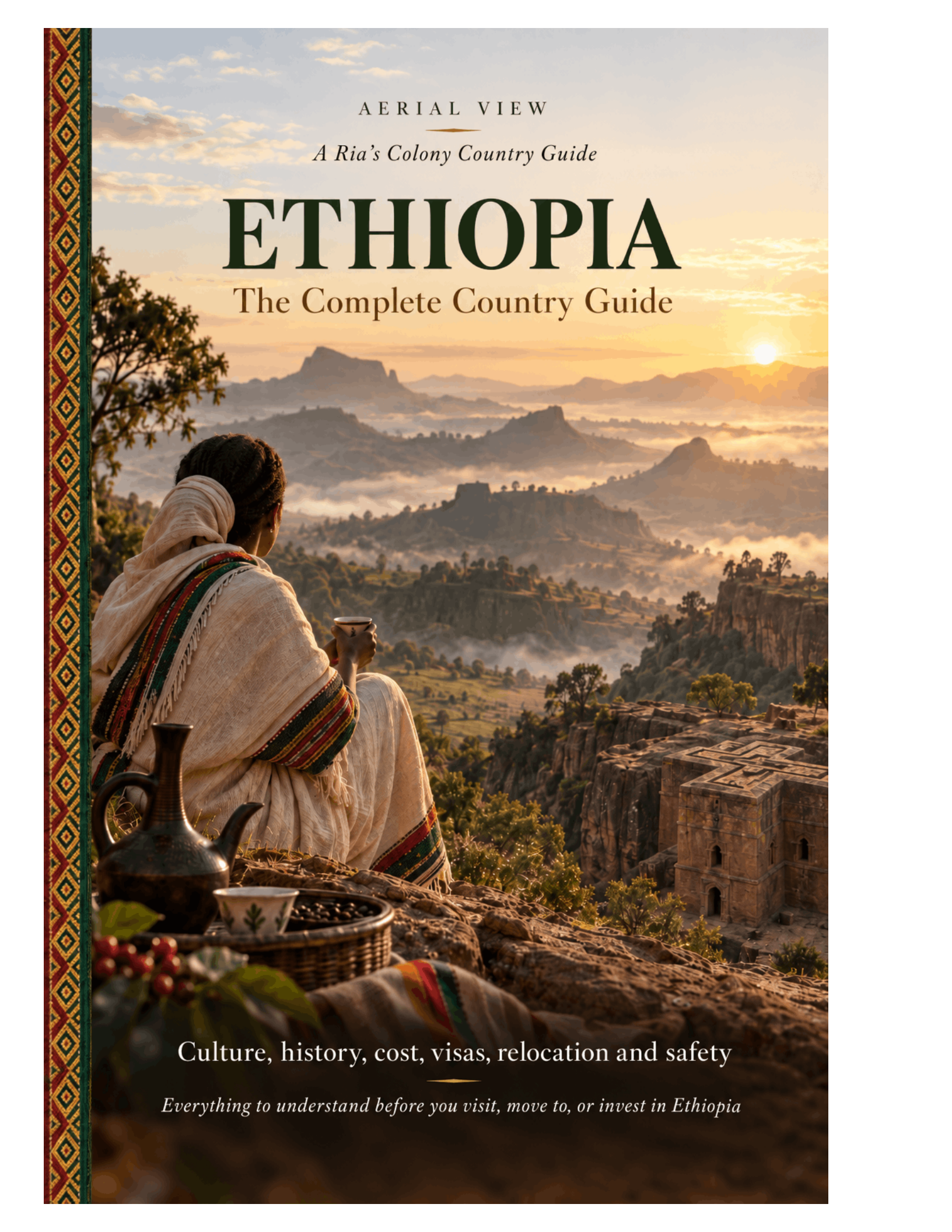


A person wearing a white headwrap and a white shawl with colorful striped borders is sitting on a rocky ledge, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape at sunset. In the foreground, there is a dark metal teapot and a small white cup on a woven basket. The background shows rolling hills, a large stone structure on a cliff, and a bright sun setting behind mountains.

AERIAL VIEW

A Ria's Colony Country Guide

ETHIOPIA

The Complete Country Guide

Culture, history, cost, visas, relocation and safety

Everything to understand before you visit, move to, or invest in Ethiopia

AERIAL VIEW

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ETHIOPIA

The Complete Country Guide

Culture, history, cost, visas, relocation and safety — everything to understand before you visit, move to, or invest in Ethiopia. Part 1 of Exploring the Cultures of Africa: 54 Countries, One Continent.

Compiled	September 2026
Sources checked	45
Currency	1 USD ≈ 158 ETB (official, floating, always confirm)
Prices	Verified against published rates where possible

Contents

No.	Section	What it covers
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05	Government	Who runs the country, and how
06	People & language	80+ ethnic groups, federal languages
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01 · ETHIOPIA AT A GLANCE

Ethiopia in numbers

Africa's oldest independent state, its second-most populous country, and — since 2024 — a currency and an economy still finding their new footing.

Metric	Figure	What it means
Land area	1,104,300 km ²	Roughly twice the size of France [1]
Population	~121.4m (2025 est.)	2nd most populous country in Africa [1]
Ethnic groups	80+	No single group is a majority [1]
Geography	Landlocked	World's most populous landlocked country [1]
Calendar	13 months	Runs 7–8 years behind the Gregorian calendar [2]
Current Ethiopian year	2019 E.C.	From 11 September 2026 [2]
UNESCO World Heritage Sites	12	More than any other African country [3]
Government	Federal parliamentary republic	1995 constitution, ethnically-organised regional states [4]
GDP	~\$175bn (2026 est.)	[5]
Urban population	32.7%	67.3% still rural, 2026 [5]
Capital elevation	2,355m	Addis Ababa — one of the highest capitals on earth
Exchange rate	~158 ETB : 1 USD	Official rate, floated July 2024 [6]

Population and GDP figures are estimates from national and international statistical bodies and may have shifted by the time you read this — the source register at the end links to where each was checked.

Ria's Colony

Africa is one continent. Understanding it should be easier.

Ria's Colony is a trade and tourism company that helps people understand African countries, travel between them, and do business across their markets — because right now, all three are often harder than they need to be.

This guide is part of Exploring the Cultures of Africa: 54 Countries, One Continent, a series covering every country on the continent one story at a time, and Aerial View, the arm of Ria's Colony built specifically for travellers — practical information, destination stories and local knowledge that help you know what to expect before you land.

Four doors, one purpose

Door	Product	What it does
CONNECT	Aerial Connect	Helping businesses research, enter and grow across African markets.
EXPLORE	Aerial View	Practical travel information and destination knowledge — this guide's home.
REFLECT	Style Mirror	Original stories on African culture, identity, economies and everyday life.
LEARN	Style Vault	Courses and resources that build practical, transferable skills.

“For the life you are becoming.” — Ria's Colony is not a booking agent; it does not sell flights or hotels. It exists to close the gap between being curious about a place and actually understanding it. Full story: riascolony.org/about

A country standing on end

Ethiopia sits on the Horn of Africa, split down the middle by the Great Rift Valley. Almost nothing about the terrain is flat, and that shapes everything from climate to how long it takes to drive anywhere.

The highlands

Two great highland blocks rise either side of the Rift, with Ras Dashen in the Simien Mountains reaching 4,550m — the highest point in the country and among the highest in Africa. Most Ethiopians live above 1,500m, which is why a country this close to the equator rarely feels tropical.

The Rift and the Danakil

The Rift Valley cuts southwest to northeast through the country, widening into the Danakil Depression in the northeast — one of the hottest, lowest, most volcanically active places on Earth, sitting more than 100m below sea level near the still-active Erta Ale lava lake.

The source of the Blue Nile

Lake Tana, in the northwest, is the source of the Blue Nile (Abay), which contributes the majority of the Nile's water by volume once it joins the White Nile in Sudan — a fact that has shaped Ethiopia's regional politics for over a century, most recently around the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Climate by altitude, not latitude

Ethiopians describe climate zones by altitude: qolla (hot lowlands, under ~1,500m), woyna dega (temperate mid-altitude, the main farming belt) and dega (cool highlands above ~2,400m, cold enough for frost at night). Addis Ababa sits in the dega zone — evenings are genuinely cold, whatever the map suggests.

The only story of its kind on the continent

Ethiopia is the one African country that entered the twentieth century without becoming a colony — not by isolation, but by successfully fighting one off. Everything about the country's politics reads differently once that fact is in place.

When	What	Detail
1st century AD	The Kingdom of Aksum rises	A major Red Sea trading power, minting its own coinage and, from the mid-4th century under King Ezana, one of the earliest states on earth to adopt Christianity officially.
13th–20th c.	The Solomonic dynasty	Rulers claiming descent from Menelik I — the legendary son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon — govern Ethiopia with interruptions until Haile Selassie is overthrown in 1974.
1 March 1896	The Battle of Adwa	Emperor Menelik II's forces decisively defeat the invading Italian army. The Treaty of Addis Ababa recognises Ethiopian independence.
1936–1941	Italian occupation	Mussolini's Italy invades and occupies the country for five years. Resistance continues throughout; British and Commonwealth forces help end it in 1941.
1974–1991	The Derg	A military junta overthrows the monarchy and installs a Marxist-Leninist government — repression, civil war and devastating famine.
1995	A new federal constitution	Ethiopia is reorganised into regional states largely along ethnic and linguistic lines, each gaining a formal territory and greater self-government.
2020–2022	The Tigray war	Conflict between federal forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, later drawing in Eritrea and Amhara forces, becomes one of the deadliest conflicts of the century before a November 2022 peace agreement.
1 June 2026	General election	The ruling Prosperity Party of PM Abiy Ahmed wins a majority of the 547 House seats. Voting is disrupted across Tigray and parts of Amhara/Oromia due to ongoing conflict. [7]

The federal system built to give Ethiopia's many peoples political recognition is also the map on which today's regional conflicts are drawn. That tension runs through almost every section below, including the travel advisory in Section 14.

05 · GOVERNMENT

Who runs the country, and how

Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic under the 1995 constitution — power sits mainly with the Prime Minister and the elected House of Peoples' Representatives, while the President is a largely ceremonial head of state. [4]

Head of government

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, in office since April 2018. Leader of the Prosperity Party, which formed in 2019 from the former ruling coalition and dominates the political landscape. Won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 for the peace deal with Eritrea; his government has since led Ethiopia through the Tigray war and, as of 2026, faces scrutiny over proposals to shift toward a more presidential system. [8,9]

Head of state

President Taye Atske Selassie, in office since 7 October 2024, elected by the Federal Parliamentary Assembly for a six-year term. The presidency is ceremonial; executive power sits with the Council of Ministers chaired by the Prime Minister. [10]

Structure

A federation of regional states, largely organised along ethnic and linguistic lines: Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, Somali, Sidama, Afar, Southern Ethiopia, South West Ethiopia, Central Ethiopia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela and Harari, plus the chartered cities of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Each has its own regional government and, in most cases, its own official working language alongside Amharic and, increasingly, Afaan Oromo at federal level.

2026 general election

Held 1 June 2026 for the 547-seat House of Peoples' Representatives, first-past-the-post by constituency. The Prosperity Party won 438 seats. Voting could not proceed across the entirety of Tigray and in parts of Amhara and Oromia due to ongoing conflict and security concerns — worth holding alongside any headline turnout figures. [7]

This is a live political situation, not a settled one. If you're building business, travel or relocation plans around Ethiopia's political stability, treat this section as a starting point and check current reporting — not a guarantee.

More than eighty ways to be Ethiopian

No single ethnic group makes up a majority. Ethiopia's federal structure exists precisely because of this — and language sits at the centre of how the country negotiates it.

Group	Share	Main language
Oromo	35.8%	Afaan Oromo
Amhara	24.1%	Amharic
Somali	7.2%	Somali
Tigray	5.7%	Tigrinya
Sidama	4.1%	Sidamo
Gurage	2.6%	Guragigna
Welayta	2.3%	Wolaytta
Afar	2.2%	Afar
Other groups (70+)	~15.9%	Various

2022 estimate, CIA World Factbook. [1] Amharic remains the national working language; Afaan Oromo, Somali, Tigrinya and Afar are also official federal working languages alongside dozens of regional languages.

Language in Ethiopia carries the memory of who held power. The 1995 constitution gave regional states the right to set their own working languages, which is why a child in Tigray is typically schooled in Tigrinya, one in Oromia in Afaan Oromo, and Amharic and English become the bridge languages once people move between regions. Ethnic identity remains one of the most actively contested subjects in Ethiopian public life — visible in debates over regional boundaries, self-governance and, most starkly, in the Tigray conflict — while a shared Ethiopian national identity exists alongside it, not in place of it.

One of the oldest Christian nations on earth, and a major Islamic centre besides

Ethiopia's religious landscape is dominated by two faiths that have coexisted, and occasionally clashed, for well over a thousand years.

Share	Faith	Detail
43.8%	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo	One of the oldest Christian institutions on earth, dating its founding to the 4th-century conversion of Aksum, with its own saints, liturgical language (Ge'ez) and fasting calendar. [1]
31.3%	Islam	Arrived early and centred historically on Harar in the east — home to 82 mosques inside its walled old town, three dating to the 10th century. [1]
22.8%	Protestant Christianity	Growing fastest of the major faiths in recent decades, alongside a small Catholic minority and traditional belief systems such as the Oromo Waaqa faith, tied to the Gadaa social system UNESCO recognised in 2016. [1]

Figures are from the 2016 census round, cited by the CIA World Factbook; more recent breakdowns are not yet widely published. [1]

The coffee, the injera, and the calendar that runs on its own time

*Ethiopia is widely regarded as the birthplace of *Coffea arabica*, and coffee culture here is closer to a daily ritual than a beverage.*

*The first pour is called *abol*, the second *tona*, the third *baraka* — the one that carries the blessing. Cutting the ceremony short can be considered rude.*

Green beans are roasted over charcoal in front of guests, ground by hand, and brewed in a clay pot called a jebena, poured across three rounds that can take well over an hour. It happens in millions of households daily — not as performance, but as hospitality. Ethiopia is also Africa's largest coffee producer.

Injera and the plate that is also the meal

A spongy, slightly sour flatbread made from fermented teff — a tiny grain grown almost nowhere else — injera is the base of most Ethiopian meals. Stews go directly on top, torn off and eaten by hand. Gursha, hand-feeding a piece to another person, is a sign of affection or respect between close friends or an honoured guest.

What to order

- Doro wat — chicken stewed for hours in berbere and spiced butter, with a boiled egg.
- Kitfo — minced beef, raw or lightly warmed, associated with the Gurage.
- Misir wat, shiro, gomen — the vegetarian fasting dishes eaten by Orthodox Christians for well over 180 days some years, now a category of their own.

Music & dance

Traditional music runs on pentatonic scales, most recognisably tizita — a mode tied to longing, sometimes compared to the blues. Eskista, built on fast isolated shoulder movement, is the best-known dance style outside the country. Ethio-jazz, pioneered by Mulatu Astatke, blended these modes with jazz and soul from the 1960s on.

Dress

Everyday clothing in cities is modern, but the habesha kemis — a white handwoven cotton dress finished with a coloured border called tibebe — remains standard for church, weddings and holidays, alongside the netela shawl and the heavier gabi wrap.

Fifteen words for the plane

Amharic	Meaning
Selam / Tena yistelegn	Hello / Hope you are well
Dehna neh / neshi?	How are you? (to a man / woman)
Dehna, amesegehallo	I'm well, thank you
Ameseginalehu	Thank you (formal)
Awo / Aydellem	Yes / No
Simeh/Simesh man ale?	What is your name?
Waga sint no?	How much is it?
Yiqirta	Excuse me / sorry
Dehna hun / hunu	Goodbye

Manners worth knowing

- Eat and pass food with your right hand only — the left is considered unclean.
- Coffee ceremonies are a real time commitment. Accepting an invitation means staying for all three rounds if you can.
- Greetings matter — a handshake, often with a slight bow, and repeated cheek-to-cheek touches between people who know each other well.
- Ethnic identity is a sensitive, actively debated subject. Let Ethiopians raise it if they wish to; don't assume, ask directly, or generalise.
- Fasting periods (Wednesdays, Fridays, and roughly 180+ days a year for observant Orthodox Christians) shape what's on the menu — many restaurants offer a dedicated fasting menu, also the default vegan option.

09 · THE CALENDAR

Two calendars, thirteen months, and a clock that starts at what you'd call 7am

Ethiopia is the only country that runs a distinct calendar and traditional time system in everyday civil life. The day begins at roughly 6am local, so what most of the world calls 7am is “one o'clock” in Ethiopian time. [2]

2026 date	Holiday	What it is
7 January	Genna	Ethiopian Orthodox Christmas
19 January	Timkat	Epiphany — the most visually dramatic festival, a night-long procession to water for blessing. UNESCO-listed since 2019
2 March	Adwa Victory Day	Marks the 1896 defeat of the invading Italian army
10–13 April	Siklet & Fasika	Orthodox Good Friday and Easter
1 May	Labour Day	International Workers' Day
5 May	Patriots' Victory Day	Honours resistance during the 1936–41 Italian occupation
28 May	Downfall of the Derg	Marks the end of the military regime in 1991
11 September	Enkutatash	Ethiopian New Year — Meskerem 1, 2019 E.C.
27 September	Meskel	Finding of the True Cross — the Demera bonfire ceremony. UNESCO-listed since 2013
~3 October	Irreecha	Oromo thanksgiving festival at Hora Arsadi and Hora Finfinne — among the largest gatherings in the country

Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha follow the lunar calendar and shift roughly 10–11 days earlier each year; dates are confirmed closer to the time by moon sighting. [11,12]

If your trip lands during Timkat or Meskel, expect extraordinary spectacle, extraordinary crowds, and hotel and flight prices in the historic north to rise accordingly — book well ahead.

10 · WHERE TO GO

Twelve UNESCO sites and a landscape that keeps arguing with itself

Ethiopia has more UNESCO World Heritage Sites than any other African country — ten cultural, two natural — with a further seven on the tentative list. [3] This is a shortlist, not the whole map.

Addis Ababa

Capital · 2,355m

The diplomatic capital of Africa, home to the African Union headquarters. The National Museum holds “Lucy” (Dinkinesh), the 3.2-million-year-old hominid fossil found in the Afar region in 1974. Merkato is reputed to be the largest open-air market in Africa. Give it two full days, not a layover afternoon.

Lalibela

Amhara region · UNESCO 1978

Eleven medieval churches carved downward directly into solid rock, most famously the cross-shaped Bete Giyorgis, still active places of worship. Entry is a single package ticket, commonly quoted between roughly \$50 and \$100, covering all churches for several days — set locally by the church, so confirm the current rate before you fly. [13]

Aksum

Tigray region · UNESCO 1980

Stelae fields with monolithic obelisks over 20m tall, the ruins of an empire that traded across the Red Sea two thousand years ago, and the Chapel of the Tablet — where Ethiopian tradition holds the Ark of the Covenant rests. Note: Aksum sits in Tigray, currently under a U.S. “Do Not Travel” advisory — see Section 14.

Gondar — Fasil Ghebbi

Amhara region · UNESCO 1979

A 17th-century royal enclosure of castles, churches and baths often described as Ethiopia's “Camelot.” Entry runs around 200 ETB (roughly \$3–4) for foreign visitors. [14]

Simien Mountains NP

Amhara region · UNESCO 1978

Jagged volcanic peaks and three species found nowhere else: the gelada baboon, the walia ibex and the Ethiopian wolf. Park entry runs roughly 250 ETB/day, plus a mandatory armed scout at \$15–20/day and an optional guide at \$20–30/day. [15]

Bale Mountains NP

Oromia region · UNESCO 2023

The Sanetti Plateau, above 4,000m, is the best place on earth to see the Ethiopian wolf. Explicitly named as an exception to the Oromia “Do Not Travel” advisory — one of the safer big-ticket destinations to plan around right now.

Danakil Depression

Afar region

Sulphur springs at Dallol, salt flats worked by camel caravans, and the Erta Ale lava lake. One of the most extreme environments on the planet, and currently inside a “Do Not Travel” region — only attempt with an established operator actively monitoring conditions.

Harar Jugol

Harari region · UNESCO 2006

A walled Islamic city with 82 mosques, famous for the nightly ritual of local “hyena men” hand-feeding wild spotted hyenas at the city walls.

Lower Omo Valley

South / South West Ethiopia

Home to groups including the Hamar, Mursi and Karo. This is real, living culture, not a performance — go with an operator who works directly with communities and pays them fairly, and always ask before photographing anyone.

Ethiopia's tourist circuit is really three separate trips — the historic north (Lalibela, Aksum, Gondar), the highland parks (Simien, Bale), and the deep south (Omo Valley, Danakil) — connected mainly by short domestic flights rather than road. Very few visitors do all three in one trip.

11 · WHAT IT COSTS

Cheap country, expensive capital, and a currency still finding its level

In July 2024 the National Bank of Ethiopia floated the birr and it lost roughly 30% of its value against the dollar overnight, as part of an IMF/World Bank reform package. [16] Two years on, the official rate sits in the mid-150s to low-160s ETB per USD, with a parallel-market premium of roughly 12–20% on top. [6,17] Budget in dollar terms; check the rate close to your trip.

Item	Typical cost
Local meal, buffet-style	\$1 – \$3
Mid-range restaurant meal, Addis	\$10 – \$20
Coffee (café, not ceremony)	~\$0.90 – \$1.50
Local SIM with data	~\$5 – \$10
Domestic flight (Ethiopian Airlines)	\$80 – \$220
1-bedroom furnished flat, Addis, expat area	\$400 – \$1,500 / month [18,19]
Single traveller's monthly budget, Addis	~\$800 – \$1,900 [20,21]

Ranges reflect the gap between local-market pricing and the “expat rate” charged in Bole, Kazanchis and Old Airport — the neighbourhoods most foreigners settle in.

Park and heritage-site fees

Site	Foreign visitor fee	Notes
Lalibela churches — full package	\$50 – \$100	Set locally by the church; ask before booking flights [13]
Fasil Ghebbi, Gondar	~\$3 – \$4	200 ETB, main enclosure [14]
Simien Mountains NP, per day	~\$4 + scout \$15–20/day	Scout is mandatory, guide optional [15]
Bale Mountains NP	Entry fee + guide required	Confirm current rate with the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority

Ethiopia runs two economies side by side, much like several of its neighbours: daily local life is genuinely cheap, while the tourist and expat markets — heritage tickets, furnished flats, imported goods — are priced closer to global rates. Both are true at once; plan for whichever one you'll actually be living in.

12 · VISAS & ENTRY

The e-Visa system, step by step

Ethiopia's entry system runs almost entirely through evisa.gov.et, the only official government portal. Fee estimates below vary by source, which tells you how often they've changed recently — confirm the live figure on the government portal before you pay anyone.

Visa type	Reported fee, 2026	Validity
Tourist e-Visa, single entry	\$50 – \$62	30 days
Tourist e-Visa, single entry	\$70	90 days
Visa on arrival (where available)	~\$60	30 days
Business / investment e-Visa	\$100+	Varies by category
Investor entry visa (executives/shareholders)	\$1,000	5 years, multiple entry
Investor entry visa (managers/directors)	\$750	3 years, multiple entry

Compiled from multiple 2026 sources including the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington DC and the official e-Visa reseller ecosystem. [22,23,24,25] Reported single-entry 30-day tourist fees ranged from \$50 to \$62 across sources checked in August–September 2026.

How to apply

Apply at evisa.gov.et at least one to two weeks before travel. You'll need a passport scan, a passport-style photo, and your travel dates. Processing is typically 1–3 business days, longer around Timkat and other major holidays. The tourist e-Visa is entry-only via Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. Never use a third-party site that isn't the official government portal — several charge significant mark-ups for the identical service.

Can I extend a tourist visa?

Yes — the 30-day tourist e-Visa can generally be extended once for a further 30 days at the Main Immigration Office in Addis Ababa. Useful if you're combining the northern historic circuit with an Omo Valley trip, which together often need 20–25 days.

What do I need at the airport?

Your printed or digital e-Visa approval email, a passport valid for at least six months beyond your entry date, and — if arriving from or transiting more than 12 hours through a yellow-fever-risk country — proof of yellow fever vaccination (see Section 14). Carrying more than roughly 1,000 ETB or a significant amount of foreign cash may require a currency declaration.

Does an approved e-Visa guarantee entry?

No. Immigration officers retain discretion to question or deny entry if they have concerns about your documentation or purpose of travel. This is standard practice, not unique to Ethiopia, but worth knowing before you fly.



Moving there for work, investment, or heritage

Ethiopia does not run a single-step immigration system. Entry, the right to work, and the right to reside are three separate, linked permissions — and Ethiopian law does not recognise dual citizenship, which shapes the path available to anyone of Ethiopian descent holding a foreign passport. [26,27]

Route 1 — Employment

Step	What happens	Typical timing
1. Entry visa	Enter on a Business, Investment or employment-linked e-Visa — not a tourist visa	Days
2. Work permit	Employer applies to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; must show no qualified local candidate was available and provide a skills-transfer plan	~2–4 weeks [28,29]
3. Residence permit	Applied for after the work permit is granted, through the Immigration and Citizenship Service; includes biometric registration	Several weeks [30]
4. Annual renewal	Work and residence permits are typically issued for one year and must both be renewed together	Ongoing

A residence permit does not by itself create the right to work, and a valid visa is not a work permit — Ethiopian immigration law treats these as legally distinct even though they are operationally linked. [27] Pathways to permanent residency for foreign employees are limited and generally tied to long-term investment rather than years of employment alone.

Route 2 — Investment

Foreign investors can apply for a Residence Permit Class A, generally valid two years and renewable, tied to a qualifying investment in industry, mining, forestry, social services or business. New 2026 entry-visa tiers also let executives and shareholders enter on a 5-year multiple-entry visa (\$1,000) and managers/directors on a 3-year visa (\$750), ahead of the fuller residence and work-permit process. [24,25]

Route 3 — The Ethiopian Origin ID (“Yellow Card”)

For anyone of Ethiopian descent holding a foreign passport, this is usually the most direct route back. Because Ethiopia doesn't allow dual citizenship, the Yellow Card functions as a quasi-citizenship bridge: holders don't need an entry visa, work permit or residence permit, are treated as domestic investors, can own property, and can access subsidised government health and education services. [31,32]

Yellow Card	Detail
Issuing authority	Immigration and Citizenship Service (in-country) or Ethiopian embassies/consulates abroad [31]
Official fee, 2026	\$300 regular / \$400 urgent, per the ICS government portal; older sources and renewal fees cite lower figures around \$200 — confirm the current fee directly with ICS before applying [31,33]
Eligibility	Ethiopian descent (born in Ethiopia, or Ethiopian parent/grandparent) plus a foreign passport and documentary proof of heritage
You get	Visa-free entry, property ownership, domestic-investor status, subsidised public services
You don't get	The right to vote, hold political office, or work in defence, security or foreign affairs roles for the Ethiopian government [32]

This is a genuinely fast-moving area of Ethiopian law — a 2024–2026 wave of immigration reforms introduced new fee schedules, sponsor-registration duties for employers, and new investment and property-owner visa routes. [30] Treat every figure above as a planning estimate and verify directly with the Ethiopian Immigration and Citizenship Service, or a licensed immigration lawyer, before committing to a move.



14 · BEFORE YOU FLY

Health, safety, money, and the practical small stuff

Health

Yellow fever: required only if arriving from, or transiting more than 12 hours through, a country with yellow fever risk — not required for a direct flight from the US or Europe. Ethiopia is itself a risk country, so the vaccine is recommended for your own protection regardless, except for itineraries confined to the Afar and Somali regions. [34,35]

Malaria: present below roughly 2,000–2,500m year-round, highest May–August. Addis Ababa itself and the highland circuit (Lalibela, Gondar, Simien, Bale above altitude) are low-to-no risk; the Omo Valley, Danakil and western lowlands are not. Talk to a travel clinic about prophylaxis 4–6 weeks before you go. [36,37]

Routine vaccinations should be current; hepatitis A, typhoid and a polio booster are commonly recommended. Drink bottled or treated water, and travel insurance that covers medical evacuation is genuinely worth having outside Addis Ababa, where the best hospitals are concentrated.

Safety — read the whole picture, not the headline

As of the U.S. State Department's most recent 2026 updates, Ethiopia sits at Level 3: Reconsider Travel, citing unrest, crime, kidnapping, terrorism, landmines, communications disruptions and exit bans. [38,39] That single rating hides a lot of variation on the ground.

Region	Advisory
Tigray Region & Eritrea border	Do Not Travel — armed conflict, unrest, crime
Amhara Region	Do Not Travel — armed conflict, unrest, crime
Afar Region	Do Not Travel — armed conflict, unrest, crime
Gambella Region	Do Not Travel — crime, kidnapping, ethnic violence
Benishangul-Gumuz Region	Do Not Travel — crime, kidnapping, armed conflict
Oromia Region	Do Not Travel, except Bishoftu and Bale Mountains National Park
Somali Region border with Somalia	Do Not Travel — terrorism, kidnapping, landmines
Addis Ababa, historic north, Simien & Bale	Not flagged — the established tourist circuit remains actively and safely visited

U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia travel advisory, August 2026. [38] These designations shift; always check the live advisory before finalising a trip.

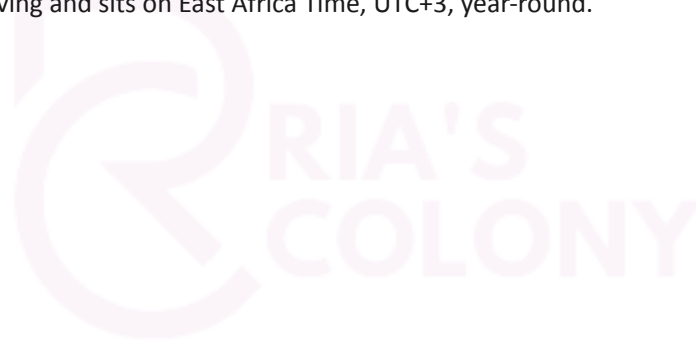
Practically: thousands of travellers visit Addis Ababa, the Lalibela–Gondar–Simien circuit, and Bale every year without incident, and tour operators actively monitor and route around unstable areas. The honest read is “go carefully, through established channels, in established regions” rather than “don't go” — but exit bans and communications disruptions can occur with little warning, so register with your embassy, keep a check-in routine, and buy proper travel insurance.

Money

The birr floated in July 2024 and remains volatile; the official rate in late 2026 sits around 155–165 ETB/USD, with an unofficial parallel-market premium of roughly 12–20%. [6,17] Cards work in central Addis hotels and restaurants; carry cash (small notes) everywhere else. Currency declaration may apply above roughly 1,000 ETB or a significant amount of foreign cash at entry.

Power, SIM & time

230V/50Hz, European-style two-round-pin sockets (Type C/E/L variants) — bring an adapter. Ethio Telecom and Safaricom Ethiopia both sell tourist SIMs with data for roughly \$5–10; you'll need your passport to register. Ethiopia does not observe daylight saving and sits on East Africa Time, UTC+3, year-round.



One airline, one hub, and a \$12.5bn upgrade already under construction

Almost everyone arrives the same way: Ethiopian Airlines into Addis Ababa Bole International Airport (ADD), Africa's largest carrier by fleet and the busiest gateway to the continent, handling around 12.1 million passengers in 2024. [40]

Bole today

Direct flights from Amsterdam, London, Paris, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Dubai, Washington DC and beyond. As Africa's busiest transit hub, Addis is also the way many travellers connect between other African cities — worth knowing if your Ethiopia trip is a stopover on a longer African itinerary.

Bishoftu — the airport being built to replace it

Ground broke in January 2026 on Bishoftu International Airport, a \$12.5bn, Zaha Hadid-designed hub roughly 45km southeast of Addis, planned to eventually handle 110 million passengers a year across four runways — designed explicitly as a connecting hub for African air travel. Phase one, with 60 million annual capacity, is targeted for 2030. [41,42,43]

Within Ethiopia, domestic flights on Ethiopian Airlines are the standard way to link the historic north, the highland parks and the south — road distances are long and driving conditions vary. Passengers who flew into Ethiopia on Ethiopian Airlines commonly receive a discount on domestic connections. In Addis itself, ride-hailing apps and the Addis Ababa Light Rail cover the city; agree fares with taxis before you get in.

The good, the bad, and the ugly

No guide does its job if it only shows you the postcard. Here's the fuller picture, based on all we were able to gather.

The good

- A genuinely singular culture — its own calendar, script, cuisine and history of independence, with almost nowhere else on earth to compare it to.
- The densest concentration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Africa, twelve and counting.
- Daily life is cheap for anyone earning in hard currency, and Ethiopian Airlines connects the country efficiently to the rest of the continent and the world.
- A real, fast-growing route home for the diaspora, formalised through the Yellow Card system.

The bad

- The currency float in 2024 was sharp, and prices for imported goods, furnished housing and heritage tickets keep moving — budget in dollars, not birr.
- Bureaucracy around work permits, residence permits and business registration is layered, slow, and increasingly strictly enforced.
- Infrastructure is real but uneven outside Addis Ababa — expect intermittent power and patchy connectivity once you leave the capital.

The ugly

- Five entire regions — Tigray, Amhara, Afar, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz — currently sit under a “Do Not Travel” advisory, and large parts of Oromia are flagged too.
- The Tigray war (2020–2022) and its aftermath remain a live wound; ethnic and regional tensions run through national politics, including the 2026 election.
- Exit bans and communications disruptions have been specifically flagged by the U.S. State Department in 2026 — a real, if uncommon, risk to plan around.

None of this cancels out the other. Ethiopia is one of the most rewarding, distinctive countries on the continent to visit or build a life in — and it is also, right now, a country with active conflict inside its borders and a currency still finding its feet. Both are true. Plan accordingly, stay informed, and go with your eyes open.

17 · VERIFICATION

Source register

Every figure above carries a bracketed number. Official government and multilateral bodies are used wherever they exist; where only operator, embassy-reseller or aggregator data was available, that's stated plainly in the text. Compiled September 2026 — fees, exchange rates and advisories change, so check again before you travel, invest, or quote this guide.

No.	Source	Domain
1	CIA World Factbook — Ethiopia	theworldfactbook.org/country/ethiopia.html
2	time.et — Ethiopian Calendar Converter	time.et/convert
3	UNESCO World Heritage Convention — Ethiopia	whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/et
4	GeoFactbook — Ethiopia (government)	geofactbook.com/countries/ethiopia
5	GeoFactbook — Ethiopia (GDP, urbanisation)	geofactbook.com/countries/ethiopia
6	Capital Market Ethiopia — NBE exchange rate	capitalmarketethiopia.com/national-bank-of-ethiopia-exchange-rate-today
7	Wikipedia — 2026 Ethiopian general election	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Ethiopian_general_election
8	Wikipedia — Taye Atske Selassie	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taye_Atske_Selassie
9	Wikipedia — 2026 Ethiopian general election	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2026_Ethiopian_general_election
10	Wikipedia — President of Ethiopia	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Ethiopia
11	Wikipedia — Public holidays in Ethiopia	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_Ethiopia
12	JoCalendars — Ethiopia Public Holidays 2026	jocalendars.com/ethiopia-public-holidays-2026
13	Hilltop Lodge Lalibela — church ticket guide	hilltoplodgelalibela.com/lalibela-church-ticket-guide-prices-access-and-visitor-tips
14	Africa Tour Operators — archaeological sites	africatouroperators.org/ethiopia/archaeological-sites-in-ethiopia
15	HikeLoad — Hiking in Ethiopia 2026	hikeload.com/blog/hiking-ethiopia-simien-mountains-2026
16	Wikipedia — 2024 Ethiopian foreign exchange rate policy	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2024_Ethiopian_foreign_exchange_rate_policy
17	Ethiopian Black Market (EBM)	ethiopianblackmarket.com
18	LivingEthio — cost of living for foreigners	livingethio.com/site/blog/cost-of-living-in-addis-ababa-for-foreigners-what-expats-should-expect
19	The Africanvestor — Addis Ababa rents 2026	theafricanvestor.com/blogs/news/addis-ababa-rents

No.	Source	Domain
20	CityCost — Addis Ababa	citycost.org/addis-ababa
21	Wise — Cost of Living in Addis Ababa	wise.com/gb/cost-of-living/ethiopia/addis-ababa
22	Rex Clarke Adventures — Ethiopia eVisa guide 2026	rexclarkeadventures.com/ethiopia-evisa-travel-guide
23	Ethiopia eVisa — application guide 2026	ethiopiaevisa.info
24	Ethiopian Embassy, Washington DC — visa services	consular.ethiopianembassy.org/service-details_visa.php
25	Ethiopia e-Visa — residency and work permits	ethiopia-e-visa.com/residency-and-work-permits-in-ethiopia
26	Wikipedia — Ethiopian Origin ID Card	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian-Origin_ID_Card
27	Rivermate — Ethiopia work permits and visas	rivermate.com/guides/ethiopia/work-permits-and-visas
28	Mondaq — Work Permits & Employment of Foreign Nationals in Ethiopia 2026	mondaq.com/employee-benefits-compensation/1764914
29	IBN Immigration Solutions — Ethiopia Work Permit	ibn.co.za/ethiopia/work-permit
30	Dablo Law Firm — Ethiopia Immigration Law 2026	dablolawfirm.com (immigration insights)
31	Immigration and Citizenship Service (ICS) — Ethiopian Origin ID	ics.gov.et/services/ethiopian-origin-id
32	Adavia — Ethiopian Origin ID (Yellow Card) overview	adavia.com/ethiopia/ethiopian-origin-id-yellow-card/overview
33	DMRLF — Foreign National Ethiopian Origin ID Card	dmethiolawyers.com/foreign-national-ethiopian-origin-identification-card
34	Ethiopian Public Health Institute — travel notice	ephi.gov.et/travel-notice
35	CDC Yellow Book — Ethiopia	wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook (Ethiopia)
36	CDC — Malaria in Ethiopia	wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/level1/malaria-ethiopia
37	SafariFind — Vaccinations & health rules for Ethiopia 2026	safarifind.com/blog/vaccinations-health-rules-for-ethiopia-us-citizens-2026
38	U.S. Embassy in Ethiopia — Travel Advisory, 27 Aug 2026	et.usembassy.gov/travel-advisory-ethiopia-august-27-2026
39	U.S. Department of State — Ethiopia Travel Advisory	travel.state.gov (Ethiopia Travel Advisory)
40	Wikipedia — Addis Ababa Bole International Airport	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Addis_Ababa_Bole_International_Airport
41	AirlineRatings — Addis Ababa's new mega-airport	airlineratings.com/articles/addis-ababa-new-mega-airport

No.	Source	Domain
42	Journal Aviation — Bishoftu International Airport groundbreaking	journal-aviation.com (Bishoftu Airport)
43	CNN Travel — Africa's biggest airport	cnn.com/travel (Bishoftu Airport)
44	Ria's Colony — Ethiopia: The Country That Kept Its Own Time	riascolony.org/blog/ethiopia-culture-history-calendar-coffee-traditions
45	Ria's Colony — About	riascolony.org/about



A note from Ria's Colony

Every country has two versions.

There's the one you can photograph in a weekend, and the one you only begin to see once you understand the history, the food, the politics, and the choices that shaped it. That second version is the one we care about.

Thank you for letting us share Ethiopia with you.

Wherever you go next, we hope you keep asking better questions, looking a little closer, and leaving every place with more understanding than you arrived with.

Safe travels.

— **Tori, Ria's Colony**

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