Welcome to Ethiopia

Your first trip to Ethiopia can be an exciting, if somewhat overwhelming, experience. We have created this Ethiopia Travel Guide to serve as an information toolkit for you to better understand your travel process, the local culture and our goals in Ethiopia.

This guide is inspired by the many people who have visited Ethiopia as part of Ohio State’s ongoing outreach efforts who have said, “Boy, I wish I would have known that before I arrived.”

We hope you will find this guide useful for your travel in Ethiopia, and we welcome your feedback and suggestions. Email us at kraft.42@osu.edu if you have any questions.

We would like to thank Laura Joseph and the Office of International Affairs for their help in developing this guide, as well as the members of the Global One Health Task force and the participants of the One Health Summer Institute, who have provided insights they think will help fellow travelers.

Our most sincere thanks goes out to our friends in Ethiopia, who make every visit feel like a journey home.

Go Bucks!
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SELAM!
About Ethiopia: “13 months of sunshine!”

Ethiopia is one of the oldest countries in the world, and the only country on the continent of Africa to have never been colonized.

Historians believe that Ethiopia may have been home to the beginning of mankind, and among the fossils found were that of the oldest living specimen, known as “Lucy.” It was more recently a founding member of the United Nations and is home to the African Union’s headquarters.

Located just north of the equator, with most towns located on mid to high altitude locations, the climate in Ethiopia is most often temperate. There are three main climates in Ethiopia—a light rainy season from March to May, a heavy rainy season from June to September, and the dry season from October through February. The dry season is the sunniest time of the year, though even at the height of the rainy season in July and August there are still usually several hours per day of bright sunshine and an average annual temperature of 61 degrees; thus the tourism motto of “13 months of sunshine...”

A light jacket is recommended for the early morning and evenings, though many Ethiopians prefer to dress conservatively and will wear a light jacket even during the day.

The new year begins in September, the year is eight years different from Gregorian calendar (now 2008). Each month has 30 days with a 13th month of five days, six in leap year.
BEFORE YOU ARRIVE
Visa Process

All visitors to Ethiopia (except for Kenyan and Djiboutian nationals) must obtain an entry visa, which can be obtained in advance through the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington, D.C., or upon arrival at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa.

We recommend getting your visa in advance by mailing these items to:

EMBASSY OF ETHIOPIA
3506 INTERNATIONAL DRIVE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008
(202) 364-1200

If it is a short term visit, between 2 and 4 weeks, apply for tourist visa. If the visit, however, is more long-term and related to business, the applicant must get an invitation letter from the institute and approval from the Ethiopian Immigration and Nationality Affairs Office. The local partner, often the University of Gondar or AAU, must submit the invitation letter to the Immigration and Nationality Affairs Office for approval. Once the invitation letter approved, the applicants can apply for a visa for more than a month.

Visa applications require applicants to fill out a form, and send it in with a current passport that is valid for at least six months, one recent passport-size photograph, a completed visa application form, and fees paid in money order, cashiers check or certified bank check made payable to Embassy of Ethiopia. Do not forget to include a self-addressed stamped return envelop, so your passport and visa can be returned to you.

All applications to be submitted by mail must be sent via an envelope with a TRACKING NUMBER, as well as include a self-addressed prepaid UPS, or USPS EXPRESS MAIL return envelope. The visa will come pasted inside of your passport. The time may range from a few days to a few weeks, so give yourself plenty of time. It is important to check with your Ethiopian host organizations (or travel agents) about current protocol or issues, as policies change.
It is recommended to make copies of your passport to leave at home and have with you in the event you lose your passport.

**Fee**


Ethiopian tourist visas (for one or three month, single entry) are available to U.S. citizens upon arrival at Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa. The fee is $50 for one month and $70 for three months, payable in U.S. dollars.

**Pre-trip Registration**


Registration allows travelers to record your foreign trip information so the Department of State can use to communicate with you and assist you in the event of an emergency.

**American Consulate**

The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa is located at:
Entoto St
PO Box 1014
Addis Ababa
E-mail: consacs@state.gov
Tel: +251-111-306000

It is open Monday through Thursday by appointment only. In the event of an emergency after normal business hours, contact the Embassy at 011 130-6000.
Vaccinations

An important stop within two months of leaving for Ethiopia is the The Ohio State University Travel and Immunization Center, located at OSU Family Medicine, 2231 North High St., Columbus, Ohio 43201. Phone: (614) 293-2700. Hours: 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. by appointment.

The center provides comprehensive counseling to international travelers about how to stay healthy while traveling abroad and is linked to a database providing the most up-to-date information on health, social, and political situations around the world, as well as immunizations and prescriptions that may be recommended or required.

We recommend that individuals seek vaccination services at least 4 to 6 weeks prior to travel, as some immunizations are given in series and require more time to provide adequate immunity or protection to the traveler. We still encourage our last-minute travelers to seek our services, though, as it is much better to travel with some protection and knowledge than without.

The center consults with the federal Centers For Disease Control and Prevention website at http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx to determine which vaccines will be important for your visit. In addition to “routine” vaccines given through childhood (Hepatitis B, DTaP, Polio, MMR, Chickenpox, Hepatitis A, Meningococcal and HPV), other suggested vaccines include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis A</td>
<td>Transmitted through contaminated food or water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typhoid</td>
<td>Transmitted through contaminated food or water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hepatitis B</td>
<td>Transmitted through sexual contact, contaminated needles, and blood products.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow Fever</td>
<td>Caused by a virus that is spread through mosquito bites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meningitis</td>
<td>Contagious infection spread by close contact with an infected person, such as living together or kissing.</td>
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The CDC also recommends a booster of polio before departure.

Depending on your insurance, vaccines may be covered by Ohio State insurance or cost from $20 to a few hundred dollars. Two other diseases significant in Ethiopia are malaria and rabies. Malaria treatment is provided prophylactically as a pill, taken prior to departure, during your visit and continuing when you return. There are a variety of options on which medications to take, so it is best to consult with the Travel Clinic.

Rabies is also at epidemic levels in Ethiopia, although a vaccine is not required. Take care to avoid all stray animals while you are in the country.

Packing Healthy

In addition to your vaccinations, pack additional supplies to keep yourself healthy, such as:

- Sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent (with DEET).
- Adequate supplies of your own personal medications in addition to the malaria medication.
- Portable hand-antiseptic is useful.
- Anti-diarrheal, such as Imodium.
- Electrolyte powder packets may be useful for dehydration.
- Pain reliever
- Pepto-Bismol
ON YOUR WAY
Traveling

There are three daily flights between North America and Ethiopia, two through Toronto, and one through Washington (Dulles). The vendor for travel is Ethiopian Air, although it may be operated domestically through United or Air Canada. There are also innumerable options through Europe.

The flight to Ethiopia is lengthy. Here is an average itinerary on a straight-through flight:
6 a.m. Depart Columbus on United flight to Dulles.
10:30 a.m. Depart Dulles for Addis Ababa
7:45 a.m. (Ethiopia time) Arrive in Addis Ababa.
(Ethiopia is eight hours ahead of Columbus.)

The first two checked bags are free on Ethiopian Air, and travelers are allowed two carry-on items. There are, however, caveats:
• You are entitled to two 50-pound bags internationally, but on domestic flights you are only entitled to one. One should be enough, unless you are leaving one in Addis.
• Ethiopian Airlines imposes a 15 lb limit on your carry-on, which they enforce when boarding in the D.C. Airport. A typical rolling carry-on bag can weigh half that, so instead use a lightweight duffel or other bag as your carry-on. You are also entitled to a purse or laptop bag so can put heavier items there. For the trip over, keep your essential valuables and medications with you; also pack a change of clothes in case the luggage is delayed.
• This lightweight carry-on will be useful for short trips and for the extra stuff you will bring back.

The Ethiopia Air flight will offer lunch, dinner and breakfast, as well as free drinks, including beer and wine. The airline also provides a small travel package including socks, an eye mask, toothbrush and tooth paste. There are complimentary movies throughout the flight, with individual players.

Sheba Miles is the Ethiopia Air mileage program and it can earn significant flight and hotel savings, so we encourage registration before you fly by visiting http://www.ethiopianairlines.com/AA/EN/shebamiles/loyalty.

Upon arrival in Ethiopia, you will go through passport control and visa check. Make sure you get in the appropriate line. If you have obtained your visa before leaving the U.S., you will get in the passport line. If not, head to the far right of the line to the visa office and obtain your visa before getting in line.
You will then head to baggage claim. Be sure to keep your luggage claim tickets, as they will be checked before you leave the baggage area.

If you are staying in Addis Ababa, you will head after baggage claim to the hotel shuttle for the Jupiter Hotel, which is the most common hotel utilized by our One Health team and Ethiopia visitors. There will be a small cubby-like kiosk on the far right of the airport. The shuttle will take you to the hotel to check in.

The hotel features a full bar and restaurant, buffet breakfast included in the rate, and good Internet in the lobby and rooms.

Many people may continue on to Gondar on the same day, but your connecting flight may not be for several hours. If so, contact Tigist to request a half-day room at the Jupiter, which costs $50. You may then take the same shuttle to the hotel, grab a shower, nap and meal, before heading back for your hour-long connecting flight to Gondar. Trust travelers who have done this; it is money well spent!

We have two main hotels in Gondar--the Taye Belay, which is closer to the town’s center, and the Keno, which is closer to the University of Gondar.
The official currency is the Ethiopian birr, and the exchange rate is about 20 birr per U.S. dollar.

Although there are places that accept credit cards (hotels, restaurants), cash transaction is still the norm, especially in smaller towns.

Money cannot be exchanged for birr in Washington, D.C., but it can be exchanged at the Addis airport at two baggage claim locations, local banks and also at many hotels. ATMs are available on campus, and in Addis, Gondar and other major towns. Most banks work with the major Ethiopian banks such as the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Check with your bank, as this is the safest and easiest way to get cash. There is often a withdrawal limit.

Due to its value, birr goes fast, so get more than you think you will need, but don’t be afraid to change money repeatedly during your stay. In addition, make sure to have enough U.S. dollars for your return trip. If you find you have leftover birr, it is a good idea to bring it back and allow a future traveler to “buy it” off of you, so they can start their trip with birr. You can also exchange at the airport before going through security.

Make sure you have at least two ways to access your money in case one fails (lost card, lost cash, etc.)

Be sure to alert your bank about your travel, including dates you will be in Ethiopia and what credit cards you will use. If you don’t, they will block use of the card and you will not be able to draw cash from ATM or use the card. VISA is much more readily accepted than Mastercard.

Make copies of any credit cards, front and back. Bring one copy with you and leave another with someone at home; this will make it much easier to replace if lost.

For cash, newer $100s and $50s (crisp and printed after 2003) are most easily exchanged at local Forex centers. You are allowed to bring in up to US$2,000, but only 300 birr can be legally taken out of Ethiopia.

In emergencies, someone can wire you money through Moneygram or Western Union – Moneygram may be cheaper. CVS and Speedway in Columbus offer this service.

Do not carry large amounts of cash or unnecessary valuables in public. Do not use visible, flimsy pouches that broadcast where your valuables are and are easy to rip off. In crowded areas, hold your bag or backpack in a way that you can keep your eye on it.
Other Conversions

Time

During standard time, Ethiopia is eight hours ahead of the United States during regular season, and seven hours ahead during daylight saving months. (2 p.m. in the U.S. is 10 p.m. in Ethiopia). But that is not the most confusing part of your “time” travel.

Because Ethiopia is close to the Equator, daylight is pretty consistent throughout the year, so many Ethiopians use a 12-hour clock, with one cycle of 1 to 12 — from dawn to dusk — and the other cycle from dusk to dawn. That means an 8 a.m. meeting in Western time would actually be 2 a.m. in Ethiopia time.

In addition, the country operates on its own calendar, which has 12, 30-day months and five or six epagominal days, which comprise a 13th month. The year is seven years behind a Judeo-Christian calendar (2015 was 2008).

Electricity

Ethiopia uses 220 V electricity operating at 50 Hz. The most common plug you will find is the European 2 pin types known as ‘C’ and ‘F’. In some older buildings and in more rural areas you will often find British 3 square pin types. You can, and it is commonly done, stick a European 2-pin plug into the British square sockets. It’s not as well-grounded as it could be and not the safest option.

Language

The national language of Ethiopia is Amharic, which is a Semitic language (as is Arabic). Some key Amharic phrases that might be helpful for travelers include:

Hello: selam
How are you?: dehna neh?
See you: chow
Yes: awo
No: ie
Please: e’bake’h (m) / e’bake’sh (f) / e’bakachu (pl)
Thank you: amesege’nallo’

Phoning Home

Before departing Washington, D.C., it is advised to turn off the roaming feature of your mobile phone and put it on airplane mode, so it may only be used on wi-fi. Use of your American phone in Ethiopia will be extremely expensive, especially if you use data.

A cell phone, however, is extremely useful for communication between team members. The easiest and least expensive option is often to purchase a disposable phone in Ethiopia, which is then outfitted with a local sim card and minutes are added as needed. To secure a phone, bring at least two extra passport photos, as they will be required by the facility that issues the sim card.

It can be quite expensive to phone home, but Skype and Google Hangout can be used for free wherever there is wi-fi. For iPhone families, Facetime also works for free on wi-fi.
What to Bring (checklist)

- Anti-diarrheal
- Bug spray
- Capri pants
- Carabineer
- Clips
- Different length socks for different activities
- Drawstring light backpack
- Electrolyte powder
- Face wipes
- Flashlight/headlamp
- Flip-flops for the shower
- Hand sanitizer
- Light jacket that you can layer on and off
- Light rain poncho
- Lip balms with SPF sunscreen
- Lounge pants
- Malaria medication
- Mosquito repellent (with DEET)
- Mouthwash
- Outlet adapters
- Pain reliever
- Pepto-Bismol
- Personal medications
- Rain boots (rainy season)
- Sandals for walking
- Shoes for hiking
- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Toilet paper (and bring some with you at all times)
- Towel (quick dry)
- Versatile clothing
- Water bottle
IN COUNTRY
Ethiopian Customs

Greetings

Men greeting men: A handshake with the right hand is appropriate in most situations, and closer friends accompany that by leaning towards each other and touching the right shoulder.

Women greeting women: A handshake with the right hand is appropriate, and good friends and family will often exchange three kisses on alternating cheeks (left, right, left).

Meetings between men and women: A handshake is usually appropriate, though good friends and family will exchange three kisses on alternating cheeks. It’s important to note, however, that many Muslim men will not shake hands with a woman. In that case, they may extend the back of their right hand for a brief bump. A simple nod of acknowledgment may suffice.

Hand washing

Ethiopians are very observant of hygiene, especially when eating. You will likely be offered hand washing before you eat, whether in a restaurant or in someone’s home.

Sanitation

The water in Ethiopia is not safe for any consumption, so use bottled water for EVERYTHING, including brushing your teeth.

Although restroom facilities at hotels will be very similar to western experiences, that will not be the case anywhere else. Some public restrooms (even at University of Gondar) are holes in the ground, and where there are toilets they do not flush, and there is no toilet paper. Instead, there are large tubs of water for cleaning and flushing. Many western visitors bring their own toilet paper or tissues. Carrying hand sanitizer to use liberally is also recommended.

Social Norms

It is appropriate for two men to walk hand in hand in public, or with their arms around one another as a sign of friendship and closeness, not sexual preference. Men may also exchange cheek kisses, as well. (Homosexuality is actually not accepted and considered taboo. Overt homosexual behavior could result in serious consequences.)

Internet Access

Internet is available at most major hotels, though do not expect it to be of the same speed as in the U.S.
**Photo Etiquette**

There both legal and ethical considerations to taking photos in Ethiopia. It is illegal to shoot photos of government buildings in Ethiopia—including the airport and presidential residences. Ethically, ask permission of people before taking their photo.

**Tipping**

The average tip is about 10% of your bill. Remember that 20 birr are worth about $1 and tip accordingly for these services:

- Baggage handler: 1-2 birr
- Taxi, hotel staff: 2-5 birr.

**Begging**

Begging is epidemic in Ethiopia, and you will see people of all ages, but most often children and women with babies. Social services are virtually nonexistent in Ethiopia, so you will also see many people with disfigurements and disabilities on the streets. Although you will be compelled to give money, it is important not to give money for it will begin a cycle that can quickly overwhelm you and your wallet.

**Clothing**

Many men wear suits for business situations, although business casual attire is also appropriate. In rural areas, khakis and a collared shirt are usually acceptable. Women often wear business casual attire, but skirts/dresses that might not be suitable. Jeans, shorts, and very revealing clothing are generally not appropriate in business situations.

Bring clothing that you can layer, mix and match, and wash out by hand if needed. A compact clothes-line for travelers is useful.

- Bring a sweater/sweatshirt or light jacket, or a lightweight thermal you can wear underneath.
- Generally (modest) casual is fine for most of our activities; bring one business casual outfit for the embassy and formal meetings. A big scarf is useful for women for church & similar visits to cover your head and/or arms.
- Bring things to keep mosquitoes off you at night—a long sleeve shirt, long pants, socks.
- You can buy used clothing, basic personal hygiene supplies etc locally. Some items however (ex: tampons) may not be available easily.
- Be it for dust or mud, bring a pair of shoes or sandals that are easily washed. You will want at least one closed pair of good walking shoes for rough areas—both rural and urban.
- Laundry is available in the hotels, but can take a couple of days, so plan accordingly.
- A small reading light can be helpful as hotel lights are sometimes dim.

**Food**

Injera, a slightly sour spongy pancake-like flatbread made from fermented tef (a gluten-free grain indigenous to Ethiopia), is fundamental to every Ethiopian meal. It is what you will use to pick up food from plates in small bites.

In traditional Ethiopian meals, circles of injera will be rolled out across the plate and topped with a smattering of spicy stews, cooked vegetables and salads. Restaurants will also bring
out baskets full of additional napkin-rolled injera rounds.

There is no silverware used in Ethiopian meals. Instead, injera is torn off into small bits with your right hand to scoop up bits of the stews and various dishes, forming a bite sized food parcel. You will get stew or sauce on your fingers--don't worry, but don't lick it off. Use a napkin!

Some common types of foods:

**Minchet:** spicy ground beef stew often served with a boiled egg.

**Key Wat:** spicy beef stew made with meat chunks instead of minced meat. Also served with a boiled egg on top.

**Tibs:** cubes of beef, lamb or goat stir-fried with onions, peppers and other vegetables. Quite often, twigs of rosemary or other herbs are added to it.

**Kitfo:** raw lean ground beef blended with spices.

**Shiro:** a vegetarian stew made from chickpea flour mixed with spices.

**Mesir Wat:** rich and spicy red lentil stew

**Kik alicha:** a non-spicy split pea stew made with turmeric.

**Gomen:** kale or collard greens, onions and spices sautéed and simmered together.

**FirFir:** a combination of shredded injera, spices, onions, sometimes meat.

Due to sanitation issues in Ethiopia, it is NOT SAFE to eat any fresh vegetables or fruits that do not have thick skins (like bananas).

If you are not a big fan of the native dishes--or your palate simply fatigues--there will be other options at local restaurants, including pizza and pasta (remnants from the five years Italy occupied the country). It may also be useful to pack some food comforts, such as dried fruits and nuts, granola bars and packaged foods.

And if you have a sweet tooth, keep in mind desserts are not popular in Ethiopia. If you want a treat, you may want to bring it from home.

**Coffee**

Coffee is synonymous with Ethiopia, as it was first discovered here and the quality is very high. Ethiopia is known for it's elaborate coffee ceremony, which involves three rounds of coffee that proceed from strong (abol) to medium (tona) to weak (baraka), with the final round considered as bestowing a blessing on the coffee drinker.

Coffee is also ordered from an Italian espresso machine (left over from the five-year Italian occupation during World War II), with a macchiato (coffee with a small amount of steamed milk) among the most popular.
**Transportation**

The areas we visit are well served by transportation, but none of the vehicles are metered and they don’t follow fixed price systems. Be sure to negotiate before departing.

The cheapest and easiest way to get around Gondar are three-wheeler vehicles called tuk-tuk or bajaj. The ride should cost 2 to 5 birr. Don’t be surprised if prices go up after dark.

A minibus service can provide a convenient and cheap way of hopping about town from around 1 birr for short journeys. ‘Conductors’ generally shout out the destination of the bus; if in doubt, ask.

Taxis operate in many of the larger towns, including Addis Ababa. Prices, however, can be higher for foreigners, so ask the hotel for a fare estimate.
Where to Visit

In Gondar

**Fasil Castle:** King Fasilides made Gondar the seat of his empire in 1636 and created a palace that would eventually sprawl into a compound. The site was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979. Guided or self tours available.

**Four Sisters Restaurant:** Offers traditional and Western food in a traditional atmosphere, including Ethiopian music and dancing, and coffee ceremony.

**Goha Hotel:** Located on a hilltop overlooking the city of Gondar, this hotel offers a wonderful menu of American and Ethiopian dishes in a tranquil setting.

In Addis

**Mount Entoto:** A historical place where Emperor Menelik II resided and built his palace, when he came from Ankober and founded Addis Ababa. It is considered a sacred mountain and has many monasteries. Mount Entoto is also the location of a number of celebrated churches, including Saint Raguel and Saint Mary.

**National Museum:** The museum is among the most important in sub-Saharan Africa, featuring two casts of Lucy, a collection of fossilized bones that once made up the skeleton of a hominid from the Australopithecus afarensis species, who lived 3.2 million years ago.

Must See

**Lalibela:** One of Ethiopia's holiest cities, Lalibela is located in northern Ethiopia and known for its monolithic rock-cut churches.

**Lake Tana:** Ethiopia's largest body of water, which gives birth to the Blue Nile.

**Simian Mountains National Park:** The highest point in Ethiopia, the Similan Mountains are home to such endangered species as the Ethiopian wolf, the walia ibex, the gelada baboon and the caracal.