



APEX
EXPEDITIONS



Ethiopia

February 11 – 28, 2017





This image and Cover: © Giovanna Fasandelli

Expedition Overview

At the cultural crossroads of Africa and straddling the Great Rift Valley, Ethiopia is an enigmatic land like no other. The continent's only country to have avoided Western colonization, it boasts a rare historical depth going back through medieval dynasties and the evolution of a religion to the reign of King Solomon. Awesome stone-hewn churches, medieval castles and great stelae all bear testament to this proud history, eclipsed in grandeur only by its landscapes. From the lofty peaks of the Simien Escarpment and its charismatic, endemic wildlife to the flamingo-studded soda lakes of the Great Rift Valley, from lake monasteries at the source of the Blue Nile to lip plates, scarification and body painting in the villages of the Omo Valley, this is raw Africa at its most dramatic and alluring.



© Giovanna Fasandelli

Photos: (Cover) Gelada, Church of St. George, Lalibela; Hamar Woman and Child, Southern Omo Valley.





© Governator Fasaneli

Itinerary

Saturday, February 11: Addis Ababa

Arrive in Addis Ababa and transfer to the *Sheraton Hotel*. Set out on an afternoon tour to acquaint yourself with Ethiopia's capital city, starting with a visit to the National Museum to view a replica of the famous, 3.2 million-year-old fossilized hominid remains known to the rest of the world as "Lucy" and to Ethiopians as Dinknesh, meaning "Wondrous One" in the local Amharic tongue. End the afternoon with an exploration of the bustling Merkato, Africa's largest open-air market. Return to the hotel for a welcome dinner and overnight.

Sunday, February 12: Bahir Dar

Depart Addis this morning on a flight bound for Bahir Dar, a picturesque town on the shores of Lake Tana. We board a private boat and journey to the Zege Peninsula to visit two of its famous monasteries, Ura Kidane Meret and Azuwa Maryam. The most beautiful of churches in the Tana region, Ura Kidane Meret boasts an incredible collection of murals that offer unrivalled insights into medieval Ethiopia. This afternoon, enjoy an excursion to the Blue Nile Falls, where we watch for the diverse array of waterbirds on the easy walk to the viewpoint. Hippopotamus and Nile Crocodile are occasionally spotted on the banks of the river. Dinner and overnight at *Kuriftu Resort and Spa*.

Monday, February 13: Debarq / Simien National Park

After breakfast, travel by road to the village of Debarq, en route enjoying the attractive pastoral landscapes and traditional villages of the Ethiopian highlands. Situated at an altitude of 10,000 feet, Debarq is the gateway to Simien Mountains National Park, home to two of the country's iconic animals: the charismatic Gelada, and the Walia Ibex. We begin our exploration of the park, before overnighting at *Simien Lodge*, with panoramic views of the dramatic, 3,000-foot-high Simien Escarpment.



© Jonathan Prossow



© Governator Fasaneli

Photos: Gelada, Lake Tana Monastery, Walia Ibex.



Tuesday, February 14: Simien National Park

The Simiens are Africa's highest mountain range, with a dozen peaks exceeding 14,000 feet in height, and we have a full day to explore this stunning region. An early start along the edge of the plateau may reveal the big-horned Walia ibex, a wild mountain goat found nowhere else on Earth, or perhaps the angular silhouette of a Bearded Vulture, high against the crags, but we'll focus most of our attention on the adjacent meadows, known as Afro-Alpine moorland, for this is the favored habitat of Gelada. These fascinating vegetarian primates, distant relatives of the more familiar baboons, spend their days shuffling across the short-cropped grasslands, occasionally gathering in bands hundreds strong. With their golden manes, bright pink breasts and comical facial expressions, time spent with these "Bleeding-heart Baboons" is likely to be a highlight of our time in Ethiopia. Overnight at *Simien Lodge*.

Wednesday, February 15: Gondar

Descend by road this morning to Gondar, Ethiopia's capital during medieval times. Often referred to as the "Camelot of Africa," Gondar was founded by Emperor Fasilidas in the early 17th-century. Our visit explores many of the castles he and his descendants established within the Royal Enclosure, as well as his ceremonial bath, which forms the focus of modern-day Timkat, Ethiopian Orthodoxy's most sacred annual celebration. Overnight at the *Mayleko Lodge*.

Thursday, February 16: Lalibela

A morning flight takes us to the small town of Lalibela, situated high in the Lasta Mountains. Arguably one of the most important religious and historical sites in the entire Christian world, Lalibela boasts no fewer than 200 rock-hewn and cave churches. These elaborate edifices, each carved entirely out of a single block of living granite, form the focus of our afternoon's exploration and we begin with three of the most impressive. Standing 38 feet tall, Bet Medhane Alem is the largest of all monolithic rock-hewn churches, sporting 72 pillars, while Bet Maryam, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is smaller but more intricate, with remains of exquisite early frescoes visible on the ceiling. We end in Bet Golgotha, which houses remarkable reliefs and early Ethiopian Orthodox art. Dinner and overnight at *Maribela Hotel*.

Friday, February 17: Lalibela

An early mule trek leads us up to Asheten Mariam monastery, perched on a mountaintop with spectacular views over Lalibela. This monastery is best known for its collection of ornate, 13th-century hand and processional crosses of King Nakuta La'ab, who ruled Ethiopia for 40 years after King Lalibela. This afternoon we'll explore a second group of churches, said to have been built overnight by a host of angels and to represent the heavenly Jerusalem. Our afternoon culminates in the cross-shaped church of Bete Giyorgis, the Church of Saint George, carved from solid red volcanic rock in the 12th century and the most famous of Lalibela's churches. Dinner and overnight at *Maribela Hotel*.

Saturday, February 18: Aksum

Fly from Lalibela to Aksum, a city founded three centuries before the birth of Christ. According to Ethiopian belief, Aksum was once the home of the Queen of Sheba and is the current resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. On arrival, our exploration commences at the area's most recognizable icons, the great stelae. Attributed to various medieval Ethiopian rulers from the 3rd century AD, these immense granite obelisks, some exceeding 100 feet in length and with an estimated weight of over



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Giovanna Fasanelli

Photos: **Simien Escarpment; Imperial Castle, Gondar; Priest, Lalibela; St. Mary of Zion Procession, Aksum.**



500 tons, bear testimony to the technological prowess of the early Aksumites. The adjacent Aksum Museum houses priceless relics from the era, giving us deeper insights into their society.

In the afternoon, we'll visit the compound of the Church of Saint Mary of Zion, site of the first church in Ethiopia. Destroyed during the Christian-Muslim Wars of the 16th century, the church was rebuilt by Emperor Fasilidas in a style reminiscent of the castles of Gondar. A small building adjacent to the cathedral will no doubt attract much of our attention, as this is the alleged final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. Overnight at the *Sabeen Hotel*.

Sunday, February 19: Langano Lake

After breakfast, we return by air to Addis Ababa and embark on a scenic drive into the Great Rift Valley. As we descend from the highlands, the landscape changes quickly to the classic thornbush of East Africa, and we'll make roadside stops for anything of interest.

Ethiopia's Great Rift Valley is a major migratory route for birds from Europe and Asia, these migrants join the resident species to form a phenomenal spectacle. The lakes that dot the floor of the Rift Valley are particularly rewarding, with elegant Black Crowned Cranes feeding along the marshy edges, African Pygmy Geese floating amongst the water lilies and dashing Northern Carmine Bee-eaters hawking insects overhead. At Lake Ziway, where local Sidamo fishermen bring their catch ashore, remarkably tame Great White Pelicans, Marabou Storks and Hamerkops provide unrivalled photographic opportunities. We'll overnight at the remote *Bishangari Lodge* on the shores of Langano Lake.

Monday, February 20: Bale Mountains National Park

We wake this morning to the strange croaking of Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys in the dense woodland around the lodge, before continuing our journey down the Great Rift Valley and eastwards across the highlands to the world-renowned Bale Mountains National Park. Crossing the moorlands near the park headquarters at Dinsho, we should encounter our first endemic mammals in the form of the stately Mountain Nyala or Menelik's Bushbuck, as well as Chestnut-naped Francolin and the characterful Rouget's Rail. Juniper woodland here rings to the songs of Abyssinian Catbird and Abyssinian Ground Thrush, and we'll search the trails for the scarce Abyssinian Long-eared Owl. Overnight *Bale Mountain Lodge*.

Tuesday, February 21: Bale Mountains National Park

Early this morning, we ascend Africa's highest road to the legendary Sanetti Plateau. Lying at an altitude of over 14,000 feet, the plateau is the last remaining stronghold of the world's rarest canid, the Ethiopian Wolf. We'll make a concerted effort to find these spectacular, chestnut-colored animals patiently stalking their favorite prey, the impressive Giant Root-Rat, which are themselves endemic to the Sanetti Plateau. Elegant Giant Lobelias dot this picturesque, otherworldly landscape of pincushion bogs and tussock grasslands, where we'll also be on the lookout for pairs of the endangered Wattled Crane, endemic Blue-winged Goose and flocks of Black-headed Siskin.

Breaking for lunch at the edge of the Sanetti escarpment, we overlook the great Harrena Forest, which is home to Africa's only forest-dwelling Lions and Wild Dogs. Seeing these elusive predators is exceedingly unlikely, although we may find the endemic Bale Vervet Monkey or perhaps the scarce endemic Abyssinian Woodpecker, before retracing our route across the plateau to *Bale Mountain Lodge*.



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Adam Riley

Photos: **Great White Pelicans, Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopian Wolf, Mountain Nyala.**



Wednesday, February 22: Arba Minch / Great Rift Valley

After breakfast, transfer to Robe where we embark on a charter flight to Arba Minch, a town spectacularly perched on the western escarpment of the Great Rift Valley overlooking the twin lakes of Abaya and Chamo. It is also a portal to the famed South Omo, a region hosting the densest concentration of distinct tribes in all of Africa. Our first taste of this diversity is at Chench, a small highland town of the Dorze tribe who are famous for their weaving culture, a tradition reflected in their patterned fabric, ornate fences, and beehive-shaped huts. In the late afternoon, we'll enjoy a scenic cruise on Lake Chamo within Nechisar National Park, watching for Hippopotamus and the legendary numbers of gigantic Nile Crocodiles for which the lake is renowned. Overnight at *Paradise Lodge* in Arba Minch.

Thursday, February 23: Jinka / South Omo Valley

An early start sees us traversing the dense, termite mound-studded thornbush of the Weita Valley, stopping first in the village of Weita, home of the Tsemai, amongst the least known ethnic groups in South Omo. Continuing to the larger town of Key Afer, heartland of the Ari people, we'll stop to enjoy the Thursday market and marvel at the immense variety of body adornment on display, amongst the varied ethnic groups present, from body paint and clay hair braids to bracelets and bead jewelry. We arrive in the cooler highland town of Jinka, and overnight at *Eco Omo Lodge*.

Friday, February 24: Jinka / South Omo Valley

A full day excursion into the Lower Omo Valley takes us into the territory of the Mursi, amongst the area's most celebrated ethnic groups. Pastoralists who keep herds of cattle and goats, the Mursi are most famed for the lip-piercing custom of their women who, at the coming of age, insert ever larger clay disks into incisions made in their lower lips. Witnessing these women in all their finery will likely remain one of the enduring memories of our time in Ethiopia.

We return via the dense thorn thickets and riverside woodland of Mago National Park, where we may be fortunate enough to see the regal Lesser Kudu, Defassa Waterbuck or the diminutive Guenther's Dikdik. Overnight *Eco Omo Lodge*.

Saturday, February 25: Turmi / Southern Omo Valley

We depart Jinka early for the bustling Saturday market of Dimeka, where we'll make our first encounter with throngs of Hamar people. With their magnificent ochre-colored hair braids, skirts of cowrie-decorated goatskin and tight copper bracelets, the Hamar women rank amongst the most strikingly regal of all South Omo ethnic groups. We arrive at *Buska Lodge*, set on the banks of the Keske River outside of Turmi for dinner and overnight.

Sunday, February 26: Turmi / Southern Omo Valley

Our day is dedicated to visiting villages of the Karo people, who are best known for their skin scarification and symbolic, ornamental painted body and face decorations. This process ranges from fine, elaborate detail to rough tracings with the palms or fingers, in magnificent combinations of white chalk, black charcoal and red and ochre earth. Overnight *Buska Lodge*.



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Jonathan Rossouw



© Giovanna Fasanelli



© Giovanna Fasanelli

Photos: Yellow-billed Stork and Nile Crocodile, Hippopotamus, Key Afer Market, Mursi Woman.



Monday, February 27: Addis Ababa

We retrace our route to Arba Minch for lunch, before flying back to Addis Ababa. Enjoy a farewell dinner celebration this evening. Overnight at the *Sheraton Hotel*.

Tuesday, February 28: Addis Ababa

Depart very early this morning on international flights out of Addis Ababa.



© Giovanni Fasanelli

Photos: **Mursi Men, Monk in Lalibela.**



Your Expedition Leader



Marco Tonoli

Marco organised his first expedition into the Drakensburg Mountains at the age of 13 for a group of friends, which ultimately led to an unquestionable love of exploring and sharing the natural world. As soon as he was of legal age, he was on the first plane out of his home country, South Africa, to discover the cultures and environments of the Middle East, Far East and Europe. This love of the world's wilderness areas and the people within it, led him to pursue what turned out to be an adventurous 16-year career as a naturalist guide throughout Southern and East Africa.

His love of ethology and species adaptations, and their survival in harsh and extreme habitats took him to the Kalahari Desert, where he led and trained a team of specialist guides, as well as lived and worked closely with the region's best trackers. In due course he developed a passion for the art and science of tracking, conducting desert Black Rhino walking safaris for the next four years.

Marco took a small break from guiding to study wildlife filmmaking and photography in the pursuit of documenting the natural world, which has allowed him opportunities to work on productions by National Geographic and Discovery Channel, as well as having images appear in notable natural history publications throughout the world.

"Marco is simply one of the most knowledgeable guides I've ever come across, and I've come across quite a few! I highly recommend Marco to anyone wanting guiding of the highest caliber."

– Alex W., United Kingdom



Expedition Details

Ethiopia February 11 – 28, 2017

\$13,670 Per Person Rate

\$15,770 Solo Rate

18 Days Trip Length

16 Guests Group Size

Addis Ababa / Addis Ababa Start/End

Included

Apex Expeditions' rates include all accommodations, meals, activities and excursions as described in the itinerary; air within Ethiopia, as noted in the itinerary; local beer and local wines at lunch & dinner; all gratuities; services of an Apex expedition leader and local guides throughout the itinerary; airport transfers; permits and entrance fees; all taxes.

Not Included

Costs not included in the price of your Apex expedition include travel to and from start and end point of trip; premium brand drinks and liquor; travel insurance (Trip Cancellation and Interruption, as well as Emergency Medical and Evacuation insurance, are highly recommended); excess baggage fees; airport departure taxes; passport and/or visa fees; items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, souvenirs, etc.); and independent travel arrangements pre- or post-trip.

Payments & Terms

20% of the trip cost will confirm your place on the expedition. The final balance is due 150 days prior to departure. All prices are quoted in U.S. dollars and must be paid in U.S. dollars. Per person pricing is based on double occupancy. The Solo Rate is paid by participants who specifically request single accommodations and is subject to availability. If you are traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we will try to match you with a roommate of the same gender. However, if a roommate is not available, the published Solo Rate will be charged. Upon confirming your reservation you will be required to pay the published Solo Rate, if we are able to pair you with a roommate, the applicable difference will be refunded at the time that the final trip payment is due for all participants. Please note that solo accommodations are limited and cannot always be guaranteed throughout. For our full set of Terms & Conditions, please visit our web site at www.apex-expeditions.com/about/terms-conditions/

One-of-a-kind adventures to the world's most fascinating places. Join us.



Reservation Form

Ethiopia February 11 – 28, 2017

Person 1: (Primary Contact)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Mailing Details:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____ Country: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Double Solo

Person 2: (If applicable and at same address, otherwise please submit a second Reservation Form.)

Passport Name: _____

Preferred Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Email Address: _____

Deposit Information:

My deposit check is enclosed (20% of total tour fare)

Charge my deposit to my: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card #: _____ Expires: _____ CCV Code: _____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

**Please return this completed form to Apex Expeditions.
E-mail: info@apex-expeditions.com or Mail: 3275 36th Ave SW, Seattle, WA 98126**

