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Nature Experience in Bale

9 Days in the South East

ITINERARY

DAY 1: Early in the morning we depart Addis Ababa and head south. Our first stop is Melka Konture on the Awash River. Melka Konture is one of the most important prehistoric archaeological sites in Ethiopia. A number of Stone Age tools and interesting fossils have been discovered here, including human skeletons, some which are up to 1.7 million years old.

From Melka Kunture we'll drive approximately 5 kilometres to a small side road that takes us to Adadi Mariam, the southern most rock-hewn church in Ethiopia. Adadi Mariam was likely built in the period between the 12th and 14th centuries and is similar to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, although slightly smaller and rougher in appearance. In the 16th century the church fell victim to raids from the Imam Gagn's troops and after that for a long time the church had fallen into oblivion. Since its rediscovery about 100 years ago Adadi Mariam is now back in service. After visiting the church we will head to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tiya.

A mysterious band of stelae fields stretch throughout southern Ethiopia, through Dila all the way up to Negele Borana. Tiya is the northernmost of these fields where over 40 stelae stand next to one another. Each one includes an engraved relief with symbolic characters and figures of unknown meaning. Little is known of the origins of these estimated 700-year old stelae. However, they were probably used to mark the mass graves of dead young men and women who lie buried together beneath the columns in an embryonic posture.

We'll then make our way to Butajira, where we'll turn east toward Lake Zway. Slowly we'll descend into the Great African Rift Valley where it becomes noticeably warmer. The (late) afternoon lunch will be spent in Ziway. Afterwards we'll travel non-stop to Awassa, an attractive and bustling city on the lake of the same name, where we'll spend our first night.

Day 2: Early in the morning we visit the picturesque fish market on the south shore of the town square where the local fishermen sell their fresh catch daily. After a refreshing cold drink or a local coffee under the shady promenade we will charter a small boat for an idyllic trip through Lake Awassa. It's quite likely that we'll encounter some hippos here.

It's time for lunch. We eat and refresh ourselves. After that we head east into to the rugged Bale Mountains. The road leads first through fertile farmland and open fields. We then gain altitude, making sharp turns over a pass at an altitude of 3,000 metres and arrive at Goba in the early evening.

DAY 3: Today we'll visit the fascinating Sof Omar Caves, located around 100 kilometres from Goba. Sof Omar is an extensive limestone cave system several kilometres long which was washed out from the Web River over thousands of years. Expansive subterranean chambers contain fantastic rock formations that resemble pillars or huge portals. Armed with flashlights, we traverse the great hidden spaces. We then return to Goba and prepare for the start of our next hike.

DAY 4 (4-5 hour hike): We head towards Dinsho, which forms the base for our trek through the Bale National Park. In the park's headquarters we'll make the necessary arrangements for our hike. We secure pack animals for our gear, as well as a local leader and scout who will join our group. Those who chose can also go by horseback.

We set off. The first stage of our hike leads through wide highlands. A variety of birds accompany us along the way while buzzards and vultures circle overhead. With high probability we should spot an endemic Menelik's bushbuck as well as endemic mountain nyalas, recognizable by the distinctive screwed horns of the males. They'll watch us carefully with suspicion. We'll pass a small waterfall and a little further we'll reach our first camp in Kotere (3,200 metres).

DAY 5 (7-8 hour hike): Today's hike takes us up into the Wasama Valley. First we'll climb up a short rise to the top of the Abor Kasir. At the foot of the mountain of Wasama we'll reach our second camp (3,400 metres). The area here is populated by the endemic Ethiopian wolf (Simien fox) that you may meet face to face, especially in the early mornings or evenings.

DAY 6 (7-8 hour hike): From the Wasama Valley we head towards Gebre Guracha. We cross the Wasama (3,600 metres) and walk through the wide highland of the Sanetti Plateau. Special Afro-Alpine vegetation grows here, which has adapted to the harsh climate of the Bale Mountains. The landscape following the autumn rainy season is particularly beautiful, when flowers and bushes are in full bloom and the land appears to be covered in a carpet of flowers.

A further climb leads us through the Batu Pass (circa 3,800 metres) to a plane featuring several mineral water springs. We'll finally reach the Gebre Guracha lake (3,800 metres) where we'll set up camp on shore.

DAY 7 (approximate 5 hour hike): Today we will cross the 4,000 metre mark. Passing small mountain lakes we climb our way up the Tullu Deemtu mountain (4,377 metres). Tullu Deemtu, or the Red Mountain, has the highest peak of the Bale Mountains and is the second highest in Ethiopia. Here we'll enjoy the spectacular views of distant mountain peaks visible across the Sanetti Plateau and the canyons below.

At the foot of Tullu Deemtu we'll meet our car, which will drive us back to the hotel in Goba where we look forward to a warm shower...

DAY 8: We leave the cool Bale Mountains and slowly make our way back. The drive heads steadily downhill, until we return to the tropical climate of the Great African Rift Valley. We then head to Lake Langano where we'll spend our last night of the trip. At noon we reach Shashemene, a place inhabited by many Rastafarians.

Near Shashamane lie the southern foothills of the Abiata-Shala National Park. We take a detour to the small lake Chitu Hora, located in an old volcanic crater. A huge flock of flamingos, which can reach 10,000, populates the lake. A little further, near the shores of lake Shala hot springs are found where the locals bathe.

We take the rest of the way to Lake Langano. For dinner, we enjoy some fresh fish. We then sit around the campfire on the shore of the lake and enjoy the balmy weather and the starry sky above.

DAY 9: We spend the morning sitting by the lake and relaxing our body and soul. After lunch we'll set off on our return trip to Addis Ababa. If the mood suits, we'll make a short stopover at Debre Zeyt which is adjacent to several small lakes of volcanic origin.

Please note that the above itinerary is meant as an example only and is a rough guide of what is possible. Some content may change depending on various circumstances. The tour details can also be modified accordingly to suit your interests and can be adapted to your circumstances. We are also not responsible for any deviations to the planned tour for reasons which arise beyond our control.