

DOWN ANCIENT PATHS™

SUMMER SCHOOL IN 'TWO' HOLY LANDS 2008 ETHIOPIA ITINERARY

Our learning adventure begins in the 'Galapagos Islands' of world Christianity! Early tradition has it that Cush, one of the sons of Ham, and grandson of Noah, came to Ethiopia from Mesopotamia. A later legend claims that Menelik I, a son born to the Jewish King Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, settled in Axum, bringing with him from Jerusalem the Jewish Ark of the Covenant to establish the dynasty which reigned with only brief interruptions until 1974 and the overthrow of the Christian Emperor, Haile Selassie. Ethiopia has had one of the oldest unbroken monarchical lines in the world.

Day 1 / April 29-30 Depart from Calgary

Day 2 / April 30 Depart London for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Day 3 / May 1 Arrive Addis Ababa / all day rest

Day 4 / May 2 Bahir Dar / Blue Nile Falls / Zeghie Peninsula

Today we take the one hour flight to **Bahir Dar** nestled in the southern shores of **Lake Tana** and proceed to the **Blue Nile Falls or Tissisat Falls** (Water of Smoke) which are 100 meters wide and 45 meters high and located about 30 kilometers from the town. Here the Blue Nile which contributes 85% of the main Nile flow, starts its long journey to the Mediterranean. After a short walk to the Falls we cross the Blue Nile and walk down the Falls. After lunch at the hotel, we will undertake an excursion to the **Zeghie Peninsula** which is noted for its 14th century churches with round, grass roofs and magnificent wall murals. We visit two churches, Betra Mariam and Ura Kidane Mehret which house ancient crowns and illuminated manuscripts. The latter has a beautiful painted 'maqdas' which is practically a compendium of Ethiopian religious iconography. Walking through dense forest with lots of bird life, we come to our overnight stop, Hotel Tana, for dinner and a Lake Tana sunset. Bahir Dar affords the safe opportunity to stroll at night after dinner.

Day 5 / May 3 Lake Tana / Gorgora / Gondar

Definitely a day to be anticipated! Following an early breakfast, we leave by chartered boat to cross the 'watery desert' of **Lake Tana**, Ethiopia's largest lake. Monasteries exist on some 20 of the lake's 37 islands. The renowned island monasteries which date to the 13th and 14th centuries introduce us to the ancient Ethiopian version of 'desert spirituality'. Flocks of birds, especially pelicans, will be visible on this journey back in time. Crossing the lake we disembark at **Gorgora** and visit Debre Sina Miriam following which we drive to **Gondar**, arriving before nightfall. Overnight at Hotel Goha for 2 nights.

Day 6 / May 4 Gondar / Wolleka

Gondar, a town founded in 1636 by the great Emperor Fasiladas, is set in a landscape of incomparable beauty. It once was the royal capital of Ethiopia. Among the highlights of the town are the Castles and Churches built by Fasiladas and his descendants. The fascinating Debre Birhan Selassie Church (a UNESCO World Heritage site) has walls and ceilings decorated with scenes of biblical lore and medieval history and is alleged to have been a onetime resting place of the Ark of the Covenant in its journey enroute to Axum. 6 km north of Gondar is the **Falasha Village of Wolleka**, once a thriving centre of Ethiopian Jewry (where some Jews still remain). Our visit here warrants a discussion of the history and place of the Jews of Ethiopia and their emigration to the modern state of Israel from 1985-1991. Before the coming of Christianity, Judaism was for centuries the dominant religion of much of northwestern Ethiopia. The 'Jewish' character of early Ethiopian Christianity continues to intrigue western Christian scholars.

Day 7 / May 5 Lalibela

Our morning flight is destined for **Lalibela**, the location of the rock hewn churches - an eighth wonder of the world - situated on the rugged Lasta Mountains, the Rocks of Ages, at an altitude of 2630 meters ... an unquestionable highlight of our itinerary. The scenery is the most awe-inspiring in the country. This 13th century town has duplicate place names from the Bible - ie. the Jordan River, the Mt. Of Olives, the Holy Sepulchre, the tomb of Adam etc. which adds to its sacred atmosphere and uniqueness. The afternoon is taken up with exploring several of the unusual rock churches - Bet Georgis, Bet Myrian, Bet Meskel, Bet Golgotha, and Bet Michael. The 11 rock churches of Lalibela date to the reign of King Lalibela in the period between 1180-1220 A.D. They can hardly be called 'constructed' as they were carved inside and outside from the solid rock ... an incredible execution indeed. One local tradition says that 'angels' built the churches but they were most likely 'Ethiopian angels'. This is 'medieval Ethiopia' at its best! A magnetic attraction you'll never forget ... to say the least. Overnight at Hotel Roha for 2 nights.

Day 8 / May 6 Lalibela / Yemrehana Kristos

Our objective today, **Yemrehana Kristos**, lies 20 km northeast of Lalibela. It is the finest church outside the town built within a cave. The exterior of the church is decorated with white marble panels and the entire church sits on a foundation of olive-wood panels which allow it to float perfectly above the marshy ground below. Everywhere the carving and decoration is exceptional. Behind the church are the bones of countless pilgrims who chose to be buried under an overhanging rock.

Day 9 / May 7 Axum

Today's flight to **Axum**, the sacred city of the Ethiopians, transports us into the fabled world of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and the mythological traditions related to the Ark of the Covenant. According to Ethiopia's national epic, the Kebra Negast (Book of Kings), the city was the 10th century capital of the Queen of Sheba ... probably more fantasy than fact. We visit the main churches of Axum including the most holy church St. Miriam of Zion Monastery church which allegedly houses and guards the Ark of the Covenant brought from the Temple in Jerusalem by Menelik the First, who according to tradition was the son of Queen Sheba and King Solomon. The church dates to the 4th or 5th centuries when the emperor became Christian, becoming one of the earliest Christian churches in Africa (cf. Acts 8:26-38 - Philip and Ethiopian eunuch). Today we will be in the most holy precinct for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church almost within touching distance of the Holy Ark itself if one believes the tradition. The site of the original palace of the Queen of Sheba, a number of nearby rough-hewn granite slabs and giant stele mark the burial place of the Queen. The Cathedral of St. Mary of Zion is the repository of the crowns of the former emperors of Ethiopia and is considered the oldest church in all of Africa. The seven mysterious obelisks of Axum (one has just recently been returned from Italy and another is the highest monolith in the world) and Ethiopia's reputedly best museum are also on today's agenda. Of particular interest in King Ezana's Park

is a tablet inscribed in three languages ... Ge'ez, Sabean and Greek, Ethiopia's version of the Rosetta Stone. We then ascend a hill to view the castle of King Kaleb. Also to be visited is the tomb of King Kaleb and the tomb of King Basen who ruled Axum at the time of Christ's birth. The city market awaits the purchase of crafts and fabrics . Patronize the local market economy in this onetime center of a great African civilization which blossomed before the time of Christ the facts concerning which remain obscure. Axum is truly one of the country's star attractions. It is to subSaharan Africa what the Egyptian pyramids are to North Africa. It is to Ethiopians what Mecca is to Saudi Arabians. Overnight at Hotel Ramhai.

Day 10 / May 8 Addis Ababa

Today we take a flight to **Addis Ababa**. Upon arrival, we begin a city tour of the highlights of the Ethiopian capital which stands at between 2300 and 2500 meters, making it the third highest capital in the world. We begin with an ascent of Mt. Entoto where Emperor Menelik II made his permanent camp in 1881. The air is filled with the fragrant scent of eucalyptus trees as we make the climb. Return to Hotel Ghion, our home for the next 3 nights.

Day 11 / May 9 Debre Libanos / Addis Ababa

In the morning, because we just can't get enough of Ethiopia's Christian antiquity and the land's botanical beauty, we're undertaking a fieldtrip to **Debre Libanos**, the revered and ancient monastery founded by St. Tekle Haimanot, located about 100 km north of Addis Ababa. Situated at the bottom of an immense gorge through which one of the tributaries of the Blue Nile flows, this monastery is a modern centre of pilgrimage where many Ethiopians still go seeking healing in its curative waters. 5 minutes up the hill from the monastery is Tekle Haimanot's cave, the source of the monastery's holy water, where the saint did all his praying. And if you have the stamina ... we'll continue up the hill from the cave and savour the breathtaking view of the monastery in its dramatic setting. The Abbot of Debre Libanos is the spiritual head of all the Ethiopian monasteries and thus is given the title 'Itchige'. Saturated with the physical and spiritual beauty of Debre Libanos, we return to Addis Ababa.

Day 12 / May 10 Addis Ababa

After breakfast, a panoramic view of the city and the surrounding countryside awaits us. The Church of Mariam and its octagonal counterpart dedicated to the Archangel Raguel testify to a bygone imperial past. Descending from Mt. Entoto we contemplate the origins of humanity and make a visit to the national Archaeological Museum which houses the 3.6 million years old skeleton of Lucy among many other interesting archaeological findings. According to many 'civilization' scholars, Ethiopia may well be the 'cradle of humankind'. Our itinerary includes more of the city's attractions - St. George's Cathedral, the Menelik Mausoleum, a display in St. Giorghis Church and the Mercato. A traditional Ethiopian dinner awaits us at our hotel tonight.

Day 13 / May 11 Addis Ababa / Tel Aviv / Jerusalem

Today we transition to Tantur Ecumenical Institute near Jerusalem to begin phase two of Summer School in 'Two' Holy Lands 2008.

(Itinerary is subject to change if necessary)