Ethiopia

Country Facts
Population: 85,237,338
Languages: Amharic (official), Tigrigna, Orominga, Arabic. English is the most widely used international language.
Predominant Religions: Christian (Ethiopian Orthodox), Islam, Animist
Time Zone: Three hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time
Voltage Requirements: 220 volts
Telephone Codes: 251, country code; 1, city code for Addis Ababa

Introduction:
Ethiopia is home to some of the most remarkable ancient civilizations in the world. The country’s mountainous landscape is covered with old ruins, remains and wonders — ancient sculpted obelisks, walled Islamic towns and thousand-year-old churches carved out of solid rock. It also has its share of wild places — with lions and hippos and untamed rivers. As English novelist Evelyn Waugh once observed, Ethiopia is a country of “crazy enchantment.” The country is still recovering from its border war with Eritrea. Most of the population is desperately poor, and parts of Ethiopia are prone to periodic droughts and famines. Ethiopia’s amazing attractions come with plenty of flies and starving beggars. Tourist infrastructure is growing, but slowly.

Compassion in Ethiopia:
Compassion International’s work in Ethiopia began in 1993. As of 2010 more than 70,500 children participate in more than 320 child development centers. The Child Survival Program serves more than 685 mothers or caregivers and their babies through 16 centers. The Leadership Development Program serves more than 175 students. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Ethiopian children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:
- Although attitudes vary widely among Ethiopia’s many ethnic groups, one common trait is friendliness. Ethiopians generally appreciate others who are humble, honorable and pleasant.
- Ethiopians are very proud. Although they are generally welcoming of guests, be humble and be careful not to say anything negative about the culture or country.
- Greetings are courteous and warm in Ethiopia. Relatives and friends often kiss on each cheek. New acquaintances shake hands gently with one or both hands. You may be questioned extensively about your well-being and your family — this is normal conversation for Ethiopians.
- Ethiopians tend to be accepting of outsiders and their practices. Still, the majority of the population is deeply religious. Expect some looks if you wear tank tops or shorts in public. Displays of affection, such as hand-holding or kissing, are better left in private.
Also avoid eating in the street or other public places. With so many hungry beggars, it is considered rude to eat in public.

- Ethiopians keep a reasonable distance during conversation and avoid prolonged eye contact. Keeping one's hands at the side (not in pockets) during conversation is considered polite.
- Ethiopia still retains the Julian calendar, and is unique in having thirteen months in a year. Their traditional calendar remains almost eight years behind the Gregorian calendar of the West.
- Ethiopian food is based on dishes called we’t (meat, chicken or vegetables, cooked in a hot pepper sauce) served with or on injera (a flat spongy bread). Dishes include shivro and misir (chick peas and lentils, Ethiopian style) and tibs (crispy fried steak). There is a wide choice of fish including sole, Red Sea snapper, lake fish, trout and prawn. Traditional restaurants in larger cities serve food in a grand manner around a brightly colored basket weave table called a masob.
- Before beginning the meal, guests will be given soap, water and a clean towel, as the right hand is used to break off pieces of injera with which the we’t is gathered up. Cutlery is not used.
- Ethiopian coffee, originally from the province of Kaffa, is served with a little rue, called ‘health of Adam,’ added for extra aroma.
- In most religious establishments, certain quarters are not open to women.
- In the smaller towns, the locals may expect a small payment in return for being photographed. Video photography in famous tourist attractions occasionally carries a small charge. Photography may be prohibited in airports and near military camps.
- In most hotels and restaurants a 10% service charge is added to the bill. Tipping is a fairly frequent custom, but amounts are small. (Please note that Compassion staff members do not expect tips, and are unable to accept cash from visitors.)
- The official national language of Ethiopia is Amharic, a Semitic language related to Hebrew and Arabic. English is widely used for trade purposes, but Italian and French are also useful.

Dos and Don’ts:
- Do address people by using Mr., Mrs. or Miss preceding their first name. Ethiopians, like many Islamic cultures, don’t have hereditary surnames but use the given name of their father as a second name.
- Do take cash. Credit and debit cards are rarely accepted.
- Do be prepared to haggle for everything.
- Do be patient and friendly with officials, and you’re more likely to get what you need.
- Don’t give beggars money, as it encourages children to quit school to earn what seems to be a profitable income. Do expect beggars to thrust their hands inside your taxi if a window is open.
• Do learn some useful phrases. The official language is Amharic, but there are many local dialects spoken throughout the country. Say selam (peace) or tadias (hello) when greeting somebody, and amahseh genahluto thank someone.

• Don’t take photos indiscriminately: Ask permission before taking photographs of people, and pay them a modest tip. Don’t take pictures of military installations, airports or bridges.

**Travel Tips**

**Personal Safety:**
Thousands of land mines are left over from the war with Eritrea. Most are concentrated around the disputed boundary. Unpaved roads, particularly those leading north from Addis Ababa to the Tigray province, and areas off the pavement around bridges or water crossings are the most likely areas for mines. In addition, there have been reports of banditry along the borders with Kenya, Somalia and Sudan, as well as isolated incidents of violence in other regions. Traveling between towns after dark is not recommended. In general, Ethiopia is virtually free of violent crimes, especially for outsiders. Within Addis Ababa, pickpocketing and petty theft are common, especially in markets. Keep valuables in a safe place. Don’t travel alone, especially at night.

Leave at home all unnecessary credit cards, social security card, library cards and similar items you may routinely carry in your wallet. Do not take more cash than you reasonably require for that day. Use the room safe or hotel safe to secure valuables as well as additional cash. Secure cash in multiple locations – wallet, various pockets, money belts. Carry items in front pockets, not back pockets. Do not display large sums of money in public; only make visible the amount of money that approximates your purchase. Maintain a close awareness of your purse, wallet, backpack, etc. as well as the people around you. It’s a good idea to keep one hand or arm in constant contact with these items especially in areas of high people traffic. Never leave items with cash in them [purse, wallet, backpack, etc.] on a bus, car, or any other location, even if the vehicle is being watched by Compassion staff or Compassion-hired contractors. Stay alert and be cautious at all times. Don’t take safety & security for granted.

**Health:**
Sanitary conditions in restaurants may pose problems for travelers. Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe, but peel fresh fruit and raw vegetables, choose meat that is cooked thoroughly, avoid local dairy products, and assume the tap water and ice cubes are unsafe.

Smog may cause respiratory problems. During the dry season, car exhaust combines with dust, so bring a bandana to tie over your face for long car trips. It’s OK to swim in Lake Langano, but avoid entering any other freshwater lake. [The water may contain bilharzia, a parasite that attacks the liver.] If you’re even nipped by an animal, see a doctor, because rabies is an issue in Ethiopia. Skin infections are common. Even the smallest wound should be disinfected and covered with a bandage. The sun can be strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat.
There are adequate medical and dental facilities in Addis Ababa. Bring all prescription medicine needed for the trip. If you plan to travel outside Addis Ababa, especially in lower-lying regions such as the Great Rift Valley, you should see your doctor about obtaining malaria preventatives, and take along plenty of insect repellent.

**We strongly advise you to contact the CDC [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.** Yellow fever, typhoid, polio, tetanus, and hepatitis vaccinations may be recommended, along with anti-malarial medication.

**Money:**
The Ethiopian unit of currency is the birr. Each birr is made up of 100 Ethiopian cents. Tourists can bring an unlimited amount of foreign currency into the country, as long as it is declared. Once in the country, foreign currency can be exchanged at the airport, banks and at your hotel. As a general rule, expect to pay cash nearly everywhere. Hotels can usually accept credit cards. Restaurants often don’t accept credit cards. Make sure to break your large bills when you are at the hotel or bank, as street vendors, local restaurants and other small establishments might not be able to make change.

**Weather:**
The best time to visit the highlands (Addis Ababa) is October through June. From July through September, it’s hotter by about 10 F / 5 C and can rain in strong (though infrequent) downpours called “the big rains.” Around Addis, it can also rain February through June (“the little rains”). Temperatures range 55-77 F / 15-25 C.

**Dress:**
Even during the hot season, expect mild temperatures — short sleeves and pants or long skirts are a safe bet. Tank tops and shorts are not commonly worn, so expect some stares if you wear them in public. Collared shirts and pants for men and long skirts and covered shoulders for women are not required, but you’ll blend in better with the conservative Ethiopian culture. Layering is a good idea, in case it gets chilly or buggy. Bring a sweater.

*All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.*