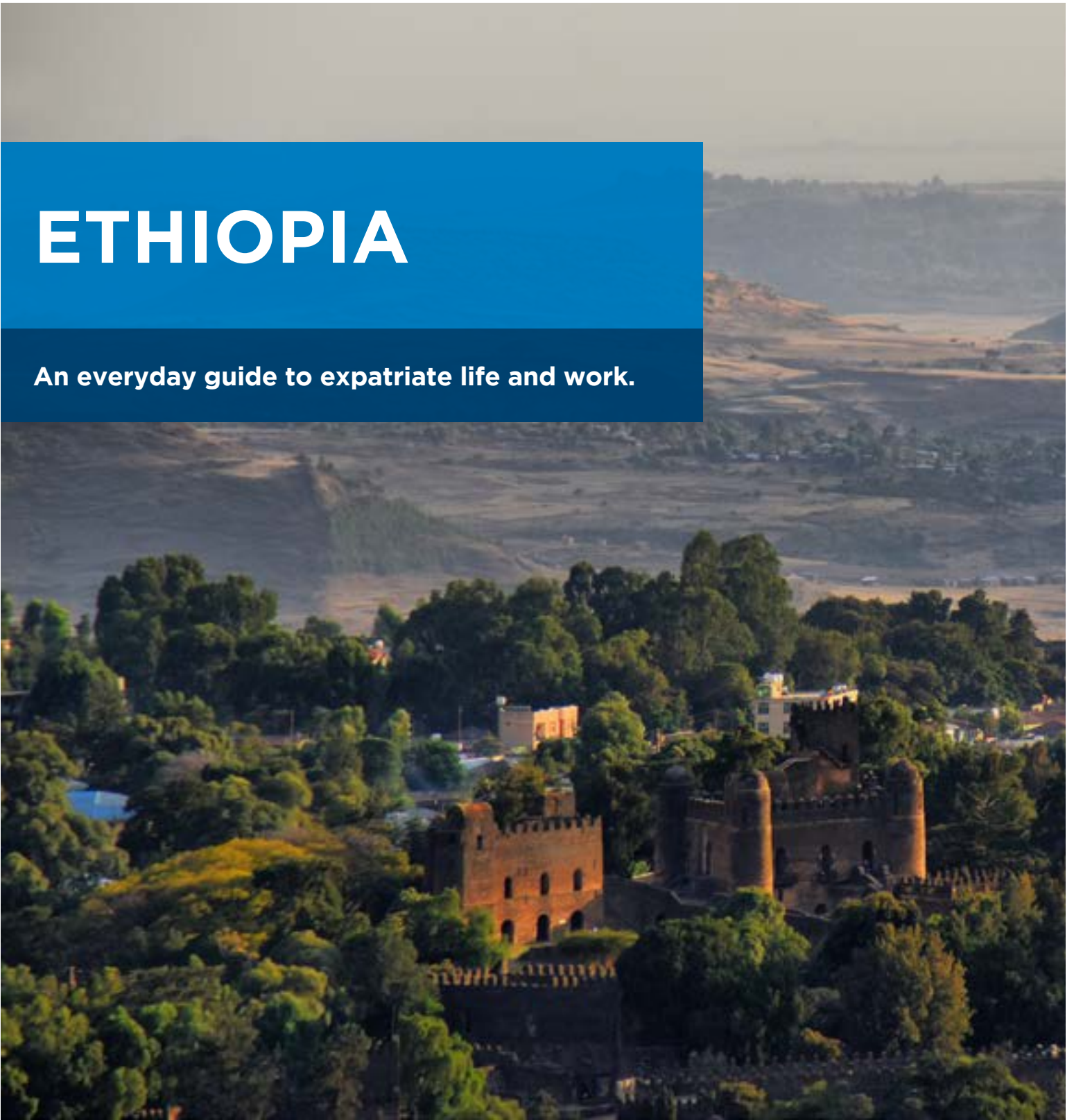


ETHIOPIA

An everyday guide to expatriate life and work.



Together, all the way.™



ETHIOPIA COUNTRY GUIDE

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Quick facts

Capital: Ababa

Population: 100 million

Major language: Amharic

Major religion: Christianity and Islam

Currency: Ethiopian birr (ETB)

Time zone: GMT +2

Emergency number: 911

Electricity: 230 volts, 50 Hz. Two-pin plugs are standard.

Drive on the: Right



Overview

Ethiopia is renowned for its ancient history and culture, as well as its reputation as the birthplace of coffee. Fascinating and beautiful, the country is home to several fossil locations registered as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

While expats may experience a degree of culture shock in Ethiopia's fairly traditional and conservative society, locals are usually warm, friendly and welcoming to foreigners. The cost of living, particularly in the capital city of Addis Ababa, is high while infrastructure, although still underdeveloped in parts, continues to grow.

Most expats are employed in either the diplomatic or education sector. Indeed, the majority of expat parents send their children to international schools as the standard of state education can be poor. Having said that, families will fall in love with the splendid landscapes, including mountains, lakes, forests and deserts.

This guide seeks to help familiarize newcomers to every aspect of life in Ethiopia from healthcare, accommodation, business, banking and tax, to visas, education, social etiquette, weather and the cost of living.

Getting Started

Climate and weather

There's little variation in temperature throughout the country, with the only major climatic differences occurring between the arid lowlands and the cooler highlands. The heavy rainy season is from June through September, with a preface of mild rainfall around March and April.

Heading into the final months of the year, the striking yellow of the Meskel Daisy blooms briefly in a countryside which is lush and green. While evenings are cool, the hottest period for the country is traditionally April to June.¹

¹ <http://www.climatestotravel.com/climate/ethiopia>

Visas

All travelers to Ethiopia require visas, with the only exceptions being nationals from Djibouti and Kenya. Visas on arrival are only available for tourists at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. There is also a new E-Visa system in place, administered by the Main Department of Immigration and Nationality Affairs in Ethiopia. Once an e-Visa is approved, an approval letter is sent directly to the applicant's email address.¹

Business visas must be applied for at the Ethiopian Embassy of one's country of residence. Documents submitted will include a letter with an offer of employment from a business or organization in Ethiopia. Once in the country, the offer letter can be used to convert the business visa to a work permit and a residence permit. Work permits and corresponding residency cards need to be renewed annually. Originals of educational degrees or diplomas are usually also required when applying for a work permit and usually need to be officially authenticated at the Embassy of one's country of origin.²

¹ <http://www.evisa.gov.et>

² <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ethiopia/entry-requirements>

Accommodations

Looking for a place to stay can be both complicated and tedious. Thankfully, many companies are on hand to provide assistance to their foreign staff struggling in Ethiopia's accommodation market. There are three main types of housing, particularly in Addis Ababa: older villas, modern apartment blocks and contemporary houses in compounds.

There's no established rental benchmark, so prices can be extremely varied. Often the best way to find a house is to hire a delala - this is a local who knows the area well and has connections. They will receive a percentage of the rental as a finder's fee from both landlord and tenant.

The tenant will be liable for all expenses once the lease has been signed, with landlords often asking for six months' rent or more up front. This includes any breakages or repairs. Foreigners are unable to buy residential properties but they can purchase properties for commercial purposes.

Schools

The Ethiopian education system consists of primary school (Grades 1 to 8) and secondary school (Grades 9 to 12). Low pay and undervaluation of teachers contributes to a mediocre quality of teaching in public schools.

Middle-class and working-class Ethiopians instead try and send their children to private schools, favoring the small class sizes as opposed to the large ones in government schools, some of which average around 60 pupils per teacher.

International schools are specialized private schools that teach a foreign curriculum and are the favored choice of expats in Ethiopia. There are a few choices for expat families, with the institutions usually found in and around Addis Ababa. Classes are usually taught in the language of the school's country of origin such as French, Italian, German, or, for American and British schools, in English.



Culture

Ethiopia is both multicultural and multi-ethnic. Religion influences both culture and tradition, with the religious majority being Coptic Christianity, followed by Islam and Protestantism. Although ethnic tensions can erupt in some areas, for the most part Ethiopia is a country where people of different religions have lived in harmony for centuries.

The country also has a rich tradition of both secular and religious music, singing and dancing, and together these constitute an important part of cultural life. Singing accompanies many agricultural activities, as well as religious festivals and ceremonies surrounding life's milestones such as birth, marriage and death.

Language

The main language spoken is Amharic. But there are more than 80 ethnic groups in the country, each having its own language and dialects. Throughout Addis Ababa, most people speak some degree of English. But in the rural areas, it's not as widely spoken.

Social etiquette and cultural faux pas

There's a number of social rules and dynamics to be aware of when settling down in a new country, and Ethiopia is no different. Here are some tips to help expats start off on the right foot.

- Politics is a very sensitive topic, with hugely divided and occasionally volatile opinions on the Derg regime, the Democratic Socialist Republic and the monarchy, all of which have ruled Ethiopia during one time or another.
- When giving gifts, presenting soap to an Ethiopian is considered an insult as it implies that they're unclean.
- Remove shoes when entering a place of worship.
- It's best to refrain from giving money to beggars on the street. Expats can support registered local feeding schemes which directly help the needy in an effort to dissuade begging.

- Ethiopian women are extremely fashionable but dress modestly for the most part, as do men. Unless at a resort or in a private compound, wearing shorts, sleeveless tops and miniskirts is generally considered disrespectful.
- One should be respectful to police and local officials. Don't take pictures of government buildings, police and soldiers.

Eating

Traditionally, Ethiopian food is a culinary delight, with injera and wot consumed every day throughout the country. Injera is a pancake, similar to sour dough, made from the unique and indigenous high protein and gluten-free grain called teff. Wots are a spicy vegetable, legume or meat stews flavored by an Ethiopian red pepper mixture called berbere. Using one's right hand, pieces of injera are torn off and used to scoop up the wots.

In addition to traditional food, there's a number of restaurants and supermarkets offering international and specialty food shops in the main cities.

Drinking

Drinking is a very popular social activity in Ethiopia from the homemade local brews of Tala (strong beer) and Tej (mead-like honey wine) as well as a variety of locally produced beers and wines. It is also possible to purchase international beers, wines and liquors. There are no restrictions on the sale or consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Holidays

A number of holidays are celebrated throughout the year, mainly based on religious calendars and days of national significance. Many of the dates align with lunar calendars, meaning dates can change from year to year.¹

¹ <http://www.officeholidays.com/countries/ethiopia>



Ethiopian Christmas – 7 January

Epiphany – 19 January

Victory of Adwa – 2 March

Good Friday – April or May

Easter Sunday – April or May

Labor Day – 1 May

Patriots' Freedom Day – 5 May

Downfall of the Derg – 28 May

Eid al-Fitr – 1 Shawwal*

Eid al-Adha – 10 Dhul Hijja*

Ethiopian New Year – 11 September

Meskel – 27 September

Moulid – 12 or 17 Rabi' al-awwal

* Dates on Islamic calendar

Transport

Addis Ababa has a number of public transport options and these are usually used by the general public, resulting in frequent overcrowding. These options include blue and white minibuses, orange and yellow city buses, and a light rail service with several lines across town.

Blue and white contract taxis are a less-congested mode of transportation, as is the recent introduction of meter taxis and even Uber-style dial-a-rides with their own apps. There are also many options to hire cars, with or without drivers, but to drive themselves foreigners need to obtain an Ethiopian driving license.

For travel outside Addis Ababa, Ethiopian Airlines flies to many destinations, both national and international. Long-distance buses also crisscross the country.

The network of roads across Ethiopia has improved vastly in recent years and most of the routes are now paved with tarmac. There still remains perilous mountain paths, though. The chewing of the stimulant khat is common among long distance lorry drivers. While it's a way to stay awake and do long journeys, there's sufficient evidence showing that it may be a major contributor to road accidents.²

Getting in touch

The telecommunications industry is small but growing steadily. While not ubiquitous in domestic households, internet connectivity can be found in many public spaces such as cafes and hotels.

2 <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/88/3/09-067512/en/>

Telephone

EthioTelecom is continually expanding and improving, being the only telecommunication company in the country at this point. It currently holds a monopoly on providing both telephone and internet services. Smartphones need to be registered upon arrival before applying for an Ethiopian sim card, which also allows one to use 3G and 4G services.

Mobile data costs can add up quickly so it's advisable to not rely on it as the sole source of internet. Mobile phone usage has become much more popular than landlines. Pay-as-you-go is the most popular and easiest mode of communication but contract phones can also be arranged for businesses.

Internet

Outside of the business environment, WiFi is readily available in hotels and cafes. The internet is generally reliable, although connection speeds can vary. Frequent power cuts can occur without notice, varying from minutes to hours.

There have been times when the government has shut down social media and websites during periods of political instability or national school exams. VPN is advisable but should be downloaded before entering Ethiopia. Extreme views or comments can be censored.

Postal Services

The postal system is reliable for the most part and there are small post offices around towns, some of which offer personal post boxes. Having post delivered to street addresses is not possible, unless using DHL or UPS or EPS (Ethiopian Postal System) for packages or urgent documents.

Employment

The job market

Many expats moving to Ethiopia take up jobs within international schools and embassies. Ethiopian schools also hire expats but will pay considerably less than their international counterparts, sometimes including basic accommodation in lieu of higher salaries.

Due to the large youth population and the issue of unemployment, a job might not be available to an expat if there's a local qualified for the same position. There's a strong emphasis for foreign companies to engage in the training and employment of Ethiopians in middle- to high-level positions.

To find a job, it's best to start by making initial enquiries with

companies or organizations of interest or to search through online portals. If offered a job while on a visit, it will be necessary for expats to leave the country and apply for a business visa from their home country.

The Ethiopian government actively encourages and solicits foreign investors with incentive packages. The country is currently experiencing an economic boom, including flower farms, potash, coffee and textiles, to name a few.³

Income tax

Personal income is taxed on a progressive rate from 0 to 35%. Taxes on monthly salaries are calculated during the monthly payroll preparation and have to be paid to tax authorities within one month after having been deducted from the employee. The same applies also for the various provident funds and pension schemes. There are stiff penalties for late submission of tax returns and all other statutory deductions.⁴ Employers must also contribute about 11% of the payroll towards social security while employees typically contribute 7% of their salary.⁵

Business etiquette

Greetings in the business environment consist of direct eye contact and lengthy handshakes, exchanging pleasantries while not letting go. Elders are greeted first and it's customary to bow slightly to those in senior positions. If the individuals know each other, there's an Ethiopian ritual of kissing each other three times on each cheek.

Business attire is quite formal, with suits for men and a smart dress style for women. It's necessary to address the person with their specific title whether it's "governor", "officer", "doctor" or "professor". Ato, woizero, and woizrity are used to address a man, married woman, and unmarried woman respectively. All these titles are followed by their last name.

Long meetings and bureaucracy will test one's patience but it's best to remain cool and calm. The host begins the meeting, leads it and concludes it. They can be quite lengthy so it's best not to make plans beyond the meeting itself, as rushing it to make another appointment will appear rude.

When enjoying the honor of visiting a colleague's home, it's advisable to bring a small edible gift such as fruit or a pastry and some flowers, plus a small gift for any child in the home. Alcohol will not be expected because many Ethiopians don't drink due to their religion or personal preferences. It also might be customary to remove shoes upon entering a private home.

Retirement

Ethiopia is not usually considered a place to retire unless married to an Ethiopian, which would make one eligible for a marital residence permit. Providing clear proof of independent financial means, excluding the purchasing of property, would be required to apply for a permit to retire without employment.

As with all foreigners residing in the country, the permit to remain is reviewed for annual renewal. There's no specific visa for retirement. Instead, it would be an annual residency card issued upon provision of financial means to remain. Note that rules to stay in the country can change often.⁶

Finance

Currency

The official currency is the Ethiopian birr (ETB), which is divided into 100 santim. Expats should note that converting and transferring birr as foreign currency out of the country is virtually impossible.

Money is available in the following denominations:

- Notes: 1, 5, 10, 50 and 100 ETB
- Coins: 1, 5, 10, 25 and 50 santim, and 1 ETB

Cost of living

The cost of living in Ethiopia, more specifically in Addis Ababa, is considered high for both local and international residents. The Ethiopian birr has recently been devalued which has caused the price of consumer goods to rise considerably. Automobiles are very expensive compared to other countries as well as property rentals and purchases. Grocery items are also much higher. The cost of living will be marginally cheaper elsewhere in the country but the availability of international standard housing and consumer goods will be much less.

Banking

Expats won't struggle to find a bank in Ethiopia. There are many ATMs outside banks and hotels for withdrawal of foreign or local currency, but there are limits to the amount of cash that can be drawn from ATMs. The major banks providing foreign accounts include Commercial Bank, Zemen Bank, Dashen Bank and Wegagen Bank.

³ <http://www.investethiopia.gov.et/>

⁴ <http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/>

⁵ <http://gpa-global.org/>

⁷ ⁶ <http://www.immigration.gov.et/>

Health

Government hospitals for the most part are overcrowded and understaffed. There are several foreign and international standard medical centers where foreigners can seek and pay for treatment. These centers also offer medical plans, including ambulance services.

Private Medical Insurance

Comprehensive private health insurance is recommended for expats in order to make use of Ethiopia's international medical centers. These facilities offer family and company plans which include ambulance and, in some cases, repatriation services.

Emergencies

The emergency numbers in Ethiopia include 911, which is a general emergency number, as well as 991 for police, 907 for ambulance, 939 for fire and 945 for traffic. Local ambulance services generally aren't reliable, so it's better to contact private clinics or hospitals for assistance in emergencies.⁷

Pharmacies

There are pharmacies throughout the country, selling a variety of both locally produced and international medications. They're all reasonably priced.

Health Risks

Ethiopia is a high-lying country, with some areas located at very high altitudes. Travelers should take precautions to avoid the illness of acute mountain sickness at these heights, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Bilharzia is a parasitic infection that's transmitted to humans through contact with fresh water. The parasite enters through the skin and prevention depends on avoidance of swimming and bathing in freshwater lakes and streams.

Rabies is quite prevalent so it's best not to pet strange canines. Signs of rabies in dogs are quite distinct, with mouths frothing, agitation and general distress.

Malaria risk is present throughout the year in low-lying areas. But there's no risk in Addis Ababa.

The water in Addis Ababa is considered safe but most foreigners choose to drink bottled or filtered water.

Vaccinations

The WHO recommends the following vaccinations for Ethiopia: typhoid, cholera, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, meningitis, polio, rabies, measles, mumps and rubella, and influenza. A vaccination for yellow fever is only required if coming from an affected country.

⁷ <https://www.internationalsos.com/countryguide/travelguide.aspx?languageid =ENG&countryid=48&content=emg>

