Ethiopia

Omo Valley Extension

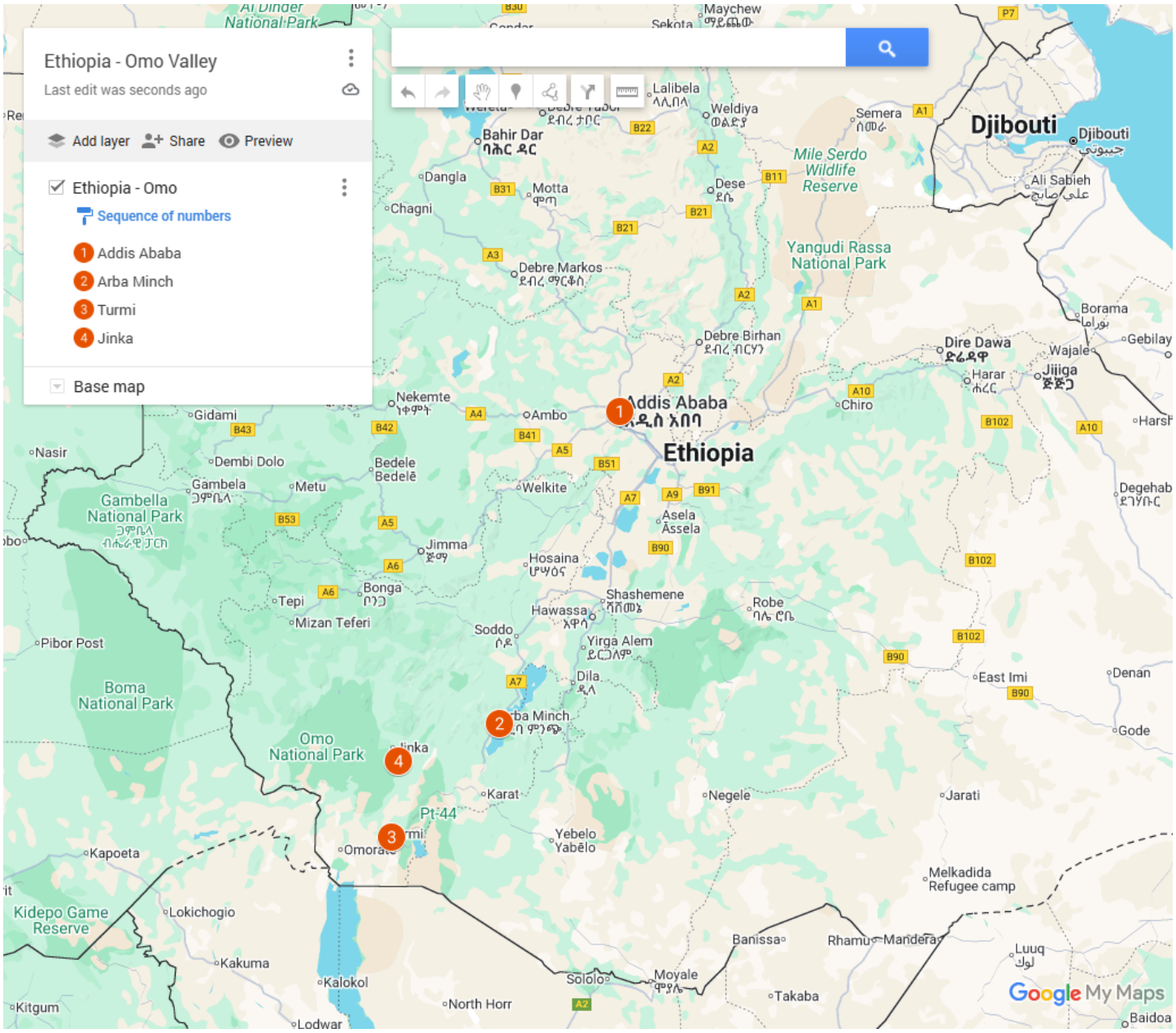


Mursi tribeswomen by Adam Riley

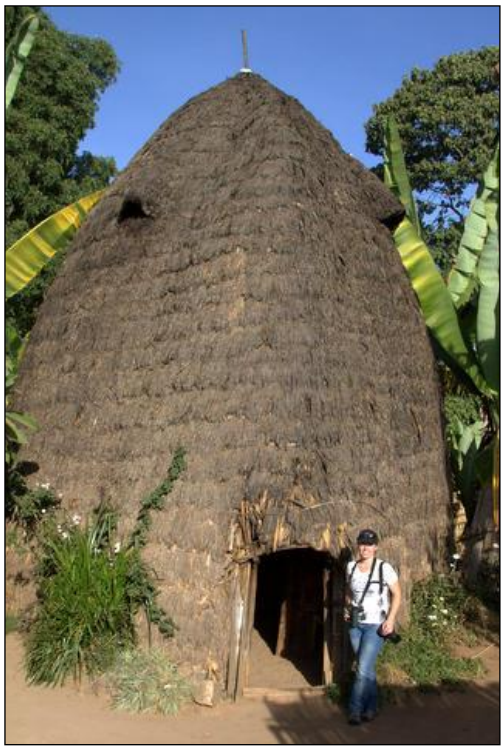
This exciting extension will take us to one of the wildest and most ethnically diverse places on Earth – the South Omo Valley. Combining a wonderful mix of culture and birding, we will have the rare opportunity to interact with several tribal communities who still live almost exactly as they did hundreds of years ago. This harsh and inhospitable part of south-western Ethiopia harbours over a dozen distinctly different tribes, each with its own unique language, clothing, hairstyles, and bodily ornamentation. Our tour will take us through the very heart of this vast and varied cultural melting pot and promises to make an exciting and memorable end to our Ethiopia birding experience!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival into Addis Ababa**
Day 2	**Addis Ababa, flight to Arba Minch**
Day 3	**Arba Minch to Turmi**
Day 4	**Turmi area**
Day 5	**Turmi to Jinka via Dimeka Market**
Day 6	**Jinka area**
Day 7	**Jinka area to Arba Minch**
Day 8	**Arba Minch to Addis Abbaba & final departure**



Birding sites in detail



Dorze hut by Adam Riley

Addis Ababa. Founded in 1886 by Emperor Menelik II, Addis Ababa is Ethiopia's capital and is one of the largest cities in Africa, with a population well over 5 million. It is located at 2,500m (8,300ft) above sea level at the foot of the highest peak of the Entoto Mountain chain and enjoys an excellent year-round climate. Addis Ababa is a pleasant city with wide avenues of Jacarandas, interesting museums and one of the largest open-air markets in Africa, known as the Merkato. Woodland and gardens are worth exploring for some interesting species that include Wattled Ibis, Tacazze Sunbird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher and even the difficult Abyssinian Woodpecker.

Arba Minch. The southern city of Arba Minch, meaning "Forty Springs", takes its name from the numerous gurgling springs that rise in the nearby Nechisar National Park. This is the largest town in the region with a population of around 80,000 people and is situated 500 kilometres south of Addis Ababa on the edge of the Omo Valley.

In the afternoon we will head towards Chencha, a "city" lying atop the eastern wall of the Great Rift Valley and inhabited by the Dorze tribe. The Dorze are famed weavers who live in tall huts that resemble a giant elephant head. All around the city are smaller Dorze villages, which were grouped around Chencha when it was the regional capital. These people have a staple diet of a type of bread made from the fermented false-banana tree. Men are occupied in the day by many tasks including the weaving of their brightly coloured cloths. They are also a farming people who terrace the hills around their villages for crop growing. Women look after the children, spin cotton, collect firewood and prepare food for the family. The traditional clothing of the Dorze consists of cloths called "shammas", which have gained popularity throughout Ethiopia. Their uniquely shaped and impossibly tall grass huts last for many years. We will have the opportunity to enter these huts and visit with traditional and friendly Dorze people as they go about their daily chores, as well as taste their traditional food and fiery brews!

This area is also rich in birds, especially since the habitat changes dramatically as we wind up the Great Rift Valley, from low-lying Arba Minch to the Dorze villages at the top. Species that have been seen on previous excursions include Augur Buzzard, African Harrier-Hawk, Eurasian Wryneck, Blue-breasted Bee-eater and White-rumped Babbler.

In the afternoon, we will look out for Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, Abdim's and Black Storks and Thick-billed Raven gliding past. Difficult to miss are the Fan-tailed Ravens that scavenge food off the breakfast tables! Numerous species of weavers, seed-eaters and sunbirds are common in the area.



Lake Chamo fisherman by Adam Riley

Lower Omo Valley. The Lower Omo Valley is situated within Africa's famous and, geologically-speaking, rapidly expanding Great Rift Valley (which will eventually split the continent into two



Typical Omo Valley market scene by Jonathan Rossouw

landmasses). Here, in south-west Ethiopia's awkwardly named "Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region", bordering Kenya and Sudan, the great Omo River dominates this dry savanna valley, resulting in some of Africa's most well developed and best preserved arid-zone riverine forests. The Omo River rises from the Shewan highlands to the north (much of Ethiopia consists of high-lying mountains and fertile plateaus, despite the impression created by some international media bodies that Ethiopia is predominately desert!). It flows 470 miles (750km), mostly southwards, before entering Lake Turkana (previously Lake Rudolf) near the Kenyan border. Lake Turkana, the world's largest permanent desert lake and also the planet's largest alkaline lake, has no water outflow, so in effect, it's a dead-end for the Omo River. The importance of the Lower Omo Valley has been recognised by UNESCO, which has declared it a cultural World Heritage site. It also contains two massive national parks and several Important Bird Areas.

This vast, scenic valley is now most famous, however, for its staggering cultural diversity. Over a dozen distinctive ethnic groups exist here, many of whom live lives little touched by the modern world. This is largely due to the remoteness and prior near-inaccessibility of the area, forming a natural barrier to modernization and the detribalization of the Omo Valley. Recent publicity about these remarkable tribes has resulted in tourists wanting to experience this wild land and its attractions for themselves. Several lodges have subsequently opened and a surfaced road is being built to allow easier access. The Lower Omo Valley is also famous for its significant anthropological discoveries, including hominid remains of several distinctive species, going back as far as four million years, as well as the earliest known skeletons of our own species (nearly 200,000 years old). The Omo Valley has clearly been a cultural crossroads of great significance for aeons, and continues to be so.

During our drive today we pass through various areas that the Gamo, Derashe and Konso people call their home. We will cross the Weto River and pass through a variety of habitats as well as an area with many hundreds of impressive termite mounds, some of them up to 8 meters high – an amazing sight to behold!

Lake Chamo. Just outside the town of Arba Minch and within Nechisar National Park lies the vast Lake Chamo. Here we will take a thoroughly enjoyable boat ride on the lake, whose shores teem with birds, including such typical African species as African Fish Eagle, Goliath Heron (the world's largest heron), Yellow-billed Stork and the incomparable Hamerkop - a species in its own family. We will visit what is known as the "crocodile market" to view a haul-out of dozens of Nile Crocodiles, including some of the largest specimens on the continent. Pods of Hippopotamus will snort at us and we will no doubt enjoy the highly localised Northern Masked Weaver and other beautiful birds. We may also encounter local



Omo Valley tribesman by Markus Lilje



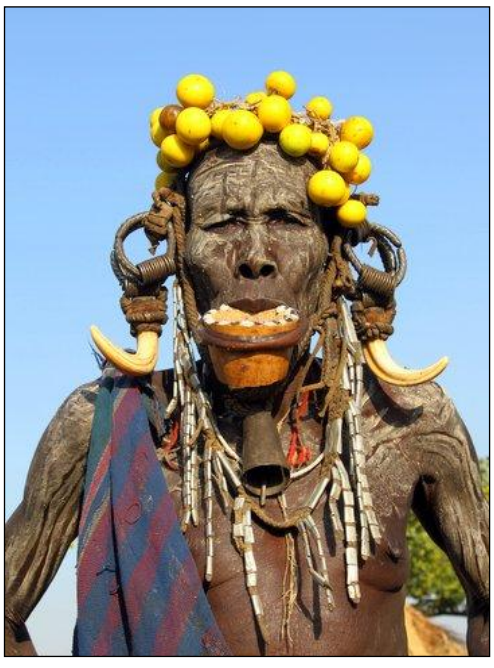
Hamer woman showing whipping scars by Jonathan Rossouw

fisherman here who fearlessly paddle these crocodile-infested waters on tiny rafts whilst fishing for Nile Perch and other freshwater fish!

Konso. Several hours of driving southward will take us to Konso, a small town famed for its amazing terraces and agriculture, and recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (declared in 2011). The Konso tribe migrated into this area thousands of years ago, and from these stone-age beginnings their remarkable culture developed in virtual isolation. They have led a largely independent existence, rarely involving themselves in trade with other communities, and have defended their lands fiercely. Their fortifications will be evident when we visit one of their walled villages. Here we will be guided through this experience by a community guide who will explain and demonstrate the fascinating lifestyle, beliefs and traditions of these industrious people. Communal living and co-operation, with the retention of traditional values, has afforded the Konso people a relatively prosperous existence in an otherwise arid and inhospitable landscape.

Turmi. Deep in the Lower Omo Valley and in the land of the Hamar tribe (also known as Hammer or Hamer). The Hamars, numbering nearly 50,000, are one of the largest ethnic groups living in the Lower Omo Valley (with an approximate population of 200,000 tribal people). Along the way, we will stop at any active market villages, which provide neighbouring tribes with the opportunity to trade and barter. Usually, three or four different tribes gather at these busy events and we will have the opportunity to stroll through these markets, admiring the stunning traditional dresses, adornments, hairstyles and scarification of these proud peoples, as well as the traditional wares that are being hawked.

The Hamer are a highly "superstitious" people, and to this day they consider twins to be babies born outside of wedlock, and children whose upper milk teeth develop before their lower teeth to be "evil" or "unclean". For this reason, such children are often discarded in the bush and simply left to die, as they would rather lose a single child than inflict any calamity upon their community. We may also stop at a village of the Erbore people, a nomadic tribe who are known for their intricate jewellery. Some of the noteworthy birds we may encounter on this leg of our journey include Yellow throated and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, White-cheeked Turaco, White-throated Bee-eater, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill and Abyssinian Scimitarbill.



Mursi Woman by Adam Riley

Karo. This morning we will depart very early for a long drive through the wild country to visit the Karo (or Kara) people. The drive takes us through vast areas of savanna where we may see wildlife including the endearing Guenther's Dik-dik, long-necked Gerenuk (a rather bizarre antelope) and fluffy Guereza Colobus monkeys. Finally, we will reach a high bend on the Omo River where a Murulle village is perched. These people exist on what is known as "flood retreat cultivation", tilling the fertile soils deposited by the annual flooding of the Omo River

The Karo are a warrior nation but are also one of the numerically smallest tribes in the Omo region. With the constant threat of attack from their neighbours, this group of people is under great pressure to merely survive. They are well known for their body painting, which is



Hamer Bull Jumping Ceremony by Markus Lilje

often done in white, yellow, black or red using various clay and stone types found in the area. Women scarify themselves to enhance their beauty by cutting into the skin of their stomach or breasts with a knife or blade and rubbing the wounds with ash to cause raised scars. These seemingly bizarre traditions date back millennia and are a part of life here. Hair is adorned in both men and women, with butter and clay applied to the woman's hair, and finely moulded clay headdresses for the men. The clay headdress of a man may indicate that he has killed an enemy warrior, while scars on a man's chest may mean the same! During the heat of the day, we will drive back to our lodge and have a rest after our early start.

Thereafter we might attend a cultural market of the Hamer, Karo and Dassanech tribes (if it coincides with our visit in this area!). Here we can see first-hand the elementary items upon which their cultures are so utterly dependent. These include beads, cowries and the various soils that they use for colouring their bodies.

As with all of the Omo tribes, the Hamar have a rich tradition of dress and culture. These people are a tribe of nomadic pastoralists who are famous for many of their customs. One of these is the "Jumping of the Bulls", which we hope to experience (this ceremony is not artificially performed for tourists so we cannot guarantee this experience, but if one is taking place within the region during our visit, we will make every effort to attend.) This amazing spectacle involves young men, who, when coming of age, must perform huge leaps and sprints across a row of bulls (typically between 10 and 30 animals) without losing their footing! During the build-up to the main events, women (usually relatives of the young man performing this rite of passage) offer themselves for whipping, a much-respected act within the Hamar community. Terrible scars that result from this whipping are seen as a sign of elevated status within the Hamar culture, and will benefit the women in terms of her standing within the tribe, as well as forming a bond of allegiance between these women and the young man, who will soon leave his family and find himself a wife.

Successful men will join the ranks of Maza, the men who have been successful in the Bull Jumping ceremony and are fully-fledged members of the Hamar tribe. Men wear ornaments in their hair, which may indicate the killing of an enemy from a different tribe or a dangerous animal. The killing of someone from a different tribe is greatly respected within this culture, and not seen in the negative light with which we view such actions. The Hamar women are immediately identifiable by their brick-red hair braids which hang down in a heavy fringe, beautiful beaded jewellery, copper bracelets tightly fixed around their arms and animal skin skirts designed to imitate gazelles and decorated with cowries. There are many other items of dress within the culture that



D'Arnaud's Barbet by Adam Riley



White-throated Bee-eater by David Hoddinott

have important meanings, such as neck wedges worn by women indicating marriage or white chalk body-paint worn by men in preparation for a ceremony. Cutting of the body and the application of ash to cause ornamental scarification is commonly performed by the Omo tribes and the Hamar are no exception. We will spend time visiting various Hamar homesteads where we will have the opportunity to learn about these proud people and observe their fascinating way of life.

During our explorations of the Turmi area we may find an array of wonderful birds including possibilities for Blue-naped Mousebird, Abyssinian Roller, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Taita Fiscal, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Singing Bush Lark, clockwork-like D'Arnaud's Barbet performing their comical tail-wagging display, uncommon Magpie and Shelley's Starlings, Eastern Plantain-eater, White-throated Bee-eater, Black-throated Barbet, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Bateleur, Purple (Rufous-crowned) Roller, Von Der Decken's Hornbill and even Black-headed Lapwing, among many others.

Keske River. The savanna and dry Keske riverbed immediately around our lodge offers excellent birding, and an optional pre-breakfast stroll in the vicinity may produce sightings of the lovely Orange-bellied Parrot, cryptic Bruce's Green Pigeons and raucous Abyssinian and Lilac-breasted Rollers. Starlings abound in number, sound and variety; with shimmering Greater and Lesser Blue-eared, Superb, Rüppell's and less commonly encountered Magpie and Shelley's, as well as their close relatives, Red-billed Oxpeckers, which enjoy rides on the Hamar's donkeys! Small seedeaters add to these typical African birds; brilliant Purple Grenadiers, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus and Green-winged Pytilias mix with firefinches and waxbills to form flocks of colourful confusion!

Jinka. En route to Jinka, we will pass through the Dimeka village, which lies a mere 20km north of Turmi. Here we will visit the Dimeka Market where hordes of Hamer and Bena villagers congregate from miles around to sell their various goods and produce. These two tribes are both agriculturalists and are very similar in appearance with strong cultural affinities. Before we reach Jinka, we will stop at an Ari village, where we can watch how Injera, the staple dish of most Ethiopians, gets made; also in this area, we will have the opportunity to watch the making of clay injera plates, the local alcoholic brew, as well the local blacksmith at work. The village of Jinka is a scenically perched town on an escarpment overlooking the vastness of Mago National Park.



Dusky Babbler by Adam Riley

Mago National Park. This park preserves 2,162 sq. km (835 sq. mi) of savanna and riverine forest on the west bank of the Mago River and adjoins Omo National Park on the east bank of the same river. This park used to teem with game; however, due to relentless poaching, game numbers have now greatly decreased. Nonetheless African Elephant, African Buffalo, Lion, African Wild Dog, Cheetah, Leopard (adult and cub were seen on our Jan 2012 tour) and many species of antelope and other wildlife still

exists. This park is also home to several primates including Olive Baboon and the rare and localised long bearded Da Brazza's Monkey. Birds too are prolific and we hope to find riverine woodland, rocky slope and open woodland specialities including the very tricky Dusky Babbler, as well as White-breasted Cuckooshrike, Eastern Plantain-eater, White-crested Helmetshrike, Black-headed Gonolek, Black-bellied Bustard, Tambourine Dove, Double-toothed Barbet, Greater Honeyguide, Nubian Woodpecker, Grey-headed and Orange-breasted Bushshrikes, Flappet Lark, Northern Brownbul, Grey-rumped and Mosque Swallows, Boran and Croaking Cisticolas, Whinchat, Beautiful Sunbird, Abyssinian and Crimson-rumped Waxbills, and Brown Babbler.

However, the main reason for venturing to this remote region is to visit the celebrated Mursi people, a tribe that is famed for the incredible lip plates that the women wear. At around the age of 15, girls have the choice of undergoing the extremely painful process of having their lower lip sliced and a small clay or wooden lip plate inserted. As the wound heals, this is replaced with larger and larger lip plates until they are able to stretch their lower lip over the back of their head and can wear lip plates of 5-inches or more in diameter! Several theories circulate as to the reason behind this bizarre practice, including that it was started to make the women less attractive to slave raiders or that it increases the bride-price, yet the actual reason now seems to be lost in the mists of time and this practice is perpetuated quite simply because it is their custom. The Mursi migrate seasonally for the purpose of growing crops and herding cattle.

Jinka to Arba Minch. Much of the day will be spent driving on what is ostensibly a travel day. Interesting birds that we may encounter along the way include Greater Kestrel, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Little Bee-eater, Boran, Singing and Tiny Cisticolas, Chestnut Weaver, Cut-throat and African Firefinch, among many others, before arriving in Arba Minch.

Arba Minch to Addis Ababa. This is another long, yet scenic drive from Arba Minch to to Addis Ababa via Hossana, potentially visiting the interesting Alaba and Wolaita villages en route. We also visit the Melka Kunture Archaeological site and Tiya Stellae, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Here over 30 carved Stellae are a reminder of an ancient Ethiopian culture – precise dates are yet to be agreed upon.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Birding is undemanding but some long travel days, low food diversity.
Birding Ease		One of the most enjoyable & prolific birding destinations in Africa. Many species are approachable & provide good visuals in open conditions.
Accommodation		Comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Mostly short walks on flat ground.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 Landcruiser vehicles. Some long drives mostly on sealed roads, prone to having many potholes & livestock. Dust is more prevalent in winter.
Photography		Good to excellent. No dedicated hides. Many species are approachable, habitat & lighting are often conducive. See notes on People Photography below.
Annoyances		Food diversity is limited in many areas.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 8;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & historical site entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

If you wish to photograph people, bear in mind that they will expect payment for their photographs to be taken. A general rule of thumb is 2 Birr per child, and 5 Birr per teenager or adult. It is, therefore, advisable to carry some small (and new!) banknotes, though fruit is also acceptable for children.

- Highland areas can get cold especially at night.
- There are several long, all day drives on this Ethiopia trip, but we will take regular rest stops and birding stops to break the long journeys. Although lengthy, these drives are scenic and full of interesting waypoints.
- Road conditions in Ethiopia are highly variable and unsealed, dirt roads can be quite bumpy and very dusty, something that is simply not avoidable. It is advisable to bring a handkerchief/buff that can be tied around your

face to cover your nose and mouth. Although an extreme case scenario, persons with back troubles should probably bring back-braces to ensure comfort on bumpy roads.

- Accommodation is comfortable.
- Some hotels & restaurants have unpleasant, dirty bathrooms.
- Mosquito nets are present at some lodges, but many are shredded or unusable. It is advisable to bring your own.
- The food in Ethiopia is quite basic and mostly consists of local cuisine only. We will be able to enjoy some western cuisine.
- We will have several 'bush breakfasts and lunches' on the side of the road whilst in good birding areas. This will occur mainly in the remote south and north of the country and will be prepared by our able drivers.
- Special dietary requirements (other than vegetarians) are for all intents and purposes impossible to cater for in Ethiopia.

Arrival and Departure Details

Day 1 of the tour is set aside as an arrival day, and you may arrive at any time. The tour will conclude at Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa in the late afternoon of day 8.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Addis Ababa Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa (IATA: ADD) is the main port of entry for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by most of the world's major airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.