



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Ethiopia

Omo Valley Extension

Birding & Tribal Cultures

31st January to 7th February 2023 (8 days)



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!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	Addis Ababa
Day 2	Addis Ababa, flight to Arba Minch
Day 3	Arba Minch, drive to Turmi
Day 4	Turmi area
Day 5	Turmi, drive to Jinka via Dimeka Market
Day 6	Jinka area
Day 7	Jinka, drive to Arba Minch
Day 8	Arba Minch, drive to Addis Ababa and depart

TOUR ROUTE MAP...



THE TOUR IN DETAIL...



Dorze hut by Adam Riley

Day 1: Addis Ababa. Today is essentially a travel/arrival day. For those doing the main Ethiopia tour, we will be arriving in Addis Ababa from Debre Berhan, while those only participating in this Omo Valley Extension will arrive at Addis Ababa's Bole International Airport.

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. The extensive gardens around our hotel are worth exploring for some interesting species that include Wattled Ibis, Tacazze Sunbird, Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher and even the difficult Abyssinian Woodpecker.

Day 2: Fly to Arba Minch and visit Dorze tribe.

Depending upon domestic flight schedules, our plan this morning will be to visit Ethiopia's Ethnological Museum situated on the main campus of the Addis Ababa University. This museum was founded by the Institute of Ethiopian Studies with the aim of preserving the country's historical and cultural heritage. It has complete collections that describe almost all the tribal groups in Ethiopia, and here we will enjoy an overview of the history, culture and traditions of Ethiopia's people.

Our first-hand exploration of the tribal cultures of the Omo Valley also starts today. The destination of our flight is the southern city of Arba Minch, meaning "Forty Springs", which 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



D'Arnaud's Barbet by Adam Riley





Lake Chamo fisherman
by Adam Riley

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.

We will overnight at a comfortable lodge overlooking Lake Abaya and sections of Nechisar National Park. 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 garden.

Day 3: Arba Minch to Turmi via Lake Chamo (boat ride) and Konso. This morning we will begin our journey into the Omo Valley to the little village of Turmi. 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 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.



Typical Omo Valley market scene by Jonathan Rossouw

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





White-throated Bee-eater by David Hoddinott

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

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



Omo Valley tribesman by Markus Lilje





Hamar woman showing whipping scars by Jonathan Rossouw

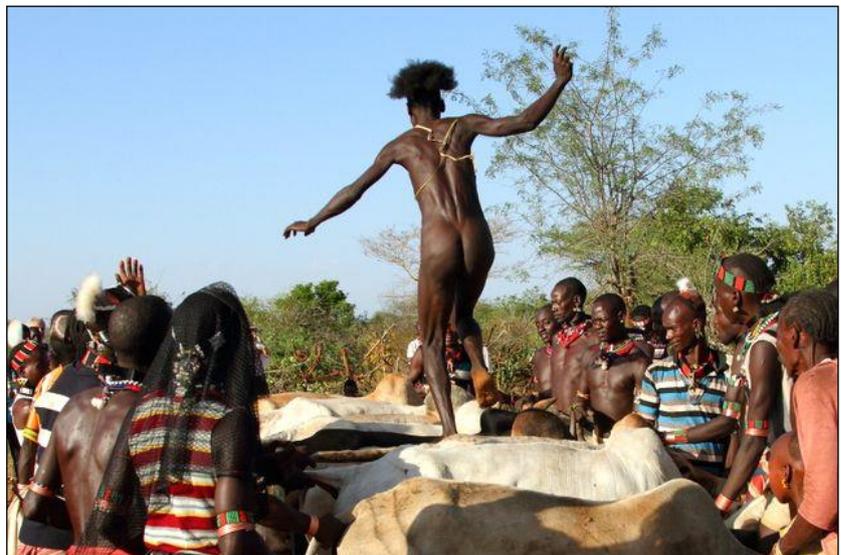
of traditional values, has afforded the Konso people a relatively prosperous existence in an otherwise arid and inhospitable landscape.

Our final destination will be our lodge for the next two nights near the market town of 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 Hamar 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.

Day 4: Turmi area, visits to Murulle and the Turmi Market. 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 often done in white, yellow, black or red using various clay and stone types found in the area. Women scarify themselves



Hamar Bull Jumping Ceremony by Markus Lilje





Black-headed Lapwing by Markus Lilje

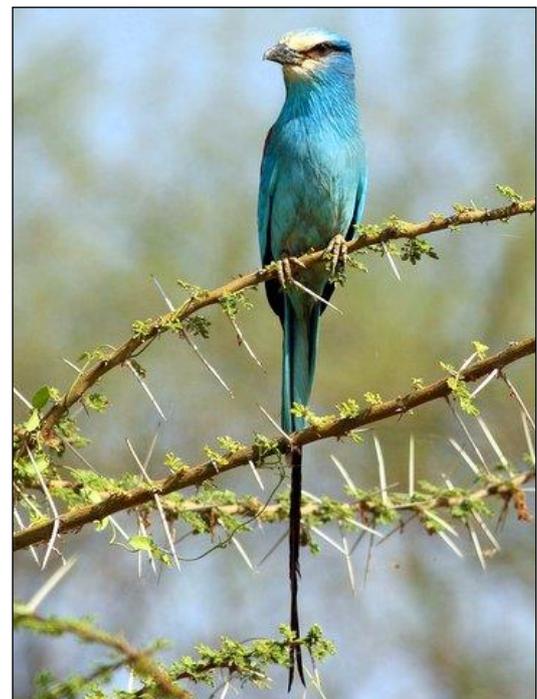
of the Hamar, Karo and Dassanech tribes (if it coincides with our visit in this area!). Here we can see first-hand the elementary items upon which their cultures are so utterly dependent. These include beads, cowries and the various soils that they use for colouring their bodies.

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 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

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



Abyssinian Roller by Markus Lilje





Mursi Woman by Adam Riley

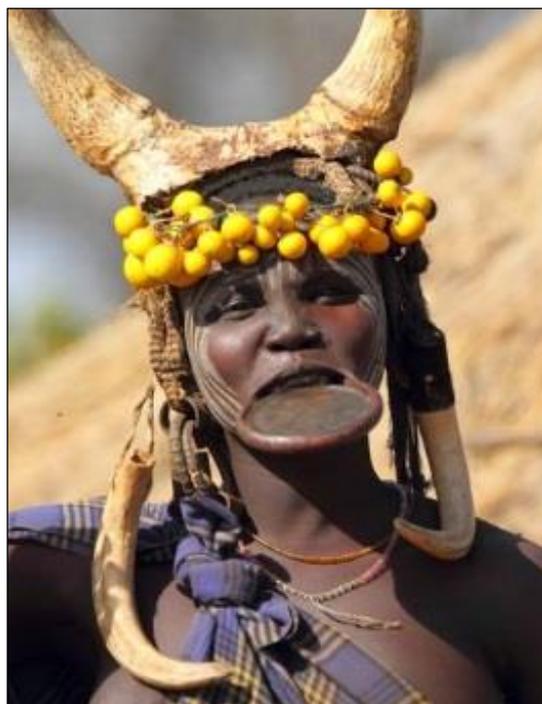
and the application of ash to cause ornamental scarification is commonly performed by the Omo tribes and the Hamar are no exception. We will spend time visiting various Hamar homesteads where we will have the opportunity to learn about these proud people and observe their fascinating way of life.

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.

Day 5: Turmi, drive to Jinka via Dimeka Market. 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!

We will do a little more sightseeing around the Turmi area before we depart the land of the Hamar, making our way to the village of 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 Hamar 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. We can expect to arrive in the village of Jinka, a scenically perched town on an escarpment overlooking the vastness of Mago National Park, in the mid to late afternoon.

Day 6: Mago National Park and the Mursi tribe. We will depart our lodge before dawn and drive through Mago National Park. This park preserves 2,162 sq. km (835 sq. mi) of savanna and riverine forest on the west



Mursi Woman by Markus Lilje





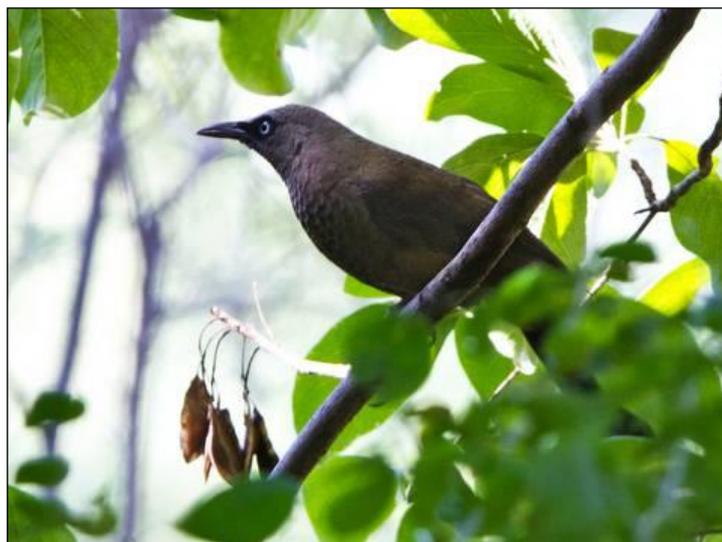
Traditional dancing ceremony by Markus Lilje

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. We will spend time visiting a Mursi village, before returning to our comfortable base in Jinka. In the late afternoon, we can visit the Cultural Museum of the Omo valley tribes which is situated in Jinka town, if time permits.

Day 7: Jinka, drive to Arba Minch.

After some final morning birding, we will depart Jinka and make the long drive back to Arba Minch. 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 at our accommodation in Arba Minch. If we did not have time to visit the Dorze on the first day in the area, we will visit them today.



Dusky Babbler by Adam Riley



Day 8: Arba Minch to Addis Ababa and depart. After breakfast this morning, we will commence another long yet scenic drive 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. From here we then drive to the capital's airport, from where we will depart from Ethiopia with some amazing and unusual memories from this unique and very special part of the world.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 8;
- Bottled mineral water each day;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- Fees for village and site visits;
- All ground transportation and;
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

This excludes:

- **ANY** flights (see above);
- Any drinks other than bottled drinking water;
- Visa fees;
- Special gratuities including tips/payment that is expected to photograph tribespeople; and
- 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 RBT 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.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold (US\$), and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.**

b) **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.**

c) **Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**

d) **Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

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



Please note:

- If you wish to photograph people, bear in mind that they expect payment for their photographs to be taken. A general rule of thumb is 1 Birr per child, and 2 Birr per teenager or adult. It is, therefore, advisable to carry some small (and new!) banknotes, though fruit is also acceptable for children.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:

You may arrive in Addis Ababa at any time on day 1 as this is an arrival day. The tour will conclude at Addis Ababa Bole International Airport around midday on 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.

FLIGHTS

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. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

