

Addis Ababa

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Since its establishment in the 19th century, Addis Ababa has always seemed like a magical portal and a gateway to another world. For the rural masses of Ethiopia it was, and is, a city whose streets are paved in gold. If you open enough doors the portal will lead you to another life; a richer and easier life where anything is possible.

If you're a foreign visitor then the portal of Addis Ababa stands on the verge of an ancient and mystical world. A world of swashbuckling adventure where great wisdom is hidden in far away mountain monasteries; a world where, ironically, life can seem both richer and easier than the one you've just left behind.

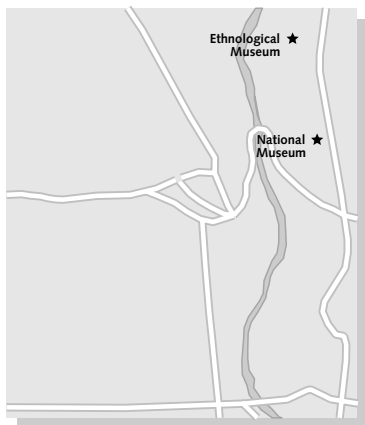
For both these groups Addis – Africa's fourth-largest city and its diplomatic capital – is a place to traverse as quickly as possible. Yet by doing so you skip the key that links these two worlds. Put simply, if you bypass the contrasts and contradictions of Addis – the shepherd from the countryside bringing his flock to a city market, the city priest with the business investments, the glossy nightclubs with the country girl prostitutes – then you risk failing to understand Ethiopia altogether.

And there are other incentives to lingering awhile in the capital. Food is probably most people's number-one priority. For tourists Addis might mean never facing a plate of injera again; for a villager from the backblocks of Ethiopia, Addis might mean never facing drought or worse again.

Whichever way you view it, Addis is an essential part of any Ethiopian story, and you'd be wise to linger in the portal for awhile.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Delve into the Aladdin's treasure trove that is the astounding **Ethnological Museum** (p90)
- Meet your long-lost Auntie Lucy, our pint-sized ancient ancestor, at the **National Museum** (p91)
- Tickle your tongue with your first injera and *wat* experience and satisfy your rumbling tummy in Ethiopia's best **restaurants** (p99)
- Throw back a *tej* or sip on a cool cocktail as you kick-start a night on the tiles Addis style (p103)



■ POPULATION: 2.8 MILLION

HISTORY

Unlike Addis Ababa's numerous predecessors as capitals, the locations of which were chosen according to the political, economic and strategic demands of the days' rulers, Addis Ababa was chosen for its beauty, hot springs and agreeable climate. Why the drastic (and pleasant) change of convention in the late 19th century? Perhaps it was because it was the first time a woman had any say in the matter! Yes, it was the actions of Taitu, the consort of Menelik II, which led to the birth of Addis Ababa.

Menelik's previous capital, Entoto, was in the mountains just north of present-day Addis Ababa and held strategic importance as it was easily defended. However, it was unattractive and sterile, leading Taitu to request a house be built for her in the beautiful foothills below in an area she named Addis Ababa (New Flower). In the following decade, after Menelik's power increased and his need for defence waned, he moved his court down to Taitu and Addis Ababa.

A lack of firewood for the rapidly growing population threatened the future of Addis Ababa in 1896 and Menelik even started construction of a new capital, Addis Alem (New World), 50km to the west. In the end, it was the suggestion of a foreigner (thought to be French) to introduce the rapidly growing eucalyptus tree that saved the new capital.

Since 1958 Addis Ababa has been the headquarters of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and, since 1963, the secretariat of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Many regard the city as 'Africa's diplomatic capital'.

ORIENTATION

Addis Ababa is massive and incoherent. It could be likened to a sprawling 250-sq-km injera adorned with sporadic piles of *tibs*, spaghetti, *mahabaroui* (a mixture of dishes, including half a roast chicken) and Sichuan noodles! To navigate the city, it's best to break it down into these distinct dishes/districts.

The mound of smoking *tibs*, representing the central (or meaty) part of the city, is at the end of Churchill Ave, the southern section of which is named Gambia St. Here you'll find many government and commercial buildings.

The steaming heap of spaghetti would symbolise Piazza, a district whose legacy and architecture is owed to the Italian occupation. Piazza is found atop the hill at Churchill Ave's north end and houses budget hotels, as well as many cafes and bars.

To the east of Piazza is Addis Ababa University, several museums and the landmark roundabouts of Arat Kilo and Siddist Kilo. South from there is Menelik II Ave, which boasts the National Palace, Africa Hall,

ADDIS ABABA IN...

Two Days

Start in Piazza with a steaming *macchiato* (espresso with a dash of milk) at **Tomoca** (p102), before visiting **St George Cathedral & Museum** (p93). Next, get ready to say hello to Auntie Lucy, your long-lost ancestor, in the **National Museum** (p91). From there, stroll north and absorb the magnitude of the **Yekatit 12 Monument** (p93).

After lunch explore the massive **Merkato** (p93) and, after checking you still have all your belongings, finish the day dining and drinking *tej* (honey wine) at a **traditional Ethiopian restaurant** (p99), while enjoying a show of song and dance.

Day two, and the morning kicks off with more culture when you marvel at the brilliant **Ethnological Museum** (p90). In the afternoon pay your respects to Haile Selassie at the Holy Trinity Cathedral (p92) and then pray to a different kind of God. The God of shopping! The strip of shops along Churchill Ave should do nicely; don't miss **Hope Enterprises** (see the boxed text, p89). Finish your day off at the wonderful **Serenade Restaurant** (p101).

Four Days

With four days, you could complete the two-day itinerary at a slower pace (more *macchiatos!*), squeezing in extra sights like the **Beta Maryam Mausoleum** (p94) and **Natural History Museum** (p94). Art-lovers should visit **Asni Gallery** (p94) and **Afewerk Tekle's home and studio** (p94), or head out of town to the extraordinary **Wusha Mikael Church** (p107).