

Ethiopia's Endemic Birds & Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Outbound flight
Day 2	Arrive Addis, Bishoftu Crater Lakes
Day 3 – 4	Arba Minch; boat trip Lake Chamo
Day 5	Lake Hawassa
Day 6	Goba/Dinshu
Day 7 – 8	Bale Mountains Lodge
Day 9 – 10	Fly Addis and inbound flight

Departs

February, March, November and December

Focus

Birds, mammals, landscapes, and culture

Grading

Grade B

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code ETH12)

Highlights

- Discover Ethiopia's unique wildlife, with mammals including Ethiopian Wolf, Giant Mole-rat, Mountain Nyala, Giant Forest Hog and Bale Monkey
- Extensive bird list, including many of Ethiopia's endemics
- Three nights in the spectacular Bale Mountains – an endemics hotspot
- Superlative and dramatic landscapes
- Fascinating Ethiopian culture
- Led by a local naturalist who has guided over 100 Naturetrek tours in Ethiopia!



Ethiopian Bee-eater, Ethiopian Wolf,
Naturetrek group in Bale Mountains National Park © H. Pinchin



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Introduction

Ethiopia offers an intoxicating blend of magnificent scenery, fascinating wildlife and an exceedingly rich culture and history. It was perhaps the earliest home of mankind, and later to Prester John – the legendary ruler of the east – and a dynasty of monarchs originating from the Queen of Sheba. It is a land of mixed religion, countless tribes and even more languages. Ethiopia is also one of the very few African countries to have escaped 19th-century colonialism and remains fiercely independent to this day. It is not only the country's long and rich history that makes Ethiopia such a special place, however, for its wildlife, too, is both exciting and unique. From the high moorlands of the Bale Mountains to the soda and freshwater lakes of the Great Rift Valley, a wonderfully diverse range of habitats is home to over 840 species of birds, around 50 of which are regional endemics or near-endemics, and 80 species of larger mammals, of which 10% are endemic.

Our tour begins with a one-night stay in the capital, Addis Ababa. After arriving, we will take a day trip to the beautiful crater lakes at Bishoftu, home to an abundance of birdlife including Ethiopian Bee-eater, Black Crowned Crane, Pink-backed Pelican, the exquisite Malachite Kingfisher, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Black-winged



Bale Mountains National Park

Lovebird, Ethiopian Boubou, Black-headed Oriole, African Paradise Flycatcher, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Abyssinian White-eye, Ethiopian Thrush, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, plus the ubiquitous Grivet Monkey. Next, we take a flight to the Great Rift Valley, staying at two comfortable lodges to explore Lake Chamo and Lake Hawassa, two of Ethiopia's most beautiful lakes, where we can enjoy some easy wildlife watching. We end the tour with three-nights in the Bale Mountains National Park, including a two-night stay at the beautiful Bale Mountain Lodge. Approaching the park, the scenery becomes increasingly spectacular, and we will hope to see the majestic and endemic Mountain Nyala, plus such avian endemics as Spot-breasted Plover, Abyssinian Catbird and Rouget's Rail. As we cross the Afro-alpine habitat of the Senetti Plateau we will search for the rare Ethiopian Wolf and its prey, the endearing Giant Mole-rat. Serval, the endemic Bale Monkey and Giant Forest Hog are also possible. The tour ends with a return flight to Addis Ababa, with time to explore the city, or for those who wish to see more of Ethiopia's remarkable culture, an optional extension can take you to Omo Valley, and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Konso.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart from London Heathrow this evening on an Ethiopian Airlines overnight flight direct to Addis Ababa. For those travelling from the north of the UK, a direct flight is usually available from Manchester instead.

Day 2

Arrive Addis Ababa, Bishoftu Crater Lakes

Upon arrival in Addis Ababa this morning, we'll head straight out of the city to avoid the usual traffic congestion.

Just 90 minutes from the airport lies a stunning chain of crater lakes, nestled within steep volcanic calderas. At the lakes, we'll enjoy breakfast at a lakeside restaurant, where we can begin spotting some of the region's special bird species. It's also the perfect opportunity to sample Ethiopia's renowned coffee, prepared in the traditional local style—it's truly delicious!

These lakes are home to an exciting variety of birdlife, including Abyssinian White-eye, Ethiopian Boubou, Black-winged Lovebird, Mocking Cliff-Chat, sunbirds, Ethiopian Bee-eater, Black Crowned Crane, and many more. The diversity of species we'll see on our first will be very rewarding.

After a most enjoyable day of birdwatching and exploration, we'll return to Addis Ababa for an overnight stay, ready to begin our journey south the following morning.

Day 3

Arba Minch

This morning we will take a flight to Arba Minch, where we will be based for the next two nights. Near to the airport there is some excellent habitat where we can enjoy such species as White-crested Helmetshrike, Grey-backed Fiscal, Rüppell's Starling, White-browed Robin-Chat, Pied Kingfisher, Olive Baboon and such special butterflies as Banded Scarlet Tip, Golden Arab Tip and Bushveld Purple Tip.

We'll next check in to the hotel and after lunch we will head to the nearby Nechisar National Park, a magical forest of towering trees, twisting lianas, and golden shafts of sunlight. Here, we can find such special species as Black-and-white Colobus, White-cheeked Turaco, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill and the elusive Narina Trogon before moving onwards to Forty Springs.



Naturetrek group in Nechisar National Park © Dan Lay, February 2025

The hotel has excellent grounds, and we can enjoy unforgettable outdoor breakfasts while watching wildlife, with the sunrise over the mountains and lakes as our backdrop.

Day 4

Forty Springs and boat trip on Lake Chamo

After breakfast we will head south to pick up the boat, which will take us out on an exciting excursion on Lake Chamo, for hippo- and crocodile- watching – the Nile Crocodiles here can reach up to 7m in length! Birds we can expect to see include African Fish Eagle, African Marsh Harrier, Great White Pelican, Goliath Heron and Spur-winged Plover.

Back on land we can search for Wire-tailed Swallow, several kingfishers, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, African Woolly-necked Stork, and several interesting dragonflies including both Southern and Northern Banded Groundling, Tigertail and Eastern Blacktail.



Goliath Heron and Nile Crocodile

We'll have lunch at the hotel before another excursion in the afternoon, which we will keep intentionally flexible to be able to pick up any important species we may have missed.

Day 5

Lake Hawassa

This morning we embark on a journey west, driving to another Rift Valley Lake, Hawassa. We will make short stops on the way.

Quite different from the alkaline lakes to the north, with its mountainous background, the lake is one of Ethiopia's most beautiful lakes and is home to a huge population of birds, and walking along the shores one can also see Hippo. Black-and-white Colobus, Grivet monkeys and Olive Baboons are also common in the area.

The star attractions here are the very localised African Spotted Creeper and the near-endemic Abyssinian Crimsonwing. In addition, the endemic and extraordinary-looking Thick-billed Raven is common here.

Other species we may well come across at Hawassa include Goliath Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Hadada Ibis, Knob-billed Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Long-crested Eagle, Grey Kestrel, Eurasian Moorhen, African Swamp-hen, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Blue-headed Coucal, Woodland, Grey-headed and Giant Kingfishers, Northern Carmine and Little Bee-eaters, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Double-toothed Barbet, Red-throated Wryneck, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike, White-browed



Thick-billed Raven © Helen Pinchin

Robin-Chat, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, African Thrush, Sedge and Lesser Swamp Warblers, Red-faced Crombec, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Grosbeak Weaver, Bronze Mannikin and Violet-backed Starling. If we are fortunate, we could see Western Banded Snake Eagle.

Day 6

Goba/Dinshu

This morning we drive further west, again making stops along the way.

We'll arrive in Gaysay grasslands, a habitat of the Bale Mountains National Park, in the afternoon. This is a fantastic time to see some of the area's special species which includes Mountain Nyala, Menelik's Bushbuck, Warthog and even Serval! The birdlife includes a very healthy population of Spot-breasted Lapwing, Rouget's Rail, Blue-winged Goose, Augur Buzzard, and many others.

In the evening we'll overnight at a comfortable hotel, either in Goba or Dinshu, positioning ourselves perfectly for the onwards drive up to the Senetti Plateau tomorrow morning.

Day 7

Bale Mountains

The Bale Mountains, lying between 2,895m feet and 4,440m, contain the largest tract of high moorland in Africa. Virtually uninhabited, they are entirely unspoilt and were set aside as a national park in order to protect the Mountain Nyala, which is found nowhere else in the world. They are green and spacious, decorated with rocky peaks and crags, numerous small lakes, extensive heathland, magnificent cloudforests and bogs, and possess an exceptional beauty and charm which can be likened to that of the Scottish Highlands.

Today we will focus our attention on the Senetti Plateau, beginning our journey by climbing up through the fine Hagenia forest, where we will look out for Chestnut-naped Spurfowl on the road, and Rufous-breasted

Sparrowhawk and Mountain Buzzard in the air. Then, we will ascend onto an open moorland plateau where little lakes, extensive grasslands and the weird spikes of primeval-looking Giant Lobelias and Red-hot Pokers create a wonderful Afro-alpine habitat. Wattled Crane and Moorland Francolin are two resident specialities, and amongst an interesting collection of upland birds we are likely to see 11 of Ethiopia's 29 endemics: Blue-winged Goose, Rouget's Rail, Spot-breasted Plover, White-collared Pigeon, Black-winged Lovebird, Abyssinian Woodpecker, Abyssinian Longclaw, Abyssinian Catbird, White-backed Black Tit, Ethiopian Siskin and Thick-billed Raven!

One of our main aims for today will be a sighting (or sightings) of the endangered Ethiopian Wolf and its prey: Grass Rats, Swamp Rats and the bizarre and endemic Giant Mole-rat. These rodents also attract many birds of prey, including wintering Spotted, Imperial and other *Aquila* eagles, as well as almost all of Ethiopia's vulture species. The beautiful Ethiopian Wolf is endemic to Ethiopia and this plateau is its stronghold; they



Ethiopian Wolf

roam the park in small groups and we will hope to spot one as we drive slowly over the plateau. We should also keep our eyes peeled for Klippspringer, the endemic Starck's Hare and Rock Hyrax which are all common in this area.

During the latter part of the day, we will continue across the plateau and descend down the magnificent Hareenna Escarpment. We will arrive later this afternoon at the beautiful Bale Mountain Lodge, deep in the Hareenna Forest, for a two-night stay. Bale Mountain Lodge is one of very

few boutique lodges found in Ethiopia, and each of the spacious, comfortable guest rooms has a wood-burning stove and stunning views towards the ridgeline of the plateau.

Day 8

Bale Mountains

We have a further full day today to explore the Bale Mountains at our leisure from our comfortable base at Bale Mountain Lodge. There are a number of marked trails that spill out from the vicinity of the lodge, giving us the opportunity to search for any of the special birds and mammals we might have missed yesterday. In addition, in the area around the lodge we have a good chance of finding the endemic Bale Monkey, and driving along the edge of the forest as dusk falls we may be lucky enough to spot a Serval or the rare Giant Forest Hog. Our group in February 2025 even had two separate Leopard sightings, including one hunting a Bale Monkey.

Tonight, we will enjoy a second night at Bale Mountain Lodge.

Day 9 – 10

Fly Addis; inbound flights

For those not opting for the cultural extension to Omo, after a final breakfast at the lake, mid-morning today we return to the airport to take the flight back to Addis Ababa. We'll have day rooms booked at a convenient hotel, giving us the opportunity to freshen up, re-pack and enjoy a farewell dinner before returning to the airport for our flight home, which typically departs in the early hours of the morning.

After an early lunch we can set off on our city tour, driving north up to Mount Entoto. In 1881 Emperor Menelik II made his permanent camp there, after remains of an old town (believed to have been the capital of 16th-century monarch Lebna Dengel) were discovered, which Menelik took as a divine and auspicious sign.

Addis Ababa, at between 2,300-2,500m, is the third highest capital in the world and Entoto is a few hundred metres higher – as we drive up the hill there is an appreciable drop in temperature and the air is filled with the scent of the Eucalyptus trees which line the road. From the top, there is a panoramic view of the capital and surrounding countryside. Entoto is an important watershed; to the north, water flows to the Blue Nile, and to the south, to the Awash River. Your guide will point out the important landmarks of the city.

Entoto was soon abandoned as a site for the capital – it was cold, difficult to provision and there was a shortage of wood. Empress Taytu was said to have led the move down to the plain of Finfine, and to have named the new capital Addis Ababa, or New Flower. However, two important structures remain within the old imperial compound on Entoto: the churches of Mariam and the Archangel Raguel. It was in the church of Mariam that Menelik was crowned Emperor of Ethiopia in 1889, and in the small museum in the compound there are various clothes, court and household implements and weapons dating from the period. The church of Raguel is unusual in that it is octagonal rather than round. There is a first-storey balustrade around which Menelik liked to stroll.

Leaving the churches we descend to Addis Ababa, stopping off at the National Archaeological Museum. Here we can see exhibits ranging from the 3.5-million-year-old bones of Lucy, through the Axumite and Gondarene periods to the monarchs Tewodros and Menelik.



St. Raguel Ethiopian Orthodox Church built in the 1880s by Emperor Menelik II.

Before returning to our hotel for dinner, we can stop off at some shops for souvenir and coffee shopping.

Optional Cultural Extension

Days 9 – 10

Konso

For those of us going on the extension, we will leave before the others, setting off for Konso, some 90km. or about an hour and a half's drive. Konso landscape is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, whilst the people of Konso are known for their intricately terraced hillsides, fine woven materials and the carved totems, waka, with which they decorate their graves.

We will visit a typical Konso village compound, a fortified, walled living area situated on a hill and hence easily defended, and the Konso museum. We can take an early lunch here before continuing on our journey to Turmi. Local restaurants offer the very healthy moringa, cooked as a kind of cabbage and served with hambasha, or local bread.



Konso

We pass the junction at Weita, home to the Tsemai people, who are related to the Konso, and in the Weita River we will see pelicans and other aquatic birds. The next major settlement is Erbore, whose people are also related to the Konso and Tsemai, before arriving in Turmi. The drive from Konso will take 3-4 hours.

Turmi is home to the Hamar, a fine-looking people; both men and women take great pride in their appearance, shaving and colouring their hair, oiling their bodies and decorating themselves with beads and bracelets worn around arms and legs. We will also check for Evangadi, or Hamer dancing ceremonies.

For the next three nights we overnight in simple en suite cottages on the bank of the Kaske River.

This following morning, we head towards the Omo River, to Omo Rate, crossing the river in a dug-out canoe, visiting the Dassenech villages on the other side.

Day 11

Turmi

Today is market day in Turmi, but the market does not start early, so we will have time to go back to the Omo River to visit the villages of the Karo people. Among the people living along the Omo, the Karo excel in face and body painting. After lunch, we will visit the market and nearby Hamer villages.

Day 12

Jinka

After breakfast, we set off towards Jinka, one of the most developed towns in the region. Any visit to the Omo Valley should take in a market, where the various ethnic groups meet for both trade and socialization. Today we will be able to see two vibrant markets: at Dimeke, just 30 minutes from Turmi, the Hamar and Bena coming from neighbouring areas, but we will not stop there and will push on to the more lively market at Alduba, attracting Hamar, Bena, Tsemai and Aari.

We will enjoy lunch in a local restaurant en route, arriving in Jinka mid-afternoon.

On arrival, we check in at Eco-omo Lodge, and after a break we can explore the town. There is an interesting museum in Jinka, which, along with various artefacts, has a lot of ethnographical information about the people of the Omo.

Days 13 – 14

Fly Addis; inbound flights

We need to get on the road early this morning, as we need to get back to Jinka by mid-morning to check in for our flight back to Addis Ababa at midday.

Leaving town, we drive to Mago National Park. Whilst the park has a variety of wildlife, the animals tend to stay away from the roads and sightings cannot be guaranteed, and therefore the main attraction in Mago are the Mursi people. We will drive to Shembel, the nearest Mursi village, about an hour from Jinka. The Mursi are known for their body scarification and (among the women) the wearing of lip plates. After our village visit, we return to Jinka to fly back to Addis Ababa, where we'll have day rooms booked at a convenient hotel.

After lunch we can set off on a short city tour, heading first to the National Archaeological Museum. Here we can see exhibits ranging from the 3.5-million-year-old bones of Lucy, through the Axumite and Gondarene periods to the monarchs Tewodros and Menelik.

After a fascinating day, we will return to our hotel, giving us the opportunity to freshen up, re-pack and enjoy a farewell dinner before returning to the airport for our flight home, which typically departs in the early hours of the morning.

Extra expenses

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday. Please note that we do not include the following in the cost of this holiday:

- Entry visa (currently US\$62) – this can be purchased online in advance
- All items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, souvenirs

- Tips

Tour grading

We have graded this tour B, with a combination of walking and wildlife-viewing from our vehicle. There are some long road journeys, though this tour is designed to allow a more leisurely pace than some of our other itineraries! We will often be at altitudes of over 2000m, and sometimes over 3,500m in the Bale Mountains, but the walking for the most part of the tour is not difficult, nor does it cover any great distance, and is always taken at a leisurely pace.

It is worth stressing that the tourist infrastructure in Ethiopia does not compare with the well-appointed lodges and camps of other East African destinations such as Kenya and Tanzania. Although this itinerary uses some of the best available accommodation in the country, it still isn't unusual to experience problems with electricity and plumbing, or lack of maintenance. You should come prepared for en suite accommodation and a few problems like leaky plumbing, power cuts, lack of hot water, lights not working, slow service in the restaurant, etc., and hope to be pleasantly surprised! Many (though not all!) roads across the country are in excellent condition.

Tour focus

This tour focuses on the best of Ethiopia's wildlife, including the birds and mammals, plus a little wider natural history. We will, of course, look at and enjoy anything that we are lucky enough to encounter. As birds are the most widespread member of the Ethiopian fauna we will spend plenty of time birdwatching, as well as dedicating time and energy to searching for as many of Ethiopia's special mammals as possible. It should just be noted that large mammals are not abundant in Ethiopia, and those looking for a mammal-filled holiday to compare with the plains and savannahs of Southern and East Africa should look elsewhere in our brochure for their ideal holiday.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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