

# st. Matthew's Children's Fund Ethiopia

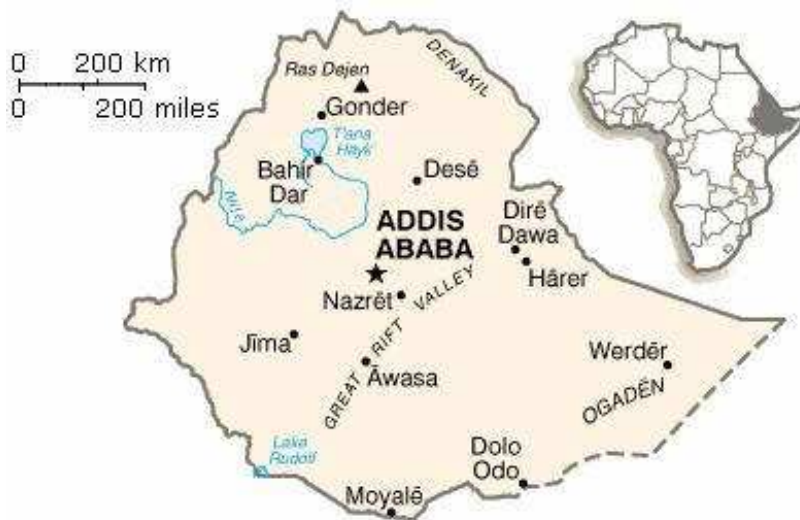
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The common perception of Ethiopia is a country of vast deserts constantly plagued by famines. Although there is some truth to this view it doesn't do justice to a country rich in history and unlike any other country in Africa.

## Geography

The **Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia** is located in the north-eastern part of Africa commonly known as the Horn of Africa. Neighbouring countries include Djibouti and Somalia in the east, Kenya in the south, Sudan in the west and south-west and Eritrea in the north and north-east. The country covers 1,112,000 square kilometres (472,000 sq. miles) making it roughly five times the size of the UK.



Although Ethiopia mainly lies only 15 degrees north of the equator, the central highlands where most Ethiopian people live, generally enjoy a temperate and pleasant climate owing to the moderating influence of high altitude. In the highlands above 2,000 metres the temperature rarely exceeds 25°C in most of the country. In the lower lying areas (Awash, Omo and Mago parks), which experience sub-tropical and tropical climates, it can get considerably hotter. The temperature generally drops quite rapidly towards sunset.

Ethiopia is a country of outstanding beauty. In the north there are majestic mountain ranges where the historic remains of Axum nestle, the 17<sup>th</sup> century castles in Gonder and the 13 rock hewn churches of Lalibela (all UNESCO sites of historical importance). To the east there is Afar and the Danakil depression, the hottest place on earth. Running from the east to the west is the majestic rift valley and a series of beautiful lakes. In the south there are rolling savannahs and incredible tribes people who have retained their unique culture and nomadic lifestyle.

There are two seasons in Ethiopia: in most of the country the dry season prevails from October until May with short rains in March; the wet season runs from June until the end of September. In the Omo and Mago parks however, in Southern Ethiopia, the seasons are different with the main rains from March to June, and shorter rains in November.

## Culture



Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa and one of the oldest in the world. What are believed to be the most ancient remains of a human ancestor ever found, some five million years old, were discovered in the Awash Valley in Ethiopia. This beats the discovery of "Lucy", a 3.2 million year old skeleton, who was unearthed in the same area in 1974.

You may have heard that Ethiopia boasts of thirteen months of sunshine! The Ethiopian year consists of thirteen months; twelve of 30 days each and an additional month of five or six days, depending on whether it is a leap year. The first month of the Ethiopian year is September (or Meskerem) and New Year's Day takes place on what is the 11th September in the Western calendar.

Ethiopia has many stories of spiritual wonder and fascination. The Greek historian Herodotus, of the fifth century BC, describes ancient Ethiopia in his writings, while the Bible's Old Testament records the Queen of Sheba's visit to Jerusalem where "she proved Solomon with hard questions". Matters clearly went further than that because legend asserts that King Menelik - the founder of the Ethiopian Empire - was the son of the Queen and Solomon. Following the sacking of Jerusalem by the Romans, Menelik is supposed to have taken the Ark of the Covenant from the temple to the safety of Axum in the highlands of Ethiopia. Most Christian Ethiopians believe this is where the Ark remains to this day.

Ethiopia was one of the first Christian countries in the world. King Ezana converted in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, it has had a strong Christian tradition ever since. Ethiopians are orthodox Christians.

In 1582 the Christian world adopted the revised Gregorian calendar, but Ethiopia stayed with the Julian calendar. As a result, Ethiopia is either seven or eight years behind the Gregorian calendar, depending on whether the date is before or after 1st January. So, the 1st January 2010 in the UK will be 23rd Tahisas 2002 in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is in the +3 hrs GMT time zone. In addition to this Ethiopia also has its own time. This is based on the idea that the Ethiopian day is composed of roughly 12 hours of daylight, starting at 6.00am and roughly 12 hours of darkness, starting at 6.00pm. So, 7.00am is 1.00am Ethiopian time.

The local currency is the Ethiopia Birr, made up of 100 cents.

Ethiopia is the only country in Africa never to have been colonised. It suffered the Italians for four years from 1938 – 1944 but repelled them, with a little help from Britain. Despite its proud history, Ethiopia remains a very poor country, with very low levels of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living according to the UN Human development index. Child welfare is also a concern with the HIV/AIDS robbing many children of their parents.

## **Food and Drink**

Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee. Its origins lie in the region of Kaffa in south west of the country hence the rest of the world calling it coffee, café or kafe. True to Ethiopian idiosyncrasy the Ethiopian name for coffee is Buna.

An intricate traditional coffee ceremony is performed in many households. The time devoted to the ceremony indicates how important the drink is to Ethiopians.

At the start of the ceremony a table is scattered with freshly-cut grass to give the fresh and fragrant scent of outdoors. A female attendant or the lady of the household sits on a low stool beside a charcoal brazier. She first lights a stick of incense to provide the right atmosphere. Guests are given a snack such as popcorn whilst the ceremony is proceeding. The green coffee beans are roasted in a pan and then ground with a pestle and mortar. Then the pot for boiling the coffee is produced, a round clay pot with a plump base and a long narrow neck and spout. After the water has been heated the coffee is added and brought to the boil. The coffee is poured into small, traditional cups and sugar is added. The coffee has a full-bodied flavour but it is not itself bitter.

The national dish for most Ethiopians is injera, a flat, sour dough pancake made from a special grain called teff, which is served with either meat or vegetable sauces. Ethiopians eat these injera by tearing off a bit and using it to pick up pieces of meat or mop up the sauce. Berbere, the blend of spices which gives Ethiopian food its characteristic taste, can be hot for the uninitiated, although vindaloo or hot curry fans will not have any problem.

When eating national food Ethiopians eat together, off one large circular plate. Visitors and guests will have choice morsels and pieces of meat placed in front of them, and when eating doro wot, chicken stew, the pieces of meat are eaten last, after filling up on injera and sauce. You eat with your right hand, and should always wash your hands before eating.

Orthodox Christians eat "fasting food", during Lent and other fasting periods, which is free of meat and animal products.