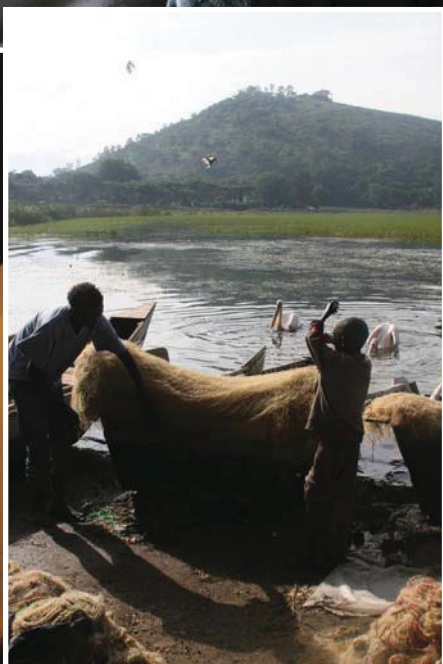
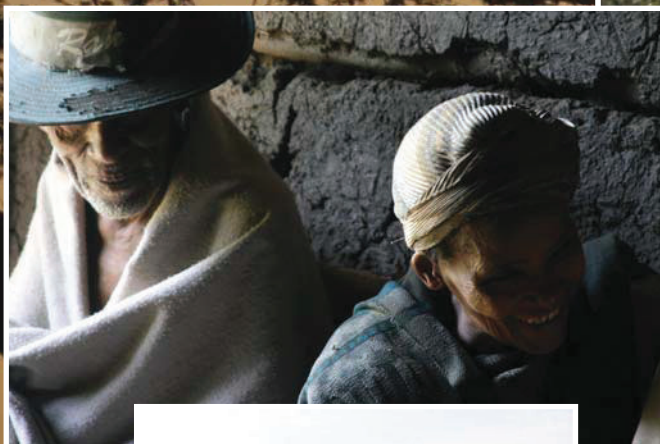


Exploring Ethiopia

What to know before you go

By Emily Greising, MSW



As families prepare for this trip of a lifetime, much of the pre-travel time will be taken up with to-do lists and last minute preparations. In an attempt to ease some of the to-do lists, we wanted to offer up some insight on packing, preparing and traveling to Ethiopia.

Preparations:

Packing for this trip can be easy. Addis Ababa is located at 8,000 feet elevation and thus can have some cool nights and mornings. Layers are ideal for this kind of cool weather, with warm, sometimes hot, days. If families are traveling during the months of July through September, the rainy season, be sure to bring extra layers, a raincoat and some mud boots. The weather during this time of year can have a damp chill to the air. Culturally it is not appropriate to wear revealing clothing. For women, skirts should reach below the knee and tank-tops and sleeveless blouses would not be considered appropriate. Sunglasses and hats are needed, but be sure to remove them when meeting honored guests.

Other than clothing, there are a few “extras” that are good to have on hand. One important item is a camera. When packing your camera, make sure to pack extra batteries or a battery charger. Be sure to have an electrical adapter with you so you can use the charger.

Many families also find it helpful to travel with a video camera so they can record their visit

When traveling around, it is polite to ask before taking someone’s photo. Occasionally, you will find someone who does not want to have their picture taken and it is important to respect this request.

The food in Ethiopia is amazing, but it can be spicy, so it is not for everyone. Before traveling to Ethiopia, try to find a local Ethiopian res-

Many families also find it helpful to travel with a video camera so they can record their visit with their child, care center staff, in-country travel or other sites . . . You definitely want to have something to share with your child as he or she grows and learns more about his or her birth country.

with their child, care center staff, in-country travel or other sites. Ethiopia is a country of breathtaking beauty in the scenery and people. You definitely want to have something to share with your child as he or she grows and learns more about his or her birth country.

taurant in your area to give the food a try. The last thing you would want is to get sick while traveling and meeting your child.

For Ethiopians, eating is a time for community. As you gather around the masob,



His family awaits

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Gift of Adoption Fund is a national 501(c)3 charitable organization that inspires adoption by providing grants to qualified parents – giving children who need families a permanent home and a chance to thrive.





the traditional Ethiopian table, you will not only share the food on the communal plate, but the time and conversation of the evening. For those who do not have a fondness for Ethiopian food, you can find comfort in the strong Italian influence in the Ethiopian diet. Many restaurants will have a Western menu consisting of pasta dishes and other Westernized foods. For travelers who are uncertain, you may want to pack some snacks in your suitcase, just to make sure you have something to eat.

Unlike most countries in Africa, Ethiopia was never colonized by a Western power, something of which Ethiopians are proud. Because Ethiopia was never colonized, there is not one prominent Western language that is used. As Addis Ababa grows and becomes more cosmopolitan, the English language is more present. However, Amharic is still the language of business and education in Ethiopia and is often the common denominator between the different regions. In total, Ethiopians have a

collection of more than 80 languages, spoken by numerous groups in the different regions. An Amharic phrasebook can help with the language barrier. There are a few Amharic phrasebooks that can be found in America, but if you cannot find one before traveling, there are some great phrasebooks and children's book that you can buy in country.

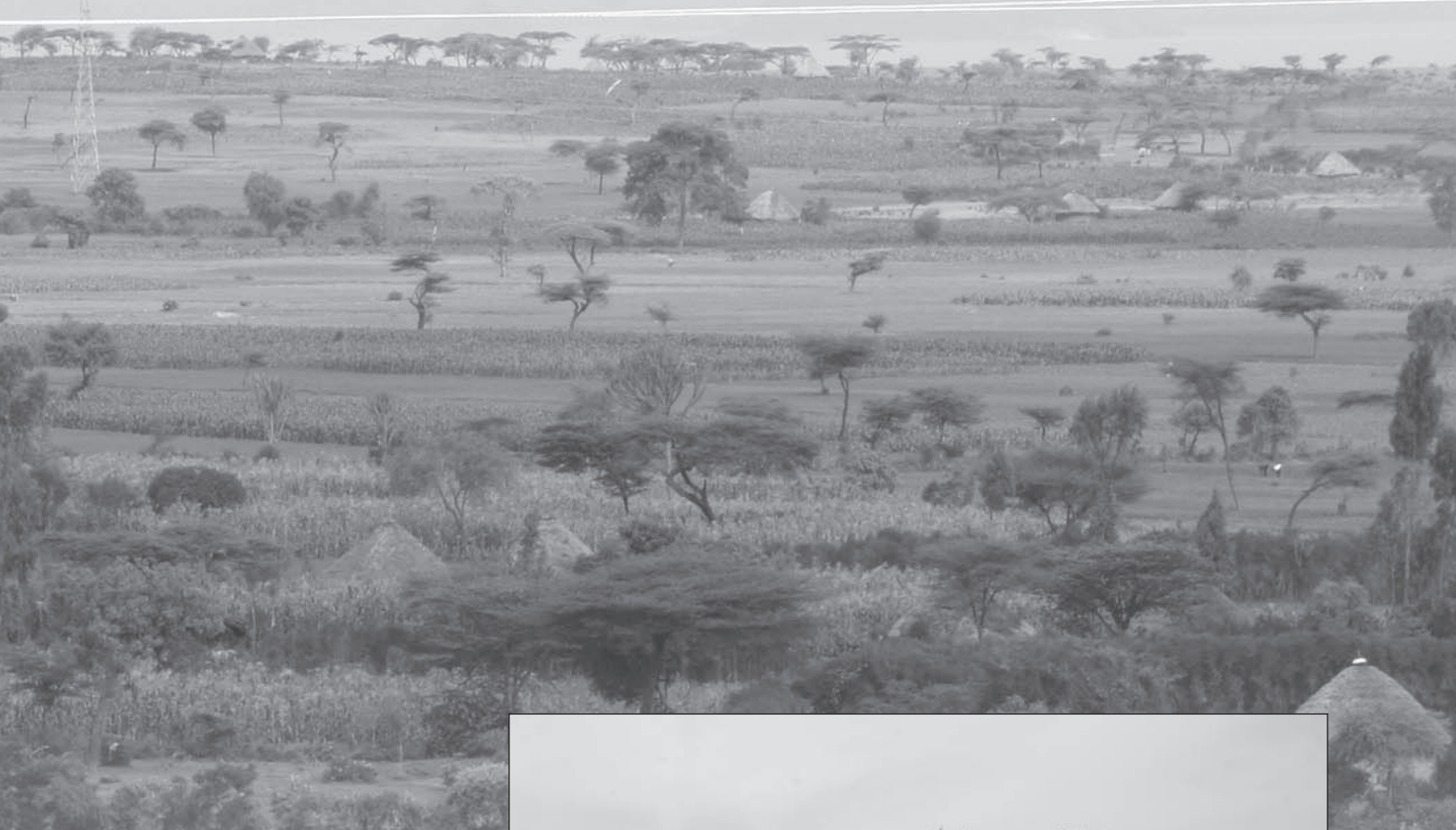
In Ethiopia:

As I mentioned before, Ethiopia is a country that is rich in beauty and history. If you have a chance, there are a number of museums in Addis Ababa that offer a wonderful insight in the history and culture of the different regions of the country. For families who have a few extra days and are able to travel to see the country, it is highly recommended. There is so much history residing in the country.

When I was there, I was excited to meet Lucy (Dinkensh), one of the oldest skeletons. To my great surprise, I had traveled all the way to Ethiopia, hoping to see Lucy and she was in

New York. Even if you do not get to meet the real Lucy, the museums are still a great stop and maybe you will get to meet her stand-in.

As one will quickly learn, coffee is a prominent part of Ethiopian culture, as the story of coffee can be traced back to a goat herder in Ethiopia. While there are many variations of the tale of discovery, the pride and significance of coffee stretches across the nation. When in Ethiopia many, if not all, families will have the opportunity to experience a traditional coffee ceremony. As an honor to guests and celebrations, family and community members gather around for the roasting of the beans. The ceremony itself consists of the roasting, brewing, sharing and drinking of the coffee. There are a few different snacks that may be served during the ceremony, such as bread and popcorn, which is always a hit with the kids. Even if you do not drink coffee, you should accept the offer of coffee, make sure to take in the aroma from the roasting beans and show your appreciation for the experience.



One of the subtle, yet important facts to know when traveling to Ethiopia is that their calendar is approximately eight years behind the Roman Western calendar. Ethiopians operate using the Julian calendar. With this calendar, there are 13 months and in Ethiopia, they pride themselves on “13 months of sunshine.”

Did you also know that Ethiopians have a different way of telling time? While in Ethiopia, even if you have set your watch to local time, you may not understand what time people are telling you. For example, in America we would say, “I am going to eat lunch at noon.” In Ethiopia, you would eat lunch at 6 p.m. This is something that takes some time to get used to, so if you have an appointment you need to meet, please make sure you know which time you are being told.

Also, keep in mind, Ethiopia is relaxed when it comes to time. People will say to you, “I’ll come in the morning, afternoon or evening” and may not give a specific time. If a specific



time is given, for example, 8 a.m., which could mean anytime between 7:30 a.m. to noon. It is important to be flexible when it comes to time and not to take it personally if someone is late. A good suggestion is to have a book on hand to read while waiting.

When traveling to Ethiopia, many differences will be apparent, but it is often the subtle differences that are the most important. In Ethiopia, the sense of community stretches far beyond what I know in America. Everyone I encountered in Ethiopia was so welcoming and kind, I am continually humbled in their presence.

While in Ethiopia, you will have the opportunity to interact with those who have been caring for your child and those who are important to your child’s story. As you spend time in Ethiopia and begin your life together with your child, you will quickly learn that everyone is family, a part of Ethiopia that sticks with me every day.

Emily Greising, MSW, is one of the Ethiopia program coordinators at Wide Horizons for Children. She has traveled extensively and always looks forward to a chance to go back to Ethiopia. For more information, visit www.whfc.org.