ETHIOPIAN

Festivals





ETHIOPIAN FESTIVALS

A Showcase of Diversity

Ethiopia, the Land of Origins, is rightly described as a melting pot of cultures thanks to the 80-plus ethnic groups that call it home. Each of these ethnic groups has its own language and traditions, contributing to the country's rich cultural diversity.

This brochure offers a glimpse into some of the festivals Ethiopia celebrates annually, showcasing the diverse traditions of its people.



FESTIVALS BY MONTH

SEPTEMBER

ENKUTATASH

Ethiopian New Year

Ethiopia ushers in its New Year on September 11, or on September 12 during a leap year. New Year's Day is known as "Enkutatash," which literally means "Gift of Jewels." Enkutatash marks the end of the rainy season and the arrival of spring, when the countryside is adorned with Ethiopia's native daisy, known as Adey Abeba or Meskel Flower.

Children celebrate the day by singing traditional New Year songs and offering flowers and drawings to neighbours, adding to the festive spirit of the season. While Ethiopia officially marks its New Year on September 11, different ethnic groups have their own indigenous New Year celebrations, most of which fall in September or October.



GIFAATAA

New Year Festival of Wolaita People

Gifaataa is a New Year festival celebrated by the people of Wolaita between mid-September and early October. This UNESCO-inscribed festival is an occasion for families to return home and celebrate together.

On the main day of the festival, families gather to share traditional holiday foods and drinks, including raw meat and local beer. In the evenings, people gather around bonfires for rituals, singing and dancing. The festival lasts for ten days and culminates in a large community celebration known as 'goolo-igetta'.

Wolaita Sodo





MESKEL

Finding of the True Cross

Meskel is one of Ethiopia's vibrant religious and cultural celebrations, commemorating the finding of the True Cross. Inscribed by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Meskel begins on the eve with the torching of the Demera, a towering conical structure made of wood and decorated with flowers.

The celebration at Meskel Square, in the heart of Addis Ababa, is a must-see, featuring colourful processions of Orthodox Church clergy, spiritual songs and performances reenacting the discovery of the Cross. The cultural face of the celebration across Ethiopia is equally remarkable. Meskel festivities among the Guraghe, Gamo, Wolaita, Hadiya and Kembata people are among those worth experiencing.

Meskel Square in Addis and across Ethiopia





SEPTEMBER

Meskel Be Guraghe

New Year and Meskel in Different Cultures

Different communities across Ethiopia, particularly in the Central Ethiopia, South West Ethiopia and South Ethiopia regions, celebrate their indigenous New Year festivals and Meskel with their unique traditions.

Masalaa, the traditional New Year celebration of the Kambata people; Mashiqaroo, Kaffa people's traditional New Year festivity; Meskel Be Guraghe, the multi-day Meskel celebration of the Guraghe people; Yahoodee, the traditional New Year festival of the Hadiya people; and Yo Maskala, Gamo people's traditional Meskel festivity are among the festivities that make September a vibrant month of cultural celebration in Ethiopia.



Masalaa



Mashiqaroo



Yahoodee



Yo Maskala

OCTOBER



IRREECHA

Thanksgiving Festival of Oromo People

Irreecha is Oromo people's thanksgiving festival celebrated at the beginning of spring, following the end of the rainy season. It is a time to express gratitude to Waaqa (God) for the blessings and mercies of the past year. The main celebrations take place in Addis Ababa (Hora Finfinne), followed a day later by celebrations in Bishoftu (Hora Harsadi).

During the festivities, participants immerse freshly cut grass and flowers in the lakes or rivers where the ceremonies take place and sprinkle the water over themselves as part of the ritual. Irreecha is also a joyful occasion for friends, families and relatives to come together and celebrate.

Addis Ababa and Bishoftu



NOVEMBER

GREAT ETHIOPIAN RUN 10KM RACE

Africa's Biggest Road Race

The Great Ethiopian Run 10-kilometer race is Africa's largest road race, held annually in November in Addis Ababa. Launched by Ethiopian athletics legend Haile Gebrselassie, the race attracts tens of thousands of participants from across Ethiopia and around the world.

More than a sporting competition, the Great Ethiopian Run is a vibrant street festival filled with music, dancing and cheering crowds, making it a unique running experience in Ethiopia, a land of legendary runners.

- *Addis Ababa*
- *Keep an eye out for the opening of registration each year on the Great Ethiopian Run website, ethiopianrun.org.*





GENNA

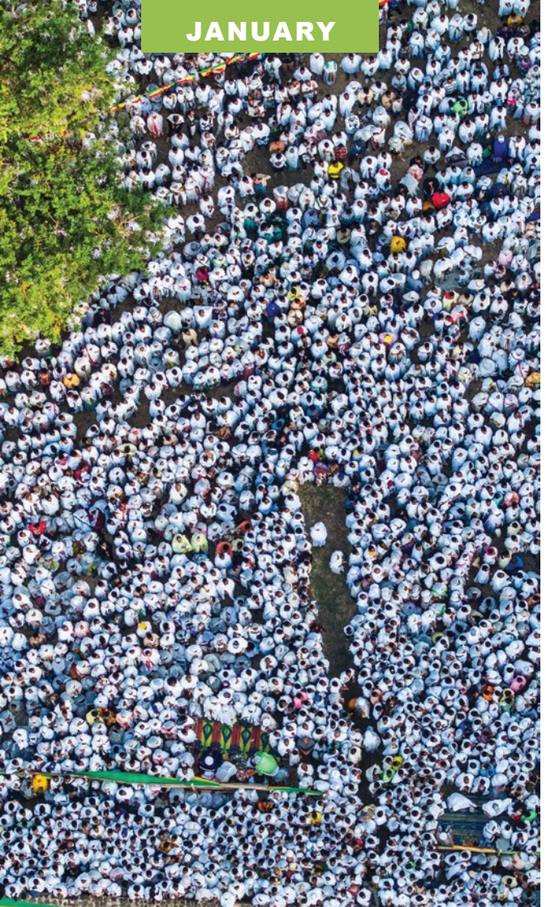
Ethiopian Christmas

Genna, the Ethiopian Christmas, is celebrated on January 7 or, in a leap year, on January 8. Also known as Leddet, the holiday follows a fasting period lasting more than 40 days. While Genna is celebrated colourfully across the country, it is observed with unique vibrancy in Lalibela, attracting pilgrims from across Ethiopia.

The celebration includes an all-night service on the eve, followed by prayers and songs by the clergy on Christmas Day. In Lalibela, priests sing along the cliffs and in the courtyard of Bete Mariam, one of the town's 11 rock-hewn churches, symbolizing the angels and shepherds who witnessed the birth of Jesus.

Bete Mariam Church, Lalibela





TIMKET

Ethiopian Epiphany

Timket, the Ethiopian Epiphany, is a dazzling festival unlike any other. Celebrated across Ethiopia and inscribed by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage, the festival commemorates the baptism of Jesus Christ. On the eve, which is known as Ketera, people escort their parish Tabots (replicas of the Ark of the Covenant) to rivers or pools accompanied by chanting and prayer.

The night is filled with spiritual ceremonies, leading to the grand celebration on January 19, or January 20 during a leap year. In the morning, crowds gather to be sprinkled with holy water before the Tabots are returned to their churches in a colourful and joyous procession.

Jan Meda (Addis Ababa), Gondar, Bahir Dar, Aksum, Batu as well as Timket pools across Ethiopia





AGEW HORSE RIDING FESTIVAL

A Celebration of Horsemanship

The Agew Horse Riding Festival is a spectacular equestrian celebration held annually on the 31st of January in Injibara town, Amhara region. The festival features thousands of horsemen and women with their brightly decorated horses, offering visitors an immersive experience of the local culture.

It is a festive occasion where horsemen and women gallop through the fields, showcasing their horsemanship and riding skills. The festival also features vibrant local attire, traditional music and dances, creating a colourful celebration of the Agew culture.

Injibara town, Amhara



JANUARY/FEBRUARY

DARAARO

New Year Festival of Gedeo People

Daraaro is the traditional New Year celebration of the Gedeo people. In the local language, Daraaro literally means flower, indicating that the festivity is dearly cherished like a flower among the Gedeo people. The festival heralds a new season and beginnings among the people who celebrate it offering gratitude to God.

As the holiday falls in the harvest season, people offer gifts to local elders from their produce as part of the holiday ritual.

Gedeo, South Ethiopia





AUGUST

BUHE

Commemoration of the Transfiguration

Buhe is a spiritual and cultural holiday commemorating the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor. Also known as Debre Tabor, it is a festival dearly cherished by children, who roam through neighbourhoods singing the traditional "Hoya Hoye" songs.

Boys also crack braided whips, locally known as "Jiraf", as part of the celebration. As night falls, bonfires are lit, and people gather around them to celebrate the holiday with singing and dancing while enjoying traditional foods and drinks.

Debre Tabor town (Amhara) and other parts of Ethiopia

AUGUST





ASHENDA

(Ashendye/Shadey/Solel/ Aynewari)

Ashenda, also known by local names mentioned above, is a vibrant festival celebrated by young girls in northern Ethiopia. It follows a 15-day fasting period known as Filseta, observed by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

The festival is cherished by girls in the Tigray and Amhara regions, offering them a special occasion to celebrate and express themselves. The girls gather in groups to sing and dance through their neighbourhoods and beyond.

Amhara and Tigray regions

GOOBEE & SHINOYYEE

Spring Season Celebrations of Oromo Youth

Goobee and Shinoyyee are traditional cultural festivals celebrated by Oromo youth, marking the transition from the rainy season to spring.

Goobee is performed by young Oromo men, who move from door to door in their neighbourhoods or gather in public squares to chant traditional songs, while Shinoyyee is performed by groups of girls dressed in vibrant traditional attire.

Oromia region







FESTIVALS WITH VARYING MONTHS

SHUWALID

The Cultural Wonder of Harar

Shuwalid, also spelled “Shawwal Eid”, is an annual three-day festival celebrated in Harar at the end of six days of fasting to make up for missed days during Ramadan. The celebration brings together Hararis from all corners of the city, who gather to celebrate with music and dancing, dressed in colourful traditional costumes.

Inscribed by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, Shuwalid is a lively festivity that offers visitors an opportunity to experience the rich cultural traditions of the people of Harar.

Harar city





FICHEE CHAMBALAALLA

New Year Festival of Sidama

Fichee Chambalaalla is a colourful New Year festival celebrated by the Sidama people and inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Marking a time of renewal and new beginnings, the festival brings communities together through traditional songs, dances and colourful attire.

Buurisame, a traditional dish prepared from false banana, milk and butter, is among the delicacies enjoyed during the celebration. The date of Fichee Chambalaalla is determined each year by local astrologers and announced to the community.

Sidama region

UKULI BULA

Bull Jumping Festival of Hamer & Banna People

Ukuli Bula, the traditional bull-jumping ceremony of the Hamer and Banna people, marks a young man's transition into adulthood. As part of the ceremony, the man must run across the backs of a line of 15 to 30 bulls without falling.

He jumps from one bull to the next and must cross the entire line successfully. He then turns around and repeats the crossing three more times. If he falls, he must wait until the following year for another opportunity; but if he succeeds, he earns the right to marry and own cattle.

Turmi, Dimeka & Key Afer towns, South Ethiopia


























Ethiopia
LAND OF ORIGINS

IMPORTANT CONTACTS

TOUR OPERATORS

Tour Operator Associations

etoa.travel
stoa-ethiopia.org

Ethiopian Holidays

ethiopianholidays.com

+251 116179900

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

moh.gov.et

8335

POLICE

federalpolice.gov.et

991

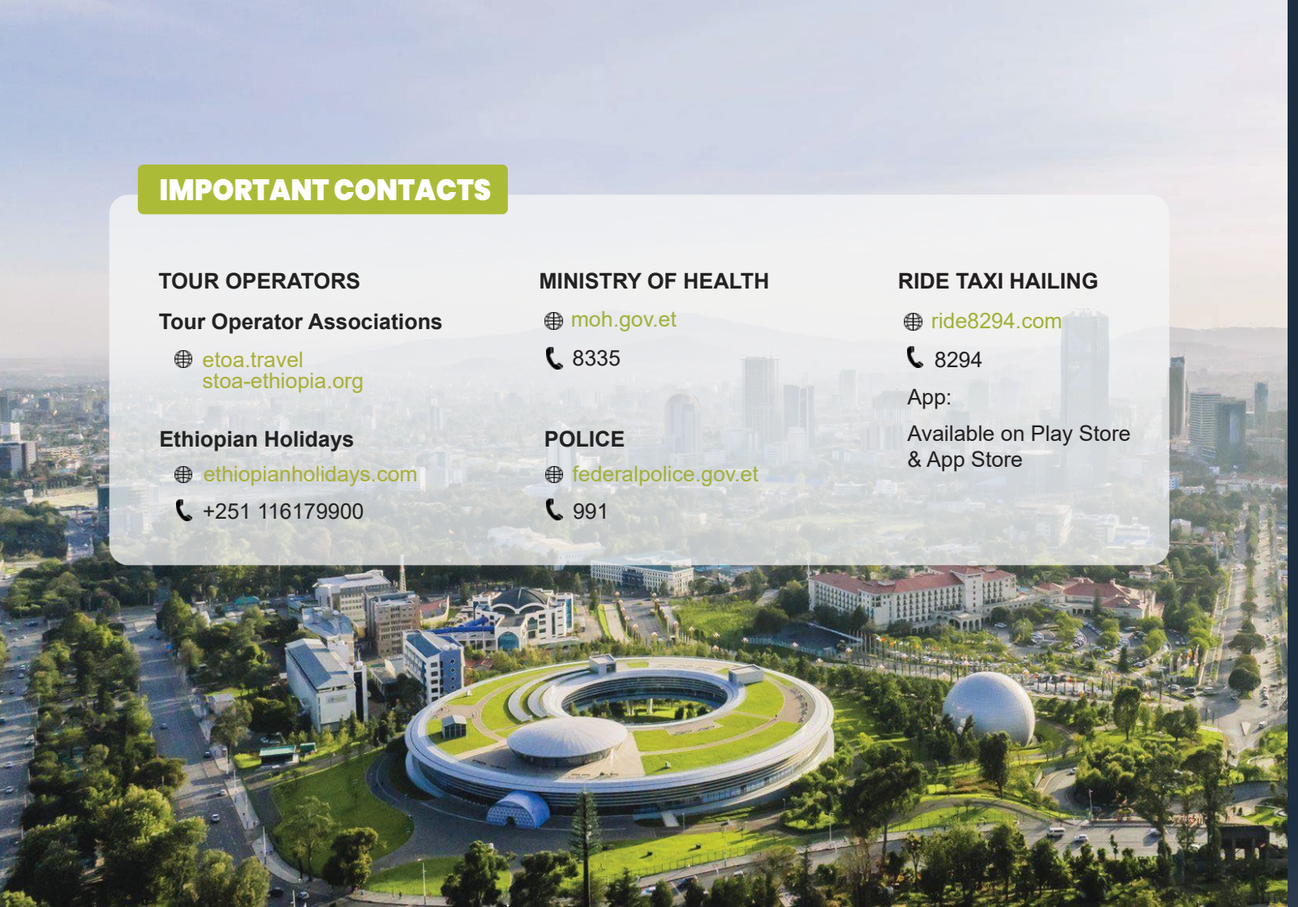
RIDE TAXI HAILING

ride8294.com

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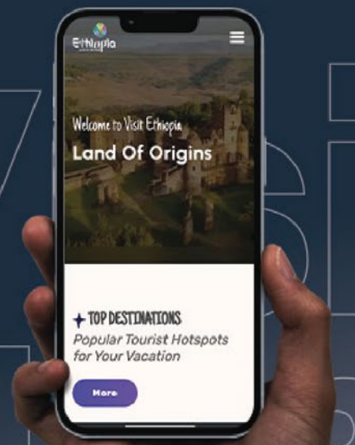
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