The Historic North and the Simien Mountains

- Three thousand years of Aksum, where obelisks still stand as testaments to buildings erected centuries before Rome became a republic, include:
  - The 12th-century church of St Mary of Zion, whose temple, the Tadebib, houses the original Biblical Ark of the Covenant.
  - The 8th-century church of cafe Yemata, a 14th-century excavation, while the sacred tree of the Arabian legend of the Sefirite Kings, which witnessed the flight of the Queen of Sheba, remains the spiritual home of Ethiopia's people. Though less well known than its counterparts at Lalibela, the Tigraian churches mostly predate them, and some might even date back to the 4th century. The Art of Ethiopia, created under the direction of King Lalibela, who conceived it as a kind of “New Jerusalem” after a series of Muslim conquests in the 12th century, the complex of 11 churches and chapels was created under the direction of King Lalibela, who conceived it as a kind of “New Jerusalem” after a series of Muslim conquests in the 12th century, the complex of 11 churches and chapels was created.

- In the south, Ethiopia’s premier hiking destination, the Abbe Senin National Park protects the “Roof of Africa,” an awe-inspiring landscape of grassy meadows and immense mountains that rises to 4,500m at Dege Aber. Upon reaching it as a Natural World Heritage Site in 1978, UNESCO listed the Simien Mountains as “one of the world’s most spectacular landscapes, with jagged mountain peaks, deep valleys and shapely precipices dropping some 1,500m.” The breathtaking scenery has inspired many, but also revered by an all-altitude race road - supports a wealth of rare endemic paintings attributed to the 11th-century master artist Melek Weltakel, as well as faunal diversity, a pool used during the Timkat festival.

- High in the mountains, the “Barbar” monks have a monastery that can be seen by precisely one living person, a designated caretaker priest who keeps it under lock and key at all times.

- Another never-before-seen aspect of Ethiopia is the elevations at which its forests and mountains are peppered with magnificent deciduous formations. Although historical sightseeing is the main tourist activity in northern Ethiopia, the highlands have much to offer to wildlife enthusiasts. The most important center of biodiversity, Simien Mountains National Park supports the world’s last population of Walia ibex, but also provides sanctuary to thousands of golden-maned gelada baboons and the iconic Ethiopian wolf. The gelada and wolf, both Ethiopian endemics, and is the last global stronghold for the Walia ibex, an imperious goat-like cliff-dweller sporting magnificent decurved horns.

- Lake Tana, origin of the Blue Nile

- Gheralta

- Steeped in legend and mystery, the town of Aksum was founded more than 3,000 years ago, when the Queen of Sheba ruled over a vast trade empire from her palace there. It is said to have been founded as the capital of the Aksumite kingdom, the only sub-Saharan African empire that coexisted with the Roman Empire, from its glory days, to the glory days, and the glory days, and the glory days. Although historical sightseeing is the main tourist activity in northern Ethiopia, the highlands have much to offer to wildlife enthusiasts. The most important center of biodiversity, Simien Mountains National Park not only supports the world’s last population of Walia ibex, but also provides sanctuary to thousands of golden-maned gelada baboons and the iconic Ethiopian wolf. The Gelada and wolf, both endemic to Ethiopia, are also commonly seen by hikers in recently established community conservation areas of Guassa and Abuna Yemata, the two nearest habitation to the Kalawake and the Tasawa National Park, and some of these are accessible by vehicle.

- Great Ethiopian Routes

- The Biblical Ark of the Covenant

- Ethiopia, it is said, is the home to the Ark of the Covenant, which Moses built as a repository for the Tablets of Law he received on Mount Sinai. According to the Old Testament, the Ark, which was invested with deadly supernatural powers, was enshrined in Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. The Ethiopian tradition states that the Ark was transported to Ethiopia 3,000 yeas ago by Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Ark is now housed in an outlying of Aksum’s church of St Mary of Zion, where it has been seen by precisely one living person, a designated caretaker priest who keeps it under lock and key at all times.
THE HISTORIC NORTH AND THE SIMIEN MOUNTAINS

GETTING THERE
Northern Ethiopia covers a vast area as so many visitors fly between main centres. Daily flights within Ethiopia (www.etiopianairlines.com) connect Addis Ababa to Bahir Dar, Gondar, Axum, Lalibela and Mekele. There are also connecting flights between most of these towns. Privately owned local airlines can also arrange non-scheduled or charter flights upon request. Most trunk roads in the region are asphalt, but some minor routes remain unsealed. Road transport can be arranged through any tour operator in Addis Ababa, or with local operators. Trail and lodge accommodation is readily available in all larger towns.

The Simien Mountains, Axum, Abba Yosef and Gheralta are primarily hiking and trekking destinations.

ACCOMMODATION
International-quality accommodation is available in Bahir Dar, Gondar, Lalibela, Gheralta and the Simien Mountains National Park. Midrange rooms are also available in these towns, as well as in Aksum, Mekele and Wukro. Budget accommodation can be found in almost all towns and larger villages in the region, including Bahir Dar, the gateway to the Simiens. Battered accommodation aimed at hikers is available in the Simien Mountains and at the Guassa and Abba Yosef community conservation areas.

FURTHER INFORMATION
Antara Culture and Tourism Bureau: www.antaraetb.com
TigraiCulture and Tourism Bureau: www.tigratourism.com
Gonder Tourist Office: www.gondarcity.gov.et
Simien Mountains National Park: www.simienmountains.org
Axumite Heritage Foundation: www.axumiteheritagefoundation.org
Guassa CCA: www.guassaarea.org

OTHER PRACTICALITIES
Holidays such as Ethiopian New Year (11th September), Melka (Fasting Day of the True Great), 27th September, Gena (Ethiopian Christmas), 7th January and Timkat (Epiphany; 19th January) are celebrated colourfully throughout the region. These holidays fall one day later in leap years.

The best places for handicraft shopping are Bahir Dar, Lalibela and Aksum.

Mounting days in northern Ethiopia lie at altitudes of 2,080m or higher, with the high Simien towering the 4,200m mark. Although day temperatures are rather mild all year round and can be chilly at night or during the rainy season. Bring plenty of warm clothing. Many mountain lodges have running water and electricity. Some mountain lodges in northern Ethiopia have been chronicled to women for centuries, a rule also applied to tourists.