



Omo River Expedition - Ethiopia and Lake Turkana - September 2004

Your 15-day trip down the Omo River in Southern Ethiopia to Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya starts in Addis Ababa on Sept 3 and finishes in Nairobi on Sept 18. **An extension to tour the north, and its incredible Coptic Christian world – Axum, Gondar, Lalibela etc, can be arranged beforehand. Also, as this is a cultural experience, a Kenyan safari extension for wildlife can be arranged afterward.**

*The photos below are from my Sep 2001 trip: http://www.safariexperts.com/country_ethiopia_trip_2.asp
Also see my photo gallery: http://www.safariexperts.com/photo_gallery_ethiopia_1.asp*

Fri Sep 3 Arrive Addis Ababa. Arriving 1430 p.m. Visit the Merkato, Africa's biggest open-air market, and tour souvenir shops prior to going to the Hilton Hotel.

Sat Sep 4 Depart Addis by air at 0800am to Jinka, arriving 1010 am.. From here you will drive for about four hours into the Hamar Mountains, between Lake Che'w Bahir (Lake Stephanie) and the lower Omo Valley. We set up camp near a Hamar Koke settlement.



Numbering about 30,000, they are known for their practice of body adornment and wearing a multitude of colorful beads. Women adorn their necks with heavy polished iron jewelry. Their society consists of a complex system of age groups. To pass from one age group to another involves complicated rituals. The most significant ceremony for young men is the "jumping of the bull" - the final test before passing into adulthood. The tribe maintains however, that real maturity is achieved only when the heart reaches the eyes - meaning when a man is able to look with his heart.

Several days before the ceremony, initiates pass out invitations in the form of dried knotted grass. The ceremony lasts three days. Late in the afternoon on the final day, ten to thirty bulls are lined up side by side. The naked initiate rushes towards the animal, vaults onto the first bull's back and then runs across the line of animals. At the end of the line he turns back to repeat the performance in the opposite direction. He must make this unstable journey without falling.

****There is of course no guarantee we will succeed in finding a bull jumping ceremony, or any other sought after ceremony; but we will make every effort to locate and gain access to them.**

Sun Sep 5 - Spent with Hamar Koke on foot and by car. Overnight at the same campsite.

Mon Sep 6 - Strike camp and drive down through the rugged hills to the Omo's floodplain surrounded by tens of thousands of termite mounds. You will follow the river to the Muguji tribal area. Here you will meet the boats and set up camp on banks of the Omo River for immersion in Muguji culture. The Muguji live on banks of the Omo River at its junction with the Mago River. Numbering only a few hundred people, they live in a symbiotic relationship with the Karo. They are very good fishermen and hunters of hippo, though few remain. As hunter-gatherers, they also trap small game and collect honey and wild fruits.



Tue Sep 7 – Leave in morning and boat up the Omo River to visit the Muguji, and then the Mursi tribes, most famous for the lip dishes the women wear. This day will involve about five hours in the boat, offering unique insights normally inaccessible because few can mount such an expedition by boat. The Mursi live between their dry-season range in the Mursi Hills, and their wet -season range on the Tama Plains, north of Mago Park. The Mursi, numbering about 5,000 people, have a war-like reputation fuelled by their urge to control large tracts of grazing land.

The men practice light scarification on their shoulders after killing an enemy, and shave geometric patterns on their head. During dances and ceremonies they adorn literally *every* part of their body with white chalk paint. Young unmarried men practice group stick fights. The winner is carried on top of poles to girls

waiting beside the arena, who decide among themselves which of them will ask his hand in marriage.

Wed Sep 8 Navigate down the river to camp at Lumele near Duss, one of the bigger Karo villages, which also has two 'satellite' villages - Korcho and Labuk. The Karo, who number only about 3,000 people, mainly practice flood retreat cultivation on the banks of the Omo River. Their women make clay pots for trading with other tribes.

Thu Sep 9 Spend a full day with the Karo, immersing yourselves in their culture, overnighing again at Lumele. The Karo excel in face and body painting, practiced in preparation of their dances and ceremonies. They pulverize locally found white chalk, yellow mineral rock, red iron ore and black charcoal to decorate their bodies, often imitating the spotted plumage of a guinea fowl. Their painted facemasks are spectacular. Karo women scarify their chest to beautify themselves. Scars are cut with a knife and ash is rubbed in to produce a raised welt. Their traditional evening dances are a sight to be remembered forever.



Fri Sep 10 An early start, strike camp, and boat down the muddy brown river for about three hours to Nyagatom to set up another camp. In the afternoon you will have your first encounter with the Nyagatom population and settlements. The Nyagatom live on the west banks of the Omo, south of the Omo Park and all the way to the border with Kenya. More populous, numbering over 7,000, they are great warriors and also have a warlike reputation. Small groups of the Nyagatom living along the Omo are specialized crocodile hunters using harpoons from a dugout canoe. Men wear a blue and ochre clay hair bun with ostrich feathers, which indicates a man's bravery. When it has been proven that a warrior has killed a male enemy, his right shoulder is scarified. Older women and men both wear a lower lip plug, the men's being made from ivory and women's made from copper filigree.

Sat Sep 11 - *Ethiopian New Year* - Again visit Nyagatom settlements on foot to learn more about how slaughter of cattle plays an important role during their initiation rites and other important cultural rites. Overnight at the same campsite.

Sun Sep 12 In the morning you will boat down into the Omo Delta, stopping at Omorati to clear customs out of Ethiopia, into Kenya. Here you will enjoy local coffee and experience Ethiopian officialdom! Proceed on to set up camp on one of the islands in the Delta. This is a full day's trip. The riverbanks are packed with life, and en route you will experience some wildlife and excellent birding.



Mon Sep 13 and Tue Sep 14 You will spend these two days visiting Dassanech settlements and spending the days with them, camping on the same island. The Dassanech number about 13,000 and live throughout the delta area of the Omo River in various sized villages, spread over numerous islands. Although they consider themselves pastoralists, they also practice flood retreat cultivation on the vast expanses of the delta. Over the years, during periods of drought, the Dassanech hosted members of different tribes seeking relief from hunger. Thus their cultural practices are

more related those of the Kenyan Samburu and Rendille tribes with whom they share the custom of male and female circumcision.

Wed Sep 15 Navigate out of the delta - no mean feat - and into Lake Turkana. As you power away from the delta, the colour of the water will gradually change from muddy brown to its legendary jade colour - hence its other name - the Jade Sea. You will cross the lake to Central Island and set up camp on its black volcanic beach.

Thu Sep 16 Spend the day exploring this remarkable volcanic island, hiking up the extinct volcanoes to explore lakes and fumaroles pouring steam and mystery out from the center of the earth. In amongst this remote and wild beauty are many bird species and crocodiles. Things have changed here since fishermen have started coming to the island to poach nests while fishing. Unfortunate as this is, it is interesting to meet them as they eke out a simple and poor living from this vast desert sea.



Fri Sep 17 Cross to the western shore of Lake Turkana to Hallawijn and Joyce's restful camp at Lobolo Oasis, just north of Eliye Springs. Here you will enjoy warm family-style hospitality, excellent food, plentiful showers and a luxuriously comfortable bed! The camp lies in the heart of Turkana country, giving you a chance to visit some of their villages. This rounds off the most extraordinary cross-section of vanishing African culture one can ever see.

To get a feeling for the detail of the trip, please refer to the diary of my own trip in 2001: http://www.safariexperts.com/country_ethiopia_trip_2.asp and view the pictures from that trip at: http://www.safariexperts.com/photo_gallery_ethiopia_1.asp

Please pay very close attention to the following:

This will be a unique trip, but do bear in mind that it is an expedition, not one of my famous luxury safaris! There will be good food and even wine where possible! The tents will be expedition-type domes (light weight) with cot beds. You will have a tented long-drop loo and a tent shower, as the Omo River is fairly notorious for people eating crocs! We don't really want to lose anyone now - do we?!

It will be the most extraordinary trip of your life. There will be a maximum of eight participants who will be selected for their suitability – sense of humour and adaptability. Do you have what it takes to be included?

Fellow explorers will need to be flexible. Things may not run according to plan due to any number of factors. It is some of the remotest Africa that one can find - difficulties of many kinds can crop up. It will sometimes be hot, dusty and uncomfortable – there can be no whiners!

In the south, most photo opportunities will probably need to be paid for - in Ethiopian Bir. This is how things have changed – but see it also as a way for them to make a living out of retaining their culture. Everyone will need to change some dollars in Addis into small notes – wads of them! There will not be another opportunity to change dollars. On our last trip, the Dassanech thought dollars were monopoly money! How intuitive they are!

Safety. It is a remote area. Men carry Kalashnikov rifles. Even so, we consider it to be safe, though obviously no guarantees can be made. My partners have, for many years, had excellent relations with local chiefs and tribes in the area, and they have come to appreciate the value of tourism. I led a trip there in 2001 http://www.safariexperts.com/country_ethiopia_trip_2.asp -- and since then they have seen many more visitors.

Baggage must be restricted to 15 kg., plus camera gear, as it is difficult to haul heavy weight around on the river. Bring plenty of insect repellent, suntan cream, and some extra Bio tablets for water treatment. We will have some tablets for you, as we cannot transport bottled water, thus. A light plastic raincoat is advisable.

Contact. About a month before departure we will send details of contact numbers, though it will be very hard for families and friends to reach you. There will be a satellite phone for emergency purposes.

The Price: US \$ 7,150.00 per person, E&OE, based on 8 people on a twin-sharing basis. This will include items described above. Max in the group will be 8, minimum will be 6, with small price adjustments accordingly.

To be considered for this safari: Please call me to let me know your interest as soon as possible. Selected members will need to pay in full, and should take out a trip cancellation policy. The trip is only refundable, less an administration fee, if the trip cannot depart.

