



## Omo River Expedition - Ethiopia and Lake Turkana

Your 14-day trip down the Omo River in Southern Ethiopia to Lake Turkana in Northern Kenya starts in Addis Ababa and finishes in Nairobi. **An extension to tour northern Ethiopia, and its incredible Coptic Christian world – Axum, Gondar, Lalibela etc, is a must, and can be arranged beforehand. Also, as this is a cultural experience, a Kenyan safari extension for wildlife can be arranged afterwards.**

The photos below are from my trip: [http://www.safariexperts.com/country\\_ethiopia\\_trip\\_2.asp](http://www.safariexperts.com/country_ethiopia_trip_2.asp)  
For more, look at my photo gallery: [http://www.safariexperts.com/photo\\_gallery\\_ethiopia\\_1.asp](http://www.safariexperts.com/photo_gallery_ethiopia_1.asp)

**Day 1** Arrive Addis Ababa. Arriving 1430 p.m. Met and visit the Merkato, Africa's biggest open-air market, and tour souvenir shops prior to going to the Hilton Hotel.

**Day 2** Depart Addis by air at 0800am to Jinka, arriving 1010 am. After a traditional Ethiopian lunch, drive through dramatic countryside, green at this time of year, through the Omo national park to the banks of the Omo river to camp at Lumele near Duss. This is 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 live on the practice of flood retreat cultivation on the banks of the Omo River. Their women make clay pots for trading with other tribes. Lale, your chief guide and interpreter, comes from this village.



**Day 3** 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 chests 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.



**Day 4** - Strike camp and boat upriver to the Muguji tribal area. Here you will 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.

**Day 5** – 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.

**Day 6** Return down river to the Karo at Duss, and enjoy a memorable barbecue dinner on the river bank with the assembled chiefs and elders.

**Day 7** 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 western 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 enjoy 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 indicate a man's bravery. When it has been proven that a warrior has killed a male enemy, his right shoulder is scarified. The elders of both sexes wear a lower lip plug, the men's being made from ivory and women's made from copper filigree.

**Day 8** 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.

**Day 9** From here you will drive for about four hours across floodplains covered with wildlife and thousands of spectacular 20 ft high termite mounds into the Hamar Mountains, which lie 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 our local contacts give us the best chance to locate and gain access to them.

**Day 10** - Spent with the Hamar Koke on foot and by car. Overnight at the same campsite.

**Day 11 and 12** In the morning you will boat down river 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.



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

**Tim Lapage** ▪ Independent Safari Consultant

P.O. Box 680098, Park City, UT 84068 ▪ 435.649.4655 ▪ safari@safariexperts.com ▪ [www.safariexperts.com](http://www.safariexperts.com)

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.

**Day 13** 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, past Central Island with its black volcanic beaches, 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.



**Day 14** Your charter will collect you in the morning to fly you low level south along the Great Rift Valley to end your journey in Nairobi, or on to the Maasai Mara, for an extension, amongst the world famous Wildebeest migration.

To get a feeling for the detail of the trip, please refer to the diary of my own trip: [http://www.safariexperts.com/country\\_ethiopia\\_trip\\_2.asp](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](http://www.safariexperts.com/photo_gallery_ethiopia_1.asp)

***Please pay very close attention to the following:***

This will be a unique trip, probably never to be repeated, but do bear in mind that it is an expedition, and not one of my famous luxury safaris! There will be good food and even wine! 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 are few truly remote places like this left on earth.. There will be a maximum of eight participants who will be selected for their suitability – sense of humour and adaptability. Do you wish to be considered for inclusion?

Fellow explorers will need to be flexible. Things may not run according to plan due to any number of factors. It is far distant Africa - difficulties of many kinds can crop up.

In the south, most photo opportunities will probably need to be paid for - in Ethiopian Bir. This is how things have changed – but consider that it is also 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. Even though men carry Kalashnikov rifles, we consider it to be safe. 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, [http://www.safariexperts.com/country\\_ethiopia\\_trip\\_2.asp](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. A light plastic raincoat is advisable.

**Tim Lapage** ▪ Independent Safari Consultant

P.O. Box 680098, Park City, UT 84068 ▪ 435.649.4655 ▪ [safari@safariexperts.com](mailto:safari@safariexperts.com) ▪ [www.safariexperts.com](http://www.safariexperts.com)