

Addis Ababa guide 2022

Abstract

We at the World Bank Group Family Network (WBGFN) Ethiopia have put together this short guide to help you with all the basic needs. If you need any more help, feel free to contact any of the members listed in this guide

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Introduction

Welcome to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The name of the city is translated from Amharic as the New Flower, indeed its capital is one of the most beautiful attractions in the whole country. As one of the biggest cities in Africa with the population of about 5 million, Addis Ababa is growing rapidly. Lots of constructions, new roads and two subway lines, beautiful parks and new library and high tech science museum exist next to small local coffee shops, street vendors, goat markets and donkeys. This is a colorful mixture you will learn to navigate and eventually appreciate.

It has a huge expat community due to African Union Headquarter, UN Economy Commission of Africa, more than 120 international missions and embassies, NGOs and delegations. Addis Ababa has a lot to offer in terms of culture (the most famous exhibit is the replica of Lucy, an early hominid), religion (beautiful Orthodox churches), food (try traditional enjera and tibs or even raw meat) and of course coffee (Ethiopians believe the coffee was born here).

Climate

Addis Ababa has a nice climate with surprisingly stable temperature throughout the year but it varies a lot during the day and can reach +27°C at lunch and drop to + 7°C in early morning hours. Though June and February don't differ too much in general. Keep in mind long and not very pleasant rainy season June-September when you might need a gumboot but for the rest of the year sneakers will do you. Also, the elevation plays a big role. Situated on top of the mountain Addis Ababa reaches 2300 meters above the sea level. You will definitely feel it especially first month or so while climbing stairs or walking. Shortage of breath and some tiredness lasts first few weeks until your body adapts to the altitude. That is why all famous runners come here for trainings!

Language

There are 8 different spoken languages in Ethiopia, Amharic is the most common in Addis Ababa, but some English is also present, especially in big hotels, supermarkets, ministries, commissions, delegations, etc. Do not expect every street vendor to understand English, same as househelp or nannies or drivers. Some of them, who comes with recommendations from expat families would understand and communicate pretty decently though. As a country which was never fully colonized Ethiopia is proud to keep its heritage and strictly adhere to its culture and traditions.

Currency

There are several Banks in Ethiopia. If you wish to open a local Birr and Dollar account, you'll need a petition from the WB Office to the preferred Bank. Plenty of ATMs, Visa card is accepted at many places, shops and hotels. It is not a problem to withdraw money from the local ATM but only in Birr (Local currency). Please, note it is almost impossible to get dollars here, even send via MoneyGram or similar transaction company due to the local law. Never exchange dollars outside of the bank, "black market" gives much higher rate than the official exchange office rate, but it is illegal to do so. The biggest banknote is 200 birr equals \$4 approximately. You will need a big wallet to carry your cash here. The current official rate is about 55 birr per 1 dollar.

Everyday life

As almost everywhere in Africa, great househelp staff are very affordable and widely available. For a big household you may have a nanny, a driver, a gardener, a guard, a cook and a cleaner. If your family is rather small you can find one person to combine several duties. The best way to find a staff is to ask around at the community (join Telegram "Anything Important" or Facebook "Expats in Addis" groups). Surprisingly, the turn-around among expats is very high here, therefore it is easy to find a househelp during the year. But lower your expectations in terms of language, service, and salary, some training might be necessary.

Shopping

Coming to Ethiopia I must warn you please, forget what you know about shopping. Big malls, shiny supermarkets, branded stores, or boutiques do not exist here. The taxes are so high here which makes it almost impossible to find imported goods in Ethiopia. No local shops provide the same quality of clothing, shoes or cosmetics as common European or US brands. Buy at least 6 months stock of the medication, cosmetics and other everyday things you need. The variety, the quality and availability of imported goods are very limited here, same goes for electronics, cars, spare parts, etc. There are several supermarkets and small stores around the city but the stock is inconsistent. Ethiopians love meat, especially beef and goat meat, chicken is considered a festive meal. Pork is very rare here as orthodox Ethiopian church doesn't approve pork. Milk and yogurt production is very limited. No dry dog or cat food is available. On the contrary, the local production of leather, coffee, cotton fabric, woolen rugs,

baskets is high and affordable. Support Ethiopian NGOs producing rugs by blind people or amazing kitchen towels by leprosy women or buy local coffee from the roastery around the corner, fresh meat from the butcher, vegetables from the street stalls. There is a huge open-air market in the central part of the city called Merkato where you can find almost everything but better to have a local friend to accompany you there.

Duty free option is possible for expats and prices differ dramatically. There is a store with perfume, alcohol, cigarettes, etc with a monthly limit for expats, but household appliances such as fridge or stove you can only buy having a permission letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Luckily, the WB office assists with it.

There are several nice pharmacies around the town but some medication is not registered in the country. If you have a prescription, you can order drugs which are unavailable in Ethiopia via the WB Health Department in Kenya, the shipment is covered by the office but may take few weeks or so. Please, contact HD department in Nairobi.

Electricity / Gas

Almost all new houses and apartments in Addis Ababa has European voltage and sockets. African triangle sockets appliances are also popular as well as socket adapters. Unfortunately, power shutdowns are very common and happens almost every day. Inverters are available but expensive, a cheaper option of a generator can also be considered. When buying a stove, look for a combine version with gas and electricity together. Cooking gas prices raised in 5-6 times over the last few years and the shortage can occur from time to time due to difficult situation with the road to Djibouti (the port for Ethiopia). Sometimes the queue to the gas/petrol station can get very long literally several hours if there is a shortage as well. Driving a non-gasoline car is an advantage in this case. Always have a full tank when travelling outside of Addis as petrol is not widely available throughout the country.

Mobile Phone / Internet

There is no big variety in the providers. Ethiotelecom is a government organization and a monopolist in mobile phone network as well as internet. Due to this fact, the service as well as the coverage and the quality is low, internet speed is low as well and no other options. You will need to have a petition letter from the WB office to have a fiber optic internet but even in this case it might not be available due to limited number of servers. Another provider Safaricom is coming to Ethiopia and we hope it will bring a long-awaited change in this business but as for now it is only available for calls in limited areas.

Security

Last year Ethiopia was considered a Fragile State Country due to the civil war in the northern parts of the country. Currently the conflict is on-hold and Addis Ababa is safe though travel outside of the city is not advisable. There are many police posts around the city still It is not advisable to walk outside past dawn. Pickpocketing and tricks are quite common here, so better be watchful just like in any big city everywhere in the world. Street beggars and kids are there, mostly refugees and homeless people.

If you are renting a house, having a guard is a requirement from the WB Security Department. There are several security companies approved by the Bank providing such services as well as security alarms installation. During the time of elections or other political rally some unrest might be expected in the city, but UNDSS provides timely and correct alerts in such cases. Currently all travel to the north of the country is forbidden due to security reasons. It is also advisable to contact the WB security office Guy Daz at gdaz1@worldbankgroup.org or +251911252731 or the WB Watchkeeper at +251115176148 to ask about the up-to-date security information should you plan your personal travel outside of Addis Ababa.

Leisure time / Activities

There are many nice places to visit inside and outside the city. Several museums and parks are located around the city, such as Unity Park with the Museum of Ethiopian History and the Zoo, Friendship park is a nice place for a walk and a nice kids playground, Entoto Park on the northern outskirts of the city provides lots of kids attractions inside a beautiful eucalyptus forest with amazing views, Edna Mall and Gast Mall has inside entertainments for kids like cinema, climbing wall, obstacle course, laser tag game, etc. which comes handy during those rainy seasons.

Take a one hour ride outside the city to the nearest town Bishoftu/Debre Zein for a nice lakes and hotels/resorts such as Kuriftu resort with a water park. Or drive another hour to beautiful lake Langano for a peaceful long weekend retreat. Bedre Lebanos town has a nice monastery and Portuguese Bridge with breathtaking waterfalls and views of the Rift Valley. There are many things to see around Addis Ababa. Having a local ID gives you an opportunity to use local rates on Ethiopian Airlines. One hour flight south will take you to beautiful towns like Arba Minch or Hawassa with great Hailey Resorts overlooking the lakes and forests for a day of spa, swimming at the pool and exploring the surroundings.

If you opt for a quiet day in the city, we suggest going to any hotels like Sheraton or Hilton Hotels for a day access to its swimming pools. Mineral water springs makes it very warm and pleasant to swim even on a cooler day.

Many different restaurants are open in Addis, try historic Italian restaurant Castelli in Piazza (great Italian food is kind of a tradition after unsuccessful invasion of Italian army) or Mamma Mia or Sale e Pepe or Betucchi – the food will be great! Hotto and Entoto Bistro are two newly opened restaurants with amazing food worth visiting. Japanese Market is known for Asian restaurants such as Tian Tian or Sakura in Bole. Beer Garden or Choma Grill are good for meat BBQ and beer lovers. You should not skip the option of trying a real Ethiopian food – Yod Abissinia and Kaheziy both are chains of traditional restaurants with good food and Ethiopian shows on the weekend. If you are brave enough to try very popular local dish – raw meat – go to trusted restaurants like Tarik or Desaleigh. There is also an app called DeliverAddis which does different delivery options, but it is not very reliable on the weekends due to high demand.

Ethiopians consider their country as an origin of coffee. According to their legend a shepherd saw his sheep eating raw coffee berries and getting burst of energy. He tried to make a drink out of those berries, dropped some beans into a fire and loved the smell. That is how the coffee was discovered. Wherever you go here in Addis, coffee is always good. Try Tomoka coffee or Kaldis or any other place, no matter how much you will pay – 6birr (1cent) for a cup from a stall along the road or 160birr (\$3) at Hyatt Hotel – the taste will be amazing!

Hyatt Regency Hotel is a popular place for fancy dinners and meetings. Its Oriental restaurant is a great Thai/Asian restaurant, and its Spa corner is amazing too. But there are many hidden gems around. Also,

Addis Ababa is considered a center of an African Jazz! Open Air concerts are coming back after covid slowdown. Check Jazz Cafe and Fendika Village for live performances.

Big and small gyms are easy to find, tennis courts, golf course and horse stables are also there. Though the city is not very convenient for bicycle riders or runners.

Housing

There are several districts popular among the expat community.

Old Airport is one of them. The International Community School of Addis (ICS) is located here which makes this district very attracting for those expats who comes with children of Middle and High School children. Despite a big variety of choices, it is difficult to find a house which will suite your needs. Most of the houses are very old, small compounds and dated water and sewage systems. If you are lucky to find a newer house, most probably it will be one of those monstrous buildings with very extravagant design. The pricing is another surprise, be prepared to pay at least \$3500 per month for a small 2–3-bedroom house. The bigger the compound – the bigger the price. You will be able to find a nice house with 3-4 bedrooms at \$4500-5500 per month. If you are not ready to pay for the convenience for your kids to walk to school, you may consider nearby Lebu district, which is less westernized copy of Old Airport. Rental prices are lower there, approximately around \$2000 per month but it will take about 20-30 min drive to school and 45 min to the WB office.

Another option is Bole district, which is often an option for young professionals and couples. The WB office is close, many shops and restaurants in the area. It is busy and vibrant part of the city suitable for those looking for some fun. Check out new apartment buildings and compounds around the WB office. Since the office moved just recently, we do not have an updated information about nearby apartments but Metrika+ will be happy to advise you on this matter. Single Family Houses are also available in Bole district. Many families consider this part of town as with the opening of the new road it takes approximately 20 min drive from school and 5-10 min drive to the office. In the afternoon the commute time might be significantly longer. Prices differ withing \$\$3000-4500 per month but the choice is bigger than in Old Airport.

Another area popular for living is everything around the British Embassy. This is another district occupied by big diplomats community. Located close to Entoto Hill it has nice fresh air and lots of greenery. British International School is located here, Sandfort International school campus is nearby, it has good reviews about Elementary and Middle School level but ask around about High School and Special support options, things might change. Some restaurants, supermarkets, Century Mall and Addis Country Club are nearby.

Some people consider CMC area due to lower rental prices, gated community and growing compound but the location is not very favorable.

Transportation

Keep in mind, Addis Ababa is quite a big city with a very complicated public transportation system. Local buses or taxis (like matatu) are not safe as well as recently opened light Metrorail. We do not advise you to use public transportation. Uber (local brand is called Ride) is freely available and convenient but be prepared to explain your location to every single driver in “Brocken English” as none of them use google maps nor speak English fluently.

Technically there are streets' names in Addis but even locals do not know them. Usually, you need to explain your location in a way "From Birsate Gebriel church go down on the road which leads to South African Embassy, there will be a restaurant Roomy Burger on your left, turn right before it and then left. You will see a small street below; this is my street, and my house has black gates". Again, technically, there are house numbers in Addis, but nobody knows it. This causes problems with post office deliveries. It is impossible to order from Amazon, etc. unless you work for the Embassy and even regular post works not very well. You will need to go to the main post office building, find a teller there and ask to check your parcel number – doesn't sound difficult but keep in mind language barrier, overall, it is not impossible but not easy. Sometimes even DHL or similar couriers experience difficulties in finding your address.

Schools

If you have children ages 3- 19 probably International Community School of Addis Ababa is your first option. It is a full IB International school from kindergarten years PYP program to full IB DP Diploma in High school. Located in a nice neighborhood of Old Airport it has a compound of 15 acres of land filled with amazing facilities from newly build state-of-the-art Elementary School Building to small traditional huts called Tukull for school store, there are sport fields, tennis courts, library, cafeteria, etc. Anything you can imagine. Highly qualified international teachers and local assistants' staff are very attentive and supportive to students of all ages. Special Education as well as English as a Second Language Support Programs are also available. Very vivid Parents Teachers Organization provide great support to the community organizing morning yoga sessions, coffee mornings, parents' ambassador program, etc. to all members of the community. Movie nights, Band Concerts, Art Shows, Educational Sessions, International Speakers are every month agendas at ICS. The security is a top notch as campus serves as a "safe heaven" for accidents. The only disadvantage is the tuition fees, these are quite high but luckily covered by the Bank.

English-speaking community with the focus on British Educational system might want to check Cambridge Academy Ethiopia CAE, Sandford International School, and British International School BIS. There are some mixed reviews about those schools (as always) but do not exclude it from your search if you are looking for a smaller and quieter environment for your child. All three of those schools offer British and International curriculum (Sandford also has IB DP diploma) and accept children ages 3-18 years old. Tuitions are less than ICS if it is your question.

Bingham Academy is well known international school also based on British curriculum but with strong Christian Education. Small school of only 360 students provide great education with glory to the God. They are known for its strong Art Program and smaller students-to-teachers ratio in classes. There are some other less popular options like Flipper International Schools or One Planet International school, but they are not so popular and have less reviews.

Greek Community School, German Embassy School and French school Lycee Guebre-Mariam has its campuses here too.

Medical facilities

Overall, Addis Ababa is fine if you do not have major health issues. There are several clinics where you can refer to go in case of sickness or an emergency but for serious problems it is advised to either do teleconsulting with well-known hospitals/doctors from your own country or seek for more advanced facilities in neighboring countries such as Kenya or UAE.

Nordic Medical Center <https://www.nordicmedicalcentre.com/> located in Bole is your emergency contact. They have the ambulance, IC units, surgery theaters, private patients rooms, labs, CT scans, pharmacy and are fully staffed with internationally qualified doctors and nurses and Norwegian-run administration open 24/7.

Silk Road General Hospital www.silkroadhospitaladdis.com in Old Airport is another option. Newly build 14-story fully operation hospital under Chinese management with international doctors has all facilities from pharmacy and consultations to operation theater and IC unites, lab, diagnostic and dialysis equipment.

Suisse Clinic <http://www.suisseclinic.com> in Kera is well known among the community mostly because of Dr Alan, the pediatrician but other specialists from Suisse clinic are also very high qualified. Though it provides 24-hour consultation service, there is no emergency health facilities. Perfect place for everyday consultations on children and family's regular healthcare.

There are some options for dental care, Chinese medicine, physiotherapy, ophthalmology, etc but better to ask directly to find the right specialist. Spa services, hairdressers, massage, yoga and other wellbeing centers are also available here.

We hope you come, explore and like it.

Enjoy Ethiopia