

AFRICA: THE LAST FRONTIERS – 2018

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 7 August 2018 – 7 September 2018

Tour Duration: 30 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$20,950

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,150

Perhaps our most enthralling newcomer to our growing African portfolio, The Last Frontiers is a heady mix that once again demonstrates the extraordinary diversity that hides away in continents most remote corner.

The tour starts in Somaliland, the definitive frontier of tourism! The confusion with its chaotic neighbour, Somalia has helped to cocoon the country as the world's best kept travel secrets. Indeed, Somaliland, de facto independent since 1991, has managed to build the most robust democracy of the entire region and takes great pride in it. Because tourists are yet to discover the country's magnificent coastline, stunning landscapes and rich culture, it has kept the developers at bay and ensures visitors a myriad of unexpected and wonderful surprises. Indeed, they are veritable pioneers in a country of astonishing hospitality. From here we make the short drive to the Ethiopian border where we descend into the vast Ogaden region and the walled UNESCO city of Harar. This Muslim city has been home to man and hyena for 500 years and the two have learned to live symbiotically. Indeed, generations of hyena men feed the urban beasts by mouth and this ancient ritual, in the shadows of the city, provides a surreal and unforgettable spectacle. We then board Ethiopia's brand new 'Red Sea train' that links Ethiopia to Djibouti and the Horn of Africa. Disembarking near Addis Ababa, we move south to the Omo Valley. Here we discover ancient tribes, highland lakes and landscapes that are reminiscent of the dawning of the world. Our next stop is Madagascar. This unique island is like somewhere out of a Jules Verne novel; there is simply no place like it on the earth! Millions of years of evolution have bestowed on Madagascar astonishing flora and fauna, of which 80% can be found nowhere else on earth. This tour is a dizzying combination of ancient tribes that inhabit south Ethiopia, the birthplace of Christianity, of extraordinary landscapes, and flora and fauna that can be found nowhere else in the world. These are the last frontiers of Africa.

Tour Fitness Level: Active

AFRICA: THE LAST FRONTIERS

TOUR ITINERARY

07/08/2018 Australia – Dubai (D)

Depart from your chosen capital city on your flight to Dubai.

Le Méridien

Dubai

08/08/2018 Dubai – Hargeisa (BLD)

Depart Dubai Fly Dubai FZ Dubai FZ 661, 04.05

Arrive Hargeisa 06.35

Situated in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland is an unrecognised self-declared independent state that was formed when the historic colony of British Somaliland merged with Italian Somaliland in 1960. As early as 1981, Somaliland had started to pull away from Somalia and after the collapse of the government in Mogadishu in 1991, the state declared its independence. The new government has presided over two decades of peace. Today we embark on a tour of Hargeisa, which is located in the Galgodon highlands at 1,334m above sea level. It is home to 1.2 million people, and while the scars of civil war can still be seen, the city exudes a calm and optimistic energy that is infectious. The locals are extremely welcoming and are often the centre of attention. Somaliland is home to half of the world's camel population and this morning we visit the city's daily camel market, an extraordinary kaleidoscope of colours and smells that assaults the senses.

Ambassador Hotel

Hargeisa

09/08/2018 Hargeisa – Berbera – Hargeisa (BLD)

Today we head out to Laas Geel. Meaning 'camel watering hole', this is home to perhaps the most extraordinary cave paintings in the world. Discovered only in 2002 by a team of French archaeologists, this incredibly vivid rock art is estimated to be between 7,000 to 10,000 years old. Among other things, the paintings depict cattle in ceremonial robes accompanied by humans, who are believed to have been inhabitants of the region. The site is amazingly preserved due to the location of the paintings, which are protected by overhanging rocks. After our visit to Laas Geel, we head north to the Gulf of Aden and the ancient coastal city of Berbera. Somaliland's third largest city, this port boasts white-sanded beaches and charming architecture. With significantly more history than the capital, the city has an eclectic mix of Somali, Arab and British colonial buildings that bears testimony to the city's former role as a major trade port in the Gulf of Aden. Berbera used to be a Soviet and later US military base, and locals still remember how the Russians and Americans took every opportunity to enjoy the sandy beaches that stretch for kilometres around the Gulf. The waters teem with fish and coral, and the coast has some of the best snorkelling in the world.

10/08/2018 Hargeisa – Harar (BLD)

This morning we head towards the town of Togechane which marks the border between Somaliland and Ethiopia. After completing immigration we start the journey across Ethiopia's vast Ogaden region and into the eastern Rift Valley. By early afternoon we reach the walled city of Harar.

Heritage Plaza Hotel

Harar

11/08/2018 Harar (BLD)

The fortified historic town of Harar is located in the eastern part of the country on a plateau with deep gorges surrounded by deserts and savannah. The walls surrounding this sacred Muslim city were built between the 13th and 16th centuries. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Harar is the fourth holiest city of Islam, and boasts 82 mosques, three of which date from the 10th century, and 102 shrines. The many townhouses, with their exceptional interior design, are perhaps the most spectacular part of Harar's cultural heritage. The impact of African and Islamic traditions on the development of the town's building types and urban layout make for this particular character and uniqueness. The city has retained much of its traditions, urban fabric, and rich Harari Muslim cultural heritage.

12/08/2018 Harar – Ziway (Mojo) (BLD)

Depart Dire Dawa Train 6, 07.00

Arrive Addis Ababa 13.15

On arrival in Addis Ababa we make the short drive south to Ziway.

Haile Resort

Ziway

13/08/2018 Ziway – Awassa (BLD)

After breakfast we continue south to Awassa where we find the smallest of the Rift Valley lakes. This idyllic lake lies at 1,700m and is surrounded by rolling green hills. The lake formed in an old caldera in the middle of the Ethiopian Rift Valley, and it is filled with fish and home to a mass of birdlife.

14/08/2018 Awassa – Konso – Jinka (BLD)

This morning we start to move further south and soon the contoured landscape of Konso starts to unfold. Extensive dry stone terraces bear witness to the persistent human struggle to harness the hard, dry and rocky environment for agriculture. The walled towns and settlements of Konso are located on hill summits selected for their strategic and defensive advantages. The cultural spaces inside the walled towns, called moras, retain an important and central role in the life of the Konso people. The erection of stones and poles is also part of the Konso tradition: a generation pole is raised every 18 years, marking the start of a new generation. Thus, the age of a village can be determined by how many poles are standing. After our visit here we ascend onto a lush plateau where the town of Key Afar is situated. This large town hosts a vibrant market once a week when thousands of Banna, Hamar and Tsemay peoples descend on it to buy and sell goods. After our visit to the market we continue to Jinka.

Eco Lodge

Jinka

15/08/2018 Jinka (BLD)

A highlight today is a visit to the remarkable Mursi people who live just a short drive from Jinka in Mago National Park on the eastern shore of the Omo River. This is the famous 'lip plate' tribe and they are the last group in Africa amongst whom it is still the norm for women to wear large pottery, wooden discs, or 'plates,' in their lower lips. Generally the girls' lips are pierced at the age of 15 and a flat slab is inserted into the lower lip. The men are slender and renowned warriors; who rarely cover their bodies as they showcase the scars of their combat.

16/08/2018 Jinka – Turmi (BLD)

This morning we drive to the Omo valley, home of the Hamar people – a fine looking tribe whose men and women take great pride in their appearance, shaving and

colouring their hair, oiling their bodies and decorating themselves with beads and bracelets worn around arms and legs. The Hamar people are also famous for their 'Bull-Jumping' ceremony – an annual rite of passage where boys are initiated into adulthood by jumping onto a group of bulls and running across their backs, as a symbol of the social jump from immaturity to adulthood and the responsibilities that entails. This ritual is a precondition of marriage for the men of the Hamar tribe during the harvest period which is June through to September.

Turmi Lodge

Turmi

17/08/2018 Turmi – Qorcho – Turmi (BLD)

Today we visit a small tribe known as Karo. With a population of around 2,000 they live along the east bank of the great Omo River and practise flood retreat cultivation, growing sorghum, maize and beans. Like many of the tribes in the Omo, they paint their bodies and faces with white chalk to prepare for a ceremony. The chalk is mixed with yellow rock, red iron ore and charcoal. Face masks are worn at times and they have clay hair buns with feathers in them. Red clay mixed with butter is put into their hair and clothing is made from animal skin. The women scar their chests believing it makes them beautiful. The men's scars represent an enemy or dangerous animal killed. Most men in the tribe have two or three wives.

18/08/2018 Turmi (BLD)

The small town of Turmi is the heart of the Omo Valley region, and its weekly market is both vibrant and chaotic. The tribal people walk many kilometres today from all over the area to buy, sell and barter. Today we visit the market and watch the fascinating spectacle as members of different communities come together to barter and to enjoy each other's company.

19/08/2018 Turmi – Arba Minch (BLD)

After an early breakfast we make our way across the Omo Valley to the western Great Rift Valley. Bordered by verdant mountains and picturesque highland villages, the name Arba Minch is derived from the abundant local springs which produce a groundwater forest. The area is rich in agriculture and is known for a great variety of fruit including mango, banana, orange, apple, guava and pineapple. As well, Lake Abaya and Chamo, the largest Rift Valley lakes in Ethiopia, provide an abundant source of fish which include tiger-fish, Nile perch, tilapia and catfish.

Paradise Lodge

Arba Minch

20/08/2018 Arba Minch – Lake Chamo – Arba Minch (BLD)

This morning we visit the village of Dorze, situated on the very top of Mount Goge. The Dorze people are a hard working tribe renowned for their skill in weaving, carpentry and other traditional crafts. Their houses are tall bee-hive shaped dwellings which are some of the most distinctive in Africa. Every Dorze compound is self-sufficient, surrounded by a small-holding of crops and characterised by their remarkable bee-hive shaped dwellings made from false (Abyssinian) banana leaves. These can measure up to six metres high ensuring they last years despite termites constantly eating away at the base. Although this causes the houses to shrink gradually, their great height ensures they remain habitable for many years. In the afternoon we explore Lake Chamo, a sanctuary for vast numbers of hippopotamus that emerge at dusk to graze on the grassy shores. The lake is also home to the giant Nile crocodiles, which can measure up to seven metres in length. The bird life is also a veritable feast on the eyes as hordes of yellow weaver birds flit constantly through the trees, and vivid-coloured kingfishers skim the lake where great white pelicans, storks, ibises, hornbills and cormorants plumb the waters for food.

21/08/2018 Arba Minch – Addis Ababa
Depart Arba Minch Ethiopian Air ET 135, 15.05
Arrive Addis Ababa 16.45

Welcome to the 'Cradle of Civilisation!' Ethiopia is one of the world's most extraordinary, yet least visited, countries. Lying in the mountains at an elevation of 2,500m, Addis Ababa is the third highest capital city in the world. It enjoys a superb climate with an average year-round temperature of 25 degrees. On arrival in Addis Ababa we transfer to our hotel.

Hilton Addis Hotel
Addis Ababa

22/08/2018 Addis Ababa (BLD)

This morning we visit the fascinating National Museum, which houses Ethiopia's artistic and archaeological treasures, the most famous of which is 'Lucy' – the partial skeleton of the oldest hominid, said to be more than 3.2 million years old. The museum also houses regalia and memorabilia from former rulers including Emperor Haile Selassie. After lunch we visit the massive and ornate Holy Trinity Cathedral – final resting place of Haile Selassie and his wife Empress Menen Asfaw.

23/08/2018 Addis Ababa – Antananarivo (BLD)

After an early breakfast we transfer to the airport for our flight to Madagascar.

Depart Addis Ababa Ethiopian Air ET 853, 08.50
Arrive Antananarivo 13.40

On arrival in Antananarivo we clear customs and transfer to our hotel.

Hotel Colbert
Antananarivo

24/08/2018 Antananarivo (BLD)

This morning we head out to the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Summer Palace of Ambohimanga. This is the palace considered to be the cradle of Madagascar and from where the King, in the 1780s, proclaimed that 'only the sea is the limit of my kingdom'. In the afternoon we explore the city of Tana, as it is affectionately known by locals. Located between two mountains, it's a terraced city of low-rise buildings which form a labyrinth of arches, narrow paths, balconies and staircases. Tana's architecture is very European and our hotel is located in a district known as 'Little Paris'.

25/08/2018 Antananarivo – Antsirabe (BLD)

Today we begin our drive south, passing through typically beautiful highland country before reaching an area known for its sisal and raffia baskets. We then continue to Antsirabe or 'the place of salt', as it is known by locals. After lunch we take a city tour of Antsirabe, a former spa town founded by Norwegian missionaries in 1872. The third biggest city in Madagascar, it is the rickshaw capital of the island and, of course, our tour is by this mode of transport. As we explore the city we visit a zebu (ox) horn workshop as well as a miniature toy factory.

Royal Palace Hotel
Antsirabe

26/08/2018 Antsirabe (BLD)

This afternoon we are privileged to be guests at the annual Famadihana ('Turning of the Bones') ceremony which is a funerary tradition of the Malagasy people. Family crypts are opened up and the remains of dead ancestors are brought out to be wrapped in new cloth. Far from being a solemn occasion, it is day of great joy which celebrates family and kinship.

27/08/2018 Antsirabe – Ranomafana National Park (BLD)

Heading further south, we soon reach the woodcarving town of Ambositra. We stop here to see perhaps some of the most unusual and skilled craftsmanship to be found anywhere in the world. Some of the intricate carving and inlay work is simply stunning. Soon after Ambositra we start to see people dressed in the traditional clothing of the area, the colourful pancho lamba. Reaching the turnoff for Ranomafana National Park, we follow the Namorona River to arrive at our destination.

Centrest Hotel

Ranomafana Village

28/08/2018 Ranomafana National Park (BLD)

Today is a special one, as we enter the magnificent 41,000-hectare rainforest that is home to the golden bamboo lemur. Discovered only in 1986 and found nowhere else in the world, this lemur feeds exclusively on a native bamboo, which contains cyanide and is found only in this area. This rainforest is also home to a dizzying array of reptiles and other species of lemur. This evening we take a night walk to discover frogs, chameleons and the nocturnal mouse lemur, which is the smallest primate in the world.

29/08/2018 Ranomafana National Park – Ambalavao – Isalo (BLD)

Leaving Ranomafana, we continue our drive south through the highlands. Soon we reach the lovely town of Ambalavao. Here the houses have beautifully carved balconies and shutters. This town marks the border of the highlands and the province of Fiarantsoa. We then continue to the Anja National Park. Dominated by a magnificent granite dome, this small park is home to more than 300 ring-tailed lemur, the national animal of Madagascar. We then continue across the Horombe Plateau where the vegetation and landscape change dramatically. Finally we descend to the fringes of Isalo National Park.

Hotel le Jardin du Roy

Isalo

30/08/2018 Isalo (BLD)

Encompassing the entire length of the Isalo massif, this 81,000-hectare national park is characterised by vast eroded sandstone formations. Along the trail there are some Bara burial sites that line the path as it passes through scenery resembling the Grand Canyon. Soon we descend further and come across an oasis where tumbling waterfalls form a natural swimming pool. This kingdom is home to an amazing array of flora, which is unique even in Madagascar. After lunch we return to our hotel where the afternoon is at leisure.

31/08/2018 Isalo – Ifaty (BLD)

After breakfast we start our journey to Tulear in the southwest of the island. Soon after leaving Isalo, we come across towns reminiscent of the gold rush in California. Here we see extraordinary scenes of people panning for sapphires along small streams. Soon after we see our first ancient Baobab trees as we enter the silver grey spiny forest which finally gives way to the azure waters of the Mozambique Channel. After lunch in Ifaty we explore the incredible botanical gardens where we can see Octopus trees and Baobab trees the height of skyscrapers! The vegetation of this park is 90% endemic to Madagascar. This evening we enjoy an exclusive candle-lit dinner beneath a 1200-year-old Baobab tree.

Dunes Hotel

Ifaty

01/09/2018 Ifaty (BLD)

The economy in and around Ifaty is centred on fishing. For generations the people of this area have fished employing the same traditional techniques that are used today. We visit the fascinating village of Ambolimailaka and meet fishermen and local Vezo people who inhabit this part of the island. A unique part of the country, this is a fantastic opportunity to experience the 'Zanzibar quarter' of Madagascar.

02/09/2018 Ifaty – Tulear – Antananarivo – Andasibe (BLD)

This morning we have some free time before transferring to Tulear airport for our domestic flight to Tana.

Depart Tulear, Air Madagascar MD 713, 14.30

Arrive Antananarivo 16.10

On arrival we transfer to Andasibe. The drive takes us through granite outcrops and then through a mosaic of paddy fields and lovely Merina villages that form the highlands of Madagascar.

Andasibe Hotel

Andasibe

03/09/2018 Andasibe (BLD)

Perhaps the most important national park in Madagascar, Analamazaotra is home to the largest lemur in the world, the Indri. Entirely endemic and unable to exist in captivity, this vegetarian lemur resembles a panda. It has no tail, walks on two legs, and can reach a height of more than three feet. It is sometimes described as looking like a four-year-old in a panda suit. The Indri is monogamous and when one partner dies, the other will continue mourning for its spouse for the rest of its life. The Indri is found only in this park and today there are only about thirty families in existence. This afternoon we travel to the Perinet Reserve where we visit Lemur Island. Here we have the opportunity to interact with the five species of semi-tame lemurs that live here.

04/09/2018 Antananarivo – Nairobi – Dubai – Perth (B)

Today we travel back to the capital for our flight to Nairobi.

Depart Antananarivo Kenyan Air KQ 257, 15.20

Arrive Nairobi 18.45

Depart Nairobi Emirates EK 722, 22.45

05/09/2018 Dubai – Australia

Arrive Dubai 04.50

On arrival in Dubai we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian city.