

SPECIAL MESKEL FESTIVAL



Memories of Italy and Dahlak Island

ERITREA

Photo by I. Fornasiero



9 days

20 - 28 September 2024

English speaking guide



The 'unforgettable' of the trip:

- **Asmara**, a UNESCO heritage site, with its elegant Art Deco and Futurist architecture
- The excursion by **monorail train to Arbaroba**, with breathtaking views
- The **Bilen villages**, with their characteristic round houses of thatch and mud
- The **Monday market** in **Keren**, a meeting place for Tigré Muslim herdsmen
- The **road 'of the Italians'** from Asmara to Massawa, an altitude difference of 2,300 metres in 115 kilometres
- The ancient port of **Massawa**, with its decadent Turkish, Egyptian and Italian buildings
- The **Dahlak Islands archipelago**, crystal-clear waters, colourful fish and Afar fishermen
- The **celebrations of the Coptic Meskel Festival**, for the 'finding of the true cross of Jesus'



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Memories of Italy and Dahlak Island

ERITREA

Day 1: Friday 20 September

Italy/Asmara

Flight to Asmara. Arrive late in the evening, meet with Kanaga Africa Tours staff who will arrange transfer to the Crystal Hotel or similar. Overnight stay in a double room with bathroom.



Welcome to Eritrea!

Day 2: Saturday 21 September

Asmara

Breakfast at the hotel and a day dedicated to visiting ASMARA, the 'little Rome', declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017 thanks to the extraordinary mixture of architectural styles that embellish its urban fabric, harmoniously combining 20th-century avant-garde and daring construction techniques of Italian rationalist urbanism, reinterpreted in a local key.



Architecture of Asmara

To begin with, we will head to the Medebar, the old Caravanserai, now transformed into a bustling recycling market, where old sheet metal and rusty antiques are given new life. And while the men disassemble, bend, assemble and weld in a concert of metallic notes and puffs of steam, we will also observe the work of the women, intent on grinding chilli peppers for the preparation of berberé, the characteristic spice that distinguishes the tasty Eritrean cuisine. Afterwards we will visit the Orthodox Cathedral of Enda Mariam, where generally on Saturdays young married couples go to celebrate their union, wearing the traditional clothes of the Tigrini, the majority ethnic group in Eritrea.



Italian Artdeco villa

We arrive at Harnet Avenue (formerly 'Corso Italia'), the main artery of the city, along which are concentrated the most interesting examples of Italian Art Deco and Futurist architecture. From an artistic and constructive point of view, Asmara encompasses all the styles of the early 20th century: Cubism, Futurism, Neoclassicism, Rationalism and Expressionism, declined in a pleasant alternation of public and private buildings, which recall the memory of a past that seems to have crystallised in the 1930s.



Berberé processing at the Medebar



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(continue)

Day 2: Saturday 21 September

We visit the old town hall and the colourful covered market opposite the esplanade of the Grand Mosque, designed in 1938 by Italian architect Guido Ferrazza. Then the renowned Impero Cinema, which has not undergone any structural changes in 80 years and still entertains Asmaris with occasional film screenings and sporting events.

We will enter the Catholic Cathedral consecrated to the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, in the neo-Gothic-Lombard style, over which a very tall bell tower dominates the city, and finally, we will take a look at Villa Roma (now the residence of the Italian Ambassador), the elegant neighbouring lodgings, and the Opera House, whose construction dates back to 1920 (these buildings can, for the most part, only be visited externally).

In the afternoon we will continue our city tour admiring the architecture of the Cinema Roma, the elegant Bar Zilli and what is undoubtedly the symbol of the city: the Fiat Tagliero headquarters, a service station conceived in the futuristic shape of an aeroplane with long wings not structurally supported by pillars. Wings that defy gravity and the passage of time and celebrate the cutting-edge technology achieved by Italian designers almost a century ago.

We will then make our way to the Italian Cemetery, where 280 men who fell during the Ethiopian campaign are buried, and finally reach the extravagant Tank Graveyard, a giant open-air depot of tanks and military vehicles used during the Eritrean War of Independence.

Return to the hotel with the possibility of going to a traditional restaurant to taste the national dish, injera with *zighini*, a kind of spongy bread made from the local cereal teff, accompanied by stew with beef or lamb sauce. Accompanied by live music and tigrin dances. Overnight stay in a hotel.



Catholic Cathedral



Fiat Tagliero



Tank Graveyard



Italian cemetery



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Day 3: Sunday 22 September

Asmara/Arbaroba/Dekemhare/Keren

Breakfast at the hotel and transfer to Asmara station, for a TRAIN EXCURSION* on the ancient and picturesque monorail railway connecting the capital to Massawa, overcoming a difference in altitude of 2,128 metres and crossing 30 tunnels and 65 bridges, through forests, precipices, vertiginous peaks and breathtaking scenery that, hairpin bend after hairpin bend, guarantee a rush of emotions. Currently only used for tourism purposes, along the Asmara-Arbaroba-Asmara line, it remains a unique opportunity to tackle one of the most spectacular and daring railway routes on the entire continent. Return to Asmara.

In the afternoon, transfer to DEKEMHARE, a provincial town that preserves numerous buildings constructed by the Italians, who intended to make it the industrial capital of the colony, to arrive at the VALLEY OF SYCAMORE, a magnificent valley dotted with majestic ficus sycomorus, the country's symbolic tree, with specimens at least 300 years old.

Then we will cross the plateau in a north-westerly direction, heading for KEREN, the country's third largest city, which in the past, due to its strategic position controlling access to the capital, was the scene of famous battles and today is a pleasant centre with a cosy atmosphere, which on market days comes alive and becomes a fascinating crossroads of people and merchandise from all over.

Along the way, we will make a stop in ELABERED, where the De Nadai concession was located, still one of the most fertile areas in the country, with its mango and guava crops, and in the Bilen villages, an ethnic group of Cushitic origin whose women are adorned with nose rings and henna tattoos. There, among the acacias and a few imposing baobab trees, we see their round, typically African houses, built of rough stone and mud with thatched roofs.

Arrival in KEREN, accommodation at the Sarina Hotel or similar and overnight stay in a double room with services.

**The train excursion is subject to reconfirmation on site, with a minimum of 20 persons for Sunday departure.*



The iconic Empire Cinema in Asmara



The railway in the landscapes of the plateau



A ficus sycomorus



Bilen Village



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Day 4: Monday 23 September

Keren/Asmara

Breakfast at the hotel and a visit to the KEREN market, set up in the wadi, the dry bed of the city's watercourse, where you can find fruit, vegetables, baskets, woven mats, spices, clothes, household utensils and wood transported on the back of a camel. We also visit the weekly livestock market, a melting pot of goats, cows, camels and their Tigré breeders typically dressed in turbans and djellabas, engaged in excited haggling with potential buyers. Afterwards, we travel to the shrine of St Maryam Dearit, the 'Madonna of the Baobab', where a centuries-old, gnarled baobab tree holds a chapel dedicated to Mary, which locals believe promotes female fertility, and where, in 1941, some Italian soldiers took refuge, miraculously unharmed by British bombing, which hit the tree but spared their lives. In the afternoon we will visit the British and Italian cemeteries dedicated to the National Heroes and the Ascari, the many Eritrean fighters framed as regular soldiers in the colonial units, who participated with honour in the Italian army's major African campaigns. A touching inscription bears the words of General Amedeo Guillet: '*The Eritreans were splendid. All that we can do for Eritrea will never be as much as Eritrea has done for us...*'. We then continue to the old railway station, now a bus terminal, the outside of the mosque and the silversmiths' souk, where we will have fun looking for the famous Maria Theresa thalers, minted by the Kingdom of Italy for the colony of Eritrea from 1935 to 1961. Return to Asmara in the late afternoon, accommodation at the Crystal Hotel or similar and overnight stay in double rooms with services.



Elder Tigré



At the Keren market



Madonna of the Baobab

Day 5: Tuesday 24 September

Asmara/Ghinda/Massawa

Breakfast at the hotel and departure for the coast, following a spectacular road built by the Italians in 1935-36, which in 115 km covers a difference in altitude of 2,300 metres, including daring ups and downs and scenic viewpoints where the gaze sweeps from steep rocky slopes to gentle slopes and wide valleys sloping down to the fiery plains of the Red Sea.



At the Keren market



Keren Mosque



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ERITREA

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Day 5: Tuesday 24 September

On the exciting descent we will encounter groups of hamadryad baboons, take a break in GHINDA for a bunna (coffee), a shai (tea) or a papaya juice, and visit the old building of the Locanda Buon Respiri, which still bears the inscription 'Tabacchi e Telefono' on its façade. Finally, we stop at DOGALI, to pay homage to the monument of the Italian fallen in the Ras Alula ambush (to whom the Piazza dei Cinquecento in Rome is dedicated), and to take a closer look at the three-arched bridge dedicated to General Menabrea over the Dongollo river, on whose pediment the inscription in Piedmontese dialect '*Ca custa lon ca custa*' (cost what it costs), probably referring to the seizure of Assab Bay in 1869, is still clearly visible. Lunch box on the way. Arrival in MASSAWA, the charming 'pearl of the Red Sea', which for centuries was one of the most important ports in the region and, in later times, the scene of painful wars that undermined its splendour, without however succeeding in dimming its timeless charm. And today, the outlines of the elegant buildings of Arab, Turkish, Portuguese, Egyptian and Italian influence draw the contours of a city that retains melancholic memories of its glorious past. Accommodation at the Dahlak Hotel or similar, equipped with a swimming pool* and overlooking the city's old harbour. In the afternoon we visit the ruins of the Imperial Palace built by the Turks in the 16th century, and later the summer residence of Haile Selassie. We will stroll through the alleyways of the old city, half destroyed by a violent earthquake in 1921 and rebuilt in record time by Italian architects who respected the original style of the collapsed buildings. We will walk through the maze of alleyways of its ancient heart, the arcades and the former Via Roma, which penetrates as far as the old covered bazaar, with its merchants' houses with their lopsided wooden terraces and elegant mashrabiyya, Moorish-style balconies whose arabesque inlays provide shade and ventilation to the most elegant buildings. We finally arrive at the Hotel Savoia and the impressive ruined Bank of Italy building dating back to 1920, perhaps the structure that has paid the price most of all for the ferocity of the armed conflict. Overnight stay in a hotel.

* The hotel pool is not always operative.



Baboon Hamadryas



Ruins of the Turkish Imperial Palace



Along the streets of Massawa



Traditional building in Massawa



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Day 6: Wednesday 25 September

Massawa/Dahlak Islands

Breakfast at the hotel and departure for the two-day excursion aboard a speedboat to the DAHLAK ISLANDS, an archipelago of over 200 islands in the heart of the Red Sea, an unspoilt natural paradise characterised by beautiful deserted beaches surrounded by calm turquoise waters that are pleasantly warm all year round, ideal for snorkelling and diving to discover the coral reef and its colourful tropical fish. An exceptional ecosystem that satisfies the interest of sea lovers and bird enthusiasts, as these islands are home to colonies of migratory birds that stop here to feed and rest. We will visit a couple of islands* with different characteristics and attractions, such as the coral sandbank entirely surrounded by the Madote reef and the volcanic island of Dissei, the extreme offshoot of the Dancalia region which, with a series of reliefs and inlets that make mooring easy, is one of the few inhabited islands in the archipelago. There lives a small community of Afar fishermen, whose women welcome us by setting up an improvised bazaar of bracelets and shell necklaces on the beach. On none of the islands are there any fixed facilities, so having the privilege of appreciating this pristine nature will require a good spirit of adaptation, with nights in igloo tents and camp toilets (small chemical toilet and fresh water for rationed showers). Lunch and dinner at the camp prepared by our cook, overnight stay in a double tent under millions of stars.

**The choice of islands will be made on the spot by the boat captain, depending on the weather conditions (wind, sea ...), the availability of permits, and the characteristics of the group.*

Day 7: Thursday 26 September

Dahlak Islands/Massawa/Asmara

Breakfast at the camp and morning dedicated to walking on the beach and/or snorkelling in the colourful coral reef. Lunch and return to the mainland, continuation to Asmara. In the late afternoon, we complete our visit to 'little Rome' by going to the market, where we can find souvenirs such as jebena (coffee jugs), straw baskets, leather goods, and to the small coffee roasters, where we can buy the fine local coffee. Accommodation at Hotel Crystal or similar. Overnight stay in double rooms with services.



White Dahlak beach



Boat in Dissei



Afar fishing village



Beautifully coloured backdrops



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Day 8: Friday 27 September

Asmara (Meskel Festival)

Breakfast at the hotel. It's a day dedicated to participating in the Coptic Meskel Festival, celebrating the finding of the true cross of Jesus: a large bonfire will be set up, which, after being blessed by priests dressed in the most solemn liturgical vestments, will be lit and the population will begin to sing and dance around the fire. Some rooms in day use. Transfer to the airport in time for your return flight, end of services.



Priests during the Meskel



Meskel bonfire

Day 9: Saturday 28 September

Asmara (ASM)/Return flight

Arrival at the destination airport.



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ERITREA (ERI01PS240426)

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English speaking guide

Individual participation fee in double room/tent
(min. 4, max 16 pax)

3,090 €/pax

in promotion at € 2,990
for booking before 20/06/2024

in promotion at € 2,890
for booking before 05/05/2024

Supplements:

- Enrollment fee: **free!**
- Single room/tent: **130 €**
- Seat on the train: **50 €/pax** (can only be confirmed on site)
- Pre-Visa service: **70 €/passport**

The fee includes:

- English speaking local guide;
- English speaking tour leader (from 7 pax);
- Tourist permits for scheduled sites*;
- Visits and excursions as per itinerary*;
- All transfers by minibus or 4x4, including drivers, diesel and tolls;
- Speedboat excursion to the Dahlak Islands;
- Meals as specified in the itinerary;
- 7 overnight stays with breakfast as mentioned in the itinerary;
- Camp materials (tents, cooker, ...) for the night in Dahlak;
- Day use in Asmara (1 room per 4 pax).

The fee does not include:

- The visa for Eritrea (on arrival 70 USD if you do pre-visa with us);
- Cancellation/health/baggage insurance;
- Air flights;
- Drinks and mineral water;
- Meals not included in the itinerary;
- Tipping and photographic tips;
- Expenses of a personal nature;
- Everything mentioned in 'supplements';
- Anything not expressly mentioned in 'the fee includes'.