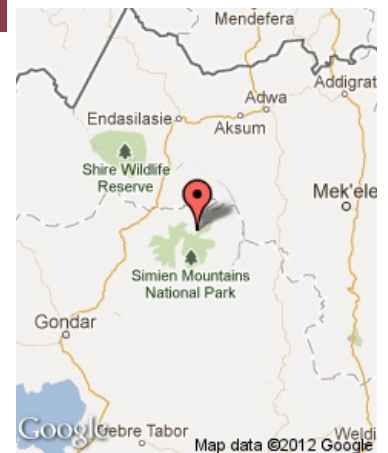


Classic Simien Mountain Trek



Highlights

The classic three to five day Simien Mountain trek, tracing the dramatic ridge trail and culminating in the ascent of Buahit at 4,430m.

Forget Kilimanjaro, the Simien Mountains have greater claim to be the roof of Africa. Whether trekking with rare Gelada Baboons, Wallia Ibex and Ethiopian wolves, or getting your thrills from terrifying vertical views, the Simien Mountains have it all up their sleeves. The Simiens is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and rightly so. Set amidst a vast mountain range that resembles a landscape you might expect to see in the Grand Canyon, the Simien National Park sits haughtily above at 3,500m+ offering a dramatic ridge with incredible views every step of the way.

You'd be hard pressed to find another trek with more views per km anywhere in the world. The trail follows the course of the ridge offering breathtaking view after breathtaking view. Highlights include the terrifying 700m drop of the Genbar Falls, the raised promontory of Imet Gogo with 360 degree views and summiting Buahit at 4,430m. Its hard to take your eyes off the drop, but the wildlife makes its best effort to divert you. Large troops of colourful gelada baboon roam the park, whilst the rare Wallia Ibex with its incredibly long curved horns will have you imitating David Attenborough as you creep steadily closer for the perfect shot.

Is it for me?

Travelling in Ethiopia is by no means easy, but it is vastly rewarding. The challenges are the lack of luxuries (a hot shower in Ethiopia is a rare thing, even in upmarket hotels), the unique cuisine and hassle from hawkers. Having said that it also happens to host one of the most unique cultures in the world with a rich cultural heritage and some of the best trekking in the world. You can't have everything.

As long as you don't come expecting to be cosseted and you have travelled previously to places like SE Asia, India and Africa then you'll no what to expect. The trek itself is challenging but by no means technical or unaccessible. The biggest challenge is the altitude. You'll start the trek at 3,000m and spend the entirety of the trek between 3000m and 4500m. Altitude problems are rare, but some of the climbs particularly on the first few days are a lot tougher than they would be at lower altitudes. You'll be well looked after by your guide, cook and scout.

In summary, if you've travelled a bit and like walking then this trek is suitable for you – as long as you come with the right attitude!

Accommodation

On trek you'll be camping in the official park camp sites at Sankaber, Geech and Chenek. The sites are in beautiful spots and have been built sympathetically with seated drop toilets set well away from the camping area. The facilities are cleaned and tidied every day, but in the peak summer months and around the festivals, the sites can be a little over-run by trekkers. Out of peak though they make for fantastic camp-sites. There is no alternative as wild camping is not permitted.


You will be sleeping in 2 men tents (you can share or have a tent to yourself) and the crew will erect and take down your tent each day (as well as carrying your gear to the next camp-site). Overnight temperatures are cold at altitudes over 3,000m, so bring a good 3 or preferably 4 season sleeping bag.

Food-wise you will have a private cook for your trek who will provide breakfast, packed lunch, tea and dinner

Prices from

335 GBP (3-5 days) per person
(based on two sharing)

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each day. The food is great, and given most Westerners aversion to the Ethiopian staple Injirra, mostly of the Western variety. Expect bread and pancakes / eggs for breakfast, filling sandwiches for lunch, herbal teas, fantastic coffee and popcorn at the end of a long days trekking and then a massive meal to end the day with soup starter and a hearty main with plenty of veg to finish.

Transport to and from the Simien Mountains is in a 4wd vehicle. The drive to the mountains from Gonder is not the most comfortable in the world, it is dry, dusty and very bumpy.

You'll be accompanied by an English speaking guide, chef and scout. Scout's are compulsory and carry rifles. It is worth noting that the guns are not really there for protection but are a cultural remnant of the role the scouts once played in protecting the area from bandits.

Itinerary

Itinerary is for the 5 day trek. Please see booking box below for 3 and 4 day itineraries

DAY 1: Gondar – Debark – Sankaber Camp (3,200m)

4-5hrs driving, 7km 2/3 hours walking

You'll be picked up from your hotel in Gondar around 7.30am for the 2 ½ hr drive to Debark in a 4x4. The road is rough and very dusty, but if you haven't left the built up areas in Ethiopia yet, it is a real eye opener into the life of the rural majority. At Debark you will sign in at the park headquarters, pick up your guide and scout and head up into the mountains (by 4x4). The road continues all the way to the first camp at Sankaber, but you'll be dropped off on the way for a leisurely three hour acclimatisation hike. The stunning views hit you as soon as you get out of the vehicle as you walk along the ridge. There will be time to stop for a picnic lunch and after a short but demanding climb (at this altitude) to Sankaber you'll be met as every day on this trek with a tray of fresh coffee, tea and snacks. (L,D)

DAY 2: Sankaber (3,200m) – Geech Camp (3,600m)

Walking 7-8hrs / 15km

After a hearty breakfast, you'll set off trekking along the ridge with stunning views over the foothills 800m below. For the first two hours the trail passes through low bush of Giant Heather, soda apple, Abyssinian rose, St John's Wort and Globe thistle. The highlight of the trek from Sankaber to Geech is Genbar Falls, an incredible 500m sheer drop. From the viewpoint opposite, you can watch the falcons, augur buzzard and lammergeier bearded vulture soar on the thermals below. From the Genbar falls, the trail passes drier dustier land, broken by lunch at a somewhat less intimidating and more peaceful waterfall. Klipspringer and bush buck may be seen in the steep rocky and wooded slopes, whilst troops of Gelada Baboons roam the dusty fields for roots. Just before you reach Geech camp site, there is a wonderful opportunity to visit one of the traditional village houses for home roasted coffee and injirra. Geech Camp itself is set on a grassy plateau with stunning sunset views. (B,L,D)

DAY 3: Geech (3,600m) – Imet Gogo (3,926m) – Siha Gorge – Kedar Dit – Geech (3,600m)

Walking 5-6 hrs / 13km

After breakfast you'll trek for 2 hours along the grass plateau past countless bizarre outsized Giant Lobelia plants. The destination is Imet Gogo, an incredible rocky promontory that grants 360 degree views over the Simien Range. At an altitude of 3,926m you can see West back along the ridge towards Sankaber and Geech and South East across a deep gully towards the tomorrow's ridge walk to Inatye and Cheneck Camp. The views here are arguably the best in the Simien Mountains and the drop is terrifying. From Imet Gogo, you'll return to camp via the Siha Gorge for lunch. Afternoon at leisure before heading out for a short optional sunset trek to KedaDit (3760m). Overnight at Geech Camp again. (B,L,D)

DAY 4: Geech (3600m) – Innatye (4070m) - Chenek (3,600m)

Walking 7 hours / 15km

Today is the longest and arguably most spectacular passing close to the ridge most of its length. After breakfast you will head back on the path towards Imet Gogo before detouring SE towards Inatye. The path drops into a forest of Giant Hazel before following the ridge on open grassland. The climb to Inatye (4,070m) rewards with stunning views. Inatye roughly translates as "mamma mia" and the terrifying vertical drop here justly warrants the name! After a picnic lunch the path follows mostly downhill through open grassland and giant lobelia towards Chenek with a number of stunning viewpoints along the way. Chenek camp is superb for wildlife with both Gelada Baboons and Wallia Ibex common here. (B,L,D)

DAY 5: Chenek (3600m) – Mount Buahit (4430m) – Chenek (3600m)

Walking 5 hours / 830m elevation gain and descent / 10km distance covered

After an early breakfast, you will head SE out of Chenek to climb Buahit Peak at 4430m. The path follows a small stream for an hour or two up to Buahit Pass. At the pass the views open up to the North East towards Lori and Sona Villages. This is a fantastic place to spot the Wallia Ibex. From here it is another hour or two's scramble up a rocky slope to Buahit Peak. It is hard work at the altitude but the views from the top and the wildlife on the way are more than worth it. After a quick lunch in Chenek, you'll be driven back to Gonder (B,L)

Details

Getting there

Getting to Ethiopia

Ethiopia's national airline, Ethiopian Airlines is arguably one of the best in Africa. International services are reliable with good seat pitch, whilst domestic flights are serviced by a brand new fleet of twin props. Ethiopian flies direct from London, Frankfurt, Paris and Rome in Europe. The flight takes around 8 hours. Great deals can be had if you book your international flight direct with Ethiopian with your domestic Ethiopian flights – you will need to call them to get these fares.

Getting around Ethiopia

Because of the state of the roads, the distances involved and the quality of the alternative (flying) most short term visitors use internal flights in Ethiopia. There are reliable daily flights between most of the stops on the Northern Circuit (Addis, Gondar, Lalibella, Axum, Bahir Dar).

If you have more time, or delight in the joys of overland travel, there are loads of options on the road. Local bus services are super cheap, regular and exceedingly uncomfortable. They'll certainly give you a story to tell. Alternatively Skybus offer a reliable upmarket coach service from Addis Abbaba to Gonder, Jimma, Bahir Dar, Awassa, Harrer and Dire Dawa. Schedules and prices are available at <http://www.skybusethiopia.com/site/schedule.html>

Price includes

Transport to and from Gonder in 4wd

All camping equipment including tents, sleeping bags and mattresses (although we recommend you bring your own 3 or 4 season sleeping bag)

Guide and all meals on trek

Park entrance fees

International flights, personal expenses and tips are not included.

When is best

The Ethiopian Tourist Board proudly promotes their slogan "13 months of sunshine" to anyone who will listen, but they are not far off the mark. The rainy season in the North is in July and August, but whilst that might stop you attempting a multi day trek in the Simien Mountains, it won't really affect you if you are planning on touring the Northern Historical route. The best time to visit the North is in Autumn, after the rains when the mountains are full of lush green and the views are unimpeded by haze.

The rains in the South are in April, May and October which make the roads in the Lower Omo Valley impassable, so you'll need to avoid these if you're planning on an adventure down here.

Comfort level

Down to earth (hostels, camping, huts)

Experience required

A reasonable level of fitness and interest is all that is needed

Travellers should bring

This list covers equipment and clothing recommended for a Simien Mountain trek. Your main bags will be carried by a mule. At all times you will only be walking with a day-pack. Day-pack large enough to carry spare clothes, waterproofs, camera, lunch, drink, etc. Main bag should be a large kit bag or ideally a rucksack which is easier to load on mules to carry. This should weigh less than 14 kg. A light kit-bag is useful for storing any gear not needed on the mountain section. Your total baggage allowance on most airlines is 20 kg. If you need more specific advice please don't hesitate to contact us. Sleeping bag: A good 4 season bag. Temperatures can be below freezing overnight. A quality liner is useful for extra warmth and upgrades a 3 season to a 4 season bag. Water bottle: Bottled mineral water will be provided for the trek. It is useful to have your own water bottles to decant into. Torch: Spare bulbs, batteries. Head torch useful but not essential. Small spare torch. Walking pole/s: Highly recommended by some, awkward for others - try one out first. Camera: Plenty of memory space or film. Spare camera batteries and cleaning kit, dust proof camera bag. The following list of clothing is provided as a guideline only. But your clothing should allow you the flexibility to cope with the range of weather conditions you may encounter on this trip. Clothing: underwear, light cotton/polycotton for general wear, and insulating next-to-skin ("thermal") vest and long johns for the cold or wet days on the trek. Socks suitable for walking and general wear. T-shirts, long sleeved shirt, sweatshirt, trousers/skirt for general wear. Walking shirt. Warm pullover/jersey, warm fleece or down jacket. Walking trousers, skirt or breeches. Walking shorts. Track suit (for evenings in camp, and as an extra layer when cold). Thick jacket (fleece, fibre-pile, or pile and pertex mix). Waterproof and windproof jacket/cagoule and over trousers. Walking boots - well broken in. Sandals/flip-flops. Sunglasses, sun hat, (packable/collapsible), warm hat. Other kit: Towel, toilet kit, spare specs, personal first aid kit (e.g. sticking plasters, lint, antiseptic cream, aspirins/paracetamol, antihistamine, malaria pills and any special personal medication). Sun cream, insect repellent, lip salve, wet wipes, sewing kit. Binoculars for bird/animal spotting, mountain map. A wristwatch with an alarm function is useful for early starts. Use strong plastic bags inside your rucksack to keep out rain and dust. Documents: Passport, passport photocopy (main page only), travellers cheques, insurance certificate, etc all in a secure money belt/pouch. Wallet for day to day use. Diary, notebook.

Reviews (3)

Reviews of this experience

“ The Simien mountain trek was a great experience. The views were truly awesome, I never tired of looking at the mountains as we trekked through them. Our guide and scout were fantastic and took great care of us, especially when altitude made walking more difficult. Our cook & his assistant also did a great job- food was plentiful and varied. All the arrangements made at local level were efficient and friendly. The support and advice provided by Tourdust pre departure was very good. Ethiopia is an incredibly interesting country and the people are very welcoming. ”

Hannah Sultan reviewing Classic Simien Mountain Trek

“ Professional, dependable, and efficient! We had a great time on the trek and would recommend the company to others trying to plan a trek in the Simien Mountains ”

Meryl Goodwin reviewing Classic Simien Mountain Trek

“ A trip that really challenged preconceptions. There was dust and rural poverty, of course, but breathtaking scenery, and people with a strong sense of a long, proud history. The altitude affects you, but you quickly learn to take things gently. I was amazed what fantastic food was produced in quite challenging conditions - although our guide clearly preferred his injera. I was prepared to endure the coffee ceremony with locals, but it was a real highlight. Local organisation was informal, but effective and friendly. Gondar has interesting history and is worth a day of anyone's time. (Disclaimer: Peter is an investor in Tourdust, travelled with Tourdust to the Simien Mountains in spring 2011) ”

peters reviewing Classic Simien Mountain Trek