

## Abune Yemata

Abuna Yemata Guh was built in honor of one of the nine saints of the Ethiopian Church, Abuna Yemata, in recognition of his work in spreading Christianity throughout the country in the late 5th century.

The site was inaccessible for centuries and remained untouched due to its remote location. It was visited only by wandering monks and devout Christians. Thanks to this isolation, many of the artworks found there remained virtually untouched. Father Yemata built the rock-hewn church in the 5th century. It is unknown why he chose such a remote location. However, historical accounts from the time describe the widespread persecution of the then Christian Ethiopian minority. Many speculate that he wanted to escape enemies and capture. Others claim that Yemata sought solitude and isolation from the world, a place of meditation and reflection, in the hopes of attaining true divinity. Regardless of its reason for creation, this rock-hewn masterpiece is a testament to the power of faith.

The sun tries in vain to sneak through the rickety wooden doors. Just outside the cave, it shines brightly, reflecting off the enormous orange sandstone cliffs. But as soon as you step inside, the rest of the world disappears, leaving you in total darkness, illuminated only by the flickering of dim candles.

The paintings found in the church date back to the 15th century and feature intricate patterns, religious iconography, and depictions of nine of the twelve apostles. They were painted with materials derived from local flowers, minerals, and fruits.

### *Itinerary to Abune Yemata Guh*

*Day 1*- upon arrival at Bole International Airport, you will be greeted by our tour guides and transferred to your booked hotel. Most flights to Addis Ababa arrive in the morning, leaving the remaining hours of the day available for a city tour of Addis Ababa. Full- and half-day tours are available on our website. Learn more about our city tours there.

***If you arrive at night, the next day will be reserved for a full-day city tour of Addis Ababa.***

**Day 2-** Take an early morning flight to Mekelle and upon arrival, continue to drive to Hawzen city, (102 km from Mekelle). Our first stop en route is Wukro Cherkos. This leaning, cruciform sandstone church is semi-monolithic and features beautiful cruciform columns (note the swirling sandstone slats), cubic capitals, an outstanding Aksumite frieze, and a barrel vault.

Next visit

Abreha Atsbeha is located 17 km from the town of Wukro in our direction. This 10th-century church is large and cruciform, with cross-shaped pillars, well-preserved 17th- and 18th-century wall paintings, and a beautiful wooden gate. Some of the church's treasures, including what are believed to be King Atsbeha's golden shoes, are displayed in glass cases in the adjacent museum.

The journey continues to Dugem Selassie.

This church resembles a tomb and may have been one before its rebuilding. The adjacent 19th-century "new" church stands not on a large hill, but on a small rocky outcrop. Partially carved into the rock, it has a plastered stone structure, easily recognizable by its white color.

Arrival in the town of Hawzen for lunch and rest, the stay lasts until the evening.

**Day -3** after breakfast in the morning, we will head to visit to Abune Abraham Monastery

This large and impressive 14th-century church (also known as Debre Tsion) has a rectangular floor plan and six massive freestanding pillars. It boasts a variety of architectural features, including elaborate domes, bas-reliefs and carved crosses on the walls and ceiling, 16th-century wall paintings, and an unusually large 15th-century ceremonial fan.

Next is Yohannes Maequdi, a church with a rectangular chapel and six freestanding pillars supporting a ceiling decorated with geometric patterns. It is most notable for its well-preserved wall paintings.

After the visit we return to the town of Hawzen and stay one more night.

(Lunch on this excursion depends on the time of the visit, with the option to bring a packed lunch or prepare one during the hike.)

**Day 4-** after breakfast we drive to Abune Yemata church on Gheralta Mountains.

Debre Mariam Korkor of the 6<sup>th</sup> century

This impressive cruciform church is known for its architectural features (cross columns, arches, and domes), its beautiful 17th-century frescoes, and its ecclesiastical treasures. It is also one of the largest churches in the region. The trail begins about 1 km from the road and requires a fairly steep, one-hour climb. Maryam Korkor combines well with the nearby Abuna Yemata Guh for a day hike from Megab. We will visit other small, rock-cut prayer rooms as well.

After the visit we return to the town of Hawzen and stay one more night.

(Lunch on this excursion depends on the time of the visit, with the option to bring a packed lunch or prepare one during the hike.)

**Day -5** drive directly back to Mekelle and catch flight to Addis,.

**Farwell Night:** Upon arrival in the city, we'll have lunch (if we arrive early), rest a bit, and enjoy an early dinner in one of Ethiopia's best jazz or (reggae optional) lounges, or in one of the most beautiful dance and folklore houses with a traditional coffee ceremony. This concludes the four-day trip.

*The excursion on the fourth day can optionally be extended by one day, depending on the customer's interests.*

## **Optional**

### Excursion to Al Negash Mosque the first African Mosque

Negash is a small village 60 km east of Mekele, the capital of the Tigray region. It was Africa's first Muslim settlement. During the reign of the Prophet Muhammad, when the Arab merchant Quraysh persecuted the Prophet and his family, he advised his daughter Rukiya and her husband Uthman, along with their twelve companions, to travel to Ethiopia. The then King of Ethiopia granted them protection and permanent residence.

The Prophet's daughter later died along with her companions and was buried in the historic Al-Nejash Mosque.

Neash is a place of great historical and religious significance and is considered a symbol of the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians.

You'll have breakfast (optional halal for Muslims) and take a city tour of Mekelle, visiting Hawelti and the Memorial Museum. Walk and drive through the streets of Mekelle. Afterwards, you can optionally pray the Zuhr and Asr prayers at the great Anwar Mosque and have lunch (optionally at a halal restaurant for Muslims). In the afternoon, you'll travel to Wukro to the Nejashi Mosque, the first mosque in Africa since the 7th century. There, you'll visit the tombs of the 15 Sahabas and take a city tour.

Finish the tour and return to Mekelle for the night.

### **What does the 4 days tour include?**

- \*Hotel fees.
- \*Air fair for domestic flights.
- \* Pick up and drop off service.
- \*Transportation, including fuel and driving.
- \*Entrance fees, at all listed places.
- \*Professional English speaking tour-guide.
- \*Lunch, dinner hot drinks and bottled water.

### **What's not included?**

- \* Alcoholic beverages not listed on the package
- \*Tips and Gratitude

All-inclusive 5-day visit to the rock-hewn churches of Tigray

Total: \$2973 (individual price)

\*Group of 2: \$ 2229 per person

\*Group of 3: \$2006 per person

\*Group of 4-9: \$1805 per person

\*Group of 10 or more: \$1635 per person

From 25% to 45% discount for group tours