

Religious Celebrations

In Ethiopia you will discover a wide range of religious holidays and festivities including the Ethiopian New Year, Finding of the True Cross, Ethiopian Christmas and Epiphany.

{mospagebreak title=Ethiopian New Year (Enqutatash)}

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Ethiopia still retains the Julian calendar, in which the year is divided into 12 months of 30 days each and a 13th month of 5 days and 6 days in leap year. The Ethiopian calendar is 8 years behind the Gregorian calendar from January to September and 7 years behind between September 11 and January 8.

Enqutatash means the "gift of jewels". When the famous Queen of Sheba returned from her expensive jaunt to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem, her chiefs welcomed her by replenishing her treasury with jewels. The spring festival has been celebrated since these early times and as the rains come to their abrupt end, dancing and singing can be heard at every village in the green countryside.

But Enqutatash is not exclusively a religious holiday. Today's Enqutatash is also the season for exchanging formal New Year greetings and cards among the urban sophisticated - in lieu of the traditional bouquet of flowers.

{mospagebreak title=Finding of the True Cross (Meskel)}

Finding of the True Cross (Meskel)

Meskel has been celebrated in the country for over 1600 years. The word actually means "cross" and the feast commemorates the discovery of the cross upon which Jesus was crucified, by the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. The original event took place on 19 March 326AD. But the feast is now celebrated on 27 September.

Many of the rites observed throughout the festival are said to be directly connected to the legend of Empress Helena. On the eve of Meskal, tall branches are tied together and yellow daisies, popularly called Meskel Flowers, are placed at the top. During the night those branches are gathered together in front of the compound gates and ignited - This symbolizes the actions of the Empress who, when no one would show the Holy Sepulcher, lit incense and prayed for help. Where the smoke drifted, she dug and found three roses. To one of the three, on the True Cross of Jesus, many miracles were attributed.

Ethiopian Christmas (Genna)

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Ethiopian Christmas, (Genna) is not the primary religious and secular festival that it has become in Western countries. Falling on 7 January, it is celebrated seriously by a church service that goes on throughout the night, with people moving from one church to another. Traditionally, young men played a game similar to hockey, called Genna, on this day, and now Christmas has also come to be known by that name

{mospagebreak title=Timket, feast of Epiphany}

Timket, feast of Epiphany Timket, feast of Epiphany is the greatest festival of the year falling on the 19 January just two weeks after the Ethiopian Christmas. It is actually a three-day affair beginning on the eve of Timket with dramatic and colorful processions. The following morning the great day itself, Christ's baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist is commemorated. Since October and the end of the rains, the country has been drying up steadily. The sun blazes down from a clear blue sky and the festival of Timket always take place in glorious weather.

{mospagebreak title=Hidar Tsion (Celebration of St. Mary's day)}

Hidar Tsion (Celebration of St. Mary's day)

The virgin's day is one of the most venerated of all religious figures in Ethiopia. About 33 days are annually dedicated to different celebrations in commemoration of Mary. "Hidar Zion" is associated with the presence of the Ark of the Covenant in Axum and the belief that the Ark itself is a symbol of her womb. Falling on 30th November every year, this festival is attended by thousands of people from foreign countries and all over Ethiopia, making it one of the most blissful annual pilgrimages in country, the "Blessed city of the Ethiopians"

{mospagebreak title=Hossaena (Palm Sunday) at Axum}

Hossaena (Palm Sunday) at Axum

Palm Sunday: This is the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Christ's entry into Jerusalem. On this date, early in the morning, the deacons walk around in every village of the town to deliver palm leaves to followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to wear on their foreheads the whole day. This feast is colourfully celebrates at Axum every year and many people come from all over the county and overseas to attend.