EXPLORE! Tour Notes

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Blue Nile and Lalibela (ET 2014)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TOUR DURATION **14** DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Busy
Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Standard
Tour Code: ET

Tour Highlights - Blue Nile and Lalibela

- ✓ Lalibela - Explore impressive churches carved in rocks.
- ✓ Bahar Dar - Walk to the top of Tississat Falls, the Water that Smokes.
- ✓ Axum - Obelisks, temples and palaces in the final resting place of the Ark of Covenant.
- ✓ Simien Mountains - Rugged and spectacular mountain scenery.
- ✓ Gondar - Exceptionally well preserved castles from the 17th Century.
- ✓ Harar - A medieval walled city and the cradle of Islam in Ethiopia.
- ✓ Awash Saba - A National Park dominated by a dormant volcano, home to mammals and predators.

Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	5 nights Simple Hotel 8 nights Standard Hotel
Included Meals:	13 breakfasts, 0 lunches, 0 dinners
Start Point:	Join tour: Addis Ababa
End Point:	Tour ends: Addis Ababa
Transport:	Bus, Boat, Flight
Countries:	Ethiopia

Blue Nile & Lalibela

Join us for a journey through one of Africa's least explored countries. On our journey along the Historic Route we visit rock-hewn churches, ancient obelisks and the forbidden medieval town of Harar. We also see many of the country's astonishing natural wonders, from the dramatic Tississat Falls (the source of the Blue Nile) to the rugged Simien mountain range.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Busy

Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

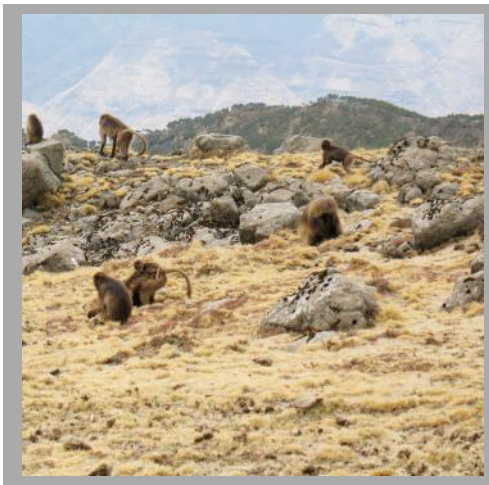
Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour Addis Ababa, fly Dire Dawa, drive Harar

Addis is situated at an elevation of around 2438m and is only about a century old. It has some elegant modern buildings and is quite spacious with wide streets and green areas. It remains the capital of a predominantly rural area and the Mercato is one of the largest open markets in Africa. You will have use of day rooms in Addis. This afternoon we fly to Dire Dawa, the commercial centre of the region and the main rail head for the Djibouti to Addis railway. From here we ascend by road from the plains to the walled city of Harar, nestling at 1700m on a hillside. The city walls are pierced by 5 gates topped by 25 towers. The 16th century mosque with its slender minaret and the narrow streets lined with small shops all give the impression of having wandered into a city from the Arabian nights.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Rooms Available



DAY 2 In Harar; exploring the medieval city on foot

Harar is the cradle of Islam in Ethiopia and by the Middle Ages, Harar had become known as the fourth most sacred city in the Islamic world. It remained closed to outsiders and even when the Victorian scholar Burton visited Harar, he entered the city disguised as a Turkish trader. Later, the poet Rimbaud came and was captivated by the beautiful people. The house where he spent his happiest days still stands. He died trying to return to the city he loved. We'll spend the day exploring the city.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 3 Drive to Awash Saba; visit Awash National Park

Today we drive to the scenic Awash National Park, we will visit the town of Aweday famous as the site of the country's largest chat market (a mildly stimulating plant). The scenic Awash National Park located in the dry acacia savanna of the Rift Valley. The skyline of the park is dominated by the jagged edges of Mount Fantelle, a dormant volcano whose crater towers above the surrounding bush. This aftenoon we will have an opportunity to visit its splendid waterfall spilling into a 150m gorge. We may also have the opportunity to spot some of the parks wildlife. The most visible large mammals are the Beisa Oryx, Soemmering's gazelle and the Slat's dik-dik. The park boosts the presence of predators such as lions, hyenas and jackals they are however only seen infrequently.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 4 Drive to Addis; orientation tour

We drive back to the capital and aim to arrive in the afternoon. We will make an orientation tour of the city visiting the two major highlights of the city, the Ethnographic Museum and the church of the Holy Trinity, whose large dome and slender pinnacles make it a landmark in the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 5 Fly to Bahar Dar

Today we take an early morning flight north to Bahar Dar, capital of the Amhara region situated on the shores of Lake Tana. We spend time on Lake Tana, visiting the Zeghie peninsula and Ura Kidane Meret Church. This dates back to medieval times and contains valuable manuscripts and religious treasures. From Lake Tana, the river meanders towards the falls, then becomes the Blue Nile on it's thousand-mile journey to meet the White Nile at Khartoum. In the afternoon you will have some free time to visit the town and local market.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 6 At Bahar Dar; visit Tississat Falls

We visit Tississat Falls, Amharic for water that smokes located about 32km south of Bahar Dar. After crossing a 16th century Portuguese built bridge, we walk up the hillside on an easy path to a viewpoint (approximately 45 minutes). There may also the opportunity to extend this to a 2 hour circular walk including a short boat crossing of the Nile. In the afternoon we visit a viewpoint close to the Nile source near a one time residence of Haile Selassie. Here we can pause to consider the tremendous distance this body of water must now travel to reach its mouth in the Delta region of lower Egypt and the Mediterranean. Please note: viewing of the falls is subject to local authorities allowing water to flow from the Blue Nile dam.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 7 Drive to Gondar

Today we drive to Gondar, located on the high plateau just north of Lake Tana. The town was the imperial capital of Ethiopia for 200 years. Gondar's most famous monuments are its exceptionally well preserved 17th century castles. The largest and best is that of King Fasilidas. It is a stone-built construction with round turrets and wooden balconies. The king also built a remarkable bath a mile or so outside of town known as the 'Pavilion of Delight'. This whole complex of buildings is unique in Ethiopia and unlike anything found elsewhere in Africa. This afternoon, as well as visiting the castle ruins, we'll also make a visit to the Debre Berhan Selassie Church famed for its ceiling frescoes of many faces.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 8 Drive to Debark; walk in Simien Mountains

A morning's drive takes us to Debark, the village base for hiking in the Simien Mountains. The range lies north of Gondar and many of the peaks rise above 4000m. The highest is Mt. Ras Dashen at 4543m, the fifth highest in Africa. The mountains are criss-crossed with tracks worn out by the local people travelling from village to village or moving their animals to fresh pastures. The combination of these tracks and the spectacular scenery make for excellent walking.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 9 In the Simien Mountains

Today we plan to explore the Simien mountains National Park on foot (approx 4 hours walking). We'll keep an eye out for some of Ethiopia's endemic mammals, the Walia ibex, gelada baboon and the rare Simien fox – misnamed as it is not really a fox, but a member of the dog family restricted to Ethiopia.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 10 Drive to Axum

Although the roads are rough and dusty, the views in this remote part of Ethiopia are simply spectacular and more than make up for them. The full day drive affords some excellent photo opportunities of the jagged Simien Mountains and the Tekeze Valley. The route is dotted with intermittent mountain hamlets that add to the splendour of the scenery. Our journey brings us to the sacred city of Axum in the Tigrayan region, that was the capital of the Ethiopian empire between the 1st and 10th centuries AD. As the birthplace of Christianity within the country, it was also a bustling commercial centre. Please note: should the road to Axum be impassable due to local conditions, we plan to return to Gondar and fly to Axum.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 11 Sightseeing in Axum

Evidence of Axum's former importance now lies at several points in or near the town. Ruined fortresses, palaces and churches, plus an abundance of giant obelisks or 'stelae', carved from enormous slabs of granite stand as mute reminders of its former glory. Axum makes claim to be the final resting place of the sacred Ark of the Covenant. But while its local guardians continue to celebrate the legend, the object of their veneration is kept strictly under wraps.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 12 Fly to Lalibela; visit rock cut churches

Today we will fly to one of the world's most remarkable historic sites. Although churches carved in rock are found in other parts of the world, those found in Ethiopia are particularly interesting. Generally, they were excavated on all sides of a rectangle, leaving a large block of granite isolated in the centre. This rock was then shaped and formed both inside and out and the carvings show extremely skillful workmanship. Lalibela, the New Jerusalem, is thought to have been constructed some 800 years ago by King Lalibela. Lalibela was his capital city, but today it is a small village. Our tour this afternoon involves a certain amount of scrambling through a labyrinth of tunnels. The churches stand in two main groups on either side of a stream, known locally as 'The River Jordan'. There are 11 rockcut churches of which the most impressive is Bet Giorgis. It is carved in the form of a Greek cross and approached through a passage in the rock. Between them, these rock-cut churches are one of the great wonders of the world. Please note: most churches have a permanent roof built over them to preserve them for posterity and are listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 13 In Lalibela; mule trek

Mountains encircle Lalibela and located among these peaks are several more isolated churches. Using mules, we journey for some two hours to Ashatan Maryam church and are rewarded with stunning views over Lalibela and the peaks and mountains of these remote highlands. Reached by steep paths, it will be necessary to dismount in places due to the shaley path. Good footwear is a must. Vertigo sufferers or people with a low level of fitness may choose not to partake in the mule trek, your tour leader can advise you. In the afternoon, we return to Lalibela allowing more time to explore the rock-cut churches.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Rooms Available

DAY 14 In Lalibela, fly Addis, tour ends

This morning we will take a flight back to the capital of Addis Ababa where the tour ends. A few day rooms will be provided for customers who booked the international flights through us.

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 13 breakfasts, 0 lunches,0 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Addis Abba - National museum £1
Bahar Dar - Sunrise boat trip £7
Harar - Hyena Man £4

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.
Accordingly, you should allow US$50 for tipping of local drivers, guides, boat crew and for any miscellaneous tipping of hotel staff.

Foreign Exchange

Ethiopia

ATM Availability: Very Limited.

Credit Card Acceptance: Limited.

Travellers Cheques: Very difficult to exchange and are not recommended. Up-to-date information re: global exchange rates can be obtained at https://www.currencyexpress.com/explore/

Local Currency: Ethiopian Birr.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: It is advisable to take your spending money in Sterling, Euros or US Dollars cash (high denomination notes usually get better exchange ates). Please note that any pre- 1999 or torn US Dollar bills will not accepted in Ethiopia. Please keep any receipts as you may be able to change back any unused local currency.

Where to Exchange: Your Tour leader will advise you.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

For passengers making their own travel arrangements, please ensure you join the group as described on day one of the tour itinerary. If you are considering purchasing your own airline tickets, you can book these through any travel agent, directly with an airline or through an online flight consolidator. In all cases, we would be happy to arrange transfers to and from the joining point of your tour if required.

Joining Tour Abroad

Clients booked on **'Land Only'** arrangements should make their own way to the joining point. Please refer to separate **'Joining Instructions'** for time and place of rendezvous with tour leader

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining **any** of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable.

If you require travel insurance for your tour, Explore Worldwide is an appointed representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services authority. Our travel insurance policy is specially tailored to the needs of the adventure traveller and will cover you for any included activity on any Explore trip. You can either purchase this at the time of booking or call us on 0844 499 0903 after you have booked.

Visa Information

Ethiopia: Visas for UK nationals can be obtained on arrival, although this can change at short notice, and you should be prepared to queue on arrival. Should you wish to apply for a visa prior to departure, please note that a single entry visa is valid for 30 days from the date of issue, so you must submit your application no more than two weeks prior to departure. It is also possible to apply for a multi-entry visa which is valid for 3 months from issue.

Visas can be obtained through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK; Visaswift, at http://www.visaswift.com/explore.aspx. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Vaccinations & Protection

Ethiopia

An International Certificate of Vaccination against yellow fever is required. We recommend protection against malaria, hepatitis A, diphtheria, tetanus, typhoid and polio. Although the risk is low you may also consider immunisation against rabies and meningococcal meningitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against Malaria. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/ and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Tour

Climate

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is generally pleasant and warm, but varies with altitude. The long rains usually arrive mid- June to early September and the short rains between mid-February and April although this pattern has been completely erratic in recent times. After the rains, the highlands of northern Ethiopia are usually green and thus particularly scenic. The temperature all year round rarely falls below 18°C. Night-time temperatures in the mountains can be cold and can drop below freezing at higher altitude. There is a strong risk of sunburn at high altitude in Ethiopia. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at http://www.explore.co.uk/weather. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable. Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found by following the BBC weather link on this page.

Clothing

Daytime temperatures are mainly warm and comfortable but evenings in the highlands can be cold. We recommend a thick jumper or warm fleece and lightweight wind/waterproof clothing. Take a sun hat.

Equipment

Bring sun cream, a torch and memory cards for your camera. An insect repellent against fleas could be useful for the churches at Lalibela.

Footwear

Comfortable, good walking shoes with ankle support are strongly recommended as well as comfortable sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Please note that there is a weight restriction of 7kg for hand luggage/daypack for international and internal flights.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Food

The prices for meals and drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive. The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Ethiopia

Lunch £: 3.00

Dinner £: 6.00

Drink

Ethiopia

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50

Water £: 1.00

Country details

Ethiopia

Population: 82,101,998

Size of Country: 1,104,300 sq km

Major Language: Amharic, English

Religion: Christian, Muslim

Time Difference to GMT: +3

Electric Supply & Plugs

Ethiopia

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport . Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditional, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: The Sunshine Orphanage (which cares for abandoned children in Luxor, Egypt), Education for All (sponsoring children through their secondary education in Morocco), The Hope Foundation (helping an Indian Village to recover from the 2004 Tsunami) and the Mufindi Orphanage, which support AIDS orphans in Tanzania.

We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation, Travel Operators for Tigers (helping save the Bengal Tiger from extinction) and Friends for Conservation. We have also adopted a beautiful Sri Lankan Elephant called 'Serendip'.

We are delighted to have received a Five Star sustainable tourism status from the Association of Independent Tour Operators in recognition of our on-going commitment to sustainable tourism.

Cool Earth

Explore are delighted to support Cool Earth to reduce carbon emissions through preventing the illegal deforestation of the South America rainforest. One of the top sources of global carbon emissions, rainforest deforestation equivalent to the USA's annual emissions, it also destroys flora and fauna, sometimes to the point of extinction. It also degrades the lives and communities of the 350 million residents of the rainforest.

Cool Earth prevents the deforestation through its support of local communities as forest guardians and by focussing on areas in immediate danger of deforestation. It has so far protected over 350,000 acres of rainforest, with each acre saving an emission of 260 tons of CO2, as well as protecting rare animals and plants. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year. In addition to mitigating emissions, when you travel with Explore, you are helping to protect the source of 20% of the world's fresh water and oxygen, as well as the livelihoods of the 1.6 billion people who are reliant on the rainforest. www.coolearth.org

Earth Matters

- The Travel Foundation

  Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- Tourism Concern

  Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2013 and 31st December 2014.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2014 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2014. 2015/16 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2015.

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