

# **BAHIR DAR, ETHIOPIA**

## **Top Tourist Attractions of Bahir Dar and its Vicinity**



**Amhara National Regional State Bureau of Culture and Tourism**

**Bahir Dar, Ethiopia**

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## **1. BAHIRDAR**

Bahir Dar is the capital city of Amhara National Regional State. The city with tremendous attractions and gratification lies at the southern edge of Lake Tana and the outlet of the Great Blue Nile River.

The Amhara region's main tourist destinations are included in the historical circuit. It includes Bahir Dar (the base for visiting Lake Tana's monasteries and the Tis Abay waterfall in the Blue Nile), Gonder, and Lalibela. These tourist destinations and other tourist attractions of the region are accessible from the capital, Addis Ababa. The region enjoys excellent connections with different regions both on the surface and in air transport channels. One outlet is from Addis to Bahir Dar, Gonder, and Lalibela in the region by road Via Dejen and Debre Markos as well as other small towns. This route helps easily access tourist attractions found in West Gojjam, East Gojjam, Bahir Dar, North and South Gondar. The other outlet is from the northwest of Addis Ababa to Lalibela by road via Debre Berhan, Dessie, and Woldeya. These outlets mostly help to visit sites that are found in North Shewa, Oromia, South Wollo, North Wollo, and Waghimra Zones.

The first standard stop in the region leaving from Addis Ababa is Bahir Dar via Debre Markos or via Motta from Dejen. This road is served as access to many zones of the region, mainly to East Gojjam, West Gojjam, Awi, South Gonder, and North Gonder.

Bahir Dar, the nature-favored city sharing the shore of the Ethiopian giant inland water body, Lake Tana, is glooming. The African largest river, the Blue Nile developing from this lake and sweeping along, the lined tall palm trees and jacarandas along the main streets, and the papyrus reed boats have been sailing since the Egyptian pyramid age on the lake are the most adorn this Ethiopian highland town. That is why it has become a major destination and a gate off for both domestic and international tourists.

Bahir Dar is also a convenient jump-off for the Ethiopian famous 'Historic Route' passing through Gonder, Lalibela, and Axum. Consequently, Bahir Dar has been launching economically, socially, and politically. And now it is the capital of the Amhara National Regional State.

## 1.1 Sight Seeing

### Top Places to visit in Bahir Dar

Bahir Dar is the tourist destination for its many alluring sites; a tourist becomes too busy with visiting these sites both in the town and its environs.

#### 1.1.1 City Tour

##### ➤ The Pero Paez Edifice



*Pero Paes Edifice, 17<sup>th</sup> century*

The still erecting two-story's building at the enclosure of Saint Giyorgis Church testifies that Bahir Dar was and still is the most inspiring place for foreigners. The building which is said to have been founded by the Spanish Jesuit, Pero Pais in the reign of Susneyos /1606-1632/ does not seem a centuries-old monument. Any destruction has not undergone over it. Architecturally, it has direct similarity with the palaces of Gondar. There is also a new museum in Bahir dar Giyorgis church.

##### ➤ Traditional Church School



Following the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia in the 4th century AD, religious education has been spread widely. Children have begun to attend church school. The institution became the dominant center of education. Consequently, today it has acted as a guardian and a preserver of the traditional Ethiopian culture.



In the heydays of the institution; that is, when the church had a dominant power over the state, the school used to have dual purposes; that is to say, teaching children to serve the church and the government in clerical works. However, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of the modern school, its importance in the governmental affairs declined after having contributed much for the development of modern education.

As the chief objective of the school is to produce dedicated religious leaders, the school life is full of devotion. The student lives “migrated” away from his parents in a small hut built around the church or the Merigeta’s house. He gets his sustenance by begging for a piece of injera (a special kind of bread baked out of Teff) and corn from the nearby laity. Moreover, he moves from place to place in search of the Merigetas accorded with the course he is going to attend.

The students are locally called *Yekolo Temari* (a student feeding fried corn) for they usually eat fried corn. Most of the churches in the region have such schools. In Bahir Dar, Kidane Mihret church school can be a glimpse of church school life.

## ➤ Open – Air Market



From Monday to Sunday, for a tourist reaching Bahir Dar, the open-air market is the other enthralling site. What makes a stranger inspired are the stalled cereals and vegetables, cultural souvenirs, and the bargaining style of the local people.

The very attractive ‘Agelgil’ around a lunch-box basket covered with naturally colorful animal skin is produced in Bahir Dar. But it is found adorning every Ethiopian and a Bahir Dar destined tourist’s house. Not only the agelgil, the intricately made wood, leather, and horn products and so much more can also be obtained by a tourist for they have practical as well as artistic and cultural values.

Above all, the ‘shema’ the white cotton national dress, and the colorful scarves, shirts are the other not-to-be-missed souvenirs. Any Ethiopian or a foreigner looks pretty enough having dressed in them.



*Don't forget to pick one, on the way to your home!!*

## ➤ **Bezawit Hill Top and the Emperors' Haile Sillassie Palace**

Five kilometers east of Bahir Dar, the split-level Bezawit palace of the former Ethiopian Emperor Haile Sillassie perches alone upon a hilltop with elegant views over the Nile River and Lake Tana. This most spectacular scenery, Bezawit palace was used only twice by the Emperor when he would stay overnight on his periodic tour of the provinces. The virginally kept enclosure of this palace is still as charismatic as if there were the Emperor.

In this thrilling site, tourists delight in watching birds, taking a look at the panoramic view of the Blue Nile River emerging from Lake Tana, and the stretched waterscape – Lake Tana.



Luckily, especially in the evening, a tourist may oversee hippopotamus from the foothill of Bezawit in to the deep water of the Blue Nile River. The palace is reached by gentle walking, or by driving vehicles

### ➤ **Blue Nile, the Grand River**

The Blue Nile, the Grand River in Africa, is one of the natural wonders of Ethiopia, especially for its breathtaking falls. The Blue Nile River near Bahir Dar town, 3 Kilometers South East of Bahir Dar, has been drawing the attention of tourists from different corners of the world.



*Blue Nile River from Bezawit hill top*

## **1.1.2 Lake Tana UNESCO Biosphere Reserve site ( 6 things must see)**

### ➤ **Lake Tana**

The Ethiopian jumbo heart-shaped inland water body, Lake Tana, is one of the famous superbly panoramic water escapes where tourists sense an atmosphere of timeless wonder. Lake Tana with a total area of 3600 square kilometers, stretching 75 kilometers North-South, 60 kilometers East-

West, lying at about 1830 meters above sea level and having 14 meters maximum depth, is rich in bird and fish life.



Little is known and studied about the lake's fauna and flora. It invites many researchers to discover its immense and untouched natural resources. In the past few years, though not complete enough, recent studies have singled out some 26 species of fish out of which 17 are endemic species to Lake Tana, at large to Ethiopia.



➤ **Endemic fish species**



These endemic fish species constitute 14 large barbs, one small barb, and two gara species. These note-worthy Lake Tana large barb species are varied because of the morphologically distinct forms they exhibit.

Some of these large barbs reach a body length of 85 cm and a weight of 12kg. Of the commercial catch in the southern shore of Lake Tana, the large barbs comprise 35%.

➤ **Bird species known to be present in the Bahir Dar/Lake Tana**





The region is also inhabited by five globally threatened (according to the IUCN red list) bird species and large numbers of waterfowls including Pala arctic and inner-African migrants. The birdlife of Lake Tana has been documented in the book "Birds of Lake Tana area, Ethiopia" by Shimelis Aynalem Zelelew, covering 275 bird species at Lake Tana (about a third of Ethiopian birds) (Aynalem Zelelew 2013). Annex 6 lists those bird species occurring at Lake Tana that are of global significance due to being globally threatened or being endemic to the Abyssinian Highlands or Ethiopia. So the birds of Lake Tana are one of the tourism resources in Bahir Dar on Lake Tana.

➤ **Tankwas papyrus reed boats of ancient design**

These monasteries are reached by motorboats. But, tankwas papyrus reed boats of ancient design that add extra beauty to Lake Tana are the main forms of transport for the local people and for the monks. They have been used since the Egyptian pyramid age. These reed boats are manufactured on the shores of Lake Tana from papyrus trees.



Despite the fact that every island monastery deserves a visit, the most commonly visited ones, taking Bahir Dar as a springboard, are the following.

➤ **Papyrus Swamps The Natural Forest type of Lake Tana**



*PAPYRUS SWAMPS*

The natural forest type of the Lake Tana Region is a Dry Evergreen Afromontane Forest with characteristic trees such as *Juniperus procera*, *Podocarpus falcatus*, *Croton* sp., *Olea* sp., and *Ficus* sp. 460 woody plants have been recorded (Friis et al. 2011). A full list of indigenous tree species can be found. In the lower and more humid parts around Lake Tana, a Combretum *Terminalia* Woodland amongst Freshwater Marches and Swamps, Floodplains and typical lakeshore vegetation would occur, while along the affluent of Lake Tana typical riverine vegetation would be found.

Lake Tana covers a fifth of the watershed's area. Along the eastern and southern shore of Lake Tana swamps dominated by papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*), cattail (*Typha latifolia*), and water lilies (*Nymphaea* sp.) occur. Submerged and partly emergent vegetation which extends from the shore and forms floating islands in the open water can be found as well, especially *Ceratophyllum* sp. and *Vallisneria* sp. The neophyte water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) is a relatively new phenomenon in the area and rapidly spreads over several parts of the lake's shorelines.

➤ Hippopotamus on the lake tana



### **1.1.3 Island and Peninsular Monasteries (more than 15 monasteries) including beautiful mural paintings, icons, parchment manuscripts, scrolls and emperors assets.**

They are the 37 islands that make Lake Tana the most breathtaking site. These islands shelter some 21 monasteries surviving remnants of a very old meditative tradition. Most of the monasteries with some exceptions which dated back even to the 14th century AD were established in the medieval period by the monks locally referred to as the seven stars. The dedicated monastic spiritual life of the monks in these monasteries is an alien world for the visitor.

The monasteries also house myriads of treasures, beautiful mural paintings, icons, parchment manuscripts, scrolls, and emperors' assets. They have been used as safekeeping places for religious relics and art treasures during times of trouble. In the troubled periods, these valuable treasures were transferred to these monasteries from all corners of the country. Even the Ark of the Covenant was once kept temporarily in one of the monasteries, Daga Estifanos. Consequently, these monasteries have served as museums for the Ethiopian Church's arts and emperors' assets.

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### ➤ **Zegie peninsula**

Zegie is a peninsula situated on the south- west edge of Lake Tana. When it is seen from nearby, it looks like a big bird resting with its wings spread. While Zegie is 12 kilometers far from Bahir Dar, it takes an hour and a half to travel by boat and an estimated 2 hours overland.

Scattered on the Zegie peninsula, there are 7 churches. They are Mehal Zegie Giorgis (George of central Zegie), Abune Betre Mariam, Azewa Mariam, Ura Kidane Mhired, Debre Selassie (Abbey of the Trinity), Yiganda Abune Tekle Haimanot, and Firie Mariam. Except for Debre Selassie and Yiganda Abune Tekle Haimanot, the other monasteries have ports which, can provide landings to small boats. As mentioned earlier, the monasteries scattered over Lake Tana and its surroundings have a historical relationship to the religious fathers know as the Seven Stars. These saints who are said to originate from different parts of the country are Abune Tadiyos, Abune Ze Yohannes, Abune Betre Mariam, Abune Hirute Amlak, Abune Ahsay, Abune Zekarias, and Abune Fikre Igzi Yohannes.

Abune Tadiyos founded Debre Mariam; Abune Ze Yohannes founded Kibran Gabriel, Abune Betre Mariam founded Mehal Zegie Giyorgis, Abune Hirute-Amlak founded Daga Estifanos, Abune Ahsay founded Mendaba, Abune Zekarias founded Debre Gelila and Abune Fikre-Igzi, Yohannes founded Mitslaye Fasiledes monasteries and strengthened them.



**Zegie Peninsula (about 12 kilometers)**

The peninsular monastery of Zegie, Wura Kidane Mihiret, permitting women to enter is the other plebeian adduction of Lake Tana.

The church's design is similar to that of Kibran Gabriel. As noted by many visitors, Wura has a more decorated building with colorful frescoes depicting scenes from biblical lore and the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. The frescoes dating back to the early 17th century are incredible to have been painted by human beings. Besides, the enclosure like the other monasteries, there is a museum having priceless treasures such as illuminated manuscripts of more than 1040 years old, crowns, dresses of Empresses, and so on.

In this peninsula, along with Wura Kidanemihiret monastery, Mehal Zegie Giyorgis, Abune Betre Mariam and Azwa Mariam monasteries are also worth visiting. The grass-roofed and elegantly built monastery, Azwa Mariam is renowned for its remarkable frescoes as Wura. Whereas Mehal Zegie Giyorgis and Abune Betre Mariam monasteries jointly possess a splendid museum having collections of crowns, crosses, vestments, illuminating manuscripts, and others. As Ura, these monasteries let ladies enter.

### ➤ **Yeganda Teklhaymanot**



It was founded during the reign of Atse Amde Tseyon. It is situated on the high land of Zegie Peninsula (Mt. Ararat). It is a place where one can see most parts of Lake Tana easily. Crosses made from gold and silver, crowns, parchment books, and clothes of former kings are major tourism resources of Yiganda Tekle Haimanot.

## **Mehal zegie Giyorgis**

Mehal Zegie Giyorgis is said to be the oldest monastery from the Zegie peninsula. Citing the founder's manuscript of deeds, the clergy explain that the church was founded in the 13th century and the founder of the monastery, Abune Betre Mariam, had come from Shewa, a place especially called Muger.

Several ancient heritages are housed at Mehal Zegie Giyorgis. An iron robe belonged to Abune Betre Mariam, different donations from ancient kings, parchment manuscripts are some of these heritages. Although the church has been rebuilt and hence it is not its former self, there are still visible sculptures on the doors and windows which are reminiscent of the ancient artistic worth



***Mehal Zegie Giyorgis***

Near to Giyorgis Church, there is Betre Mariam Church which is one of the few churches which still maintain their ancient splendor. The church was built after the death of Abune Betre Mariam by his assistant, Abune Betrelomewos, and it was erected on the grave in memory of Abune Betre Mariam. Decorated with ancient murals, the traditional round and beautifully thatched-roofing, Betre Mariam Church has doors and windows which depict ancient sculptural art.



***Betre Mariam***



## **Azewa Maryam**

Among the Zegie Monasteries known for their ancient painting reserves, Azewa Maryam and Ura Kidane Mihret are worth mentioning. Azewa Maryam which is said to be built during the reign of Emperor Amde-Tsion has beautiful mural Paintings adorning the nave. The edges of some of these paintings are decorated with silver. Since the pictures of the other Zegie monasteries were painted at Azewa Maryam, the church was sometimes called ‘Sie’l Bet’ (House of Pictures).



*Azewa Maryam*

## **Ura Kidane Mihret**

Ura Kidane Mihret is said to be found by Abune Yohannes in the 14th century, during the reign of Emperor Amde-Tsion. While the church is round and its ‘Yekine Mahlet’ (choir) is built with bamboo, its ‘Mekdes’ (nave) and ‘Kidist’ (holy sanctuary) are built with bamboo and stone. Until recently, the church had a thatched roof. The nave is decorated with murals painted in the 16th century. Ancient parchment manuscripts, crowns, vestments, crosses are some of the ancient heritages housed there. Ura Kidane Mihret allows both males and females.



*Ura Kidane Mihret Church*

In the Zegie peninsula, there is Mount Ararat that provides a panoramic view of Lake Tana and the vicinity. At its top is Yiganda Tekle Haimanot Church. Said to be put up during the reign of Emperor Amde Tsion, the church is one of the Zegie Monasteries known for its collections of heritages. To reach the church, there is a sloppy footpath which takes about an hour.

### ➤ **Deq Island**

Deq is the largest island in Lake Tana. It is located 37 kilometers north of Bahir Dar and takes about 3 hours by boat. The island was previously known as ‘Sebat Debir Ager’ (Place of Seven Churches) as the churches had been seven, but later they made eight including Mihila Kidane Mihret. These churches are Daga Estifanos- the nearest monastery to Bahir Dar, Narga Selassie, Kidist Arsema, Kota Mariam, Ze Ibd Iyesus, Joga Yohannes, Gadna Giorgis, and Mihla Kidane Mihret. The word ‘Deq’ means ‘Lij or Tinish’ in Ge’ez (the English- Kid or Small). It is believed that perhaps this name is given to the island for it is the least elevated as compared to the other islands scattered over Lake Tana.

Deq Island was originally allowed only for nuns and monks, but since other people have gradually inhabited the island, the population has increased. The inhabitants are Amharic speakers and followers of the Orthodox religion.

The local people divide the time of their coming to the island into four. The first was during the invasion by Ahmed Grag, the second when Empress Mintiwab was building Narga Selassie Church, the third during the reign of Emperor Tewodros, and the fourth was during the Dervish invasion during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV.

Historians explain that Deq Island was the place where earlier Ethiopian emperors used to put their opponents in exile. For example, during the reign of Emperor Hizbinagn, the founder of Debre Tsimona Monastery, Aba Shinoda who was accused of presenting a statement of opposition was put there in exile under the emperor’s order. The manuscript of Aba Shinoda’s deeds (‘Gedil’) found in Dima Giorgis states that Aba Shinoda died on this island.

### ➤ **Narga Sillassie Monastery**



*Narga Sillassie*

Narga Sillassie Monastery, which itself makes an island in the rainy season because of the rise in the level of the water and makes the western edge of the Deq is called ‘Males’ and Females’ Kurit Gedam’. It was founded by Emperor Bakafa’s consort- Etege Mintiwab (1738-1763). While the church is round and built with stone, wood, and limestone, it has 8 big doors having 4 meters in height and 2 meters in width each. Its round nave is decorated by ancient paintings which depict Biblical scenes. The paintings in the west are descriptions of the story of Christ, in the south are representations of the story of St. Mary and her miraculous deeds, in the east Christ’s miracles, and in the north are Christian martyrs’ deeds. In the courtyard of the church, there are ruins of other buildings and a one-storey control tower having two doors reminiscent of Gondarian architectural art of the same age. Beds and vestments which belonged to Etegie Mentiwab and her son Emperor Iyasu, different parchment manuscripts and crosses are kept as heritages.

### ➤ **Kidist Arsema**

Surrounded by big trees on the western edge of Deq Island and said to be founded in the 14<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Emperor Seife Aried, there is an ancient monastery called Kola Kidist Arsema. This monastery which is now not much better than a rural hut has ‘Tabot’ (a replica of the Ark of the Covenant) which according to the clergy, had been brought from Jerusalem. Saint Arsema, for whose name the church was erected, is said to be a German. The manuscript of her deeds (‘Gedil’) states that she went to Armenia with other virgins in exile and passed a miserable life in favor of her belief. The blurred paintings on the roof of the nave depict the martyr’s deeds.

### ➤ **Kota Maryam**

Kota Maryam is said to be the first church founded on the island of Deq. It is believed to be put up by Aba Hirute Amlak who had been in the Daga Estifanos monastery. This round-s shaped church is built with wood, mud, and limestone and has a thatched roof. Its floor is covered with bamboos fastened with leather straps and the roof is supported by 12 thick and long pillars. The reliefs sculpted on the windows around the nave reflect special artistic talent. The different parts of the church were renovated in 1986, 1991, and 1992 by heritage renovation experts of the Ministry of Culture. However, the pictures of the ancient saints painted on the walls of the nave are damaged due to the ravages of time and lack of care.

### ➤ *Debre Maryam – Lake Tana*



Debre Maryam monastery is found at the northern tip of the Abay River and the northeastern outskirts of the city. The River leaves Lake Tana and launches its long journey to the Mediterranean Sea at this spot. It can be accessed by boat from the city. Founded by Abune Tadiyos during the reign of Emperor Amde Tsion (1312-1342 AD) the monastery is well, known for its hippo colony and birds watching.

The Monastery of Debre Maryam can be reached by boat for about 20 minutes northeast of Bahir Dar. It is also possible to reach there by crossing the Blue Nile River using a boat after driving towards Abay Bridge. It is an ideal site to experience the Nile outlet and a hippo colony.

Moreover, there are many historical heritages found in the church museum such as drums made from clay, parchment books, and crosses made from bronze. It is an island surrounded by the Blue Nile River and Lake Tana.

➤ ***Kibran Gabriel***



➤ **Kibran Gabriel**

It was founded in the 14th century during the reign of Amde Tsion and rebuilt during the reign of Emperor IyasuI (1682-1706). It is the closest monastery from Bahir Dar and lies on a tiny, forested crescent- presumably part of the rim of an extinct volcano. Near to Kibran Gabriel, there

is Entos Iyesus. Both Kibran Gabriel and Entos have served for long years as monasteries dedicated only for monks and nuns respectively. However, since nuns were transferred to another location for some reason, Entos was said to be deserted until recently. But now a church is built and the Ark ('Tabot') of Iyesus is put and it is changed into a monastery. Kibran Gabriel is dedicated to men while Entos is to women; the nuns are allowed to attend the historical accounts and covenants of the monastery by entering through an exclusive door. Ancient artifacts in the monastery have been preserved to be used for spiritual services, annual celebrations, and worship.

➤ ***Kibran and Entos eysus***



**Entonese Eyesus Monastery**

The annual religious festival is amazing and you are lucky to attend it. Entos Eyesus women's unity monastery was named by the founder of the monastery, an Egyptian monk, saint Entones, born in Keman, Egypt. Entos Eyesus women's unity monastery was re-opened recently after being closed for 150 years. The walls of the original buildings can still be seen. It is astonishing how these buildings were constructed at a time when modern transportation: - vehicles, motorboats, and machinery were non-existent. The monastery is in close proximity to Kibran Gabriel on Lake Tana, this green island monastery, after several attempts to reopen; it was by hermit Abba Tekell Michael Tsege Dengel Tureneh who by the grace and willingness of GOD started the long and arduous mission of the rebuilding of this ancient monastery.

### ➤ *Daga Estifanos*



Daga is the other principal magnetism and the most visited monastery though it is far from Bahir Dar. As with that of Kibran, it is closed to women. This monastery is erected on a steep hilltop and needs to climb up walking through a winding path.

The treasure house found here is different from other monasteries in that it hosts piles of brightly colored ceremonial cloaks and mummified coffins containing remains of the former Ethiopian Emperors; that is, Emperor Dawit /Late 14th C/, Emperor Zere Yakob (15th C), Emperor Susenioy (early 17th C) and Emperor Fasiledes (17th C).

It is situated on the highland of Lake Tana and easily seen from any direction of Lake Tana. The monastery is founded by Aba Hirut Amlak during the reign of Emperor Atse Yikunu Amlak, 13th C. Icons, clothes of former kings, golden crowns, moral painting, different ancient books are major collections of Daga. Also, coffins of some of the former prominent Emperors of Ethiopia are kept mummified; Yekuno Amlak(1268-1283), Dawit (1382-1430), ZeraYakob (1434-1468), Zedngle (1603-1604), and Fasiledas (1632-1667). There are farmlands and dense forests that are ready for the visit. It is forbidden for females to visit.

### ➤ *Tana Kirkos*



Located on the eastern shore of Lake Tana and in a remarkably beautiful setting, the Tana Kirkos monastery had been used as one of the four places of ancient Judaic worship where sacrificial stones are still found. The museum of the monastery has collections of several valuable and unique treasures, which inspire visitors. It is closed to ladies.

Tana Qirqos is also one of the well-known historical and religious monasteries of Ethiopia. It is believed that in this monastery, the Holy Ark of the Covenant has stayed for 800 years in a tent since 450BC. Another important story of Tana Qirqos Monastery is related to Saint Yared. Saint Yared, Ethiopian greatest musician, poet, and patron saint of many churches in Ethiopia, stayed for two years in this monastery. He wrote "Degua" a great book by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in this monastery.

A stone bowl in which Yared used to mix ink is preserved in the monastery. From the arrival of the Holy Ark of the Covenant up to the 4th century A.D for 800 years, sacrifice was done in this historic monastery. Sacrificial pillars or altars, a bowl in which sacrificial blood was first collected before scattering is found in this monastery. It is believed that the Holy Ark of Covenant was brought to Ethiopia (Lake Tana, Tana Qirqos) from Israel by Menelik I (The son of King Solomon) or Falashas who migrated from Israel to Ethiopia. There are several historical and religious relics in the monastery: cloak and Degua of Saint Yared, a bowl in which Sacrificial blood was first collected before Sacrificing, the cross of Abune Selema (the first bishop of Ethiopia), the first bible translated from Hebru to Geez, Dish/plate of king Solomon of Israel, and beds of Emperor Gebre Meskel and Emperor Sertse Dingle.

### ➤ *Kristos Semira*





Separated from Tana Kirkos Monastery by River Gumara, a tributary to Lake Tana, the Monastery of Kristos Semira is a religious place given a special prestige by its believers. This monastery is open for both men and women. The church is situated on a hill called Guangut, which is found at the edge of Lake Tana and made captivating by different species of plants and birds. The hill on which the monastery lies is a natural tower that allows a perfect view of the magnificent stretch of Lake Tana from the front, Daga Estifanos, Mitsly Fasiledes, and Rema Medhane Alem monasteries from a little farther and Tana Kirkos from the border.

Ethiopian Saint called Kristos Semera founded Kristos Semera monastery. According to legendary sources, she prayed for 12 years standing on Lake Tana without rest. Nehasie 24 and Ginbot 12 are annual celebration days' of this monastery. It is believed in Ginbot 12 God gave promise to Kristos Semera and Nehasie 24 is celebrated as the commemoration day for the death of saint Kristos Semera. Her dead body is preserved today in a box within this monastery.

There are two options to go to Kiristos Semira and Tana Kirkos monasteries. The first is traveling by boat for four hours from Bahir Dar, and the other is about 20 km drive west of the town of Hamusit, which is found 35 kilometers on the Bahir Dar - Gondar highway.

➤ *Rema medhanalem*



It was founded by Abune Nob during the reign of Emperor Yisaq (1414-1429). In the holy of holies, there are bees without a hive whose honey is given to the devotee after the communion service, and they are believed honey cures different diseases. The dead bodies of Atse Sertse Dingle and religious leaders are preserved in the boxes. Three stone bells (with a total length of about 3 m and a diameter of 5 inches) serve as bells during the annual ceremony and are major tourism resources of this church. Manuscripts, cap of Welete Petros, icons that are said to be brought from Jerusalem, colorful cloaks are also major tourist attractions of this church. This island is the best place for bird watching.

## 1.1.4 Attractions in the vicinity of Tis Abay

### ➤ **The Blue Nile Falls** (*Follow the Rainbow to Blue Nile Falls*)



To speakers of Amharic, this natural wonder is known as Tis Issat, or “great smoke.” Approximately 40 meters high, four streams merge into one massive 400-meter wide waterfall during the rainy season (June through September). The spray from the falling water creates temporary rainbows spanning the gorge as well as permanently lush vegetation all around the falls. Thirty kilometers south of Bahir Dar, the falls are the most spectacular feature to reach the falls, there are two alternative ways to reach the falls. One is the route through 1.5 kilometers of the road out of the town to the parking lot, which lies on the edge of the Blue Nile Gorge. Then after walking for about 20 minutes, crossing the 17th C footbridge locally called Alata Bridge that had a historical value built by the Portuguese, a crescent-shaped gorge appears with a thunderous noise; that is, the Blue Nile Falls.

The other alternative is the route through the North East of the main road where the local people cross the river with papyrus reed boats. For the guests, motorboats are hired to cross the water. After playing across the waters, 30-40 minutes walking along the bank of the river is required to reach the bottom of the falls. But using the former route gives a chance to visit the historic footbridge, the spectacular sceneries, and it also provides a chance to watch birds in the forest

and in the gorge. Or else both ways can be used, one to go to the falls and the other to turn of the Blue Nile, a tributary of the Nile River.

### ➤ **The Abay fall and Portuguese Bridge**

The Tis Abay fall is found 30 km south of Bahir Dar. The fall is estimated to be between 37-45 meters high, consisting of four streams that vary from a trickle in the dry season to 400 meters wide in the rainy season. Regulation of the outlet flow of Lake Tana now reduces the variation somewhat and takes much of the flow out of the falls. The noise, the force, and the smoke created by the fall are incredible. It is one of the best tourist attractions in Ethiopia. A short distance further downstream from the fall there is a historic Stone Bridge constructed on the Abay River. It was built at the command of Emperor Susenyos in 1626. A craftsman who had come from India with Alfonso Mendez, the Catholic patriarch of Ethiopia, supervised the construction.



**Portuguese Bridge**

That is why thousands of visitors are seen streaming to this most spectacular scene.

### ➤ **Andasa Mineral water**

On the way to Tis Abay Falls, Andasa Mineral water is found on a small island formed by the Bule Nile River. Furthermore, to the West of Tis Abay Town, some 7 kilometers off the road in the extended escarpment of Yagume ridge, surrounded by stunning natural scenery, there is an impressive rock-hewn church called Degay Debelo which is said to have been hewed by St. Lalibela before his coronation.

## ➤ **Wonkshet Gabriel Andinet Monastery**



### ***Wonkshet Kidus Gabriel***

The ancient *Wonkshet Kidus Gabriel Andinet Monastery* is located to the east of Tis Abay town, about an hour walk after crossing Alata Bridge. It is surrounded by rugged mountains covered with natural forests; beautified by green scenery where hot and cold holy water flows and different wildlife and birds chatter gloriously. People who want to either get a respite from illness or attend religious services flood to the site throughout the year. Several pilgrims witness that they got relieved from a disease or addiction and some express that they have decided to spend the rest of their lives in the monastery.

## ➤ The Rock hewn church of Dengay Debelo



Dingay Debelo Rock-hewn church is situated 7 kilometers west of Tis Abay town, which is 30 kilometers far from Bahir Dar city. It is believed that the church was hewn during the reign of Emperor Lalibela, and sometimes the hilltop is called '*Yelasta Korebta*' (Lasta's Hilltop). Beside the rock-hewn church, the beautiful natural scenery, the rural life and historical heritages are additional attractions for visitors. Recently, an Ark ('Tabot') has been carved for the church in the name of St. Lalibela, and the church is providing regular religious services.

## Tips about the Amhara Region

**Communication:** mobile, fixed telephone, fax, postal and internet connection

**Currency:** The units of currency are called Birr and cents. The Birr is divided into 100 cents.

**Languages:** Official language Amharic (Amharigna); English is also used for communication around tourist destinations.

**International telephone code:** +251

**Medical service:** Government and private referral hospitals, higher clinics and pharmacies around major tourist destinations.

**Power:** 220V for single phase customers & 380V for triple phase customers

**Souvenir shop:** obtained in each destination

**Time:** GMT +3

**Water:** potable water is available

### The Town, Bahir Dar

- Year of foundation: in 1930
- Distance
  - From Addis Ababa – via Debre Marcos, 563 kilometers, Via Mota, 485 kilometers
  - From Gonder, 180 Kilometers
  - From Axum, 540 Kilometers
  - From Lalibela 316 Kilometers
- Altitude: 1790 meters above sea level
- Average temperature: 18.3<sup>0</sup>c which is the most favorable weather condition throughout the year.
- Language: it is Amharic that is the official language of the country, comprehensively spoken though other Ethiopian languages are communicated. But the medium of instruction in secondary school and in Universities is English.
- Religions: Major religions are Christianity (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido) and Islam; though with less number of followers other Christian descendants are also found.
- Public transportation: Smart, new, clad, international airport very suitable road from the capital and other towns.
- Communication: Postal, telephone, fax, and internet services connect Bahir Dar to all parts of the world.

- Medical Service: Felege Hiwot and Tibebe ghion Hospital is the public referral hospital, while GAMBY, KIDANMIHRET, DRIM KARE and ,ADINAS private hospital has soon become operational. A public health center, and other numerous private clinics and pharmacies are delivering services to patients.
- Power: 220 volt, for single phase customers 380 volt, for triple phase customers.
- Water: Potable water is available.

## 1.2 Tourist Facilities

### Where to Stay

There are tourist class hotels & lodges in Bahir Dar city. Here is the list of tourist recommended hotels in the destination

#### 1.2.1 Hotels (Tourist Standard and star rated)

**There are some standard star and rated hotels in the Bahir Dar**

No	Name of hotel	city	star	Telephone
1	Addis Amba	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0582205353
2	Asinora	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0582209225
3	Benmas	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0583201010
4	Blue Nile resort & spa(Avanti)	Bahir Dar	4	0582209225
5	<i>Delano</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0582200622 0930352720/ 0919798080
6	Grand	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0582209225
7	<i>Homeland</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	090918341110 /0918340022
8	Jacaranda	<i>B/Dar</i>	4	0582209899
9	<i>Lakemark</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	1	0582201211,0930352700/ 0918141669
10	<i>Naky</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	4	0583200075 0911819261 / 0901000001/0918760075
11	Papyrus	<i>B/Dar</i>	2	(251) 058 220 51 00
12	Rahn Nile	<i>B/Dar</i>	3	0582207478
13	<i>Solyana</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	2	0583206222, 0910129629 /0930415899
14	<i>Water front</i>	<i>B/Dar</i>	2	0583205056, 0918560295 /0930416484



Guests indeed enjoy the luxurious accommodations, the cheap and delicious dishes, and the most hospitable reception. There are also non-Star-rated hotels, lodges, pensions, guesthouses, which give services for tourists based on tourists' interest.