

FAQ: Travel -- Before You Go to Ethiopia

Created by AAI parents and staff, September 2005

DISCLAIMER: The following information has been compiled from reports by previous travelers and from service provider websites as an educational service for future travelers. It is not designed to be exhaustive, but to respond to the majority of questions that arise as parents prepare to visit their child and/or bring a child home from Ethiopia with AAI assistance.

To prepare for a safe, healthy, and enjoyable journey, there are a number of things to arrange before leaving. This FAQ includes a Travel Checklist and travel information to help with your preparation and your time there. Information was current as of the date noted above – information is subject to change without notice.

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I. Travel checklist

After dossier goes to Ethiopia

- U.S. Passport (2-8 weeks to process)
- Consult physician and start travel vaccinations (if you have not already done so)
- Ethiopian Visa -- if you are obtaining it in the U.S. (2+ weeks to process)
- If taking donations, make arrangements with agency
- Check into your insurance for international travel coverage and/or secure travel insurance

After travel approval received

- Plane Tickets for self and children
- Arrange lodging
- Send agency a copy of your travel itinerary and lodging plan

___ Set time(s) for people at home to call you in Addis, buy international calling card(s)

1-3 weeks before departure

- ___ Contact bank about cash or traveler's checks
- ___ Make photocopies of important documents to take with you and to leave at home, including travel itineraries and a copy of your passport's ID and Visa pages
- ___ Get preventive medications to carry with you (antibiotics, antacids, etc.)
- ___ Consider notifying your credit card companies that you will be traveling abroad (they might "decline" charges from an unusual source as potential fraud)
- ___ Practice pack to check weight and space
- ___ Final pack and get ready for a great adventure!

II. U.S. Passport

Your local court house or post office is often an "acceptance facility" for the U.S. Passport Agency. To find an acceptance facility and passport photo site near you, check the Yellow Pages under Passport Services or Passport and Visa Information. Also, places where passport photos are taken should be able to refer you to nearby acceptance facilities.

The official Department of State website is <http://travel.state.gov/> -- click on "Passports for US Citizens" for complete instructions for new or renewing and to download application forms (forms are also available at acceptance facilities). The website indicates processing takes about six weeks.

III. Ethiopian Visas are available through the U.S Embassy in Washington, DC and at the airport in Addis Ababa.

A. U.S. embassy in Washington DC – this visa is good for multiple entries for two years and costs \$70. You must enter the country within 90 days of issue. You will need to submit an application, money order, recent passport-size photo, and your passport. For security, it is recommended to send this by registered carrier (Fed Ex, UPS, DHL) both ways. Some families have used a DC courier service to hand-carry the documents to and from the Embassy. To get an application and to confirm visa application requirements, visit <http://www.ethiopianembassy.org/index.shtml> and click on "Visa Information." It is important to follow instructions precisely and to write clearly.

B. Addis Airport –This visa is good for 30 days (and can be extended for up to 90 days) and costs \$20. Many travelers have had no

difficulty obtaining their visas and going through immigration while waiting for luggage to arrive.

IV. Getting There – Agencies and Airlines

After your child's case is finalized in Ethiopian court, you will be given dates you are to be in Addis for the US Embassy Visa appointment. You will then need to make airline and lodging arrangements. In general, families arrive a day or two before their Embassy appointment and depart about a week later. Some families stay the minimum time, while others choose to take a few extra days to visit sites in or around Addis.

Your child(ren)'s tickets should have their Ethiopian first name as best you can spell it and the last name of the father, if a couple is adopting, or the mother, if she is adopting as a single parent. The final spelling of the Ethiopian name won't be known until the translation of the court order is finished. That is the spelling which will be on the passport, but you can't wait that long to book the tickets. Ethiopian names may have several different spellings in English, and the airlines don't seem to have a problem as long as it is close.

A. Travel Agencies.

1. Susan Parr Travel. www.susanparrtravel.com Susan Parr is a very knowledgeable and helpful travel agent who has helped AAI traveling parents for several years. The website includes information on Ethiopian adoption travel.

2. Ethiopis: www.ethiopis.com. Ethiopis is a travel agent specializing in low fares. Some travelers have had trouble with ticket confirmation through them; others loved them.

3. Other travel agencies. You may have a favorite travel agent or be interested in working with a discount travel agency. Some traveling parents have found this to be disadvantageous when problems have arisen during the trips.

B. Airlines.

1. Ethiopian Air (EA or ETA): www.flyethiopian.com Flights to and from Addis can be shorter and less expensive than other airlines, but the children's one-way tickets to the U.S. may be more expensive. Traveling parents have reported that seats are a bit snug, flight attendants were very friendly and helpful and that the elderly and babies get extra attention from flight attendants. Lost/misplaced luggage and unexpected cancellation of confirmed reservations has been a problem for some travelers. Be sure to reconfirm reservations while in Addis.

2. Lufthansa: www.lufthansa.com Comfortable, with larger seats than Ethiopian Air, and most planes have individual TVs on seatbacks. Lufthansa flies into Addis from Frankfurt about three times a week. **Transit visas.** While in Addis, you will need to go to the German Embassy for a transit visa. Return flights to Frankfurt traditionally include a short stopover where you land to refuel but do not deplane. United Airlines and US Airways are mileage partners.

3. British Air (BA): www.ba.com Airfare can be less expensive; most planes have individual TVs on seatbacks. Flights arrive in and depart from Addis in the middle of the night and flights are less frequent than Lufthansa. Northwest Airlines partner. **Transit visas.** While in Addis, you may need to take your child(ren) to the British Embassy for a transit visa IF you plan to leave Heathrow airport to spend the night in London.

4. Northwest: www.nwa.com Northwest connects with partner KLM Royal Dutch airlines to fly into Addis Ababa via Amsterdam several times a week. **Transit visas.** A Netherlands transit visa is required.

V. Lodging – selected hotels and guesthouses (alphabetical)

The following information was provided by travelers in 2004-5 for hotels and guesthouses within about 15 minutes of AAI's Layla House. There are a number of other hotels available in Addis you may wish to research for your trip. Prices vary by season and may change without notice, so check prices before booking. NOTE: The following telephone numbers were accurate *prior to* the telephone number change in September 2005, at which time an additional digit was added to each number. The numbers were unchanged on websites shortly thereafter. See the Ethiopian Embassy website for more information:
<http://www.ethiopianembassy.org/telenium.shtml>

A. Ghion: Phone number from the U.S.: 011-251-1-51-32-22
NOTE: Ask for the Addis Ababa Ghion when you call--the person who picks up is the switchboard person for all the Ghions in Ethiopia.
www.africa-ata.org/ghion_hotels.htm
Airport shuttle.

Rooms. The suites have 3 rooms, including a kitchen and a backyard terrace where kids can run and play. The "Riviera Suites" are reported to be the nicest and you should ask for them by name if you want a suite. The Riviera Suites are bungalows next to the actual hotel building. The carpet looks old but people were happy with the accommodations overall, stating they provide independence and separation from the bustle of Addis.

Food. A breakfast buffet is included. Room service is available for meals other than breakfast, two restaurants and a café by the pool. Several restaurants, a grocery store, and a pharmacy within a five minute walk.

Other. Tennis courts and playground for children. The grounds have many acres of trees, flowers, and winding paths. Internet is available. They may take credit cards – one recent traveler reported they would take a credit card with a 5% surcharge. They will exchange money and travelers checks. Cost per night: about \$65 for a suite.

B. Ritmo Guest House: This is a private guest house set up to serve adoptive families. Many people have said they felt a lot of support staying here and got to know others who were also adopting.

Rooms. Most rooms have a private bath with shower either in the room or adjacent, but a couple are shared. Rooms are very basic with simple furnishings. Room assignment typically depends on the configuration of your party (a couple picking up two older kids, a single person picking up an infant, etc). Water heaters are small but reheat water quickly so plan accordingly.

Food. Breakfast is included and may consist of rolls and eggs, peanut butter, jelly, honey, and bananas. Other meals are available for a fee. You can also cook your own meals—everyone has access to the kitchen, groceries and snacks can be purchased within walking distance. Two restaurants within two blocks.

Other. Laundry service is available – items are hand washed and line dried on a covered porch. It can take a couple of days to dry during the rainy season. Dry clothes are put in a crib and people sort through them to find their clothes.

If you are adopting a toddler, be aware there are very hard surfaces and steep stairs. It can be noisy as there is a recording studio next door. There is a guard at the entrance. Two Internet cafés nearby, \$2-3/hour.

Cost per night: about \$40 per couple, \$25 for an individual, plus about \$5 per child. They accept cash only, in Birr or \$US.

C. Hilton: Phone number from the U.S.: 011-251-84-00
<http://www.hilton.com/>

(search on Addis Ababa) The hotel is clean and convenient — about what you would expect from a Hilton in the U.S. Airport shuttle.

Rooms. Suites are available.

Food. Indoor restaurant serves Western and Ethiopian food; moderately priced (by U.S. standards) Italian restaurant; café by the pool; room service. Grocery store within walking distance.

Other. Small playground, tennis courts, jogging track, ping pong, Jacuzzi, saunas, squash, and mini golf. Staff is friendly and helpful. Same-day laundry service.

A house doctor is available. Internet available for about \$15-\$20 an hour. Credit Cards accepted. Will exchange money and cash travelers' checks. Cost per night: about \$140.

D. Kidane Mehret Guesthouse. If your child is in this orphanage, contact your agency if you are interested in staying at the orphanage itself. They have limited space for traveling parents to stay in their Guesthouse.

E. Sheraton: Phone number from the U.S.: 011-251-11-5171717
http://www.starwoodhotels.com/luxury/search/hotel_detail.html?propertyID=149

The Sheraton is a luxury hotel by any standards. The website has a comprehensive description. Airport shuttle.

Rooms. Suites available, private balconies, in-room safes.

Food. Five restaurants and lounges, 24 hour room service

Other. Swimming pool, children's pool, massage, sauna, 24 hour front desk, and more. Internet available for about \$15-\$20 an hour. Credit cards accepted. Will exchange money and cash travelers' checks. Cost per night: about \$170-\$200 per night.

F. Yilma Hotel: Phone number from the U.S.: 011-251-1-20-12-69
Email is yilmahotel@telecom.net.et Airport shuttle. Clean and simple.

Rooms. Singles, doubles and suites, though the suites are small. Refrigerators are provided if you ask. There are phones in the rooms -- to make a call, contact the front desk and they dial the number for you.

Food. Good restaurant, other restaurants nearby. Small stores for things like crackers and water are within a 2 minute walk. A larger grocery store is about a 15 minute walk.

Other. No internet access, though there is an internet café across the street. Good overnight laundry service is provided. The hotel has a contract with the UN to house the soldiers who guard the UN Mission for Ethiopia and Eritrea so travelers have reported to feel very safe there. This also means they are often full. Birr only-- credit cards and \$US are not accepted. Cost per night: about \$25 for a double, \$30-35 for a suite.

VI. What to pack for yourself – documents, clothing, snack food, camera, computer, adapters, converters, luggage

A. Documents. Consider taking the following with you:

- 1) Passport – photocopy of photo page and Ethiopian visa page, packed separately from original
- 2) Travel itinerary – copy packed separately from tickets
- 3) Emergency Telephone numbers – for local agency staff, drivers, etc., as well as contact numbers just in case your credit card or Traveler's checks are stolen.

- 4) Phrase book – some people have found this helpful, others have not, relying instead upon the taxi drivers and English-speaking staff at hotels/guest houses and orphanages.

B. Clothing: No shorts or anything which might be considered immodest. It is considered inappropriate to show your knees. Ethiopians are quite modest and probably a bit more formal than many of us. Consider drying time when packing. (See Travel FAQ -- Weather/Climate, Calendar) Many parents take 3-4 outfits plus jacket and an extra pair of shoes or sandals, then wash clothes while there. Some parents carry a small/travel sewing kit.

Trousers are fine for women as well as men. The temperature can drop very quickly and storms can come up on you quickly, so a light coat, sweater or windbreaker is suggested. A pair of closed-toe shoes are suggested as the footing can be a bit tricky in some areas. Athletic shoes are acceptable. Many buildings are not heated so take warm clothes during the cooler months. During the rainy season, some people carry umbrellas, but showers are sudden and torrential, so an umbrella may not be effective. During the hot/dry season, some travelers have recommended sunscreen and a sun hat.

B. Snack food. Many travelers take “comfort food” in the form of beef jerky, granola bars, ramen noodles, nut or cracker packs or other easily-packed foods. There are no restrictions on small amounts of food for personal use going into Ethiopia.

C. Cameras. Many parents take digital or film cameras or camcorders to record their trip. Film – mostly Fuji and Kodak – is available and costs about the same as in the U.S. Most parents prefer to bring film home for developing rather than having it developed there. Some parents take an inexpensive digital camera or disposable camera(s) for their child(ren) to take pictures to bring home.

D. Computer. A few parents have taken a laptop computer to record notes, play DVD's, and backup digital media. Internet connection with your laptop is not available in Ethiopia. There are a number of Internet Cafés you can use. You may be asked to declare your electronic equipment at the Addis airport when you arrive or depart.

E. Adaptors and Converters. Electrical outlets in Ethiopia are different than in the U.S. Families have reported finding an inexpensive travel kit at discount and travel stores which contains suitable adaptors.

Adaptors change the plug configuration. It can change U.S. two-prong parallel rectangle shaped plugs into two-pronged round (both

close together or far apart) or rectangle at an angle, etc. You may encounter several different plug styles in Addis.

Converters change the voltage from 120V to 220V or reverse. Chargers for camcorders and cameras often accept either, so check the fine print on the charger itself. Other appliances -- such as hair dryers -- will probably burn out if you plug them into 220V, which is what they have in Addis. So if you have a small appliance, be sure it takes 220 Volts or take a converter.

F. Luggage guidelines. Generally, international flights allow 70 pounds, less than 62 linear inches, H + W + D, for up to 2 checked bags and 40 pounds, less than 45 linear inches, H + W + D for 1 carry-on bag or 1 bag and a personal item, like a purse. *Check with the airline or travel agent for exact requirements.* You may wish to take a lightweight duffel to bring back additional items as part of your child's baggage allowance. When you pack, assume your checked bags may go astray -- keep essentials, at least one change of clothing, and copies of important documents in your carry-on. Changes in Latitude Travel Store has a carry-on size chart for most airlines: <http://www.cil.com/bagregs.htm> Also consider checking the security information at the Transportation Security Administration site: <http://www.tsa.gov/public/>

VII. What to pack for your new children – clothing, baby equipment, snack food, entertainment, camera, computer, adapters, converters

A. Clothing. You will have a general idea on size based on child reports. Many families take 3-4 sets of clothing – shirts, pants, underwear, socks. Elastic waistbands are good. For older girls who may be wearing a bra, you might consider an athletic/sports bra or camisole. Take clothes appropriate for the season, as well as a sweater or sweatshirt for cool evenings and for the trip home. Some families will take clothing in two sizes, and leave behind what is not used. If the clothing you take does not fit, you can exchange it for clothing at Layla or buy new clothes in Addis. Some parents carry shoes, some choose to buy shoes in Addis.

Many families set one outfit aside as “new” for the plane trip home. Before departure, you may want to pack a second outfit in the child's backpack to come home, for the option to change during the trip.

B. Baby Equipment.

1. Strollers receive a mixed review from traveling parents. Some say an umbrella stroller was the best thing they took, especially eating out, because baby seats aren't available in restaurants. It also was used in the airports on the way home by parents bringing home toddlers who “gate-checked” them at boarding. Other parents said there

were big fees charged by the airlines to take the strollers and that the roads were not smooth enough for them.

2. Sling/Backpack/Baby Bjorn: Recommended by many. Easily goes where you go—whether in a store, on a rough road shoulder, or in a taxi.

3. Diapers, etc. Disposable diapers are available at Addis markets but may cost more than in the U.S. Pull-ups/trainers and disposable wipes are not readily available.

C. Snacks/formula. Formula is available in Addis to use while there and on the trip home. Snacks are readily in Addis – breadsticks, rolls, and a little snack they call “dabbo.” Breadsticks are probably the best choice for little ones still teething. Older children may like choosing some snacks from the grocery stores when you are out. Granola bars, raisins, nuts and other snack food you may bring from home are also good options.

D. Entertainment for kids. Many parents take puzzles, cassette or CD players, notepads and pencils or crayons, bubbles, beads and necklace-making stuff, hand-held toys and similar items for quiet times at the lodging and for the airplane. A plain writing tablet is handy for drawing, playing Tic-Tac-Toh and for tracing coloring book pictures. So much is new to the older kids while traveling, that they often do not require much “entertainment.” Music cassettes and some CD’s are readily available in Addis. Gum is good for the return flight.

E. Backpack. Many parents take a backpack for each child to keep their things in while in Addis and on the trip home. It should be easily carried -- rolling backpacks are discouraged because they are awkward on escalators and are heavier than regular backpacks/daypacks.

VIII. Money – where to get, how much to take, exchange rates, tipping

Most places in Ethiopia will not accept credit cards. Cash is the preferred medium, though some parents have used traveler’s checks. Traveler’s checks incur a higher exchange fee than cash – a fee is assessed per check, so the exchange will be less costly if you take larger denomination of traveler’s checks.

A. Where to get cash. Allow several days for your bank to obtain sufficient “clean” bills for your needs. Bills should not have any marks on them, be worn or be torn at all, and should be newer than 1996.

NOTE: some banks recommend travelers carry bills newer than 2001. \$100 bills are easiest to exchange, though some parents have taken \$20 bills. The new \$50 bill —the one with red lines through it – is unfamiliar and travelers have reported places will not take it. Do not take \$100 bills dated 1996 (there was a problem with counterfeit 1996 bills and many banks will not exchange them.)

B. How much to take. In addition to your anticipated lodging amount, you will need to carry money to pay for food, outings, taxi drivers, tips, clothes, gifts, and souvenirs. In addition, you will pay for the child(ren)'s U.S. Visa (\$400 in cash) and an exit charge at the airport of \$20 in US currency for U.S. citizens (parent(s), traveling companions, and U.S. siblings, if they travel), and 100 Birr for the adopted Ethiopian child(ren) over two years of age. Travelers have suggested budgeting \$50-100 per day plus lodging, gifts, Visa and exit charges.

Sample costs (remember that bargaining for price is expected):

Child's traditional outfit: \$10-20

Adult traditional outfit: \$15-30

Ethiopian t-shirts: \$3-8

Baskets: \$3-20

Table linens: \$10-75

Bead jewelry: \$1-10

Wooden cross: \$5-10

Metal cross: \$8-10

Small musical instruments: \$3-20

Taxi drivers : \$3-5 per hour -- be sure to negotiate a rate at the start of the drive, don't wait until the end.

Internet cafe: \$2-3 per hour

C. Exchange: You can exchange money at the airport, the Hilton, the Sheraton, and the Ghion and most banks. The Hilton and Sheraton will also change traveler's checks for a fee. The Sheraton will make a cash advance on your Visa or Mastercard for a higher fee. You can change your Birr back into US bills at the airport after you pay the exit charge unless you are flying out with British Air. BA leaves at 7am and the bank is closed. You may want to keep some birr as keepsakes for your child(ren). If you arrive home with more than you like, AAI cheerfully accepts donations in Birr, or future travelers may purchase it from you. The exchange rate is about 8.6 Birr to \$1. You may wish to check this currency conversion site before you travel:

<http://oanda.com/>

D. Tipping: If someone helps you with your luggage in the airport in Addis, you should tip them 5-10 Birr. Other than this, tipping is not necessary or encouraged, though some people tipped in restaurants

anyway, or tipped their taxi drivers a small amount at the end of their visit.

IX. Telephone.

The least expensive way to speak with people in the U.S. when traveling is to buy an international calling card here in the U.S. and have them call you in Ethiopia. Arrange a time for them to call you in advance to be sure you are there when they are calling. Early morning and late evening works well for many families. Addis is 11 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time (10 Mountain, 9 Central, 8 Eastern). To dial out of the U.S., dial 011. To dial the city of Addis, dial 251 after 011. If you are calling a mobile phone in Addis, dial 011-251-9-number. As stated above, be aware that Addis telephone numbers added a digit in September 2005. See the Embassy website for more information. <http://www.ethiopianembassy.org/>

International calling cards can often be bought at ethnic restaurants and stores catering to Africans. Posters will list the countries valid for the card and approximate talk time. Also, they can be found online at stores such as www.africanprepaid.com

To call the U.S. from Addis costs about \$2.50 a minute. You cannot use anything but the Ethiopian phone company, which has a monopoly.

X. Taking donations and gifts

Families are asked to carry donations with them when they travel to Ethiopia. AAI has many donated items which need to be transported and will be happy to ship a box or more to you to pack with your luggage, especially if there is more than one member of your family traveling. Some families take donations of clothing, craft supplies, toothbrushes, vitamins, or other items collected from friends, instead of or in addition to the items AAI has ready to go. If you would like to do this, contact AAI for a current list of needed items.

NOTE: Once you have checked into your initial flight in the U.S., you will not see your luggage again until you reach Addis. There are luggage carts at the airport that make handling large pieces of luggage manageable, or porters are available for a dollar or two.