Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a country of contrasts. Situated in the horn of Africa, it is the country where the two oldest religions have co-existed in harmony for centuries. It has some of Africa’s highest mountains and the world’s lowest depressions. It has the largest cave in Africa and is the hottest place on earth.

Ethiopia’s civilisation is known as the cradle of mankind and has more UNESCO Heritage sites than any other country in Africa. It has its own calendar and alphabet and apart from a brief occupation by Mussolini’s fascists, it was never colonised. Ethiopia is a land of enormous ethnic diversity, there are more than 80 ethnic groups and as many languages.

But Ethiopia is Ethiopia and this will be obvious to the visitor from the moment of arrival in Addis Ababa, courtesy and hospitality are intrinsic throughout the country.

With its combination of history, culture, ethnic diversity, stunning scenery and varied wildlife, this country is truly unique.

GAA Charity of the Year

Having been selected as the GAA Charity of the year 2011, Playing for Life wants to take this opportunity to bring together the two communities – Ireland and Ethiopia. While the two countries may seem worlds apart, there is an uncanny similarity – a passion for hurling!

In Ireland, hurling dates back to the 5th Century and is thought to predate Christianity having been brought to this island by the Celts. Similarly, the Ethiopian sport of ‘Karsa’ is thought to have been developed in Tigray with the first settlers to the country.

With your help, Playing for Life would like to bring a group to Ethiopia in an effort to:

• Build a school/sports facility (using local contractors) in the local area.
• Play a Hurling/Karsa game against a local Ethiopian Team.

“We all see these awful sights of the 3rd world on our televisions, we can change the channels at home but when you sit 2 feet away from a child dying of HIV, you can’t get that picture out of your head.”

Henry Shefflin, Kilkenny GAA All Star
Itinerary

The group (of approximately 60 people) will travel to Addis Ababa from Ireland and stay overnight. The next day they will fly to Mekele in the Northern territory of Tigray and travel by bus to Adigrat. During their stay they will visit the historic towns of Azum and Gheralta. (right) The trip will be 12 days duration.

Tigray

Tigray, Ethiopia’s northern most region, has more than 120 rock-hewn churches. Adigrat is a bustling, friendly town, with strong links to Eritrea which give it a decidedly cosmopolitan feel. Gheralta, is the home of a quarter of the rock churches, some famous for their stone workmanship, ancient paintings and old manuscripts, and others known for their magnificent view and difficult ascent.

Aksum

The town of Aksum was established during the reign of the Queen of Sheba in 500 BC. Aksum became the main ancient city of Ethiopian civilization and a powerful kingdom. The Axumites were renowned for their fine architecture and craft skills, in particular as masons and metal workers, which they retain to this day. It is reputed to be the home of the Ark of the Covenant. Greek traders knew Aksum as the centre of an empire which had trade links with Rome, India, Arabia, Egypt and Persia.

These ancient trading links were not solely commercial; technological and cultural advances moved along these lines too. For historians, the similarities have been noted between the ancient Irish game of Hurling, played with a ball and stick between two parishes and Karsa, an ancient Ethiopian game played with a ball and a stick between two neighboring communities and it is this connection that Playing for Life wish to develop by bringing a group of Irish GAA players to Ethiopia in January 2012 to play a game of hurling.

Legend

Amongst all the famous story-tellers in the world the Celts, the Greeks, the Indians and the Jews, the Ethiopians have their own story to tell. The Kebra Nagast is a 700 year old account of the origins of the Emperors of Ethiopia, tracing the dynasty all the way back to King Soloman of Jerusalem and the Queen of Sheba. This book contains the story of how the two monarchs met and has been the basis for Hollywood movies and many books.

Despite having 700 wives and 300 concubines, King Soloman felt duty bound to have a child with the Queen of Sheba and the book tells of their son who became Menelik 1, Emperor of Abyssinia. He was the founder of a dynasty that would reign in Ethiopia until the Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in 1974. The book also tells how the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Aksum in Ethiopia by Menelik 1 and how the Ethiopian nation converted from the worship of the sun, moon and stars, to that of the “Lord God of Israel”.

The Kebra Nagast is not merely a literary work but the repository of Ethiopian national and religious identity and to the Ethiopians, it is similar in importance to the Old Testament and the Qur’an.
Security

Ethiopia is a safe country to visit and Addis Ababa is still one of the safest capitals in Africa. Volunteers should, of course, use common sense and not carry large amounts of money with them or they should leave particularly valuable items with hotel reception.

Health & Precautions

Ethiopia requires all visitors to have an up to date Yellow Fever vaccination certificate. For your own wellbeing, we also recommend immunization against Hepatitis A and B, Tetanus, Typhoid and Polio. Malaria medication is highly recommended throughout Africa.

The temperatures in the highlands are moderate, rarely exceeding 30C even at the hottest times of the year.

All volunteers are required to take out standard holiday insurance prior to departure. This can be obtained through our travel agent (Caroline in Phoenix Travel: 01 2870070) through your bank or online.

“To those considering the experience I would say go for it – you’ll get back a lot more than you could ever give.”

Mary Dooley, Co Offaly

A note from Tracy

I set up Playing for Life in 2005 following a trip to Ethiopia and it is very close to my heart, taking up a lot of my time, drive and passion. By asking African Communities what they need, Playing for Life aims to provide funding for Educational and Sporting facilities, using local staff and contractors with the long term aims of employment and self sufficiency.

Over the last couple of years, our volunteers have travelled to Kenya, Malawi and Tanzania to assist in the initial phases of building Vocational Education and Training facilities and Community Centres. We have worked directly with communities providing training in Health and HIV/AIDS prevention, account keeping, I.T. & computers, Sports, Block laying, Carpentry, Welding, Food preservation and Music and Drama.

We have the backing of Irish Aid through their Civil Society fund and we have signed agreements with the Malawian Ministry of Education. Last year, Playing for Life’s HIV/AIDS awareness programme reached over 24,000 school children in Malawi alone.

All our projects are self sufficient, generating income for the communities and maintaining the future viability of the developments. Each year our students graduate from vocational education with a set of their tools enabling them to start their own business or gain employment immediately.

We need your help and support to continue this valuable work, it really makes a difference!

Tracy
HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Become a volunteer (Cost: €4,000)

As a Volunteer, you will raise €4,000 by December 2011 and travel with us to Ethiopia to support the GAA Heroes and contribute towards the building of the school. This will include your flights, accommodation and meals.

Sponsorship in Kind

The following items would be welcomed as in-kind sponsorship donations:

- Kits (for both the Irish Hurling Team and the Ethiopian Karsa Team)
- Refreshments (for pre-event meetings/press events & also in Ethiopia)
- Text Voting System (for the selection of participants)
- All other ideas and options welcomed

"I have to say that the trip exceeded all my expectations as it was an experience of a lifetime. I could only compare the experience to winning an All Ireland"

Marcella Heffernan, Mayo GAA All Star

"The Malawians are gorgeous people, similar to the Irish of the 50's, seeking a little help and knowledge to improve their living standards. Surely it is not acceptable that a human being suffering from HIV should have to also battle against hunger"

Eoin 'The Bomber' Liston, Kerry GAA All Star

"The Playing for Life concept is fantastic and long may it continue. I was delighted to have been able to go and teach music to such talented people. It has been the most sad, happy, humbling, emotional experience of my life and I hope to return one day."

Ray McDonnell, Irish Defence Forces Army Band