



*Time to Tour Eritrea*



# Time to Tour Eritrea

by Kidane Tekle

## **1. Background:**

I read, in Madote.com, the article written by Stephen Lioy on **“Should Eritrea be on your horizon?”** The article outlines a major point, which is quoted below.

**“Despite a wealth of archaeological ruins, stunning Red Sea coastline, and one of the world’s greatest concentrations of largely forgotten art deco architecture, the small country of Eritrea on the Horn of Africa hasn’t received much attention in tourism circles. But that is about to change.”**

This interesting article inspired me to make an in-depth analysis on the subject matter and write this article albeit there is some information gap in the paper. It is not written based on field study and observation but solely based on secondary information, that is what is found googling. Hence, it is initiated with an intent to present the tourism potential of Eritrea, which has been downplayed due to either the 30 year war of independence or the border war with Ethiopia during the 1997-2001. The United Nations Sanctions and the Ethiopia’s pursuing of a ‘no war and no peace’ stance have their toll in thwarting the industry. The ‘no fly zone’ has, also, its negative impact.

The presence of large numbers of land mines, and the continued tensions that flare up between Eritrea and Ethiopia have deterred the development of a tourist industry in Eritrea. Not very many tourists came during the last two decades and the revenue generated from this sector was very minimal as compared to many countries.

Situation has started recently to be better as mentioned in the Stephen’s article. Peace accord was reached between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Flight has opened between the two countries and the ‘no fly zone’ is no more existing on contrary to what Stephen mentioned in his article. Agreement of cooperation was made between Ethiopian and Eritrean Airlines. Flight from any corner of the world is now possible to Eritrea.

The tourist potential of Eritrea is big and has to be harnessed with conducive services in place and by taking commensurate action. The country has great tourist destinations as there are places of interest with historical significance and natural attraction. The range is wide. That of Eritrea is a kind of interest to any tourist as it makes one march through time from ancient civilization to contemporary history. I put below some of the best destination areas in Eritrea to visit and I believe that they are no less than the most astonished and regularly visited tourist attraction places of the earth.

Eritrea's name was taken from a Greek word to mean Red Sea and it is located in the horn of Africa that has many natural wonders. It is blessed with a long and beautiful sea coast, islands, high mountains, lowland depressions, wild life, hot water springs, forested mountains and hot sandy desert areas. All these diverse natural exquisiteness make it to be an ideal and fascinating tourist destination.

The Eritrean people are very deeply rooted with religious up-binging. This is what they transcending the image of God in them. They may be poor in materiality but rich spiritually. Different religions were and still practiced in Eritrea.

Judaism is thought to have existed as an important religion in Eritrea and Ethiopia before Christianity became the official religion of the Kingdom of Aksum (today's Ethiopia and Eritrea) in the early 4th century AD.

Jews first settled in Eritrea in the late 19th century, emigrating from Yemen. Many Jews came to the country in search of economic and commercial opportunities. In 1905, the Asmara Hebrew Congregation was formed. During the 1930s, many Jews arrived in Eritrea fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe.

Eritrea was one of the first Christian countries in the world having officially adopted Christianity in the 4th century. At the same time, it was the first Muslim settlements in Africa , where a group of Muslims facing persecution in Mecca travelled through modern day Eritrea. Followers of the Prophet Mohammed traveled to the Eritrean coast in 615 AD to establish relations with Adulis authorities and seek

protection for their new faith. One of the historical sites in Eritrea is the 500 year old Sheikh Hanafi Mosque in Massawa, which is presented in para 2.9 below.

## **2. Tourist Attractions/Destinations:**

Having said the background information in its history, it is imperative to look the situation now. It is striving coming out of the quagmire of war of independence and the border war between Eritrea and Ethiopia held from 1997 to 2001. Peace has now prevailed in both Eritrea and Ethiopia subsequent to the acceptance by Ethiopia of the final and binding decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC.)

It is very peaceful and going to any corner of Eritrea, one faces smiles and greetings from the friendly people. You can wander around even during the night times in the cities and no one faces any sort of a problem. There is no burglary or pickpocket.

Whether you bask in the colonial splendor of the capital, Asmara, or explore ancient ruins on one of the virgin islands in the country's many Red Sea archipelagos, Eritrea is a country that would very much be worth visiting. Just imagine finding yourself in a place where different civilizations flourish. Think about the exploration of the Punt land and the reflection of Turkish and Egyptian remnants of buildings still standing especially in Massawa. The art deco buildings in Asmara and the steam engine railway built by the Italians are of a major scenes not to be missed visiting and enjoying. If you are a little adventurer, you can visit Nakfa where bitter battles were fought with Ethiopia.

Let me walk you through the different scenarios and believe that they will of high interest to you and visiting them in person, of course, will give you get first-hand experience. The warm season in Eritrea runs from June to September, with a cooler season from October to May. Different locations in the country experience different temperatures. In the lowlands temperatures tend to be warmer. This is particularly true of the Dankalia region, which is quite warm and has almost no rainfall.

This is the time to tour Eritrea. All tourists of different walk of life and nationalities are also welcomed to Eritrea and enjoy their visits. I also propose all Eritreans to visit their country's attractions and historical sites. They are stunning and worth a life history memory.

## **2. 1 The Land of Punt:**

According to Widedia, "Land of Punt is a name for a geographic place, mentioned in Ancient Egyptian texts. At times it is also called Pwenet or Pwene. Ancient Egypt traded with this place, at least since 6.000 BC. It was known for producing and exporting gold, aromatic resins, blackwood, ebony, ivory, and wild animals. The region is known from ancient Egyptian records of trade expeditions to the Punt Land. Some biblical scholars have identified it with the biblical land of Put. The land of Punt is dubious and not an already finalized version in which area it existed and when. There are some findings made." But I would like to share you on what has been said.

The exact location of Punt is, though, still debated by historians, most scholars today believe Punt was situated to the southeast of Egypt, most likely in the coastal region of modern Djibouti, Eritrea, north-east Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Red Sea littoral of Sudan. However, some scholars point instead to a range of ancient inscriptions that locate Punt in the Arabian Peninsula. It is also possible that the territory covered both the Horn of Africa and Southern Arabia. Puntland, the Somali administrative region situated at the extremity of the Horn of Africa, is named in reference to the Land of Punt. As shown in the below map, the Punt Land stretches from Eritrea to Somalia and across to Yemen. It had both land and sea connections with Egypt and far east.



As mentioned above, there are different versions presented about the Punt Land. Some claim that it was in Eritrea. Some say it was in Somalia. Still, it was not yet ascertained where this Africa's last, lost, and great civilization of the Land of Punt was located.

## **2.2 Port of Adulis:**

What comes as part of the Punt Land, is the port city of Zula. The ancient port of Adulis was one of greatest significance in antiquity. It was is located on the Gulf of Zula of Red Sea coast of Eritrea, on the crossroads of trade between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. It is mentioned in a number of Classical and Byzantine sources, together with other Red Sea ports, such as Berenike (Egypt), Myos Hormos (Quseir, Egypt), first and later with Clysma (Ismaylia, Egypt), and Ayla (Aqaba, Jordan). This port-city articulated the Roman, Byzantine and Indian trades for over seven centuries

It is best known for its role in Aksumite trade during the fourth to seventh centuries AD. It is connected to Aksum in Ethiopia by a tortuous mountain route to Qohaito, then across the plateau to the city itself. Not only did it offer a good harbor on the route to India, but it was a source for luxuries such as ivory, tortoise-shell and rhinoceros horn.



The subsequent introduction of Christianity is also a consequence of a long-lasting trade and cultural interaction with the Romans and the Byzantines through the Red Sea, just as the introduction of coinage. The spread of the Islam and of the early Arab people in the Horn also started in the Eritrean coastal and insular regions.

The place is also historical because it is where the first 21 kilometer rail was built until Kumayle by the British in 1868. The Expeditionary British Army composed mainly by the Indian troops has to travel 610 kilometers deep inside Ethiopia to confront Emperor Tewdros in Gondar. The Emperor held hostages of about 50 foreign diplomats. Queen Victoria ordered the British Army in India to travel to Gondar and free the Hostages. When Tedros saw an army with sophisticated weaponry, he committed suicide.



5th-6th century AD Byzantine Church ruins in Adulis

### **2.3 National Museum - Asmara:**

National Museum Asmara is found in Asmara City close to Selam Hotel. It has a unique identity, the gist of which is neatly synchronized in the National Museum of Asmara. The Museum has kinds of exhibits that is the tombstones from Dahlak Islands, findings from Adulis and Sabean material.

## **2.4 N'da Mariam Orthodox Church**

N'da Mariam Orthodox Church is located in Asmara. The Nda Mariam Orthodox is commonly known as Enda Mariam Orthodox Church. The main building is composed of three massive elements slightly up the hill which makes it another useful landmark in Asmara with two wooden doors, which have frames of red ceramic tessera.

## **2.5 Asmara Sembel Archaeological:**

The site was recently discovered when a family was building a house. Now, the place is reserved for the Eritrean National Museum. It is located in the outskirts of Asmara and it features of what probably was a village with marvelous construction site. The site can be viewed from an adjoining building, which was constructed by the Asmara national Museum.

## **2.6 Asmara Tank and Truck Graveyard:**

A one day sightseeing to observe the Tank Grave Yard, where one will see a heap of destroyed tanks and armored vehicles captured by the Eritrean People's Liberation army from the Ethiopian Army during the thirty years war of independence.

A visit to the tank graveyard in Asmara, picture of which shown below, will give a clue how much the war was devastating in terms of war machines aside the big sacrifices made in life. It is located in the outskirts of Asmara. All here are military equipment



used in the 30-year long war between Eritrea and Ethiopia



## **2.7 Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque:**

Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque, built by the Italians, is one of the major tourist attractions and religious places in the city of Asmara. The Mosque is located in the Peace Street of Asmara close to the main market. The building structure is majestic and visitors are expected to cover their heads and it is mandatory for women to be covered from head to if entering the mosque premises.

## **2.8 Asmara Art Deco:**

Asmara became an Art Deco laboratory during the 1930s for designs that seemed, well, just too out there for mainland Italy. Rationalism, Novecento, Neo-classicism, neo-Baroque and monumentalism are among the varied avant-garde styles played with here. The result today is hundreds of aging, sherbet-colored buildings that are still standing, some needing a coat of paint — or two — but otherwise intact. With its plentiful palms and sunshine, the whole city has a decidedly Miami Beach vibe, minus the miniskirts and Ferraris. Asmara, the modernist African City is now a UNESCO world heritage site.

The most art deco buildings and the world heritage site include, among others, the Fiat Tagliero Service station built in 1938, Cinema Impero (1937), City Hall (Governor's Palace built in the 1930s), Opera House (1920), Cinema Odeon (1937), Cinema Roma (1937), Bar Zilli (1939).

The star is the Fiat Tagliero gas station, designed in 1938 by Giuseppe Pettazzi to look like an airplane, a spaceship or possibly a bat. Mr. Pettazzi's extraordinary flourish was the concrete wings that jut (extend) out a total of more than 90 feet. The municipal authorities at the time required him to build pillars under the wings so they wouldn't collapse, which was an unforgivable insult to Mr. Pettazzi. According to local legend, Mr. Pettazzi installed detachable pillars, and at the station's opening, he pulled out a pistol and forced the builder to remove the supports. Needless to say, the wings are still there.

Asmara's art deco buildings have to be maintained to give them their original look. They are still standing majestically as if they were built yesterday. It is such a fascinating scenery. As a modernist city 'Asmara Bella' has been a center of attraction for many architectural admirers and now that it has been enlisted in UNESCO world heritage, the flow of tourists is likely to continue in great numbers. It will only need its people to continue keeping the City they Love as tidy and clean as it has been for more than a century.

One cannot miss the Opera House, picture of which from inside shown below, is located in the Harnet Avenue. It features Art Nouveau ceiling painted by Saviero Fresa. It is very much amusing to see this picturesque building. However, it needs major maintenance to preserve its original look as part of the walls from outside are crumbling. Otherwise, it is magnificent and worth visiting.



## **2.9 Foro Via - the Railway Station:**

The Eritrean railway is the only railway system in Eritrea that was used to travel between Asmara and Massawa. It was constructed between 1887 and 1932 by the Italians connecting Massawa with Asmara and later with Bisha. It was, also, served Keren and Agordat. The line was destroyed during the 30 year war of independence and rehabilitated partly after independence.

The railway systems still uses equipment of the 1930s built by the Italian 'Littorina' railcars with a steam locomotive. The railway is a narrow gauge and may need change.



Keren and Akordat Railway Stations

One of the experiences that cannot be missed in Eritrea is the ride on an authentic steam train. The line still uses much of the original equipment, including the trains themselves. The trip on the Eritrean railway through the landscape of high mountains has a breathtaking views. Some consider the view as a kind of a paradise and comment that with the introduction of electric traction, that Eritrea can become the Switzerland of Africa.

The steam locomotive is a great tourist attraction. There are lots of foreign people attracted to it and would like to tour the area by this railway. For everybody who visits Eritrea, an absolute must-see is the journey from Asmara to Massawa for the best and unforgettable scenic sites and beautiful landscape that no one would want to miss. From the terraced mountains of Asmara area, the journey to Massawa takes you down a mountainous road with quite spectacular views.

The journey on the Eritrean railway takes you a 117 kms. passing through three climate zones: the fall - the cool air of mountainous Asmara, the spring - plateau around Ghinda area, and the summer - the heat of the Red Sea desert.

It takes you two hours by railway from Asmara, which lies 2,438 meters above sea level to Massawa, which is located at the Red Sea coast.

## **2.10 Massawa:**

Red Sea coast stretches for about 1200 km. The sea has extraordinary marine life, including fishes, colorful coral reefs, dolphins, sea turtles and the sea is known for activities like: swimming, snorkeling and taking walks along the coast.

Some of the world's most spectacular diving is in the Red Sea. There are a few dive shops in Massawa with rentable gear and boats to take you to the Dahlak Archipelago, which includes more than 200 islands.

Massawa city, which is located in the Red Sea, is the main port of Eritrea. It is an Old town sits on an island (Batse) that it shares with the country's busiest deep-sea port (not very busy), a free trade area. It is an old town consisting of medieval Ottoman style

coral buildings separated by narrow alleys as well as an ancient mosque. The mosque was built by the followers of Prophet Mohammed around 1,450 years ago while they settle in Massawa.

Mosque Sheikh Hamal is a quintessential work of architecture with different murals and sculptures that gave it more archeological importance. The tomb of Sheikh Hamal, the namesake of the mosque, and his wife is also located within the mosque's compound. No one has yet been able to decipher the meaning of the inscription but according to the inscription on the tomb of Sheikh Hamal, it is believed to have been engraved by either Iranians or Turks. However, there is an Arabic inscription that reads as "Omer Al-Sherif died on the 10th year of Hejira in Massawa". This is estimated to be like 1,400 years old.



The Sheikh Hanafi Mosque, picture of which shown below, is a 15th century mosque found in Massawa. The over 500 year old mosque is one of the oldest surviving in the





structures in the city. It was named after Sheikh Hanafi, who was a great teacher who funded his students' studies in Egypt.

The island is connected to the mainland via another island called **Tualud**, both separated by a causeway. On Tualud you will find most "downtown" hotels like the Dahlak, Red Sea, Central, Corallo , etc. Tualud also hosts St. Mary's catholic church and the famous tank monument.



*The Massawa war memorial. The memorial is a composition of three Ethiopian tanks. The middle tank, known as Commander Number 1, which was the first tank captured by the EPLA at the battle of Adebzemat in 1977. The other two were halted at this location in 1991. The tanks are surrounded by black and white marble, a fountain spouting from the tanks gun and flower beds.*

Massawa is accessible from Asmara and the rest of inland Eritrea via the Asmara-Massawa highway. Buses run many times daily (before dusk) between Asmara and

Massawa. Minibuses also run as soon as they are full (which takes very little time) between the Asmara bus station and Massawa. Regional buses run from the Massawa bus station and around the area a couple of times a week. But other than the long coastal two-day voyage to the other port city of Assab and to the inland via Asmara, there is not much to see beyond Massawa within the region. Massawa also connects to Asmara by narrow gauge rail, but it is not open to any regular service as it is more or less a museum railway with trains running on a steam engine and only open to chartered tours.

The Ottoman Empire conquered the Habesh (mostly covering the coastal line of present-day Eritrea) starting in 1557, when Özdemiş Pasha took the port city of Massawa and the adjacent city of Hergigo, even taking Debarwa, then capital of the local ruler Bahri Negasi Yeshaq (ruler of Medri Bahri). They administered these areas as the province of Habesh. Yeshaq rallied his peasants and recaptured Debarwa, taking all the gold the invaders had piled under their custody. In 1560 Yeshaq, disillusioned with the new Emperor of Ethiopia, revolted with Ottoman support but pledged his support again with the crowning of Emperor Sertse Dengel. However, not long after, Yeshaq revolted again with Ottoman support but was defeated once and for all in 1578. The Ottomans controlled over Massawa, Hergigo and some of the nearby coastal environs, which were later transferred to the control of Beja ' (deputies).

There are several buildings built by the Turks in Massawa. Most of the buildings seen are of Turk structural design. There are some, which were built by the Italians. Lots of maintenance work is required to refurbish the buildings to their original features.



The below is the picture of Banca d'Italia (bank of Italy) building, which is situated in Massawa's Taulud Island and was built by the Italians in the 1920s.



The building was devastated during the liberation of Massawa in 1990. A complete structural and architectural assessment was conducted of Eritrea's Banca d'Italia building by the Lebanese-based Sabbag firm. The idea is to turn this historic building into an exquisite eight suite hotel and refurbish it with luxurious high end amenities. The project is being financed by Qatari Diar and the Government of Eritrea (GoE), whom together have invested on several construction projects along the Eritrean coast and capital with the goal of boosting tourism and modernizing urban centers. The project has not so far materialized.

### **2.11 Dahlak Islands:**

Dahlak archipelago consists of two large and 124 small islands. Some write that there are 200 islands. It is known as ideal location for adventure sports. In the archipelago of two hundred or more islands one is able to see the mangrove trees and coral reefs submerged in coastal waters. Out of the many islands that form the Dahlak Archipelago, the island of Dahlak Kebir is the largest and accounts for the largest population recorded. There are ancient Turkish and islamic ruins in this island to be visited.

Charter yachts are available for hire in Massawa. You can use the hired yacht and cruising (scuba) for diving and pearl fishing.

### **2.12 The Dahlak Marine National Park:**

Dahlak Marine Park is located in the Northern Red Sea Region of Eritrea. It includes part of the Dahlak archipelago and the surrounding waters. There are more than 350 varieties of fish and divers can even catch a glimpse of wrecked ships in the waters.



Luul Resort Hotel at Dahlak Islands

The coasts of the islands exhibit a number of marine and bird species. The islands are also home to a number of mangrove species. The islands can be easily reached from the city of Massawa by private boats.

Most tourists claim that a trip to the Dahlak Islands is a must see place. It deserves to be in the list of the major attractions of Eritrea to be visited.

### **2.13 Embasoira Mountain:**

Embasoira mountain, which is the highest peak in Eritrea, is located 135 km south of Asmara. It is 3,018 meters above sea level. It is part of the Eritrean highlands. The Great Rift Valley cuts through Eritrea and joins the Red Sea. The area has juniper forest and fertile agricultural areas. There are substantial areas of lush and native forest dotted around the mountain.

### **2.14 Qohaito Archaeological Site:**

Qohaito, also known as Kohaito, was an ancient city in the Debub region of Eritrea. It was a pre-Aksumite settlement that thrived during the Aksumite period.



The site was located over 2,500 meters above sea level, on a high plateau at the edge of the Great Rift Valley. Qohaito's ruins have yet to be excavated. The ancient port of Adulis lies directly to the East. Qohaito ruins are replica of the ancient palace of the Axumite civilization

### **2.15 Metera:**

One of the major attractions of Eritrea is Metera. It is an archaeological site to visit in Eritrea that has great historic significance attached to it. It is located close to the city of Senafe. Excavations have evidenced that the city of Metera has been a witness to the kingdoms of Aksumite and D'mt. The Aksumite rulers reigned from roughly 100 AD to 940 AD.

During Emperor Haileselassie's time, the excavated artifacts were taken to Ethiopia. Hence, many of the historical artifacts of Metera and Adulis, which were in the custody of the museums of Ethiopia, were later returned to the National Museum of Eritrea after





independence.

The ancient ruins of impressive temples of the Aksumite era can be visited with a tour guide that can explain the significance of each monument. A monument of interest here is the Hawulti, obelisk that dates back to the pre-Aksumite era.

### **2.16 Hawatsu Reservoir and Copse:**

Hawatsu Reservoir and Copse is located within 40 km from Segeneiti and 105 km from Asmara. This place is best for bird watching, like Pink backed Pelican, Grey Heron, Black-headed Heron, Hammerkop, Egyptian Goose, Little Grebe, Northern Pintail and European Wigeon.

### **2.17 Denakil Depression**

The Denakil Depression, one of the hottest and lowest lands on Earth, is a famous Eritrean destination. It is an arid region and records very less rain throughout the year.

Geologically, the depression is said to have been formed as a result of the rifting of tectonic plates in the region constituting the Horn of Africa. The depression has a number of hot yellow springs that disgorge sulfuric acid. Most of the depression is located in Ethiopia, yet the portion that spreads to Eritrea makes it one of the major attractions of Eritrea.



Tourists can book tours before-hand to visit the Denakil Depression, one of the most geologically active regions in the world. In Ethiopia, a three day Denakil tour covering the hot springs and volcanoes and a journey to the Denakil is made. The landscape is so unusual that you will almost believe that you are in another planet. Many visitors camp and there are a number of good-quality campsites, that now exist in the Ethiopian part of the depression. As a matter of fact, Ethiopia was nominated in 2015 as the world's best tourist destination by the European Council on Tourism and Trade.

### **2.18 Asmara Zoo:**

Asmara zoo is located 3 km away from Asmara City on the road to Massawa. The zoo is known as Biet Ghiorgis. The animals found in the zoo are hyenas, baboons, snakes, lions, ostriches and several colorful birds. The zoo in Asmara is full of herbs, plants and variety of cactuses. The surrounding area of the zoo overlooking the valleys and gorges is a nice place for walking and mountain tracking. Also, you find here a kids play ground.

### **2.19 Semenawi National Park:**

Semenawi National Park is located within 21 km distance from Asmara at the foothills of a mountain range as well as in the valleys at average height of 900 meters. Leopards, klipspringers, bushbucks, warthog, and duiker are the common animals inhabiting this national park. There are also a large number of birds to watch.

### **2.20 Abarda'e Rock engravings:**

The engravings are located some 25 kilometers to the east of Asmara. The rock engravings is a significant place to see and requires half day tour. No finding has so far been made how and when it was engraved.

### **2.21 The Italian Mausoleum in Adi-Quala :**

Adi Quala lies at a distance of 92 kilometers from Asmara to the south east of the country. The tomb was built in 1940s in commemoration of the Italian soldiers who fell in the humiliating defeat in the hands of King Menelik's army of Ethiopia in the Battle of Adowa in 1896. The war is recorded as a great African victory of the 19th Century.

## **2.22 Massawa and the Escarpment – Down the Hill:**

The journey down to Massawa was one of the most fantastic drives you can ever imagine. One has to traverse the southern suburbs of Asmara, through the palm fringed streets up to the lorry park and market place, then turned right up by the Coptic Cathedral and head up a long steady rise to the edge of the city. Then you have to pass in a semi-countryside of industrial units, the occasional high-status house and pine woods. The road wind gently through this rocky and wooded landscape.



What a magnificence that you enjoy is the land below the mountain fully covered by cloud. It is full of serenity that you feel deep in yourself the exasperation of the clifty and twisting road and the beauty of the greenery of the area. Unforgettable memory you will have of this wonderful place.

Below the cloud lie the Felfil Selemuna with green lush growth of tropical trees. Wild animals are there in the forest. The monkeys are of course the obvious recipient of guests in the area.

## **2.23 Tourist Site in Gash Barka:**

Gash Barka is an area mainly inhabited by the Kunama and Nara people. It is taken to be the bread basket of Eritrea. There are several dams built around here and lots of agricultural activities are being undertaken.

A number of tourism sites exist in Gash-Barka region including ancient trenches, caves, rivers and elephant enclosure. Elephants are more common wildlife in this region.

The prehistoric cave arts are worth seeing in this region.

## 2.24 Keren City:

It is the biggest city next to Asmara and located in the western part of Eritrea. It is worth visiting Mariam Dearit of Keren. Two kilometers out of Keren is the shrine of St. Mariam Dearit, a statue of the Virgin Mary that has its residence inside a trunk of an ancient baobab tree out in the open field, over 500 years old and 75 feet high. The Statue, which is believed to have powers of healing. It is also believed to mark the spot from, which fertility springs. Local women brew coffee in the shade of the tree and believe they have been blessed fertility-wise if a passing traveler accepts a cup of coffee. There is a pilgrimage every year on the 29th May.



St. Mariam Dearit's shrine in Keren, built into a huge baobab tree

Another interesting thing is the Monument for the martyrs of the 1961-91 liberation struggle. The below is the picture of the Monument. You will have an excellent view of part of Keren City from here.



### **3. Tourism Development Policy**

The Ministry of Tourism of the State of Eritrea has made several efforts to develop tourism in a manner that encourages conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and bio-diversity, and conservation of archaeological and historic sites, architecturally important buildings and the cultural traditions and identities of the country's several ethnic groups.

Tourism, has been, among others, which was affected by the conflict with Ethiopia. Not many tourists visited the country. Now, peace prevails in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. The environment has become very conducive to attract lots of tourists. Tourism in Eritrea will contribute to the country's revenue and development of the economy. The government started a plan to develop the country's tourist industry and it is targeting for more international tourist arrivals in the country.

There is in Hadas Eritrea dated 24 October 2018 an article on Basic Essentials of Hotels by Ere-Tourism. The excerpt of the article, which is written in Tirigna, is taken here by translating it to an English version. It stresses on 1) cleaning, 2) Safety of the Guest, 3) Internet Service, 4) Comfortable beds, 5) Clean of bad odor, 6) Well lighted, 7) proper drain of bath room sink and availability of water, 8) Efficient telephone reception, 9) Availability of delicious food, 10) Efficient reception with bookings during guest arrival and check out those leaving the hotel.

What should be done more to stimulate growth of the tourist industry? There are five main actions this article would like to recommend that have to be taken by the Ministry of Tourism of the State of Eritrea.

#### **3.1 Brochures:**

Prepare brochures showing different touristic sites in Eritrea to create awareness and incite inflow of tourists. The brochures can be distributed through Embassies and tourism organizations. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) agency is



responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It prepares a global report on Inclusive Tourism Destination. Eritrea can use this forum to introduce its tourist potential and be able to attract tourists. Eritrea travel guide was posted in the World Travel Guide and none of the art deco buildings, historical and religious sites are mentioned in it. In this respect, there is much to be desired. Opening up to tourism is also expedited through proper handling of visa and customs service.

### **3.2 Posters:**

Different posters of the tourist attractions have to be printed and distributed through Embassies and put them in the walls of hotels in Eritrea. “13 months of Sunshine” is the motto of the Ethiopian Tourism Department. This is to mention one. But there are different tourism catchy slogans in different countries. For detail, refer to the below site. <http://www.escapemanila.com/2017/06/tourism-slogan-of-every-country-in-world.html>

For Eritrea, “**three seasons in two hours**” may be used as a slogan or another one can be coined.

### **3.3 Organizing a Touring Company:**

A Touring Company has to be established that caters to the service needs of tourists. The Company will have touring vehicles and touring guides. Vehicle should be arranged for touring. Tourists come either in a group or individual and can rent cars with a driver to go around the country and see the tourist attractions on their choice and time. A Tourist Guide with proper knowledge can be assigned to the tour. Fees will be charged for the service.

### **3.4 Strengthen the Hotel and Tourism Training Center:**

The Training Center gives a 6 month training in hotel and travel and a 3 months training in travel, food and hotel improvement. In Ethiopia and other countries, hotel and

tourism management, diplomas and degrees are given in addition to certificate programs.

World standard food preparation and catering should be adopted and Chefs and hotel attendants have to be trained and certified. The Institute can provide a diploma or a certificate level training. This is because food of different varieties (Italian, Chinese, Indian, etc.) can be served with having trained Chefs. The hotel and restaurant attendants and managers can have the proper training and, hence, can expedite efficient service rendering and contribute to the growth of tourism in the country.

The Institute has to strive to equip trainees with major skills of Tour Guide, Tour Operation, Tourism Management, Hotel Management, Front Office Operation, Food and Beverage Service and Food Preparation and other related field. The development of hotels and transportation obviously facilitates the growth of tourism in Eritrea in addition to related infrastructure development.

### **3.5 Hotel and Accommodation:**

Tourists and visitors may come in an increasing number with the peaceful situation now existing in the horn of Africa. Many more can come if tourism awareness of the destinations is made by having persistent advertisement in mass media or social networking. But, the problem is hotel rooms to accommodate incoming tourists or visitors. Some lack amenities that makes the hotel service extremely low. Some lack water and electricity. Some lack even toilet paper.

The following reviews, which were made by foreign visitors to Eritrea with respect to the hotels they stayed, are of interest and will give a clue to the areas where the problems are. Addressing them will be a priority. They are quite amazingly similar in most cases with the above-mentioned Eri-Tourism article. In addition, new hotels with tourist class rooms, have to be built to accommodate increasing tourists, government or private visitors.

- The bed linen wasn't fresh- I suspect it had not been changed before I was given the room; the bed was uncomfortable - it had to be replaced long ago; the Wi-fi does not reach all the rooms; the toilet did not flush properly, the shower did not function properly; out of three days I had only one hot shower - and yet the **hotel** proudly displays a TripAdvisor **sign!**”
- Good amenities, facilities and service. Eritreans are great people with great hospitality. Good bar and restaurant. Breakfast not good enough though. Located centrally, with good foot access to businesses.
- You have to ask for everything starting with the service ending on hot water, sorry not hot barely warm. Service is tragic and with each gets worst. Food also got worst. It was my fourth visit and after 4 days I have decided to change. Everything has its limits.
- Nice and helpful staff, historic style, lots of atmosphere, however, rather run-down rooms and no breakfast included. The hotel is close to main street, Harnet Avenue, and surroundings are wonderful. Outside of the hotel, the staff serve bar items in a nice setting.
- Once in a while they ran out of supplies like beer and coffee but electricity and hot water were always ok. Wifi was not good. It is better in other hotels in the city.

### **3.5.1 Asmara Palace:**

The staff was really informative once I arrived but email communication was literally impossible with this and one other hotel. That was the most frustrating thing.

The rooms are comfy, spacious and well equipped. The restaurants serve great food. The Italian restaurant is lovely and the food is good, though a tad (somewhat) expensive. There is a well equipped gym but the air con was never on, which made it a bit stuffy. Being 7,200 feet above sea level makes you puff a bit too.

My main point is this: Eritrean people are simply lovely. So friendly and warm. We had a little trip outside the city and.....wow. It is awesome. There's quite a bit to see here and the crime rate is ridiculously low. I'd come back here for a holiday!

Receptionist spoke perfect English, we were politely welcomed and everything seemed OK. However, as we settled in we could see the wear and tear of the premises. Broken glass, dust, lack of refurbishment and cleaning, etc. This would not even get a 3 star, most likely a 2 star in Europe, however worrying as it is, this is unfortunately the best hotel in Eritrea. And yes, Internet sucks big time. You may receive messages and send them but forget about normal web usage here.

### **3.5.2 Crystal Hotel:**

Excellent caring staff. There is not a huge choice of facilities in Asmara, but the Crystal Hotel is a good choice one way or another. The excellent and caring staff make the choice worthwhile. In Asmara on business, I was a guest for about two weeks. The room was adequate. The restaurant had numerous quality choices for the vegetarian and fish eater. The hotel was well located and makes walking to destinations do-able. A word of caution is the very high altitude in Asmara. Be careful.

### **3.5.3 Midian Hotel:**

Do not bother trying to use the Wifi here, it's expensive and does not work - don't bother. The hotel is about 10-15 minutes fast walk to the downtown area where the restaurants are. There is also a grocery store nearby within a minute walk. Breakfast is usually included with the room charge - no selection just an omelette and coffee and/or juice. Order early as the food takes a long time to reach the table.





