

FESTIVALS CALENDAR – TIMKAT, MESKEL, ENKUTATASH, GENNA, IRREECHA, ASHENDA

OVERVIEW

Ethiopia's calendar brims with Orthodox Christian holy days, regional cultural festivals, and national celebrations that shape memorable trips. Key dates follow the Ethiopian calendar and may shift by one day in leap years.

CORE FESTIVALS

- **TIMKAT** (Ethiopian Epiphany): Celebrated annually on 19 January (20 in leap years). The eve, Ketera (18 January), involves processions of tabots (replicas of the Ark of the Covenant) and night-long vigils; morning water blessings follow. Gondar's Fasilides' Bath is a famous focal point.
- **MESKEL** (Finding of the True Cross): Celebrated around 27 September (28 in leap years). Eve celebrations build the Demera bonfire at Meskel Square in Addis Ababa and in towns nationwide; daisies (adey abeba) decorate the structures.
- **ENKUTATASH** (Ethiopian New Year): Falls on 11 September (12 in leap years). Celebrated with church services, family gatherings, and songs by children with bouquets of yellow flowers.
- **GENNA** (Ethiopian Christmas): Observed on 7 January; Lalibela is especially atmospheric.
- **IRREECHAA** (Oromo Thanksgiving): Celebrated at the end of the rainy season, commonly late September/early October, at sacred lakes and rivers in Oromia such as Hora Harsadi (Bishoftu) and in Addis Ababa.
- **ASHENDA** (Girls'/Women's Festival): Takes place in late August following the Filseta fast, most prominently in Tigray and neighboring areas; processions of girls and young women with decorated grass skirts and songs.

TRAVEL PLANNING NOTES

- **Book Early:** Accommodation and flights sell out in festival hubs (Addis Ababa, Gondar, Lalibela).
- **Etiquette:** Dress modestly; follow procession routes respectfully; ask before close-up photos.
- **Weather Context:** Meskel and Enkutatash align with the end of the main rains in the highlands; Timkat occurs during the dry, cool season—crisp mornings and strong sun.

SOURCES SUMMARY

Dates and descriptions draw on UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage entries (Timkat and Meskel) and widely used national references for Enkutatash, Genna, Irreechaa, and Ashenda.