

## **Somaliland Adventure**

**Trip notes: EAXS**

**Validity: 01/01/2011 to 31/12/2011**

Welcome to Somaliland - a country that doesn't officially exist! This 'country,' formerly a part of Somalia, certainly has a lot to offer the adventure traveller. From marvelling at the prehistoric painted caves of Laas Geel, exploring the lively capital of Hargeisa, scuba diving off the coast of Berbera to bartering at the livestock market in Burao. While here, we'll meet with jailed pirates, go on an anti piracy patrol, discuss politics with the Somaliland government and various clan elders and volunteer at a number of local charities.

### **Itinerary Disclaimer**

The information in this dossier has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change and does not form part of the contract between the client and Babel Travel. The itinerary featured is correct at time of printing. Occasionally our itineraries change as we make improvements that stem from past travellers, comments and our own research. Sometimes it can be a small change like adding an extra meal in the itinerary. Sometimes the change may result in us altering the trip for the coming year. Ultimately, our goal is to provide you with the most rewarding experience.

**VERY IMPORTANT:** Please ensure that you print a final copy of your dossier to review a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans. For the latest updated trip notes please visit our website: [www.babeltravel.com](http://www.babeltravel.com)

### **Cultural Engagement**

Robert Young Pelton and Babel Travel have teamed up to create the first organised entries into the World's Most Dangerous and forbidden places. Our Cultural Engagement trips have been created to challenge the intellectual, emotional, participatory and educational desires of a very select group of individuals. Our trips will maintain the highest level of personal and physical safety based on Robert Young Pelton's 30 years in conflict zones and Babel Travel's experience in the adventure travel business.

These trips are 'dangerous' because they are designed to make you think, our intention is not to scare you. Being inside a country is a completely different experience compared with watching it from the outside and it is bound to energise and engage you. You will be inspired to want to make a difference. Each group is screened, trained and tasked with creating an end product to share with the world. We do not intend to be passive observers. Stories, interviews, research, video and photographs will be combined to create a portal for the next group and the world. Communities in these regions don't have time to entertain outsiders. They are happy to engage, challenge and share with visitors but only if they take their message to the outside world.

Kevin Pollard, Founder and General Manager of Babel Travel, has long wanted to tap into Pelton's expertise and access ever since he read his best selling guide *The World's Most Dangerous Places* which was first published in 1993 and is now in its fifth edition.

Participants in this program will update the sixth edition and carry on Pelton's two-decade legacy of safely penetrating and making sense of the world's least understood regions.

Cultural Engagement trips for 2011 will include 11-22 day itineraries to Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, North Korea and Colombia with other destinations coming soon. Each journey will cost in the neighbourhood of EUR 5 - 12,000 per person, excluding airfare. Robert Young Pelton will not lead the trips personally, but will choose both the trip leaders (1 western and 1 local) and co-design each itinerary. Each western trip leader has a background in philanthropy, journalism, adventure travel and is considered an expert in the country they are leading trips to. There will be a second unadvertised list of trips for those return members who Pelton will accompany into selected locations.

Robert Young Pelton is the author of a number of books on survival and global conflict. He has journeyed through 36 conflicts and travelled to over 120 countries.  
[www.comebackalive.com](http://www.comebackalive.com)

### **Trip Structure**

The key elements of our Cultural Engagement trips (other than North Korea or other fixed agendas) are:

- 1) Meeting with VIPs and subject matter experts to welcome you to the country
- 2) Charitable social benefit hands on activity
- 3) Political discussions and interaction with at least two opposing entities
- 4) Exposure to authentic, non commercial and socially relevant environments
- 5) Interaction with locals, penetrating discussions and documentation of the countries situations
- 6) Formal interviews, information gathering, fact checking and publication of group's endeavours for public viewing and further discussion
- 7) Traditional interaction with social, political, NGO or other groups to understand how outsiders can engage, understand and better the situation
- 8) Cultural immersion into music, art, dancing, storytelling, history etc
- 9) Contemporary interpretation of culture, historical monuments, natural wonders, landscapes or events by experts
- 10) Trip members questions answered, flexibility in itinerary to take advantage of opportunities or invitations and constant support for unscripted discovery, interaction and follow on relationships

### **Formal Structure**

Each trip member will be sent a personal safety guide culled from Come Back Alive or Dangerous Places on survival in the specific area to which they are travelling. Members will be asked to pick 5 things that they hope to learn. There will be a formal videotape interview of your expectations or goals both at the start and after the trip. Your privacy is assured.

You will be asked to use a skill you have to contribute to a diary, wrap up, interview and query. Each person will be issued with a workbook with suggested questions, discussion points, and a do-it-yourself travel guide creation kit modelled on The World's Most Dangerous Places. The goal is to give structure to exploration and curiosity.

During the trip you will be brought into the narrative and will be filmed interacting, interviewing, photographing or helping. At the end of the trip the material will be assembled

into a web based blog. Should you choose not to be photographed, you will not be included on the public site. Those who wish to have their trip kept private will be respected.

## **Itinerary**

### **Days 1-2 Hargeisa**

Arrive and check into your hotel. Your leader will leave a notice in the hotel reception with information for our all important welcome meeting, scheduled for 12pm on Day 1. You will need to bring your passport, all vouchers and a copy of your insurance policy to this meeting so that your leader can obtain important details that are essential to the running of the trip. This meeting will give you an overview of all the exciting things you will be seeing during your stay and includes a lot of practical information on how to get the most out of your time in Somaliland.

Important Note: it is a condition of joining our trips that you are in possession of a comprehensive travel insurance policy before leaving your country of origin. For coverage in Somaliland we highly recommend Ingle Insurance. Visit their website for more information: <https://www.ingletravel.com/en/travel/specialRisk.asp>

The capital Hargeisa is the largest city in Somaliland (and in fact all of former Somalia) with a population of 2.5 million. It was the colonial capital of British Somaliland from 1941-1960 when it gained independence as the State of Somaliland and united with Italian Somaliland to form the Somali Republic.

In 1988 Hargeisa was almost completely destroyed during the regime of former Somalian president Siad Barre. Barre wanted to wipe out the Isaaq clan, and over 50,000 people are believed to have been killed during the bombings of the city. A MiG fighter jet in the centre of the city serves as a memorial of the brutality.

In 1991, a power struggle between the leaders in Mogadishu led to the city's destruction. While Mogadishu and the rest southern Somalia were being destroyed, the opposite was happening in Hargeisa and the rest of north western Somalia. By 18 May, 1991, secessionists in the Somaliland region had declared independence and reconstruction had begun.

Since 1991, the city has undergone a complete facelift. Over 99% of devastated building have been reconstructed and are in better condition than before the war. Remittance money sent from overseas relatives has contributed significantly to the rebuilding efforts. The stability of Somaliland has aided Hargeisa's reconstruction process - the city is now dotted with new villas built by returnees from the diaspora. In addition, its thriving markets are a source of pride for Somalilanders who are keen on showing the world their prosperity in comparison to conflict ridden Somalia.

Hargeisa has working traffic lights and traffic laws are respected. All residents entitled to drive must hold a photo driving license and cars are required to bear Somaliland license plates. Hargeisa is considered to one of the safest places in Somalia.

Hargeisa is in a mountainous area at an elevation of 1334 m. This altitude gives Hargeisa and the surrounding region a milder climate than the Gulf of Aden (one of the hottest areas on the planet). Temperatures here range from 13C-32C.

After our welcome meeting we'll explore the city's markets, the freedom arch and the MiG

fighter jet monument. We will also have the opportunity to meet the Somaliland president Ahmed M. Mahamoud Silanyo and his team.

On Day 2 we'll visit a charity run by UNICEF and meet the famous Edna Adan Ismail at the Edna Hospital. We'll also meet some clan leaders for an afternoon qat chewing session. Qat is a mildly narcotic leaf which is commonly chewed throughout the country.

Late in the afternoon we'll visit the nearby Naasa Hablood hills.

It is believed that the Naasa Hablood were formed by earthquakes which permanently altered the landscape several million years ago. It is said that when Ancient Egyptians came to what is now present day Somaliland, they were so amazed at the sheer majesty of the hills that when returned home they constructed the Pyramids of Giza. The Naasa-Hablood are featured on the Somaliland Shilling.

### **Day 3 Arabsiyo/Gabiley**

Travelling 10kms south west of Hargeisa we reach the area known as Salahley. Here you will find not only a beautiful savanah country side but also you will be able to experience the nomadic lifestyle of the Somali people. You will see traditional Aqal-Somali (A portable nomadic house), you will see men milking shecamels, you will see little girls looking after sheep and goats in the open savanah areas

Moving on we reach Arabsiyo, a popular resort town for weddings, honeymoons and Eid celebrations. Arabsiyo has an estimated population of 75,000. Arabsiyo is also a major farming area. The first modern farming started here in the early 19th century when the British army set up a base on the outskirts of the city.

Moving on we reach the picturesque town of Gabiley. Known as the bread basket of Somaliland, Gabiley is renowned for its agricultural and farming industry and has a population of 120,000.

Gabiley is one of the oldest areas in the country after Zeila, Berbera and Amud. Some stones left behind (known as Arabian stones) were believed to have been earmarked for the construction of pyramids.

In the early 1950s, health and sanitation in the city were an immense problem and tuberculosis was rife. The first tuberculosis hospital was built in Gabiley. Primary education is almost available in the whole district; even the smaller communities have their own primary schools. The chances to enrol a child at school in Gabiley district is far better than most of the country.

### **Days 4-5 Kalabaydh/Tog Wajaale/ Borama**

After breakfast we travel through the lush, green mountains to Kalabaydh, famous for cereals such as maize and sorghum. We'll meet with local cattle, sheep and goat farmers to talk about daily life in the region. We'll also visit the nearby 'Lafta Nabadeed', named after a historic tree in the area and a place where locals come to recite poetry.

Only 20 km away is the border town of Tog Wajaale. It is now a major hub linking Somaliland and Ethiopia. All imports destined for Ethiopia from the major port of Berbera go through this strategic border city. There is a twin Ethiopian sister city (also called Wajaale) on the other side of the border. In the nearby town of Baligubadle we'll visit some more

nomadic communities who spend their life grazing their animals between Somaliland and Ethiopia.

After taking lunch at the border we travel onto Borama. The city now has a population of over 250,000 and serves as the commercial hub and capital of the Awdal region. Borama is a mountainous and hilly city. It is also unusually fertile in comparison to rest of the country which is largely arid. The verdant fields of Borama attract many animals such as gazelles, birds, and camels.

Borama is also an important educational centre and home to Amoud University, the first post-civil war institution of higher learning in Somalia, and EELO American University. The Amoud University was established by a group of Somali intellectuals living and working in the Gulf states. More than 2,000 students live here. Students come not only from Somaliland but from areas of Somalia as well, including Bosaso in neighbouring Puntland, and Beledweyne, Mogadishu and Kismayo in the south.

Borama is also home to the first school for the hearing impaired in Somalia. Borama Deaf School trains and provides educational services for deaf children. Since the school is the first and only one of its kind in the country, it has attracted significant numbers of deaf pupils from across the region and beyond.

While here we'll spend some time at the Borama Deaf School, we'll meet with students from the Amoud University and learn about one of the many self-help projects in the town.

### **Days 6-7 Zeila**

After a 5 hour drive through the mountains we reach the coastal town of Zeila (or Saylac in Somali). It is surrounded on three sides by the sea, and by a great expanse of desert on its landward side. This historic city was once part of the Ottoman Empire, a dependency of Yemen and Egypt and a major trade city during the 19th century. Zeila is famed for its old colonial landmarks and natural beauty; its mangroves, sandy beaches, coral reefs and towering cliffs.

During the Somali civil war, Zeila was frequently bombarded and nearly all the buildings were destroyed to some extent. Residents fled the town, seeking refuge in to neighbouring countries such as Djibouti. Remittance money sent from overseas relatives has contributed to the rebuilding efforts in the town. Today, the city's population is estimated at around 80,000 inhabitants with the majority belonging to the Maxamed Case sub-clan of the Gadabuursi clan.

During our time here we'll meet some senior Somaliland politicians. We will also have time to explore the town's markets, enjoy a meal with a Gadabuursi clan. While here you can relax and unwind on one of the sandy beaches. You may even be fortunate enough to see turtles and dolphins!

### **Days 8-9 Berbera**

Skirting the stunning coastal mountains we reach Berbera (7-8 hours).

Berbera has a population of 300,000 and is the main seaport in Somaliland. Built in 1969, it is the main commercial seaport for Somaliland. Berbera used to be a Soviet and later US military base, and locals still remember how the Russians and Americans used every occasion to enjoy their beach.

Berbera was less damaged than Hargeisa during the Somali civil war that led up to Somaliland's declaration of independence in 1991. It was once a major trading port in the Gulf of Aden evidenced by the mix of architectural styles in the town from old Somali, to Arab, British colonial. Berbera also has several buildings dating back to the Ottoman Empire.

Berbera received a financial boost when Ethiopia lost access to the sea through the Eritrean ports of Assab and Massawa. By this stage, the port had developed significantly from the decrepit place it was in the early days of Somaliland independence. Today it has become a major export port for Ethiopia, and is now the main source of foreign currency for Somaliland.

Development money has been used to improve infrastructure in the area. The journey from Berbera to Hargeisa used to be a long bumpy ride and now takes less than three hours.

The weather here is very dry, hot and wet during the rainy season. The landscape around Berbera is semi-arid with temperatures in summer reaching 50C. Most residents seasonally migrate to the cooler inland cities during these hot times.

We will visit pirates in a Somali jail and discover what happens when a ship is taken over. We will learn about how the shipping company reacts and how a ransom is paid. Later, we'll go on a real life anti piracy patrol off the coast of Berbera.

Later in the day we'll explore the town, meet an influential clan leader, visit a Nasa runway (used as an emergency space shuttle landing strip) and enjoy a typical seafood dinner on one of the city's picturesque beaches.

### **Days 10-11 Burao/Nomad Visit**

Travelling via the majestic Sheekh Mountain we reach Burao (4 hours).

With a population of 800,000, Burao (or Burco) is the capital city of the Togdheer province and the second largest city in Somaliland. It has the biggest livestock market in the region, and brings together traders from as far as Bossaso in the north east of Somalia, Luq, on the boundary with Kenya, in the south, and Djibouti in the west. The inhabitants of Burao are the Habar Yoonis and the Habar Jeclo, of the larger Isaaq clan of the Somali people.

Like many other cities in the region, it suffered from the destruction and internal displacement caused by the civil war in the 1980s. In 1988, almost all its residents were forced to flee. The vast majority of the population ended up in refugee camps in Ethiopia. In 1991, they returned to a ghost town – most of the town was in ruins and anything of value had been looted. In recent times, the city has started to revive economically with more and more commercial opportunities for rural merchants. The reliable electricity and water supply (groundwater) has also helped attract business to the area.

Despite the increased economic activity, 3.5 million people in the Burao region are in dire need of humanitarian aid. One in every six children suffers from malnutrition. We'll spend some time with the charity, Medair, who has a malnutrition clinic in Burao and provides life-saving nutritional aid for children under five.

South of Burao is a grassland savannah which attracts many wild animals. You might be fortunate to see some of these animals while here: Kudu, wild boar, zebras, the Somali Wild Ass, warthogs, antelopes, the Somali sheep, wild goats, camels, and many different types of

birds. Lions and leopards can also be seen on occasion.

While here we'll explore the city's bustling livestock markets, chew qat and talk politics with the Habar Yoonis and Habar Jeclo clans.

On Day 11 we travel approximately 40 km through the scenic wilderness, or Miyi as it is known in Somali, to a Nomad camp. The Somali nomadic lifestyle is what defines the Somali culture. It is from these dry plateaus and valleys that all Somali traditions spring. The traditional dances and weddings in Miyi form the basis of almost all Somali poetry and music.

After around 4 hours we return to our hotel in Burao.

### **Day 12 Odweyne**

Today we travel westward through the Daallo mountains to Odweyne.

Odweyne is the capital of the Odweyne region of Somaliland, a de facto independent republic which is claimed in whole by Somalia. As at 2010, the city's population is 250 000. From Gatitalay onwards, the town is surrounded by mountains, lakes and farms. The Habar Yoonis is predominant clan in this town. While in Odweyne we'll spend a few hours at a Save The Children centre, talking with charity workers and young Somalis to learn about the rehabilitation efforts taking place in the town.

### **Days 13-15 Hargeisa**

After 130 km drive (3 hours) we return to Hargeisa. Most of Day 13 is spent working with a centre for internally displaced people of Somalia.

Due to conflicts in the last few decades, cities in Somalia have experienced a strong influx of internally displaced people (many of whom have chosen to stay in the urban centres) and returnees from refugee camps overseas. The inability of urban centres in Somalia to absorb their destitute inhabitants and these newcomers has resulted in uncontrolled sprawl.

On Day 14 we spend most of the day visiting the Laas Gaal caves.

Laas Gaal is a complex of caves on the rural outskirts of Hargeisa that is famous for its rock art. Discovered by archaeologists in 2002, the paintings are estimated to date back to somewhere between 9 000 and 3,000 BC. These Neolithic paintings depict cows in ceremonial robes, domestic dogs and giraffes next to images of humans. The site overlooks the picturesque countryside, where nomads graze their livestock and wild antelopes are seen roaming. The local nomads once used the caves to shelter from the rain.

You are free to depart at any time on Day 15, but please arrange for departing flights after 12pm in case of any travel delays. If you plan to linger a little longer in Hargeisa, post accommodation can be organised through our hotel.

### **Arrival and Departure Transfers**

Arrival and departure transfers are included in the price of this trip. This is regardless of when you arrive or depart Somaliland.

### **Arrival Complications**

Arrival transfers are included for all clients arriving in Hargeisa. If you have booked your flights separately from your trip please ensure that you inform Babel Travel of your flight details at least one month before departure. If you have not made contact with our representative (please look for the Babel Travel logo and your name) within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, please contact our Somaliland representative. Give this person your exact location in the airport (find a landmark) and you will be attended to promptly.

Please do not leave the airport until you meet with a Babel Travel representative.

### **Starting Point Hotel**

TBA  
Hargeisa  
Somaliland

### **Finishing Point Hotel**

TBA  
Hargeisa  
Somaliland

### **Trip Style: Cultural Engagement**

This is the only way professionals, intellectuals, and modern day explorers can visit the world's most inaccessible places with comfort, security and insight. Robert Young Pelton and Babel Travel have designed experiences that are both life changing and inspiring. Those who want more from their travels will understand that whilst these trips are intense, they are also engaging and rewarding by opening a window into the rapidly changing world. Accordingly these trips are never the same, never dull and will encourage further exploration. Comfort, safety and value are the cornerstones of planning and the ability to engage and interact with our hosts is critical. This is a trip for those who "do" not watch.

### **Exploratory Adventures**

Our exploratory trips are often our most exciting and memorable Babel Travel adventures. We may have designed a new itinerary or created a first-time adventure to a new land but rest assured; we've been planning this over a long period of time. Our local operators have been operating trips for a number of years in Somaliland and we have had a team of on-the-ground staff and researchers (local and western) working hard to put this trip together. Our exploratory trip will be accompanied by a senior member of our Babel Travel team along with one of our on-the-ground managers. These trips are popular with experienced adventurers who thrive on the sense of discovery and serendipity that occur on first time forays into new places. You are part of the exploration, helping make decisions as we go, and sharing insights with guides and local people about your experience.

### **Included Activities**

This is a list of included activities on this trip. All other activities are optional and at your own expense. For a list of optional activities and sightseeing available on this trip, see the optional activities section below. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded.

Walking tours in Hargeisa, Berbera, Burao and Oodweyne, visit to the Laas Geel cave, visit to the Edna hospital, lunch with senior Somaliland politicians, farm visit in Gabiley, Somaliland/Ethiopian border visit, meetings with various clan members, visit and talk with pirates in a Berbera prison, go on an anti piracy patrol in Berbera, visit a school for the deaf in Borama, meet students at the Amoud University in Borama, visit a children's school in Hargeisa and visits to other NGO's, aid centres and refugee camps.

### **Optional Activities**

All of our itineraries include some free time, the amount of which usually depends on the style of tour you are travelling on. Although we do not arrange any specific optional excursions in Somaliland, there is plenty of free time for you to undertake activities not covered specifically in the itinerary. You should allow approx. USD 30-40 per week for extra activities.

### **Group Size**

Maximum of 12 travellers per group.

### **Accommodation**

Guesthouses/hotels (14 nights)

Our main criteria for choosing hotels are neatness and cleanliness. On our Cultural Engagement trips, most of the hotels are 3 to 4 stars - comfortable and sometimes luxurious! Bathroom facilities may be shared and rooms may be multi-share rather than twin. Please bear in mind that hotels can occasionally be challenged with minor problems and technical difficulties. At each hotel your leader will try to organise the rooming arrangements to suit everyone's requirements.

If you are travelling alone you will be allocated a room with another group member of the same sex. If you are travelling as a couple please note that we cannot guarantee the availability of double beds.

If you have purchased pre or post trip accommodation (if available), you may be required to change rooms for the additional nights.

### **Early Check-in Throughout the Trip**

Throughout the trip we request that our hotels prepare rooms in time for our arrival, however this may not always be possible. Instead we can store our luggage and explore our new destination.

### **Included Meals**

14 Breakfasts, 14 Lunches, 14 Dinners. Allow for \$100 for snacks.

Meals range from a gourmet dinner in Hargeisa, to simple lunches at a roadside eateries or meals with a local family. The large majority of meals will be traditional Somaliland fare with between 1 and 10 meal choices in each location

Somali people usually begin their day with a flatbread called laxoox (or lahoh), as well as

liver, toast, cereal or porridge made of millet or cornmeal. Traditionally, the main meal of the day is eaten at lunchtime. Lunch can be a mixture of rice or pasta with meat and sauce. A traditional soup called maraq is often served with lunch. Maraq is made of vegetables, meat and beans and is usually eaten with flatbread or pita bread. Later in the day, a lighter meal is served that includes beans, ful medames, muffo (patties made of oats or corn), hummus, or a salad with more laxoox.

### **Getting Around**

Private vehicle, local bus, taxi, boat, camel, walking.

We travel in Jeeps and Land Cruisers as local transport can be unreliable and dangerous in parts of the country. All our drivers/guides are in daily contact with local NGOs through their satellite phones to check routes and all the latest security issues. In addition to this we travel with at least 3 armed security guards, known as Special Protection Units (SPUs).

### **Getting There are Away**

International flights are not included in the price of the trip. Babel Travel can assist with finding you the right flight. The tour price quoted is land only.

There is an international airport in Hargeisa with flights to and from Dubai, Djibouti City, and many other cities and towns across the Horn of Africa and the Somaliland region. Since 2008 Ethiopian airlines does not fly to Hargeisa International airport. Daallo airlines have also stopped flights to Hargeisa, leaving Jubba airlines based out of Djibouti City in Djibouti or Mogadishu as your best bet. They have several flights a week and connect Hargeisa to Djibouti, Mogadishu, Dubai, Nairobi and Entebbe. Djibouti to Hargeisa .You will not need a visa for Djibouti as you will be in transit. The same applies for transiting in Mogadishu – you don't require a visa for Somalia.

Also be aware that Jubba Airways very occasionally waits until enough people have purchased tickets before departing. You may be waiting a few days or more for a flight, regardless of whether you have a ticket or not. You may also want to try African Express Airways. They have a few flights a week into Berbera usually from Sharjah or Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

All departure taxes should be included in your international flight ticket. Please contact Babel Travel from more information on your flights to/from Somaliland.

### **Visas**

It is your responsibility to arrange a visa before you travel. Babel Travel cannot accept responsibility for anyone who is refused entry because they lack the correct documentation.

All travellers require a visa to enter Somaliland. Please note that Somalian visas are NOT accepted. Somaliland is a different country altogether! Most travellers can obtain a visa in the Somaliland Mission in London or in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Please contact the Somaliland Embassy in London and apply online. <http://www.somalilandgov.com/>. The whole process is fairly un-bureaucratic and can be handled by post, which makes London the most convenient place to get a visa for travellers who live in Europe and/or want to obtain a visa before travelling to the region.

You will need a letter of introduction from your employer/sponsor stating the purpose and

duration of your trip. Babel Travel will provide this letter of introduction once your trip deposit has been made.

If the visa application form requires a contact address in the destination, please give either your meeting point hotel or the address of our local contact.

A visa will be flatly refused if your passport contains evidence of travel to Israel. Note: this is not confined to just an Israeli stamp in your passport. You will be refused a Somaliland visa if there is an Egyptian entry or exit stamp from the Egyptian/Israeli border (at Taba or Rafah) or a Jordanian entry or exit stamp from the Jordanian/Israeli border (at Wadi Araba near Aqaba, Sheikh Hussein bridge or King Hussein bridge otherwise known as the Allenby bridge) is in your passport. Even without actually having an Israeli stamp in your passport, these exit or entry stamps prove that you have visited Israel and entry into Somaliland will be disallowed.

## **Insurance**

Our trip price do not include insurance. However, it is a condition of joining our trips that travellers are fully insured for any medical expenses they might incur while travelling. At the start of the trip your leader will ask to see your insurance documents and will note down the policy number and emergency contact number.

We recommend that you take out a comprehensive travel insurance policy that covers repatriation and evacuation in case of a medical emergency, kidnapping, serious injury or worse, trip cancellation or trip curtailment as well as covering lose of baggage and valuables. You may also need specific cover for expensive camera equipment.

Many credit card companies offer complementary travel insurance. However the majority of such policies offer virtually no cover and cannot be accepted as adequate travel insurance. If you are planning on using credit card insurance you must bring along proof that the policy covers medical emergencies. Failure to be able to provide such proof to the leader will result in you being compelled to purchase a new approved policy before you can join the trip. If your travel insurance was not purchased from Babel Travel or our agents, you will be required to sign a waiver absolving the company and its agents should your policy not be adequate.

Any clients unable to provide proof of adequate travel insurance cover will be required to purchase a policy or will not be allowed to join the trip.

Most insurers require a local police report to support claims for loss of or damage to personal property. Our office can only issue a letter verifying that personal items have been lost or damaged on the trip of USD 50 in value and the leader was informed of the loss or damage at the time that it occurred. We recommend Ingle Insurance for this particular trip; <https://www.ingletravel.com/en/travel/specialRisk.asp>

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD 500, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control necessitate a change to our planned route.

Babel Travel's Cultural Engagement trips are insured through Ingle Insurance. These trips cover clients in cases of traffic accidents, medical emergencies (including medical evacuation and repatriation), accidental death and disablement coverage, incidents related to war, terrorism and kidnappings but it does NOT include ransom or extortion insurance.

We also do not cover for political evacuation (i.e. preemptively removing participants from a volatile situation before there is a medical emergency claim).

### **A Word About Safety and Security**

By choosing to travel with Babel Travel you can be sure that your personal safety and well-being is our prime concern.

Although the countries we have chosen for our Cultural Engagement trips are generally considered to be mostly safe, it should be known that foreign traveller safety can be associated with some risk. Local and foreign rebel groups, clan and militia rivalries and marauding pirates all add to these risks. Babel Travel will do its best to mitigate these risks by performing due diligence, daily information gathering and security reviews in what we may consider to be "dangerous or higher risk areas" before travelling there. Babel Travel works closely with local government security forces and monitors these situations to make security determinations on a daily basis. In some extreme cases it may be necessary for our local trip operators to postpone, delay or even cancel the trip in the rare event that safe passage is not possible at that given time.

Our local trip operators and their security force personnel have the ultimate decision in these cases and their decisions are non-negotiable and final. In the event a of a trip being delayed or an area bypassed because of security risks, Babel Travel will make every effort to keep the trip on schedule by either increasing time at one destination, eliminating or skipping an area or staying at another destination point. Your safety is our number one concern, and these adjustments may be necessary to achieve those goals.

We travel in Jeeps and Land Cruisers (and in some cases helicopters and light aircraft) as local transport can be unreliable and in parts of the country, dangerous. All of our drivers/guides are in daily contact with local security briefing services through their satellite phones to check routes for increased security risks. In addition to this, we travel with up to five armed security guards at all times.

The Somaliland government requires that all foreigners take SPUs with them when travelling outside of the major cities. As the Republic of Somaliland is not recognised by any government, there are no Consulates to turn to for help if you run into problems with the law.

That said, Somaliland is a fairly peaceful region. Violence is rare, and there is an active police force to ensure that laws are respected. The eastern parts of Somaliland near its border with the self declared autonomous region of Puntland is dangerous and non-essential travel is strongly discouraged. Somaliland is relatively safer compared to other parts of Somalia. Knowing a little of the local language can go along way and is a valuable tool if you wish learn about the local people. Also, learning about local customs and laws is very important if you wish minimise the chances of conflict with local authorities.

### **Travel Warning**

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs currently advises against travel to most of the countries we have chosen for our Cultural Engagement trips. Before choosing to join this trip you should first read the relevant sections of their website; [www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch). You can also check security updates in English on the following website; <http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/index.html>. It is also advisable to be aware of the travel warning issued by your own government. We ask that you take out Ingle Insurance which,

in itself, will cover you against all issues other than terrorism, and can be upgraded prior to departure to cover all eventualities.

## **Your Health**

All travellers joining our trips are assumed to be in good health and to have a sufficient level of fitness to complete their chosen itinerary. If you have an existing medical condition or disability you must make this known at the time of booking. If accepted on the trip, you must also make your condition known to the leader. When selecting your trip please carefully read the itinerary and assess your ability to cope with our style of travel. Please contact us at [info.en@babeltravel.com](mailto:info.en@babeltravel.com) should you require any clarification on what is involved on your itinerary. For travellers over 70 years a completed medical certificate is required. Babel Travel reserves the right to turn away, without recompense, any person who is found, at any time during their trip, to have concealed an existing medical condition. We also reserve the right to turn away any person who we consider incapable of completing the trip. If you are taking any form of medication, please make sure that you bring an adequate supply to last the duration of your stay and inform your leader at the start of the trip. You might not be able to obtain suitable medication during the trip. If you suffer from asthma even occasionally, we recommend you bring your medication as it cannot be administered by your leader and may not be readily available while you are travelling.

Although there are no particular health requirements for this trip, as Somaliland has its fair share of health issues, we recommend you consult your doctor before you travel about vaccinations and health risks. Respiratory diseases such as tuberculosis and food-related illness are common, and malaria is a risk in many parts of the country.

Flies are notoriously bad here due to poor sanitation. Winter brings some relief, but they come back full-strength when spring arrives.

It is your responsibility to bring a small supply of items such as insect repellent, aspirin, anti-diarrheals and plasters for small cuts and abrasions. Some travellers like to bring along their own emergency medical kit which may be used by local medical staff in the case of accidents or illness. Your group leader is fully trained in basic first aid and will carry a very well stocked First Aid Kit which can be used in emergencies.

## **Drinking Water**

Please DO NOT drink tap water, even in hotels or restaurants as it usually contains higher levels of minerals than the water you are used to drinking in your own country. It is fine for a local to drink water from a tap as their bodies are conditioned to it, but we highly recommend you drink bottled water at all times. Bottled water is found everywhere and is quite cheap. Upset stomachs generally occur quite quickly if you drink local water, and although it is not really serious - it can hamper your overall enjoyment of a country. Also, please aim to brush your teeth by using bottled water.

## **Extreme Temperatures**

Somaliland has two wet seasons (April to June and October to November) and two dry seasons (July to September and December to March). From July to September temperatures are unbearable and can reach 40-45C (especially in Berbera). The combination of a yearly average temperature of 31C and the high level of humidity makes Berbera one of the hottest cities in the world. Travel is much easier during the winter dry season, from October to March, when daily temperatures do not exceed 30C. The average temperature outside of

Berbera and Zeila at this time is between 22-27C.

### **Are You Ready For This Adventure?**

On most of our itineraries there are long travel days and some rough travelling in areas away from main tourist routes. Mountain passes, bumpy and windy roads can sometimes make for some real challenging travel experiences. If you have experienced motion sickness in the past, we highly recommend you consider medication to help ease the discomfort. On some occasions, we depart very early in the morning to make sure we get the most our time in the next destination. It should be made clear that travel in this part of the world is not for the faint-hearted. Roads are often in a bad state of repair and journeys can therefore be tiring.

Extreme temperatures, staring crowds and widespread poverty will probably lead to a dose of culture shock. As a developing country, Somaliland does not have the amenities and sanitation you would be used to in your country. Transport may be delayed and services may not run to schedule.

Overall, patience, understanding and a sense of humour will see you through and you'll no doubt grow to love this amazing place.

### **Money**

The Somaliland shilling is the local currency, although it not internationally recognised. It is regulated by the Bank of Somaliland, which was established in 1994.

Bank notes are the issued with denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, and 500 shillings. The 500 shilling has the most recent issue of 2005. You may see a few 1, 5, 10 and 20 shilling coins.

The central bank provides exchange services for various currencies at the official government rate (US Dollars, Euros and British Pounds are the most commonly accepted), but most people prefer the better, although unofficial, rates provided by the Hawala agents and moneychangers found on the streets of main cities.

As at December 2010, USD 1 = 17,000 Somaliland Shillings

Somaliland is purely a cash economy. This means you cannot use Visa Card, Mastercard, or any kind of Travellers Cheques while in Somaliland.

Before leaving for Somaliland, calculate how much money you'll think you'll need in US Dollars, Euros or British Pounds and take that, and a bit extra with you. Having notes changed into Somaliland Shillings is a fairly simple exercise. Please make sure that all the notes are unmarked and undamaged in any way and should have been printed since 1996. New and fresh notes are preferred in most banks.

You cannot obtain Somaliland Shillings outside of Somaliland. Upon arrival at the Hargeisa airport there are a few places where you can change money (at a poor rate) and we recommend you change some money at the airport before departing.

Remember if you run out of money while in Somaliland it can be difficult, expensive and time consuming to find banks that can transfer money over to you. Babel Travel recommends you take at least USD 800 with you for your 15 day trip in Somaliland. This

will cover all optional activities, snacks, special clothing requirements, some souvenirs and other items.

All Babel Travel tour prices mean no hidden extras, no local payments or kitty and no compulsory single supplements.

For money safety we recommend that you carry your cash and credit cards in a secure money belt or pouch concealed under your clothing.

### **Tipping**

If you are happy with the services provided by your leader, local guides and drivers, a tip - though not compulsory - is appropriate. While it may or may not be customary to you, it is of great significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels. Please consider this when budgeting for your extra expenses on this trip.

### **Language**

Somali is the official language of Somaliland, though Arabic is taught compulsorily in schools and is used in mosques around the region. Most people speak both Somali and Arabic. English is also a subject at school and is widely spoken today.

### **Dress**

As a general guideline, clothing should be lightweight, loose fitting and easily washed. You should keep in mind that Somaliland has very conservative attitudes towards dress, particularly in remote areas. The way you dress will often determine the degree of respect you receive from locals. Both men and women should keep legs, shoulders and upper arms covered at all times. Long pants, dull colours and lack of logos are ideal. Women are highly encouraged to wear a head scarf (especially outside Hargeisa). Cheap local clothing can be purchased in all the local markets in Hargeisa.

### **Laundry**

Some of our hotels offer a laundry service however this may not be available in all accommodation. As self-service laundries are scarce in the country, we recommend you bring bio-degradable laundry detergent in case you need to handwash your clothes. Your leader can let you know the best places to do your laundry on the trip - usually at any 2 night stop to allow enough time for drying.

### **Communication**

#### **Email**

Internet cafes can now be found in most large towns in Somaliland. The cost for an hour is approx USD 2.

#### **Phone**

Calls from Somaliland are the cheapest in Africa and fierce competition between the country's carriers means calls from Somaliland are five to six times cheaper than other African countries. A 3 minute call (to Europe) will cost approx. USD 6 from a hotel and approx. USD 4 from a telephone centre.

## Post

The postal service is relatively good and stamps are available everywhere. An overseas stamp for postcards will cost approx. USD 2. Posting of parcels can be time-consuming however, and contents of parcels normally have to pass customs inspection before they are sealed for posting. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.

## Alcohol and Drugs

Being an Islamic country, the consumption of alcohol in Somaliland is illegal.

The possession or use of any illegal drugs is also strictly prohibited. When overseas you are subject to local laws and the penalties for breaking the law are severe. In order to safeguard the interests of the group as a whole, our trip leaders are instructed to insist that any person found to be in possession of drugs leave the group immediately. The leader's decision on this matter is final.

If you need to carry certain drugs with you for purposes of medication, please ensure that you also carry a copy of your prescription.

Babel's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

## Ramadan

Ramadan is a Muslim religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar; the month in which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. It is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims do not eat or drink anything from true dawn until sunset. Fasting is meant to teach the person patience, sacrifice and humility. Ramadan is a time to fast for the sake of God, and to offer more prayer than usual. During Ramadan, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

This period is actually a wonderful time to travel to Muslim countries (we encourage you to travel then) as it gives you an opportunity to view first hand, the sacrifices people make for the sake of God. Sitting with a group of locals when they break their fast, can be one of the more rewarding aspects of your adventure. Approximate dates in 2011 are 1 August – 29 August 2011.

## Your Fellow Babel Travellers

On group trips you will be exposed to all the wonderful things that comes with experiencing a destination with like-minded people. Your fellow Babel Travellers will most likely come from all walks of life, and from different countries. We ask you to have patience with all travellers for the sake of group dynamics. We want every one of you to have the best travel experience of your life. Being punctual helps the group. If you are asked to be in a place at a particular time, please ensure that you do so. Being late may mean you'll miss that special cultural performance, spend less time with a local family - or in some cases

completely miss an important connection or journey. The best groups are the ones that work together as a team!

### **Trip Leader**

Your Babel Travel trip leader is there to ensure that all aspects of the trip run smoothly. He/she will share their local knowledge, advise you on how to fill your free time and coordinate the day to day running of the trip, although occasionally he/she may need your understanding if things do not go according to plan. If you have any problems on the trip, please let your trip leader know so that steps can be taken to put it right.

In Somaliland we also use the services of specialist guides at sights of particular historical interest, and specialised mountain guides for any trekking/ hiking activities in mountain regions. At Babel Travel we aim to support local guides who have specialised knowledge of the regions we visit - and who better to hear it from than the locals themselves? If you were interested in delving deeper into the local culture then your leader can recommend a local guide service in most of the main destinations of your trip.

### **Sustainable Travel**

We strongly believe that wherever we travel, we should take a responsible attitude with us. Sustainable Travel is about respecting the country we have chosen to visit. Your enjoyment of the trip should never be at the expense of the culture or the environment of the host country. Therefore, we believe that giving back to the communities we visit is essential.

In Somaliland we have built strong links with local communities, aid agencies, charities, women's and children's groups, hospitals - all of which directly rely on the assistance of donations and products purchased by our travellers and other visitors. We offer Babel travellers an opportunity to interact with locals at these organisations.

### **What To Take**

What you need to bring will vary according to the trip style you have chosen, the countries you are visiting and when you are travelling. As a guideline, you should pack as lightly as possible - under 10kgs is a great idea! On the vast majority of our trips you are expected to carry your own luggage over short to medium distances (no longer than 20 minutes). Packing light is also crucial as there may be weight restrictions on local aircraft.

Due to the nature of this trip, cumbersome suitcases and wheelie bags are not recommended for Babel Travellers! Most group members carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags with wheels are acceptable (if it has carry straps) but you will need to carry these bags up and down stairs, over bumpy roads, through muddy streets etc. You will also need a day pack/bag to carry water and a camera etc for day trips or walking tours.

It is very important that your bags can be locked. It may be necessary to store your luggage separately (and unattended) from the group.

### **Checklist**

The following is a guide to what you should bring along on your trip and is not meant to be a complete and absolute list. You are welcome to bring less, or more than what is mentioned below.

Travel documents: (your passport, visa, updated travel insurance, flights tickets, travel voucher)

Health requirements and any necessary medication

Money: cash/credit cards, money bag or pouch

First Aid Kit

Alarm clock and torch (flashlight)

Lightweight travel towel

Ear plugs can be very useful

A scarf or face mask for dust and sand

Phrase book

Sunscreen (with high sun protection factor and lip balm)

Sunglasses

A hat

Antibacterial hand gel (wet wipes etc)

Tampons (can be difficult to find on tour)

Day pack to carry your personal needs during the day

A lock for your backpacks - small and large

Conservative attire (you can purchase headscarves in Hargeisa)

Comfortable shoes with good grip and ankle support

Warm clothes

Please check recent temperatures before your trip departs:

Babel Travel leaders collect clothing for poorer village communities. If you have room in your luggage, warm children's clothes and shoes are particularly appreciated.

## **Your Belongings**

Although it can be traumatic and distressing to lose personal belongings, remember that almost everything can be replaced. Your valuables are your responsibility so look after them. Keep items like cash, tickets and passports on your person in a hidden money belt or stored in the hotel safe. Leave all non-essential jewelry and other expensive items at home.

Once on the road you will find that most of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables.

Please be aware that while travelling in Somaliland there is the risk of pick-pocketing. We recommend that you exercise caution when walking alone at night and encourage you to walk together and only on main, well lit roads. Be particularly careful on public transport. Precautions such as carrying your day pack on your chest, not placing your bag over the back of your chair and wearing a money belt will reduce any chance that your valuables should be stolen.

## **Participation Form**

All group members on a Babel Travel trip are required to sign a participation form on Day 1 of the trip. This will take place during the important welcome meeting. Please be aware that signing this form is an essential part of travelling with Babel Travel and is a requirement of all travellers.

## **Feedback**

One of the many unique features of our Cultural Engagement journeys is that we putting together a mini documentary and website to show the world what life is really like inside Somaliland. You are explorers and your input along with the interviews, documentation and notes is important to show our hosts how they can better understand or get involved. You are responsible for giving a voice to the new friends we make along the journey.

In addition, this trip is the first of its kind and we encourage you to provide suggestions, improvements and enhancements.

**Thank you and we look forward to welcoming you.**