

Horn of Africa



Djibouti, Somaliland,
Sudan & South Sudan

July 2015



...16 days of rough traveling on the Horn of Africa...

...These two weeks were originally intended to be used for the Pygmy project in DR Congo. However due to other parties not being ready with the project, this needed to be postponed. Instead the two weeks were used to travel around the exiting Horn of Africa. I used Addis Abeba as a hub for this journey.

My good friend Hans Ollongren, also from Club-100, decided to join for part of the trip. Great to have a traveling companion who also share the same interests and values when traveling. We met up in Djibouti as we had different flight plans to/from the region.

The trip included four countries in total this time. Djibouti, Somaliland, Sudan and South Sudan. We travelled together for the first two countries, and then I continued on my own. It has to be said that these are possibly not the first countries to visit when going to Africa for the first time. They are all individually unique, offers very different things to do and see, but are all quite "rough" in terms of finding western standards and comfort in hotels and choices of food at restaurants.

It is also often said about them that there are security issues when traveling around, with recent incidents of casualties from Al-Shabab trying to destabilizing the region. This is partially true, but to a large extent over exaggerated. You can travel quite freely, in parts also with the help of security militias. However and with all these inconveniences – the rewards are so much greater with very warm and welcoming people and fantastic sights to visit. You are also seen as quite exotic as there are very few other travellers around – hiking up the prices of services unnecessarily.





...Djibouti, the small country of big surprises...

...It is since some time back now not necessary to have a visa prior to traveling to Djibouti. This can be obtained upon arrival (VOA) at 90 \$. There are quite a few hotels to choose from in Djibouti City: From top range Kempinski and Sheraton to more moderate Hotels and Guesthouses. I would suggest to stay in the more reasonably priced mid-range hotels such as Hotel Alia (centre) or Hotel African Village (near the airport). They still cost around 100 \$ / night. The top range hotels can still be used to access the swimming pools and/or restaurants. Money can be changed at the airport. Don't change more than necessary as USD \$ works fine in most places..

We stayed at **Hotel Alia (96 \$)**, which gave easy access (walking distance) to all major sights, the Sheraton and some good restaurants. Nice, clean, A/C, friendly staff and breakfast included. I can highly recommend **the Café de la Gare (French)** that is quite expensive, but really good. The other more moderate choice would be the **Singh (Indian)**.

We used **Dolphine excursions (Sonja)** to help us organize a two-day trip to the main sights in Djibouti. Lac Assal and Lac Abbé. The cost for this per person was 430 \$ including meals/hotel and soft drinks. If in season (September-October) try and go Whale shark watching in the bay. Another excursion many do is to go hiking up Gouda Mountains. As we were "off-season" and did not have time to go hiking, we concentrated on seeing the main sights: the two lakes.

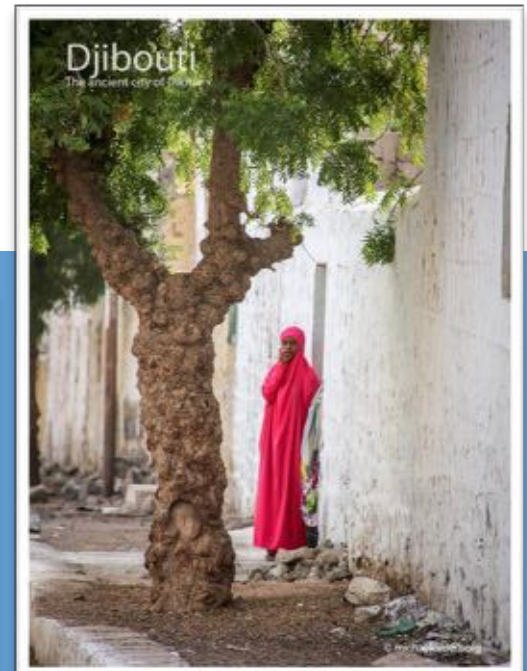
Djibouti
Land i Afrika

Djibouti, formellt Republiken Djibouti, är en stat i Östafrika, på Afrikas horn. Landet gränsar i norr till Eritrea, i nordväst och väster till Etiopien och i söder till Somalia. [Wikipedia](#)

Huvudstad: Djibouti
Landsnummer: +253
Befolkning: 872 932 (2013) Världsbanken
Valuta: Djiboutisk franc
Världsdel: Afrika
President: Ismail Omar Guelleh

Resmål Visa drygt 1 till

Djibouti	Gulf of Tadjoura	Arta	Dikhil	Ali Sabieh





Lac Assal and Lac Abbé!

Two majestic lakes in different corners of the country....

...**Lac Assal** is only a couple of hours drive north of Djibouti City on mostly decent roads in the Danakil desert. This is **the lowest point of the African continent with a level of 155 m below sea level**. It was close to 50 degrees in the shade upon our visit. The water, 10 times saltier than the sea, wasn't much cooler. Salt is still extracted here for commercial purposes. On the way we had opportunities also to stop and see some of the nomads / Bedouins in the area to take photographs.

We then backtracked down towards Djibouti again and turned left to get to **the small town of Dikhili where we spent the night**. A French outpost until 1935. We walked around this very genuine town and were also invited to a party where local officials had a dinner gathering. At 03:30 on the following morning we took off to get to **Lac Abbé in time for sunrise**. This was a 3-hour drive straight through the Danakil desert on non-existent roads. We finally arrived to find an amazing place looking like a moon landscape with oddly shaped rock- / mountain formations. We saw pink flamingos, wild boar, gazelles, jackals, camels and the rare fennec. The most impressive sight however were the **many nomads coming through in waves with their herd heading for water in the early morning**. Just like they must have done for thousands of years. We

thereafter headed back for Djibouti which good a good 4 hours to drive.





The republic of Somaliland.... Not fully recognised yet by the world community

We continued our journey from Djibouti with a short flight to the capitol of Somaliland: **Hargeisa**. They celebrate 25 years since declaring independence from Somalia. They have however yet to be recognised by the world community. This is not likely to happen any day soon though. It would break the agreement with the African union and also send signals to other autonomous regions who seek their independence due to ethnic differences.

Many have raised a word of warning to travel to Somaliland, but they often mistakenly put an equal sign between Somaliland and Somalia. This republic has its own elected government, boundaries, money, passports and laws.

They are however in desperate need of foreign investments. Most money and investments today comes from exile Somalilanders' that wants to help rebuild this new state.

There are a couple of hotels and guesthouses to choose from. We stayed at the often-recommended **Oriental Guesthouse** in the very centre of town. The owner also operates a tour-agency to the few sites, which are available to see. The city of Hargeisa has a lively and quite large **market and a livestock market of camels and goats**, which is very interesting to visit. There is also the **"Mig-plane" square**, otherwise not much to see in Hargeisa. The choices for food are also quite limited and poor.

Somaliland
Stat

Somaliland är en sedan 1991 självutropad stat i östra Afrika. Enligt Sveriges UD är det officiellt en del av Somalia men har i praktiken fungerat som helt självständig stat efter den somaliska centralregeringens kollaps 1991. Huvudstad är Hargeisa. Wikipedia

Huvudstad: Hargeisa
Landsnummer: +252
Grundades: 18 maj 1991
President: Ahmed Mahamoud Silanyo
Befolkning: 3,5 miljoner (2008)
Nationalsång: Samo ku waar
Sevärdheter: Laas Geel, Qaytaha Cuntada, Central Mosque, Independence Monument, War Memorial





Still very remote and isolated.... ...and in desperate need of financial support from

The Saba (Yemenite) restaurant is all right. There is also the newly opened hotel Damal, which offers really good and eatable food. It's near the "mig-plane" monument.

We took a two-day tour around the country including visits to Las Geel, the ancient "rock art" site from some 5000 years back. This is on the road to Berbera on the coast. We stayed over here in the Mansour hotel on the beach. This coastal fishing village does not have much to offer in terms of sights. It is also very run down and

destroyed from the civil war. There are scattered and sunken ships all around the port. Be aware of the extreme heat here on the coast. The most exiting stop on this trip must have been visiting the small village up in the mountains called Sheekh. Not much to see apart from a really colourful local market.

You will still need to travel accompanied by a security military guard for safety. We saw one tourist in the four days we visited. He stayed also in our hotel. When changing money, do so in the city centre instead of at the airport, where the rate is much better. At the time of writing ca: 7500 S£ / 1\$.





A recently divided country and nation.... ...With a magnificent history and ancient sites to show for

It proved to be more difficult than I had expected to get a visa for Sudan. The embassy required an invitation and said they would help, as I had no contacts of my own. As times pasted (5 weeks) and nothing happened I managed to get an invitation through the local tour operator who helped in organizing the visit to the UNESCO heritage site of Meroe in Sudan instead.

I opted to stay at the **Bougainvilla Guesthouse** in a quite residential area of Khartoum.

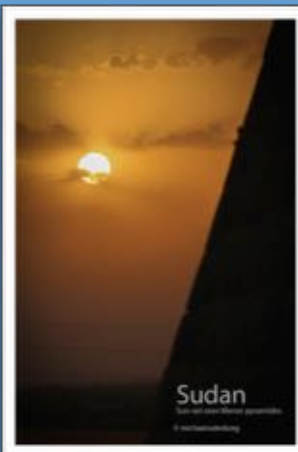
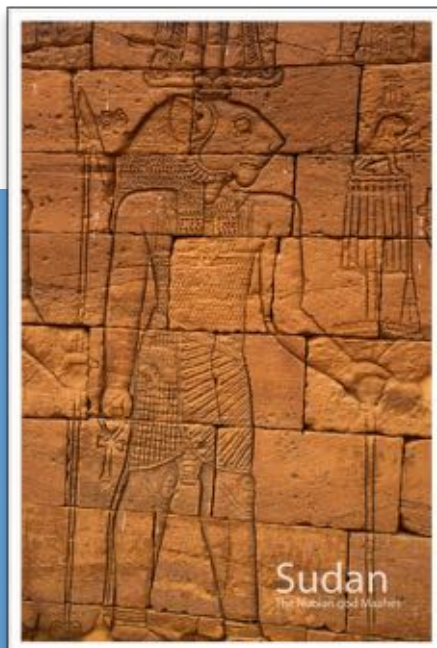
This was a good choice with well functioning service, A/C and rooms for 55 US\$ / night. There is also a good Shwarma / Pizza restaurant just down the street with excellent Shwarmas.

Medhat Travel had organized my **2-day tour up to Meroe** or the village of **Bagrawiyah** as it is known as locally. With a driver and an English-speaking guide we set out in the early morning for Meroe, which is some 300 km north of Khartoum. We had also catered food and drinks as this was during Ramadan and it was difficult to get anything to eat along the road.

Sudan
Land i Afrika

Sudan, formellt Republiken Sudan, ibland kallat Nordsudan, är ett land i Nordafrika, som ofta även anses vara en del av Mellanöstern. Wikipedia

Huvudstad: Khartoum
 President: Omar al-Bashir
 Valuta: Sudanesiskt pund
 Befolkning: 37,96 miljoner (2013) Världsbanken
 Bruttonationalprodukt: 66,57 miljarder USD (2013) Världsbanken
 BNI per capita för köpkraftsparitet i dollar: 3 230 för köpkraftsparitet i dollar (2013) Världsbanken
 BNP-tillväxt: -6,0% årlig förändring (2013) Världsbanken





The Nubian site of Meroe

This UNESCO world heritage is really world class ...



After some 3-hours of driving – the first 2 on paved roads and the last hour straight through the dessert – we reached the first of three sites which we had planned to visit – **Nagaa** (picture left). Here we also got to see how the Bedouins used a local water well to take up water (80 meters deep) for their goats and cattle. They used a camel to help pull a long rope in order to get the water up.

The next stop was the **second Meroitic city of Musawwarat es-Sufra** where many queens had spent long times back between 900 to 200 B.C. Archaeologists work here off-and-on during the cooler season to restore this site.



We then eventually at around 4 PM came to the main site of **the Kushitic Kingdom of Meroe**. Just in time to be able to enjoy the sunset a few hours later. This Nubian site is the oldest and most impressive site in the whole of Sahara with over 200 pyramids in total. Having seen most of the sites in Egypt such as the pyramids of Gize, Memphis & Sakkara, Hatshepsut, Karnak, and Luxor etc. I must confess this site of **Meroe impressed me the most**. Maybe because it has been kept fairly untouched. The sand dunes come right up to the pyramids. And above all you are all-alone at this site and can just stroll around, sit on a sand dune and just marvel at these magnificent tombs of ancient kings and queens. I just sat and watched as the sun set come over the site...

The site of Nagaa and at a local water well....





The newest UN recognized state...

It is only four years ago when South Sudan got its independence...

Sydsudan
Land i Afrika

Sydsudan, formellt Republiken Sydsudan, är en stat i Östafrika. Huvudstaden är Juba. Sydsudan gränsar i norr till Sudan, i söder till Uganda, Kenya och Demokratiska republiken Kongo, i öster ... Wikipedia

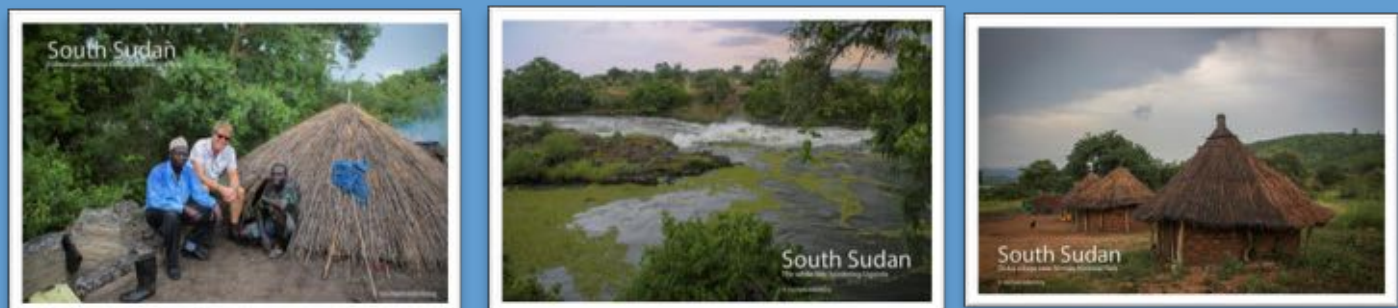
Huvudstad: Juba
Landnummer: +211
Befolkning: 11,3 miljoner (2013) Världsbanken
Valuta: Sydsudanesiskt pund
President: Salva Kiir
Nationalsång: South Sudan Oyeel
Officiellt språk: Engelska

I had no reservations or booked arrangements coming into Juba, South Sudan. My only hope was to be able and visit on of the National Parks in the country.

Upon arrival you quickly realize that his is a country where most things, which we take for granted, still needs to be developed. The airport is the first example of this. It is very rudimentary and after coming off the aircraft you are directed to a tent near the runway where you are tested for Ebola. Thereafter you can enter into the arrival hall were your visa is being checked. The baggage claim hall is a semi-covered area where they simply use a tractor transporting the luggage onto the waiting people. Luggage arrives and they check for you baggage-receipt and thereafter you off. Taxi drivers scramble outside trying to hustle customers to be taken the short drive into town. I was informed of this and not to change money at the airport where the rate was poor. I took a "Boda-boda" (tuc-tuc) instead for ca: 10 sek into town where I also changed 100 US\$ cash.

Time to decide where to stay. With three alternatives recommended I opted for Juba Bridge Hotel right on the river Nile. At 70 US\$ / night this was one of the more expensive choices. I managed to change money at the black market in the centre on the way to the hotel. The hotel is nicely located right on the Nile. It was quite a treat to sit at the restaurant looking out over the river where locals were washing clothes, swimming and going about their daily shores. The food served at the restaurant was a positive surprise, as was the cold beers, which could be ordered. Expect to pay 50-70 SEK for a full meal and a beer! The also put on some live music performance and lots of people came to enjoy this open-air concert.

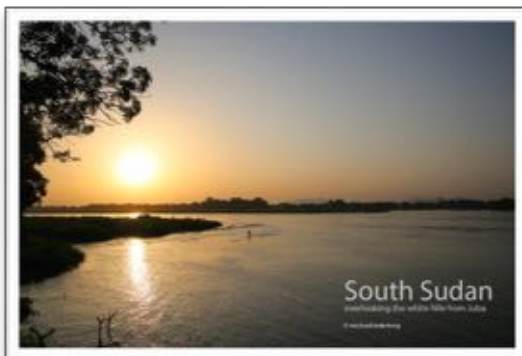
The Nimule National Park on the border to Uganda...





The National Park of Nimule

Much of the wildlife has been killed during the civil war...



Having asked around if the National Parks of Boma and Bandingalo could be visited, I had to give up, as I was told not. No tour organizers, bad roads and infrastructure, no place where to stay and also a bit unstable due to continued disagreements between the tribes of the Dinkas and the Nuers. The Nimule N.P. however seemed to be open, but no one in Juba could help organize a trip from there.

I was told to make my own way using a "shared minibus" down to Nimule, which I also did. Arriving there I stopped and checked-in on the way at the Horizon Guesthouse who has the slogan "Your home away" – what could possibly beat that?



The owner of the guesthouse helped to organize a 4-wheel drive vehicle (his brother) to take me into the game park. Together with a ranger at the entrance gate of the park took me on a 4-hour tour around the park. We saw three waterfalls of the white river Nile. We also saw how the local fishermen smoked the catch of the day. We continued to venture into the park also using a speedboat in order to get closer to hippos and other animals. Most wildlife had been killed off during the civil war and only some have returned back in to the park. We did however see elephants, Vervet monkeys, baboons, hartebeests, gazelles, wild boar and some birds. The Nimule National Park gets very few visitors. The entrance fee into the park is 70 US \$. Add ca: 100 US \$ for the car + driver..

Pictures from the Nimule National Park in the south...

