

## ADDIS ABABA

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→

## IS THE RHYTHM CALLING YOU?

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[www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel](http://www.songlines.co.uk/musictravel) for our bespoke tour to Addis Ababa in 2011



## Want to experience the music of the acclaimed *Éthiopiennes* artists on their homeground? Heruy Arefe-Aine outlines the places to go in the capital

Nestled about 2,300 metres above sea level, Addis Ababa (also spelt Abeba – meaning New Flower – is home to somewhere between five and seven million people. Addis, as it is often affectionately called, is the urban and cosmopolitan hub of the country, while still somehow maintaining the feel of an overgrown village. Addis has grown up without much in the way of urban planning. Until recently most streets lacked signs and even now directions are usually given by the way of landmarks, making finding your way around the city a sometimes challenging task for visitors.

Music in Ethiopia seems to be in an

ambiguous position. It is much loved and omnipresent, but generally not highly respected, although there are signs that this is changing. Seventeen years of military dictatorship ravaged the musical landscape, driving many artists into exile or retirement. The live music scene is still recovering.

*Azmaribets*, literally translated as a minstrel's house, are scattered around the city but located primarily in the Cazanchis neighbourhood. The musical set-up can vary but usually consists of percussion or the *kebero* (small drum played with sticks), the *masenqo* (a one-string fiddle) and accompanied by backing vocalists and handclaps. Lyrical improvisation and punning is highly prized but the music stands

on its own. Lead *azmaris* are usually the owners of the venues and give each place its distinct flavour, so visiting an *azmaribet* usually follows discussions of who to listen to. *Azmaribets* are open daily, picking up at about 11pm and often going on until 4 or 5am. Examples of the *azmari* repertoire can be found on volumes 2 and 18 of the *Éthiopiennes* compilations (Buda Musique). This series is a great introduction to Ethiopian music, although the focus is on the 1960s and 70s. For more recent releases, try your local Ethiopian restaurant, as they will tend to be playing music from current artists.

Reggae-pop superstar Teddy Afro [see Backpage #48] plays packed stadium shows. Veterans like Mahmoud Ahmed or Mulatu Astatke play very infrequently in Addis as they are often touring. Other contemporary bands tend to roam around the city, so check listings, or, better yet, seek local advice, as venues come and go at a dizzying pace.



Merkato, the largest open-air market in Africa

### PLACES TO VISIT

#### Merkato

Often referred to as the largest open-air market in Africa, the Merkato is an overwhelming shopping experience. It covers several miles and over 10,000 people work there. Watch out for pickpockets.

#### The Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies

A small but well designed ethnographic museum with a dedicated exhibit displaying musical instruments from the

various regions of the country.

**Located in the grounds of the Addis Ababa University, Sidist Kilo Campus. Open daily from 8am-5pm, +251 1 111 9469.**

#### The Alliance Ethio-Française

This cultural institution has long been a strong supporter of cultural events and programmes in the city – both with local artists and bringing in musicians from around Africa and Europe to play and collaborate with Ethiopian artists.

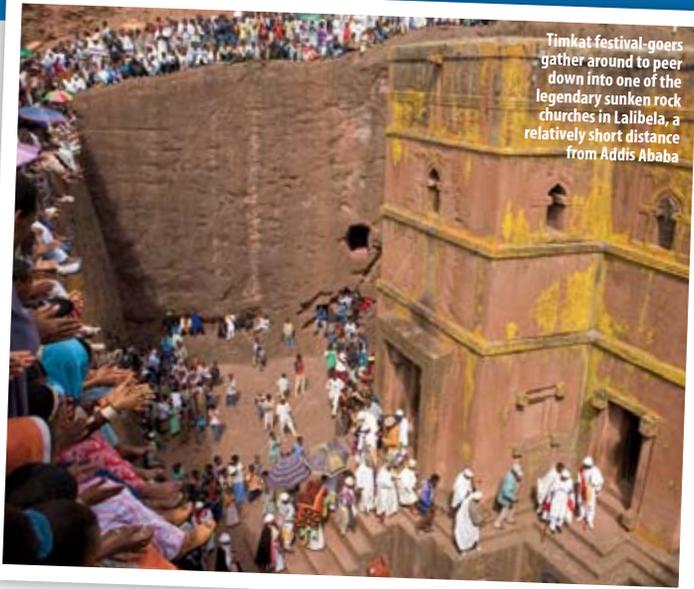
**[www.allianceaddis.org](http://www.allianceaddis.org)**

### RECORD SHOPS

Bootleg cassettes and CDs are sold on every street corner with a mishmash of Ethiopian traditional and pop, and Western pop. Shop and website Mitmita, dedicated to Ethiopian music, is expected to open shortly. Until then, the Piazza neighbourhood is the place to explore.

### RADIO

Most radio stations play a mix of Western pop and R&B. Sheger Radio, 102.1 FM, offers the widest range of music though broadcast entirely in Amharic.



Timkat festival-goers gather around to peer down into one of the legendary sunken rock churches in Lalibela, a relatively short distance from Addis Ababa

## MUSIC FESTIVALS

### The Ethiopian Music Festival

An annual event since 2001, this festival is dedicated to highlighting various figures from Ethiopian music, as well as supporting new artistic projects, and features a mix of local and international artists. The programme can range from a focus on traditional instruments such as the *begenä* [Ethiopian harp, see Tools of the Trade #42] to a look at the saxophone in Ethiopian music. Past editions have featured performances by Mahmoud Ahmed, Alemayehu Eshete, Alemu Aga, Susheela Raman, The Ex, the Idan Raichel Project, and the premiere of the Addis Acoustic Project. The festival has been following azmari tradition in switching venues and dates. A new website is under construction, but you can keep updated by joining the Facebook group.

### The Festival of 1,000 Stars

Located in the town of Arba Minch in the south of Ethiopia, this festival

is focused entirely on music from the southern nationalities, a region which is home to 55 of Ethiopia's approximately 85 ethnic groups. Taking place in a football pitch over three days, the festival is a unique exposure to the culture and music of these varied people. It normally takes place in December, though the 2009 edition had to be cancelled. It is hoped that the event will return this year.

[www.1000starsfest.com](http://www.1000starsfest.com)

### AfroRootz

A new festival launching in December 17-19 2010. It will present local musicians and artists from the African continent and African diaspora. No website at present.

### Timkat Festival

If your visit to Ethiopia falls around January 19, head the relatively short distance out of Addis to Lalibela, for the Ethiopian Orthodox celebration of Epiphany. Timkat Festival is alive with music and dancing along the way to Lalibela's rock churches.

## RESTAURANTS

The city is packed with restaurants. They're generally tasty and many offer a floor show featuring music and dancing from the various regions. Some are not very authentic but they will provide you with a taster of different styles. They tend to be quite loud, so be forewarned. Here is a selection:

### Habesha

Located on Bole Road, +251 1 551 8358.

### Dashen

Located behind the main post office, +251 1 552-9746 and +251 1 655 6437.

### Fasika

Located off Bole Road, opposite the Sunshine Building, +251 1 550 9912 and +251 1 551 4193.

### Yod Abyssinia

Two locations: Old Airport and Bole Medhane Alem, +251 1 618 7061 and +251 1 372 0607.

### Black Rose

Upscale, intimate lounge that has no live music but is the place to be, and plays one of the widest ranging musical selections in the city.

Located in the Boston Building, Bole Road, +251 1-663 9884

## CLUBS

### Flirt

Small lounge located in the Jambo Building opposite Bole Medhane Alem Church. Sunday nights for new Ethiopian jazz-funk piece Nubian Ark.

### Club Alize

Currently the spot for live music in Addis. A lush space with a capacity of about 450, it mixes local bands and international acts passing through

Addis. Addis Acoustic Project have enjoyed a popular residency here. +251 1 662 2293.

### Guramayle

Monday nights are devoted to the Jazzmaris, who, following the travelling minstrel part of their name, have been moving from space to space. Presently they have taken up residency here.

Located on Bole Medhane Alem Road, +251 911 21 07 57.

## AZMARIBETS

All azmaribets listed below are on the same street in Cazanchis – why not visit all three in one (long) evening?

### Duka

Generally referred to as Mimi's place. Mimi (Sinteyahu Zenebe), 'the Queen of Azmaris', is a petite, engaging singer who featured on Dub Colossus' *A Town Called Addis* and Invisible System's *Punt – Made in Ethiopia*.

### YeWodal

Malefya Teka, owner of YeWodal, possesses a thrilling vibrato and has

been a part of the Addis scene since the azmaribets first sprang up in 1991.

### Fendika

Owner Melaku Belay is Ethiopia's most innovative dancer and can be seen on YouTube from his many tours with sax legend Getachew Mekuria and Dutch free-punk stalwarts The Ex. Every other Friday, there's a DJ set of old Ethiopian 45s, followed by EthioColor, a new azmari collective, with special guests both local and international.



Maserat Balete sings the *tezeta* (blues) at Fendika

'Queen of Azmaris' Mimi (Sinteyahu Zenebe)

