

# THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Ethiopia



## HAPPY ETHIOPIAN NEW YEAR

Projects Abroad **Ethiopia** would love to thank all volunteers who has been a big help in our Projects in 2006 E.C. And wish you all the best. Based on the comments you guys has been giving on to us, we have planned to include more activities and social events for our volunteers.



New year - New spirit - New Style

Help...

Learn...

Explore...



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Projects Abroad

# VOLUNTEER STORY

*A German Tourist decided to make her next tour as a volunteer in Ethiopia*

Julia Ninic (36) is a traveller who has visited various countries as a tourist. She has been doing this for a very long time and has now decided to do it in a different way. "I always wanted to volunteer and I felt this is the right time to do so. When I looked at the different destinations Projects Abroad works in, I found Ethiopia to be the perfect place for me to do a Care Project." said Julia, who has German and Croatian ethnicity.

She was placed in Kidane Miheret Orphanage, where Julia worked with abandoned children from the age of three to twelve years old, some having disabilities. Starting work at 9 am, she usually spent the whole day with the children. "I usually start my day at the orphanage by teaching math, English, arts and crafts for children from the ages of four to seven years old in the mornings and prepare outdoor games in the afternoons." Julia also helped the children with some sports activities which she has prior experience with.

"I really enjoyed working with the children, the staff and other volunteers for the past four weeks. Even if I know that I can't change everything, I believe I played my part in the lives of these children. I have seen changes in their behaviour, I feel they are more disciplined and more interested to learn than they were in my first week at the orphanage." explains Julia, about the success of her time on the project.

Apart from the projects, Julia and other volunteers arranged weekends and holiday trips to visit different parts of the country outside of Addis Ababa. "During my stay the other volunteers and I arranged a trip to Ambo, Wenchi lake, Gonder, Lalibela and Bahirdar. Having the chance to visit the countryside was so great and it was even greater doing it with other volunteers who come from different parts of the world."

Julia explains the culture hasn't been much of a shock for her as she is used to traveling to different countries and has been exposed to many different cultures before. "I totally recommend people to come and help in Ethiopia. The culture wasn't much of a shock for me, I found the people to be very nice and friendly. Even if the life of the community is still developing, the people are full of faith and hope."

Julia's advice for future volunteers is to be patient and enjoy their time. "Things might be a bit different during the first few days but you will definitely enjoy your time volunteering."

Julia summed up her four week volunteer work in Ethiopia by saying, "I am very thankful for having the chance to volunteer. It was an amazing experience for me. I would like to thank Projects Abroad for arranging this trip for me. I really loved my host family, the children I work with and the whole country. I will definitely miss the children and recommend everyone to come and share the love. Even if they don't have anything they can give back, I feel that they gave me their hearts; and that is the best gift anyone can give".





## *'Enkutatash' the Ethiopian New Year*



**Enkutatash**, meaning “gift of jewels” in the Amharic language, is the name for the Ethiopian New Year. The story dates back almost 3,000 years to the **Queen of Sheba**, of ancient Ethiopia and Yemen, who was returning from a trip to visit King Solomon of Israel in Jerusalem; as mentioned in the Bible in I Kings 10 and II Chronicles 9. She had gifted Solomon with 120 talents of gold (4.5 tons) as well as a large amount of unique spices and jewels. When the Queen returned to Ethiopia her chiefs welcomed her with *enku* or jewels to replenish her treasury.

From September to November much of the Ethiopian plateau, as well as many river valleys, hills and mountain slopes are covered by yellow-flowered *Bidens* species, including *B. macroptera*. In some locations, these flowers grow in masses so dense that they resemble cultivated fields. (eol.org)

In Ethiopia, yellow is a symbol of peace, hope and love. Yellow *Biden* is often displayed to signify the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the dry and sunny season and, more specifically, the start of the Ethiopian New Year, which usually falls on September 11<sup>th</sup> on the Gregorian calendar. Bouquets of these flowers are often presented to families or friends as gifts. Together with grasses and sedges, they are also used in decorating the floors of homes, particularly during household or communal coffee ceremonies.

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**Happy Ethiopian New Year!!!**

## NEW PLACEMENT

### *Selam Children Village II, Educational and Vocational School*

Selam Children village is a non-governmental organization that provides family care services under two village compounds. The two villages in total have 18 family houses which contain 12-14 children in each family. Selam also has an Educational and vocational institution which mainly serve children from the village and others who are under a scholarship program which is provided for children who cannot afford the tuition fee and are not able to buy uniforms and stationery.

Projects Abroad has been working with Selam Children village I for quite some time. In fact, it has been one of the most appreciated placements for our care projects in Ethiopia. Understanding the vast extremes of the organization and the need for more skilled man power, Project Abroad Ethiopia finished all the necessary processes to start placing volunteers at Selam Village II; Selam Primary and high schools for teaching projects and Selam David Roschli Technical and vocational Collage (SDR-TVC) for Pro-volunteers who have vocational and technical skills as well as work experience.

Using this opportunity, I would love to acknowledge previous volunteers who worked at Selam I (as well as other orphanages), who have done their best to successfully accomplish their projects. Your effort is the reason why our placements, and the people, are understanding and even participating in volunteering. We are getting more and more requests from different organizations and this shows the necessity of volunteers for the overall development of the country and the people.





## 'Meskel', the foundation of the True Cross

Meskel, one of the major Ethiopian festivals, mainly in the Orthodox Church, is celebrated for two days beginning on September the 26th. According to legend, it is said that in the year 326, Queen Helena (Empress Helen) the Mother of Constantine the Great, discovered the cross upon which Christ was crucified. Unable to find the Holy Sepulchre, she prayed for help and was directed by the smoke from a burning fire as to where the cross was buried.

In the middle ages, the Patriarch of Alexandria gave the Ethiopian Emperor Dawit half of the True Cross in return for protection afforded to the Coptic Christians. A fragment of the True Cross is believed to be held at a monastery called Gishen Mariam, about 70 kilometres northwest of Dessie. Meskel has been celebrated by Ethiopians for thousands of years.

There are two occasions on Meskel. The first is Demera (September 26), in which bonfires are built topped by a cross to which flowers are tied. The flowers are Meskel Daisies. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church orchestrates the lightening ceremony. After the bonfires are blessed; they are lit and the dancing and singing begins around them. Priests in full ceremonial dress sing around the bonfire. While the Demera is set on fire, there is an inner feeling of brightness for all those who are around it. Little Demera are also built at individual houses or villages. After some time, splinters from the bundles of burning wood collapse. Which direction they fall is very significant: north, south, east or west. Interpretations are soon conjectured as to whether the fields of grain are going to be plentiful or not, or there is peace all year round, etc. At the closing of the Demera, a rain shower is expected to fall to help put the fire out. If the rain falls and the fire is extinguished, there is a belief that the year will be prosperous.

The day after the Demera is Meskel. This day is observed with plenty of food and drinks as believers go to the spot of the Demera and, using ashes from the fire, mark their heads with the sign of the cross. The festival coincides with the mass blooming of the golden yellow Meskel daisies. The best place to see the Meskel Festival is in the capital Addis Ababa at the famous Meskel Square, as well as all along the Historic route (Bahir Dar, Gonder, Axum, and Lalibela) and in other major towns. Meskel is colourfully celebrated.



## Editor's Note:



Greetings! Welcome to the September newsletter. As the yellow Biden covers the highlands of Ethiopia, everyone is filled with new hope and new beginnings. Some volunteers were lucky enough to celebrate the Ethiopian New Year and the Meskel festival with us. Following the New Year the Ethiopian distension is prepared to serve volunteers with more dedication preparing more activities and improving projects.

I hope you found something that will grab your attention as you go through the newsletter. I would like to thank all volunteers from the past and present for sacrificing your valuable time, money and knowledge to make a difference at our projects. Big thanks to volunteers who have shared their stories and photos with us. We encourage everyone to join us in making the newsletter more interesting and exciting. You are welcome to send us your own written articles and pictures. This will help others to understand and learn more about Ethiopia. If you have anything you'd like to contribute, suggest, or comment on, please contact: - [berekettesema@projects-abroad.org](mailto:berekettesema@projects-abroad.org)

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