

Northern Red Sea Region: The land of Adventures

Written by Sirak Habtemichael



It is a home for natural resources including variety of marine species, incredible landscape, clear and unpolluted seashore, archaeological sites, infrastructure wonders, forestry, wildlife and more and more. Every rock, every village and every single place has its own history to tell and magnificence to provide to any lucky individual who visits, but even the lifetime of man is not enough to study every single place in the Northern Red Sea region of Eritrea.

The Minister of Tourism, Mrs. Askalu Monkorios, accompanied by the administrator of the region, Mrs. Tsigereda Woldegiorgis, along with around 65 selected individuals from various Ministries and organizations embarked upon a tour in the vast and rich part of Eritrea, the Northern Red Sea region.

The region stretches 600 kilometers along the coastal line, and around 450 kilometers inland, a total area of 34,236 square kilometers with every single place of history and scenic beauty, which made it impossible to cover in a few days tour. For that reason, the organizers of the tour only selected places with high importance and easier to reach.



The expedition began from the port city of Massawa, capital of the region, and made its way to the very cradle of Homo sapiens, the Buya area located on the tip of the east African rift valley, around 110 kilometers from Massawa. This is the area where a 1.4 million year old Human Cranium of Homo erectus family that was later identified as remain of a young lady was excavated. From archaeological studies, the skull of the early human remain was unique from the other findings of other corners of the world because it still possesses the full facial feature of the 'Buya Woman', and it is believed to have filled the missing link in those transition era.

Buya is an example of uniquely preserved relics of one up to two million years of stone tools, large amount of fossilized bones of extinct animals and others. The achulian stone tools are

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abundant once you reach in the Dandero valley of Buya and the very place where the human cranium was found is still preserved but the actual finding was moved to the national museum of Eritrea.

The inhabitants of Buya received the visiting group with a warm welcome, and most interesting of all, the banners they were holding signified how well-informed they are in regards to the archaeological importance of their district and reflect how attached they are with the finding of the human cranium and how important it is for Buya to be an area where the very first humans originated.

Crossing the village of Buya, the motorcade made its way to South Eastern part of the region to finish the first day of the expedition in the sub zone of Gel'alo, but before going to the destination another archaeological site and of very high significance had to be visited, Abdur, a coastal site that may be the first place where man discovered the possibilities of marine resources.

This site is located on the eastern edge of the Gulf of Zula. Stone tools discovered within the uplifted marine terraces along this coastal line of Eritrea at the Abdur archaeological site dated back to 125,000 years, show the earliest well dated to the evidence of human occupation of coastal marine environment.



The way to Gelalo is yet another significant factor that makes the region more tourists friendly. The smooth tarmac road that mostly runs side by side with the clear coastal water and sand made the expedition extraordinary. To make matters even more trilling a family of ostriches with around fifty newly born marched crossing the road to the sea as if they were deliberately performing a march to welcome the group.

The second day was yet another very long day but of course full of adventures. As if chronologically sorted, day one started from the early pre-history of man up to where the first sea daring humans originated. The tour as well as the history of the area continues from these onwards.

Adulis, is a place of high archaeological importance and an ancient port city, which may be one of the oldest civilizations of the world was the first place the group visited on the second day. The ancient port city located 56 kilometers from Massawa, archaeological findings in Adulis show that it existed around 2000 BC and became a major port around 240 BC. The ancient port

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city reached its apex of prosperity and influence from 100-700 AD. Adulis was a famous port harboring many ships at one time and facilitated the transportation of raw materials from the African hinterland to the Arabian land, India and China and vice versa.

Another harbor, just a few kilometers from the town of Gelalo is Marsa Fatuma. Standing remains of recent history from the Italian colonial era makes this harbor worth visiting. Historical references date the rise of Marsa Fatuma as one of the main harbors of the Italian colonizers from the very early of 20th century. The Italians selected the harbor as a main base for potassium mining from the Dalol depression around 96 kilometers from the Harbor.

The expedition continued to explore more and enjoy the beautiful scenery along the way. Sunrise in the region is by itself something many people would only see on postcards and to make the tour even more adventurous, the hotel we were staying was located only a few meters from the sea.

By the sides of the road around Erafaile, remains of centuries old walls stand still narrating the history of the people of the area and their bravery to protect their land from Ethiopian war lords which continuously raided the area to find a sea gate.

After driving in the dusty roads around the Burea peninsula towards the tip to visit a village called Engel, the clear seashore and shimmering crystal clear coastal sands welcome you from afar. By then, it is impossible to feel any exhaustion from the long hours of drive. Most interesting of all, the cultural diversity of the ethnic groups that inhabit the area and their genuine welcoming nature, accompanied by their unique drum beats and their dancing styles, and of course the fresh sea food they provide is indeed another significant factor that makes one to stay as long as possible. By far, unpolluted sea and unpolluted people would define this specific section.



Just a couple of kilometers from the area is an Island called Delleme. We had to use small local boats to cross the sea. The Island was used by the Italians to control the channel that goes from the Northern part of the Red Sea to the south. Ruins of the walls that were used by the Italians and heavy artilleries are still there in the Island.

From the other end of the Island, beautiful sound of the sea wave smashing against the cliffs immediately caught everyone's attention as if it was deliberately calling us to enjoy the beauty and power of nature. The mangrove trees surrounding most of the Islands around the area also provide the area a magnificent scenic beauty and cooler breeze.

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There is nothing to leave in the area except footprints, because it would ruin the site, and of course nothing to take except photos. It is like driving on pages of history engraved by nature itself. The tour in the Northern region doesn't end here, there is more to tell and more to enjoy.