



United States Department of State

1996
POST REPORT

Eritrea

SUDAN

Asmara



*Red
Sea*

ETHIOPIA

DJIBOUTI

Preface

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Eritrea is a small country of ancient origins located close to the mouth of the Red Sea. Within its borders are a variety of landscapes, from rugged mountains to scorching lowland deserts. A visitor can discover, in different parts of the country, both beautiful coral reefs for snorkeling and steep, stony trails to remote archeological sites long isolated and virtually unexplored. The oldest known settlement within Eritrea is the ancient city of Adulis, which some believe was founded by the Greeks in about 600 B.C. Adulis became the principal Red Sea port of the ancient Axumite Kingdom, which fell about 600 A.D. During the many years following, Eritrea was exposed to Arab and Turkish influence.

Eritrea's most striking characteristic, at present, is that of a country that recently won a 30-year war for its independence against almost unimaginable odds. Having been an Italian colony since the late 1800's, and then briefly, after World War II, under British administration, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia in 1952 by the United Nations. In the 10 years following, Ethiopia gradually eroded the federal institutions, and in 1962, abolished the federation and made Eritrea an Ethiopian province. These actions led to the beginning of a 3-decade civil war, in which the virtually unarmed Eritrean people challenged Africa's largest army. The war ended in 1991, when the Eritrean army captured Asmara and the Mengistu regime collapsed. Eritreans overwhelmingly voted for their own independence in a 1993 U.N.-observed referendum.

During the long war, the Eritrean fighters (about a third of whom were women) formed cultural troupes that helped to unify the country by holding performances in local villages about the diverse cultural traditions to be found within Eritrea. Fighters taught villagers and one another to read and write, and a spirit of self-help and independence was

fostered that strongly characterizes the Eritrean culture. As it now makes its transition to a democratic society, Eritrea is a place of hope and struggle. The process of writing a Constitution, scheduled to be finished in 1996, has been an inclusive one that has drawn in many sectors of the population, as well as both Eritrean and non-Eritrean experts in its own country and abroad. Institutions of all kinds, devastated by the war, are being rebuilt. There is a spirit of stubborn resourcefulness and determination to succeed as Eritrean leaders soberly study the successes and failures of other countries in the region to build viable democratic societies capable of supporting themselves.

This is the official post report prepared by the post. The information contained herein is directed to official U.S. Government employees and their families. Any other information concerning the facts as set forth herein is to be regarded as unofficial information.

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The Host Country

Area, Geography, and Climate

Eritrea is about the size of England and has a 630 mile coastline on the Red Sea. It shares its borders with Sudan in the north and west, and with Ethiopia and Djibouti in the south. Eritrea's capital and most populated areas are located on a high plateau in the center of the country. The eastern edge of this plateau is a spectacularly steep descent into the great Rift Valley, where the highlands abruptly end and a single road slowly descends, on hairpin curves, down to the port city of Massawa. The capital of Asmara (at about 7,600 feet above sea level) is located virtually on the brink of this escarpment, and although Asmara is only about 65 miles from Massawa as the crow flies, the drive from one city to the other takes about 3 hours.

In the west, a more gradual descent from the plateau leads eventually to an arid plain along the Sudanese border. The coast is a thinly populated desert, except for the ports of Massawa and Assab. Assab is an important port located near to the Djibouti border. A road begins in Assab that terminates in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa.

The climate is temperate to cool in the highlands, and moderately warm to scorchingly hot in the lowlands (depending on the season). Generally speaking, the cooler season in Eritrea stretches from November until March. Nights in Asmara are almost always chilly (50°F), and daytime temperatures are in the 70's or 80's. During the winter (November to February), brief cold snaps can drop Asmara's temperature into the 40's. The warmest season in Asmara is in April, May, and June. Massawa has summer highs of 105 to 120°F and winter highs of 90, with nighttime temperatures in the 70's or 60's, respectively.

The time of the rainy season varies within the country. In Asmara and in the western lowlands, it seldom rains except during the "short rains" in March and April, as well as during the main rainy season that stretches from late June through the beginning



a view down the main street of Asmara

of September. A good rainy season may bring almost daily downpours in the afternoons later in the summer. Asmara receives about 21 inches of rain each year. With the rains and during the winter, fog is common, especially along the escarpment. On the northern coast, the rainy season stretches from December through February; Massawa receives about 10 inches of rain a year. It seldom rains on the southern coast.

Years of war have sadly deforested the country, and although reforestation is important to the present government, many pressing needs compete for priority. Wildlife includes an impressive array of birds, including raptors and water birds, some of which are migrants and some which are unique to Eritrea and little documented. Animals include baboons and other monkeys, ostriches, camels, hyenas, gazelles, and leopards. Elephants are returning to Eritrea (now that the war is over) and other species will almost certainly follow.

Population

Eritrea's population is estimated at about three million, with another 500,000 refugees living outside of Eritrea, mostly in Sudan. In general, the country is thinly populated. The capital, Asmara, contains approximately 435,000 people. The per capita income is \$75 to \$100. Life expectancy is 45.5 years. Literacy is estimated at 20%.

The country's population is diverse and composed of nine major tribal and ethnic groups (Afar, Begia, Bilen, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre, and Tigrinya), each with its own language. Mode of dress and other cultural traditions vary widely among these groups. About half of the country is Moslem, living primarily in the lowlands. The other half, living primarily in the highlands, is Christian, primarily Orthodox Christian and Roman Catholic, although there are small Protestant communities. A small percentage of the lowland communities are Animists.

The Eritrean government's working languages are Arabic and Tigrinya. English has been established as the language of instruction in public schools

from about the 5th grade onwards and is the language of instruction at the University of Asmara. Ge'ez, an ancestor of Tigrinya, Amharic, and Tigre, survives as the liturgical language of the Orthodox church.

Western dress predominates in Asmara, especially for men and young people in general. Women often wear a traditional dress of white cotton with a colorful border and a white shawl that covers the head. Women's hair is traditionally braided in an elaborate style that varies according to custom and style. The traditional dress for men, also white, is seldom seen except on ceremonial occasions.

The staple food is zigny, a highly spiced, reddish stew containing beef, mutton, goat, or less commonly, chicken. The zigny is eaten with injera, a soft, grey, sourish bread somewhat like a pancake that is primarily made from fermented teff (a nutritious local grain). The zigny is ladled into the center of a large injera, and diners tear off pieces of injera from the edges and use them to wrap up or sop up bite-sized pieces of zigny. Popping such a bite into one's neighbor's mouth is a traditional mark of esteem (although most Eritreans know that foreigners are not used to this). Many Orthodox Christians, as well as Moslems, will not eat pork. Seafood is not a familiar item in the Eritrean diet, although the government is developing the fishing industry (which was banned by the Ethiopian government during the war) and hopes to help Eritreans accept fish as a bigger part of their diet.

There are no "family names" in Eritrea. A child has his or her own name as a "first" name and the father's "first" name as a "last" name. Women do not change their names after marriage, but they do change their title from Woizerit (Miss) to Woizero (Mrs.). The equivalent of "Mr." is "Ato," and persons are addressed by their title and first name.

Although the Western calendar is widely used for business and official purposes, it coexists with both the Moslem calendar and a traditional Orthodox calendar. The latter runs 6 or 7 years behind the Western calendar, begins on September 11, and has twelve 30-day months, plus an extra "month" of 5 or 6 days. Days of the week are identical to Western usage.

Public Institutions

Since the late 1800's, Eritrea has been successively under Italian, British, and Ethiopian rule. An armed struggle against

Ethiopia that lasted for 30 years brought Eritrea de facto self-rule in 1991, when the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) captured Asmara and the Marxist regime of Lt. Col. Mengistu in Ethiopia collapsed. Two years later, in April of 1993, Eritrea held a referendum (proclaimed free and fair by the United Nations) that overwhelmingly approved independence, and the EPLF formed the Provisional Government of Eritrea.

On May 19, 1993, the provisional government issued a proclamation regarding the reorganization of the government. It declared that during a 4-year transition period, and sooner if possible, the following tasks should be achieved: drafting a constitution and then carrying out the process of ratification; preparing a law on political parties; preparing a press law; and carrying out elections for a constitutional government.

The present government includes legislative, executive, and judicial branches. The judicial body operates independently of both the legislative and executive bodies, with a court system extending from the village through to the district, provincial, and national levels. The legislative body, the National Assembly, includes 75 members of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ, the name adopted by the EPLF in 1994 when it established itself as a political party) Central Council, and 75 additional representatives elected by the population. The National Assembly, which has the highest legal power in the government until the establishment of a democratic constitutional government, sets internal and external policies, regulates their implementation, approves the budget, and elects the President.

The President nominates people to head the various ministries, authorities, commissions, and offices; the legislative body ratifies the nominations. The Cabinet, the country's executive branch, is made up of 16 ministers and chaired by the President. It implements the policies, resolutions, and laws of the government and is accountable to the National Assembly. The ministries are: Agriculture; Construction; Defense; Education; Energy, Mining, and Water; Finance and Development; Foreign; Health; Information; Internal Affairs; Justice; Local Government; Marine Resources; Transport; Trade and Industry; and Tourism.

In March 1994, the National Assembly established a Constitution Commission. The members include Eritreans from every ethnic and religious background and women comprise 48% of the

Commission's members. The Commission is responsible for seeking the views of the population at home and abroad about the structure the Eritrean government should have and for establishing the rights and obligations of all citizens. The Commission will also consult international jurists and examine the constitutions of other countries. It is expected to prepare a draft constitution to be considered for ratification within 2 years. The government has said that this will be followed by multiparty elections.

Arts, Science, and Education

Eritrea's National Museum in Asmara is presently housed within a palace and grounds that once served as a residence for various colonial rulers. The palace and its formal gardens have been carefully restored since Eritrea gained its independence. The palace holds a small collection of archeological remains, as well as paintings and other artifacts from the colonial periods. An ethnographic collection is located in the former palace stables, which were used as prison cells during the war. Also located on the museum grounds is the Military Museum that displays Eritrean arms and weaponry captured from Ethiopia during the war.

The arts scene in Asmara is slowly rebuilding itself after independence. A group of visual artists, many of whom are ex-fighters who taught themselves to paint in the field during the long war, hold public exhibitions of their work. Traditional music, also developed and performed by fighters in the field, is primarily heard at weddings and other ceremonial occasions, although a popular music scene consisting of tunes primarily performed by and for young people is evolving. Western music is also popular among the young.

In the area of science, the Ministry of Marine Resources, located in Massawa, manages all activities related to the development of the coast's hitherto under used marine and mineral resources. The Eritrean government is also studying ways to maintain a balance between the protection of the environment and the use of natural resources for development. A National Environmental Management Plan for Eritrea considers such diverse issues as the continuing need for wood as fuel and the resulting deforestation and soil erosion; diseases caused by poor sanitation; and the most rational ways to achieve economic development in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The Eritrean educational system experienced a severe decline during the long war for independence. School standards dropped precipitously, and all primary education was required to be conducted in Amharic (the Ethiopian, not the Eritrean language). At the same time, the EPLF army built an alternative educational system in the liberated areas. With liberation, the largely dysfunctional former Ethiopian system, and the small but effective EPLF system, were merged. From 1991 to 1993 there was a 49% increase in the number of students in school, a 52% increase in the number of teachers, and 235 new schools were built. Still, as of 1993, only 26% of elementary-aged children, 20% of the junior secondary-age students, and 15% of the senior secondary-age students attended school. Continuing problems include an acute shortage of qualified teachers, a need for more schools, and a severe lack of basic supplies, such as textbooks and writing materials.

The University of Asmara was founded in 1958 as the Santa Famiglia College by an Italian Catholic teaching order, and originally functioned as a small, private, Catholic college administered and largely staffed by Italian Sisters. In 1967, the College became the University of Asmara with the support of a former ruler. It remained, however, privately funded and never resembled a national university. During the war, much of its expatriate staff left, and its standards badly declined. In 1990, the university itself (students, staff, and materials) was moved to Ethiopia. Thus, at liberation, the EPLF did not inherit a university in any real sense of the word.

Asmara University now enrolls about 3,000 students and is embarking on a well-planned and coordinated process of building itself. Its primary goals are training secondary school teachers; developing degree programs to train students for work in government ministries and vital fields of economic development; providing research capabilities in important fields; creating a foundation for training academics capable of eventually filling the university's faculty needs, and expanding the university to include advanced degree programs. The university is developing as a valued national institution, integrated into the plans of the government and charged with the important task of training the teachers who will be the key to resolving the nation's education crisis. As such, it is seen as crucial to the economic development of Eritrea.

Commerce and Industry

Eritrea, a country with limited economic resources, is still struggling to recover from the war's devastating impact on its worn and obsolete infrastructure. Unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people, is a serious problem that can be masked by a modest prosperity born of significant remittances from Eritreans who left the country before and during the war and are now living abroad.

Eritrea's pre-war economy centered on agriculture and light industry. In the early 1960s, the country was exporting horticultural products to the Middle East and Europe, and there is still significant potential in this area. At the present time, efforts to establish a free-market economy have begun, and economic development in a free-market environment is a high priority of the Eritrean Government.

The investment climate in Eritrea is one of the most liberal in Africa. A new investment code provides special investment incentives, including the fact that no taxes are charged on exports and items brought in for re-export; a reduced tax rate over several years is granted to investors; losses incurred during the first two years of operation may be carried forward for three consecutive years; access to investment is open to all; and there is free movement of capital for both Eritreans and foreign investors to bring in or take out of the country any amount of money.

Eritrea wants to privatize at least some of the 42 state-owned enterprises that were nationalized by the former Ethiopian government. Apart from infrastructure improvements, especially electricity and industrial machinery, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is particularly interested in modernization of the textile, glass, and leather industries. Traces of oil exist at the eastern and northeastern coasts of the country. There are also known mineral deposits at the southern and southwestern parts of the nation. The fishing industry provides significant investment potential, particularly in Massawa.

American businesses are taking a growing interest in Eritrea. Oil companies are actively negotiating exploration agreements, and good opportunities for U.S. companies exist in energy (oil, natural gas, and thermal), agriculture, food processing, construction, heavy equipment, mining for minerals (including gold), light industry, telecommunications, marine resources, tourism, and general consumer goods.

Transportation

Asmara is a small city and most common destinations can be reached within 10 or 15 minutes by bicycle, or by foot in an hour. A walk from home to the Embassy wouldn't take more than half an hour or a 15-minute bicycle ride. Car traffic is rather light at present, although it increases each year. Traffic moves on the right side of the street. It is possible to spend a tour in Asmara without a personal car, although it would make shopping inconvenient and travel outside of Asmara very difficult. And since Asmara is small, the ability to take short trips outside of town easily is important to many Embassy employees.

Automobiles

Employees intending to bring a vehicle to post should contact the post as soon as possible. Postponing an automobile purchase until arrival at post is not recommended, since cars for sale are, at present, scarce and expensive, even if available duty-free. Cars can be imported duty-free. Vehicles that are more than 10 years old are not permitted to be imported into Eritrea, and all cars are inspected for road reliability before being issued license plates.

Japanese and European cars prevail. Diesel fuel is a popular option here for four-wheel-drive vehicles. Unleaded gasoline is not available. A standard economy car is sufficient for city driving and traveling the main roads outside of Asmara. Any real exploration of the countryside, however, requires a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Many roads still remain unpaved or are in poor condition. Air-conditioning is not necessary for Asmara, but it is important for traveling to the lowlands.

Automobile repair services exist, but spare parts for cars cannot be counted upon. It is wise to bring an assortment of common spare parts, such as air, gas, and oil filters, an extra battery, spark plugs, a distributor cap, belts, a water pump, an alternator, spare windshield wipers, and tires. Jerry cans for extra fuel are recommended if you plan to explore the countryside. Gasoline costs are comparable to U.S. prices; no high octane gasoline is available. Regular and diesel fuel are available at the Embassy.

At this time, American diplomats and their families are using their U.S. drivers licenses in Eritrea. The Embassy will assist with details related to this, as well as with obtaining license plates and automobile registration cards. Third-party accident insurance must be purchased.



Bicycles are popular and available locally.

Local

Taxis are available, but may attempt to overcharge unknowledgable foreigners. Bus service within the city is improving, but at present it is not recommended for employees and families. Auto rentals are inordinately expensive (and even higher for driving outside the city). A railroad once ran from Massawa to Asmara and on to Keren and Agordat in the western lowlands. It was destroyed during the war, although some reconstruction of the rail line is beginning in Massawa.

Mountain bicycles are available locally for a reasonable price (comparable to or less than one would pay in the U.S.) and can be easily repaired. A license and a number plate for the bicycle are required. Bicycles are also required to have light reflectors, as well as a head lamp if the bicycle is to be ridden after dark, and these items can be purchased in Asmara.

Regional

Within the country, limited bus service is available for the adventurous, and there is a twice weekly flight between Asmara and Assab. For leaving the country, two airlines currently provide most of the service from Asmara: Ethiopian Airlines and Lufthansa. There are usually one or two flights daily between Asmara and Addis Ababa, from whence connections can be made to the rest of Africa and elsewhere. The future may bring increases in the number of flights and airlines serving Eritrea, so this information should be checked.

Communications

Telephone

Telephones are installed in all Embassy housing. The quality and service are generally good. As of this writing, callers from other countries can directly dial telephone numbers in Eritrea, but callers in Eritrea cannot dial directly to other countries. International calls to outside the country must be arranged through an operator, but this usually takes only a few minutes and the quality of the lines is quite good. Calls to the United States are approximately three dollars a minute. It is less expensive to call Eritrea from the United States. Fax machines are available at the Embassy and at other locations in Asmara. E-mail is routed directly to Washington, D.C. Limited Internet capacity can be arranged, though with some difficulty.

Mail and Pouch

There are two ways to receive mail in Asmara: through the international mail or through the diplomatic pouch. Most Embassy employees use the pouch, since it is much more reliable for receiving publications such as magazines and journals. Both take about the same amount of transit time (2 or 3 weeks from one address to the other). Asmara usually receives a pouch twice weekly.

The pouch address is:

Name
American Embassy Asmara
Department of State
Washington, DC 20521-7170

The international address is:

Name
U.S. Embassy
Box 211
Asmara, Eritrea

The usual restrictions on pouch service apply, e.g., no glass, liquids, or aerosol containers may be sent through the pouch. Embassy employees may only send packages of the size of a videotape or smaller to addresses outside Eritrea, unless they are returning items to a catalog company. Packages sent to Eritrea must meet the following length and girth dimensions and weight requirements: (1) The length may not exceed 24 inches, and the combined length and girth may not exceed 62 inches, (2) Mailing tubes may not exceed 32 inches in length and five inches in diameter, and (3) the maximum weight per box or parcel is 40 pounds. Boxes not conforming to these regulations may be returned by the State Department to the sender.

Radio and TV

Voice of America and the BBC World Service broadcast in English to Asmara, although reports on the quality of the reception are mixed. Program guides are available from the United States Information Service and the British Council. Shortwave radios should be brought to Eritrea.

Eritrea has a television station that broadcasts in the PAL format 6 nights a week. News is reported in Tigrinya and Arabic, and there is half an hour of news



sunset in Massawa

in English from CNN once a week. Documentaries or movies, often in English, follow the news broadcasts. Additional television programming, including CNN, Worldnet, and French and Arabic programs, is available via satellite. Most of the programming on satellites is also in the PAL format. There is also a (expensive) movie subscription channel that can be purchased. The Embassy and USIS both have satellite dishes and receive CNN. Satellite dishes and receivers can also be purchased locally.

Multisystem televisions and VCRs (capable of receiving both PAL and the U.S. NTSC system) should be brought to Eritrea, particularly if viewers will want to see local programming or satellite broadcasts. In addition, there are local videotape rental stores with a limited supply of movies, but all of these tapes will only run under the PAL system. All videotapes from the U.S. run under the NTSC system, and people who like to watch videotapes are advised to bring plenty of their own.

Newspapers, Magazines and Technical Journals

The Eritrean government publishes three newspapers. *Haddas Eritrea* (New Eritrea) is published twice a week in both Arabic

and Tigrinya. *The Eritrean Profile* is published once a week in English.

The Embassy subscribes to the *International Herald Tribune*, and copies are available for employee reading, although they arrive in Asmara 1 or 2 weeks later than the publication date. Western magazines are appearing more and more frequently at local newsstands. Currently, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The Economist* can be obtained. Very few books in English are presently available for purchase.

The USIS supports a library owned by the city by providing it with subscriptions to a number of American journals, magazines, and books. The British Council and Alliance Francaise also have libraries.

Health and Medicine

Medical Facilities

A Health Unit is located on the Embassy compound and is presently staffed by a part-time nurse. As this Embassy is relatively new and still setting up its programs, people interested in serving in Eritrea should call or cable the Embassy to learn the most current status of the Health Unit. All immunizations are

currently available at the Health Unit, as well as a basic stock of medicine, including preventive medicines for malaria. Health Unit services are available to all official Mission employees and their dependents. The regional medical officer is located in Sanaa, Yemen, and visits Asmara quarterly.

Medical and hospital facilities in Eritrea do not meet Western standards. They are overcrowded, have a limited stock of supplies, and are poorly maintained. Limited laboratory tests and x-ray services are available. Patients requiring more medical assistance than the basic services provided by the Embassy Health Unit are evacuated to London. Dental facilities for routine use are not recommended. Employees and their families are encouraged to complete all dental work before coming to post. Medical evacuation will be authorized for employees and eligible dependents from Asmara to Nairobi to allow for treatment of dental emergencies and/or for required dental care.

Some basic prescription and non-prescription medication is available in Asmara pharmacies, but the supply is extremely limited and unreliable.

Community Health

Asmara is a clean, safe city with a dry climate located at an elevation of 7,600 feet. Newcomers must first acclimatize to the altitude (the air contains less oxygen than at sea level) and may experience symptoms such as shortness of breath with activity, fatigue, headaches, and difficulty sleeping. The process of adapting to the altitude varies by person, but it is normally fairly painless and short-lived for healthy people. Since the climate throughout most of Eritrea is very dry, dehydration is a concern, but this is easily prevented by drinking an increased amount of fluids. Finally, Eritrea is close to the equator, and one's skin must be protected against the strong ultraviolet rays of the sun. This is particularly true at high altitudes, where damage occurs more quickly than in the lowlands.

The most common illnesses encountered in Eritrea are upper respiratory and gastrointestinal. Mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever are not a problem in the highlands, but are found in the lowlands. Communicable diseases of concern would include tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, meningitis, and food-borne illnesses.

Preventive Measures

The dust and dryness of the air can irritate those with respiratory diseases and allergies. Vaporizers (to dampen the air) and air purifiers (to filter dust) can be helpful. The dust can irritate those who wear contact lenses. Bring all supplies related to contact lenses to Eritrea, as well as an extra pair of eyeglasses, and your prescriptions for both.

All needed prescription and non-prescription medicines and supplies for both routine and chronic medical

conditions should be brought into the country. This includes items such as aspirin, a thermometer, bandages, disinfectant, adult and baby acetaminophen, vitamins, and cough syrup, needed for routine, home-treatable conditions. An anti-motion sickness medication, such as Dramamine, is useful for road trips (many roads, including those to Massawa and Keren, are bumpy and steep) and is unavailable locally. Adequate supplies of a strong sunblock (at least SPF 15) should be brought. Note: Tampons are not available in Eritrea.

Malaria suppressants are unnecessary in Asmara, but they are needed for trips to lower elevations in Eritrea, where malaria is a problem. Although flies and mosquitoes are not terrible pests in the highlands, they can be irritating during certain seasons, so an insect repellent containing about a 35% concentration of DEET is an important item to bring. Insect repellents are essential at lower elevations in Eritrea, because of the threat of malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases.

All water for consumption should be filtered and then boiled or distilled. The boiling temperature of water is lower at higher altitudes, so water in Asmara should be boiled for 3 minutes. Both imported and local mineral water are safe and available locally. Local milk should be heated to the boiling point, since pasteurization can not be counted upon, but powdered milk can be easily purchased locally. All fruits and vegetables must be peeled, cooked, or disinfected by having been soaked in a solution of bleach and water (bleach is available locally). Meat should be cooked until well done.

All immunizations recommended by the Department of State should be taken prior to arrival.

Employment for Spouses and Dependents

Employment opportunities are limited. As of this writing (1995), the State Department has five part-time, intermittent, temporary (PIT) positions authorized, including a full-time administrative assistant and part-time positions of nurse, community liaison officer, self-help coordinator, and general services assistant. USAID is in the process of expanding its operations in Eritrea, which should open up future employment opportunities. There are also a few (but an expanding number of) international organizations and businesses that may offer job possibilities. Since the Embassy is presently small, there are usually jobs available for those who want them, although the choice of job might be quite limited.

As of now, there is no bilateral agreement on the employment of spouses and dependents of diplomats in the local economy. However, obtaining a work permit in Eritrea requires foreigners and their potential employers to engage in a process to ensure that Eritrean nationals have had a chance to apply for the job and that no qualified candidates did apply.

American Embassy



the American Embassy in Asmara

Asmara

Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, has an estimated population of 435,000. The city is situated at over 7,600 feet above sea level on a flat, rocky plateau with a number of hills that are sometimes quite steep. Two miles from Asmara is a breathtaking escarpment into the great Rift Valley and the beginning of a steep, winding road leading to the port city of Massawa on the Red Sea, 65 miles (and 3 hours) away.

The Italian imprint on the city's architecture is unmistakable. Most of the city's buildings date from the years when Eritrea was an Italian colony, or from 1950 to 1975, when there was still a considerable post-colonial Italian population. Only a few streets have names that are known or used. The north side of the city contains a poorer section of traditional dwellings and unpaved streets. There was a virtual moratorium on construction and infrastructure maintenance during the 30 years of war, and the city still shows signs of neglect. Ironically, this isolation also allowed Asmara to retain its unique character, disrupted by neither hasty unplanned expansion nor awkward modern

additions, so that the city appears in many places like a charming postcard from 30 years in the past.

The city itself feels like a small town and is strikingly clean and safe. Residents and visitors alike can walk virtually anywhere, day or night, without fear. There is a downtown shopping district along the main street that comes alive at night, when the inevitable cool breezes of evening draw residents out for a stroll. The plenitude of small cafes offering capuccino, fruit juice, snacks, or a beer is a treat. A series of more traditional markets winds behind the main street offering foodstuffs, spices, handmade baskets, furniture, jewelry, religious artifacts, and other items for sale.

The Embassy is located a short stroll from the center of town, and Embassy-leased houses are a short 5- or 10-minute drive from the Embassy. But no place in Asmara is very far from any other place in town.

The Post and Its Administration

A U.S. consulate was opened on the existing Embassy compound in the early 1950s; the land was purchased in 1952. It was closed in early 1977, when the Ethiopian government closed all foreign consulates in Eritrea. The Consulate was reopened in 1992 and became an embassy in 1993, concurrent with Eritrean independence. A U.S. military communications facility, Kagnew Station, operated in Asmara from post-World War II until 1975. It stationed about 2,000 – 3,000 military personnel at its peak and is well remembered by the Eritreans. The old station grounds and buildings are now used by the Eritrean government.

The Embassy is headed by the Ambassador, assisted by the DCM, and includes Political, Commercial, Consular, and Administrative Services. Other agencies at post include USIS, AID, the Peace Corps, and a Military Liaison Office.

The Embassy telephone number is 291-1-120004 (291 is the country code, and 1 is the city code), and the exchange is open 24 hours daily. The work week is Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. There is no Embassy snack bar, but several restaurants are within easy walking distance.

All new arrivals are met and assisted through customs and immigration. In the event of a problem, call the Embassy at 120004 and ask for the administrative officer, or after hours, the duty officer. New arrivals are assigned sponsors to assist in orientation, office check-in, and getting settled.

Housing

Housing for all agencies of the mission is under short-term lease. Telephone service, water supply, and electricity are generally reliable, although there are occasional disruptions in service. All houses have large water tanks that the Embassy will fill in case of shortages from the city systems.

Temporary Quarters

Newcomers usually move directly into their houses. The Amba Soira or the Hamassien Hotel are the most likely temporary lodging places at present. Both hotels are basic, but comfortable; they have restaurants and coffee shops, and are a short stroll from the Embassy or downtown Asmara. There are currently no televisions in the rooms of either hotel.

Permanent Housing

Houses in general are a bit small, but certainly adequate. Most residences are one story and have three bedrooms, one and a half or two bathrooms, a kitchen, and a living/dining room. The typical house has a small garden, and all are surrounded by brick walls topped with flowering hedges such as bougainvillea or lantana. In the back of a typical house is a separate building containing several rooms that are intended to be living quarters for household help, but can be used as a storage space for consumables and other items, as most household employees do not live in. Most houses lack an excess of closet or other storage space.

Housing assignments are made by an inter-agency Housing Board.

Furnishings

All employees are provided with furnished quarters. The Embassy supplies a washer, dryer, freezer, vacuum cleaner, and transformers. Electric heaters and humidifiers are available, but air-conditioners and fans are unnecessary.

Asmara is a furnished post. All houses are provided with standard furniture for the living room, dining room, kitchen, and bedrooms. This includes lamps, carpets, one queen-size bed or twin beds for the master bedroom, and twin beds for additional bedrooms. Bedding includes mattresses, springs, pillows, and bedspreads. Kitchens include a gas or electric stove, microwave, refrigerator, water filter, and fire extinguisher. Porch furniture is provided. Note: You must bring your own iron and ironing board. Draperies are not currently provided; houses have sliding wooden shutters that can be closed at night.

Employees must supply their own china, glassware, flatware, kitchen utensils, table linens, bedding, towels, small kitchen appliances, scatter rugs, and cleaning implements such as brooms, mops, and sponges. Newcomers receive a Welcome Kit for use until the airfreight shipment arrives. This kit contains the essentials for housekeeping, such as sheets, blankets, pillows, towels,



one of the houses the American Embassy leases in Asmara

dishes, flatware, cooking utensils, broom, and mop. An iron and ironing board may or may not be available, depending upon the demand for these supplies when you arrive.

Utilities and Equipment

Houses have both 220v and 110v, 50-cycle lines and outlets. In some houses, the 110v lines can only handle light appliances, such as lamps; they can not handle microwaves, food processors, or hair dryers, for example. These can be operated with transformers, however, which are provided. All outlets are made to fit European-style round-pronged plugs. Plug adapters are available locally. The outlets do not provide for a ground lead.

The electrical voltage fluctuates quite a bit, and outages do occur. Surge protectors for sensitive electrical equipment are absolutely necessary. People who bring home computers should also bring an uninterruptible power source (UPS); a UPS that can operate for two hours without power is useful and recommended. Voltage stabilizers are also recommended and available locally.

Stoves are electric or use bottled gas. Electric water heaters supply kitchens and each bathroom.

Food

There is no commissary in Asmara, but employees stationed here receive a consumables allowance. It is recommended that newcomers ship a partial consumables allowance before arriving at post; the remainder can be shipped within one year after arrival, once you have determined your needs. The initial consumables shipment should include all foods and other needs for babies, all paper products, cleaning supplies, all pet food and supplies, all toiletries, laundry detergent, and snack and specialty food items. The consumables shipment should include goods, such as those packaged in glass or aerosol containers, that can not be sent through the pouch. Common items that are unavailable locally include baby food and formula, shortening, chocolate, fresh or canned mushrooms, unsugared soft drinks, powdered sugar, low-fat powdered milk, many spices used in Western cooking, and nuts other than peanuts. Basic foods such as flour, sugar, coarse salt, and oil are available.

Local fresh produce is generally inexpensive and easily obtained at the many corner markets or downtown. Much of the produce is available seasonally. Usual vegetables include onions, potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, hot peppers, garlic, lettuce, chard, carrots, and parsley. Green beans, eggplant, celery, artichokes, corn, radishes, green peppers, and cauliflower are seasonal. Fruit, except for the ubiquitous banana, is seasonal and includes oranges, lemons, grapes,



locally grown spices in Asmara

mangoes, papayas, grapefruit, and various others native to the region. Imported apples and pears are sometimes available.

There is not a great quantity or variety of canned or other prepared foods available in Asmara. However, what is available reflects the long Italian colonial influence. Thus, imported items such as pasta, tomato sauce, ketchup and mustard, mayonnaise, canned peas and corn, canned tuna, capers, anchovies, and olive oil are generally available, although expensive. Also, these items are usually not imported from the United States, so they may differ from American products of the same name.

Beef is inexpensive, lean and a bit tough, but easy to obtain at butcher's shops. Lamb and veal are often available at the same shops. Chickens are available for sale, but most Americans don't eat them because they are very lean and tough. Pork can be difficult to obtain, but is often sold one day a week at a government shop downtown. Several stores sell fish from the Red Sea, and although freshness can be a problem, this will improve with time.

Locally made butter, yogurt, and cheese of varying quality are often available, but there is no fresh pasteurized milk. The bread supply is vulnerable to flour shortages. Coffee beans, ground and unground, are plentiful. Soft drinks, mineral water, and tea are also popular. There are two home-brewed alcoholic beverages: meas, a wine made from honey, and suwa, a weak, slightly sour version of beer. A local brewery also

produces an excellent Western-style beer. Local distilleries, originally Italian, produce a typically Italian range of liquors, and a limited selection of imported liquor and wine can be found at high prices. Local and American cigarettes are available.

Several times a year, the Embassy organizes a joint order from an overseas vendor for a wide variety of fresh and frozen goods, including imported wines, chicken, turkeys, holiday goods, and butter.

Restaurants are described under the Entertainment section of this report.

Clothing

Asmara has a moderate climate with chilly evenings. On most days, the temperature ranges from 55° to 75°F – a little colder in the winter, a little hotter in April and May. The weather can feel quite hot one moment and cool 5 minutes later, so layered clothing is the most practical. Jackets or warm sweaters are often needed in the evenings.

Newcomers to Asmara should bring enough clothing for their tour; these can be supplemented locally or by catalog order from the U.S. In general, Americans living in the United States would not have to buy new or different kinds of casual clothes to live in Asmara. Jeans or other casual pants, t-shirts, turtlenecks, jackets, and sneakers are good clothes for walking around town for both men and women. Shorts are acceptable for jogging or tennis. Heavy coats are not needed, although at least one warm jacket should be brought. The rain falls mainly during July and August, and then it tends to fall during discrete portions of the day, so raincoats can be useful but are not necessary. Umbrellas are needed, however.

For office wear, Asmara is less formal than Washington, D.C. This has not been a particularly formal city in terms of dress, although it is getting more so. "Smart casual" is the most common office attire for Eritreans, except for the more senior members of a staff. Most invitations are marked "informal," although different Eritrean attendees at the same event may be dressed either casually or in a suit and tie (men) or in heels and a nice dress (women).

Sandals, sneakers, and dress shoes are all useful at this post. Swimsuits and shorts should be brought for trips to Massawa. Hats are recommended as protection from the powerful sun. Visitors who like to hike and camp should bring rugged clothing

suitable for these activities, including sturdy shoes that can grip rocks, and rain gear.

A limited supply of clothing and fabric is available locally. There are also shops that will custom-make sweaters and vests of wool or synthetics. Leather items, such as shoes, purses, backpacks, jackets, pants, or skirts, can be custom made and are comparatively inexpensive. Shoes of variable quality are also available.

Men. Men wear suits and ties, or ties and sports jackets, to work. It is best to bring both, as both will be useful. Better sports wear will be useful for informal receptions and dinners. With the possible exception of the Ambassador or DCM, black tie is not necessary.

Women. Women's office dress is less formal than in Washington, D.C. Either dresses or pants may be worn. For more formal receptions and dinners, a couple of nicer dresses, as well as stockings and heels (or dress shoes) are useful. However, better pants suits would be suitable for those occasions also. Since Asmara is cool, a supply of stockings or tights is useful. An "easy care" hairstyle is recommended. Local hairstyling services exist, but they are fairly basic.

Children. Bring all children's clothing, as the local supply is limited. Make sure to bring plenty of warm clothes for children. Children need a good supply of pants, long-sleeved shirts, sweaters and sweatshirts, jackets, sturdy shoes, socks, and warm pajamas. Long pants are necessary, since most play areas are paved or gravel. Cotton hats or caps are needed to protect children from sunburn. Clothing for warm weather, including trips to the beach, should be brought.

Supplies and Services

Supplies

Although the availability of supplies is improving, selection is limited and imported items are expensive. Many items can be found, however, if one is persistent in searching. A new (1995) publication, *Eritrea at a Glance*, has been produced locally by an international committee and contains an extremely useful guide to locating goods and services, accompanied by detailed local maps for shopping. It can be obtained through the Embassy.

Local shops are typically small and may stock a wide variety of goods, some of which are not visible on shelves, so

you need to ask for what you need. A plenitude of little corner stores stocks everything from foodstuffs to batteries to bottled water and local beer. Other stores specialize in goods such as hardware, building supplies, basic electrical appliances, clothing, kitchen needs, stationery, and local t-shirts, among others. Film and developing services are plentiful, but expensive. The local supply of cleaning products is expanding, but it is still limited and expensive. The selection of English language books is very poor.

Useful items to bring with you from home would include all paper products (toilet paper, tissue, paper towels, tampons, and stationery, for example), cosmetics and toiletries, all soaps (including laundry soap) and cleaning supplies, holiday decorations (including artificial Christmas trees), art and craft supplies, and favorite spices and foodstuffs. Disposable diapers are extremely expensive here and should be brought if needed. Bring a good supply of toys for children, as these are largely unavailable. All pet food and pet supplies should be brought with you, including immunization medications (except for rabies, which is available), products to deal with ticks and fleas, deworming medicine, and other medications for possible illnesses, as veterinary services for pets are extremely limited. All supplies for sports and other favorite outdoor activities should also be brought. These might include supplies for tennis, hiking and camping, fishing, snorkeling at Massawa, and for birdwatching or gardening or photography. An ice chest and Thermos are useful for weekend trips. If you like to barbecue, bring a grill and charcoal, as these are unavailable. Artists should bring all of the supplies that they need.

In choosing what to bring, newcomers should be prepared to entertain themselves at home. A good supply of books, music, recreational items, and supplies for hobbies (including cooking) should be brought. A VCR and an ample supply of videotaped movies are important for some of us. Computer games (and a computer) should be brought by those who enjoy them. Cookbooks, especially those with high altitude recipes, are extremely useful and can also provide great entertainment for those who love to cook.

Since supplies are limited, bring mail order catalogues for items (specialty items in particular) that you may want to order from time to time; for example, clothes, books, art supplies, seeds, and cooking supplies.

Basic Services

Basic services in Asmara are quite basic. Most services can be located in *Eritrea at a Glance*, available locally and through the Embassy. These include car and bicycle repair, beauty salons and barbers, dry cleaning and laundry, film developing, and shoe repair. A few tailors for men and women's clothing exist. Catering services are limited. Picture framing is available.

Domestic Help

Most Embassy Americans hire domestic help to assist with house cleaning, clothes washing, and ironing, as well as a range of other duties that can include food shopping and cooking. The dry air means that houses get very dusty, and especially those people with representational responsibilities will find that life is much easier with household help. Eritreans, most often Eritrean women, are hired, and their salaries are not expensive by American standards (about \$90 a month). All speak some English, some better than others. Most people hire one person for either full-time or part-time employment, with duties and working hours being negotiated individually with the employee. In addition, many people hire a gardener's services on a limited time basis to care for their yards. Additional help is available for those who need it. Servers and a limited number of reliable caterers are available for hire to assist with large parties or receptions.

Although some Eritreans have worked for Americans and Europeans before, many have not, so you can expect to provide training for anyone that you hire. At present, household help is located by word of mouth. There are usually many willing applicants for a position, but an employee who speaks and understands English and is used to Western ways is harder to find. Newcomers with infants or toddlers should be aware that good quality nannies and baby-sitters are also difficult to find. Expect that it will take time to find someone suitable, if, in fact, you are able to find someone who meets your needs.

Religious Activities

Most churches in Eritrea are Orthodox Christian, Moslem, or Roman Catholic. Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican services are held every week in English. For locations and times, see *Eritrea at a Glance*. There is a Synagogue that is open every day from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m., but it has no Rabbi at present.

Education

Dependent Education

A small but growing International School for grades 1 through 5 has just been established in Asmara. The school is beginning to provide guided instruction for older students using standard, internationally approved correspondence courses. Since this is a brand new school, Americans with children who are considering a posting in Asmara should contact the American Embassy and ask about the present status of the school.

There is also an Italian school for children of preschool to high school age. Grade ranges from preschool (ages 3 to 6), Primary School (ages 6 to 11), Middle School (ages 12 to 14) and High School (ages 14 to 19). All instruction is in Italian, but English will be added to the curriculum starting in the 2nd grade. The school is also planning to begin an International Baccalaureate program. If you are interested in the Italian school, contact it before arriving to determine what documents you need to bring to place your child in the school. These can include birth certificate, passport, school records, and health records. Some documents may need Italian translations.

Special Educational Opportunities

Other educational opportunities in Asmara are limited. The University of Asmara does not presently have a policy on admitting foreigners into its classes. Both French and Tigrinya are taught at the Alliance Francaise, and private tutors in Tigrinya can be found.

Post Orientation Program

When the Embassy is notified of an assignment, the prospective newcomer is sent a welcome telegram containing information about Asmara and Eritrea, as well as travel and shipping information. A more detailed packet of information is given to new arrivals. Newcomers are also assigned a sponsor who meets them on arrival and assists with settling in at the post.

Recreation and Social Life

Asmara is an isolated, safe, peaceful, and relatively small town located high in the mountains. Within this description lies much of its charm for those who love it here. Potential visitors should expect, however, that they will most often rely



the International School



flowers grown in an Embassy compound garden plot

on themselves for entertainment, as quick and easy sources of outside entertainment are few.

Sports

The Embassy compound contains one lighted tennis court and a horseshoe pit. A new heated swimming pool is being constructed at the Embassy and is scheduled to be completed in 1996. The city of Asmara also has a Tennis Club with three courts. Facilities for young children are quite limited. There is currently one playground that has equipment such as swings and slides, as well as a snack bar. It is located at a kindergarten named Aghi, which is run

by ex-fighters and is open to the public on Sundays from 10:00 until 6:00.

Popular sports include soccer, bicycling, and jogging. Eritreans are enthusiastic cyclists and hold bicycle races in Asmara. It is quite easy to bicycle to work at the Embassy or elsewhere, although the cyclist may find him or herself challenged by another cyclist to race on the way to and from work. There are joggers (male and female) who run daily.

Hiking in the countryside outside Asmara is a good way to get exercise and see the landscape outside of the city. The only problem is that the country is still

mined as an aftermath of the war, and hiking must be limited to well-established trails used by animals and people.

Gardening

Most houses have small yards that are largely paved, but have a small amount of garden space. Other houses have a larger garden space. There is also a limited amount of space on the Embassy compound for individual garden plots. Some seeds can be found locally, but bring your own if there are any flowers, herbs, or vegetables that you definitely want to grow. A U.S. seed catalogue is also extremely useful.

Vegetables to be grown would include those listed under the "Food" section of this report, as well as those that are largely (or completely) unavailable, including broccoli, Chinese vegetables (e.g., snow peas, celery cabbage), cucumbers, and green peppers. Useful fresh herbs that can be grown include basil, rosemary, thyme, sage, oregano, dill, coriander, and parsley. Among the flowers that do well here are geraniums, snapdragons, impatiens, carnations, chrysanthemums, nasturtiums, various daisies, gypsophila, and sunflowers. But bring seeds! Although plants can be bought, there are few nurseries. A book on the propagation of plants is useful for the uninitiated, since this is the main way that the gardener in Eritrea will obtain new specimens locally.

Touring and Outdoor Activities

Massawa, a port on the Red Sea, is 3 hours east of Asmara down the escarpment. The scenery is breathtaking (and a bit hair-raising for those who are leery of heights) down the long and winding road. Massawa itself was heavily damaged during the war, although it is being industriously repaired. The old town's architecture reflects its Arab and Turkish influence. While in Massawa, visitors can stay at one of several beachfront hotels and swim in the warm sea water. The hotels themselves provide very basic accommodations; water and electricity can be unreliable. The coral reef is little disturbed, however, and makes for delightful snorkeling. From Massawa, one can take a short boat ride to the uninhabited Green Island, for more snorkeling, or farther to the Dahlak Islands for camping and exploring. Several hours south of Massawa, by unpaved road, are the ruins of the Axumite seaport of Adulis, believed to be the oldest known settlement in Eritrea.

Two hours north of Asmara is the town of Keren, which has long been a cultural crossroads between the Christian

highlands and the Moslem lowlands. It was the site of heavy fighting during both World War II and Eritrea's war for independence. There is a local market here that can be a good place to purchase gold and silver jewelry, as well as the "Shrine of the Black Madonna" built at the base of a large baobab tree. A clean and inexpensive hotel is located at the center of town and has magnificent views from the roof-top bar.

Also 2 hours northeast of Asmara is an area called Fil Fil, which is mountainous, green, and forested, a nice contrast to the dry landscape of Asmara. Archeological remains can be found at Ade Kaieh, about 120 km. southeast of Asmara, site of a 2,000-year-old Axumite dam. Ruins of an ancient Axumite city dating from the 6th to the 8th or 9th century are throughout this area. Axumite remains can also be found in other parts of Eritrea, although the isolation brought on by many years of war has meant that many archeological sites in the countryside have yet to be identified, excavated, and studied.

Four hours south of Asmara, in Ethiopia, is Axum, which was a political and religious center as far back as the first millennium B.C. Its script, language, style of architecture, and writing traditions indicate a link between Axum and south Arabia, which, before the rise of Islam, was under Axumite Christian rule. One of the ancient city's chief attractions is its obelisks; one, at 76 feet, is the ancient world's tallest standing obelisk. An even larger one, 108 feet, lies fallen and broken. Other sights include excavated ruins, stone thrones, a large reservoir excavated in the rock, an underground tomb, and an ancient Orthodox church. Axum has been claimed to be the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant.

Embassy personnel occasionally organize group trips to various sites within Eritrea. Exploring the countryside requires four-wheel-drive vehicles in many areas, extra gasoline and spare tires, plenty of water, and food. If you are prone to motion sickness, be prepared with preventive medication. Road conditions are improving steadily, but a good percentage of the roads in Eritrea are still unpaved. Guides who speak English and Tigrinya can be useful for finding remote locations on unmarked roads, as well as for negotiating unforeseen situations. Finally, careful travelers will consult with others in advance of taking a trip about the condition of specific roads (many of which are under repair) and about the potential existence of land mines in unfamiliar territory.



the "Tukul," a place for parties and informal gatherings located on the Embassy compound

Asmara is a designated R & R post; the R & R point is London. An optional R & R point is Washington, D.C.

Entertainment

Dinners in people's homes are a common means of entertainment. Restaurants are also popular. Typical restaurants offer a limited menu of Eritrean food, simple grilled meats and fish, and standard Italian dishes such as spaghetti or lasagna. There are two Chinese restaurants, however, and other restaurants are attempting to expand their menus. Several restaurants offer good pizza. Prices for all of the above are reasonable.

The USIS offers weekly films and occasional cultural events. Other cultural programs are sponsored by the British Council and the Alliance Francaise.

Social Activities

Organized activities are limited in Asmara; most gatherings are much less formal. An international women's organization meets monthly. Any woman can attend these meetings, which serve as a source of information about happenings in Asmara, as well as a place to meet both Eritrean women and foreigners. A dart league, run by Eritreans, meets at the municipal swimming pool and has been known to organize its international membership into teams that play tournaments. The Embassy organizes parties or gatherings occasionally for American and Eritrean employees, particularly on holidays. Another place to meet Eritreans and the international community would be at benefits held to assist various organizations within Eritrea.



Official Functions

Nature of Functions

Diplomatic officers have a great deal of social contact with Eritreans. Diplomatic functions are typically receptions or dinners and are most often informal. Eritrean men who are invited may or may not bring their wives, and women may or may not bring their husbands. Official representational responsibilities are especially significant for the Ambassador, the DCM, the AID Director, the public affairs officer, and other senior Mission members.

Standards of Social Conduct

No formal calling or dropping of cards is necessary at the Mission. New staff members are requested to meet with the Ambassador and DCM as soon as possible after arrival. The Ambassador and the DCM may suggest other calls.

Calling cards are not needed. Business cards can be ordered upon arrival. The Mission prints its own invitations, and photocopied maps are often included to show the location of a residence.

Specific guidance is given to anyone assigned to Asmara in a temporary capacity or as part of a military exercise.

gazelles

Notes for Travelers

Getting to the Post

At present, no American carriers serve Asmara directly. Transfers to a foreign carrier for direct service to Asmara are available at London, Rome, Frankfurt, and Cairo at the time of this writing. It is not necessary to transit Addis Ababa. If advance notification is received, new arrivals will be met at the airport in Eritrea and assisted through immigration and customs. It is essential to obtain a valid entry visa prior to arrival.

For airfreight shipments, containers should be of a size acceptable to a passenger aircraft for air shipment. This size may vary according to the airline. Containers should be marked:

American Embassy
For: (Name)
Asmara, Eritrea
Telephone Number: 291-1-120004

Seafreight should be routed through the European Logistical Support Office (ELSO), in Antwerp for onward shipment to Asmara. It is then routed directly to the port of Massawa by sea.

As soon as consumables, airfreight, and/or seafreight are packed (and before they are shipped), send a copy of their bills of lading and packing lists to the General Services Office (GSO) in Asmara. It is important that these documents arrive in Asmara before the goods arrive in Eritrea. Before you ship your private vehicle, have your shipping agent send the bill of lading to the GSO in Asmara.

Customs, Duties, and Passage

Customs and Duties

Employees assigned to the Embassy are entitled to full duty-free privileges for the duration of their tour. There are no restrictions on items to be imported, except that cars can not be more than 10 years old.

Passage

Each traveler must have a valid diplomatic or official passport, as well as a valid Eritrean visa. Although visas are sometimes issued at the airport under special circumstances with advance notification in writing, this is not a customary procedure and should not be assumed as a privilege granted to travelers. Persons arriving in Eritrea from a yellow-fever endemic area must have proof of a current yellow fever vaccine.

Pets

There are no quarantine restrictions, but all pets must have an up-to-date health certificate, including evidence of a rabies shot for warm-blooded pets, especially dogs and cats. Tick fever and intestinal parasites have been reported as problems for pets here. There are many diseases among the local chickens, a fact that could pose a problem for pet birds. Only the most basic veterinarian services (for dogs and cats, not birds) are available in Asmara, so before coming to the country, have your pet examined and given all of its needed shots and vaccinations. Bring all pet supplies, including food and medicine, with you. A rabies vaccine is available. Make sure before you leave for Eritrea that you have the necessary paperwork to bring pets, particularly parrots and other birds protected by the CITES treaty, back with you to the United States. For more information on the CITES treaty, contact the Fish and Wildlife Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Firearms and Ammunition

The importation of personal firearms is forbidden by both the Eritrean government and Embassy policy. Furthermore, the possession of personal firearms in Eritrea is prohibited by the Eritrean government. For further information, contact the Embassy in writing.

Currency, Banking, and Weights and Measures

The Government of Eritrea continues to use the Ethiopian birr, but is developing its own currency. The current exchange rate (1995) is approximately six birr to one U.S. dollar. There are 100 cents to the birr; birr bills are available in the denominations of 100, 50, 10, five and one. Credit cards are rarely accepted in Eritrea, except for airline ticket purchases. Foreigners must pay hotel bills and airline tickets in U.S. currency or U.S. dollar denominated traveler's checks.

The Embassy has a cashier service open three days a week from 9:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. U.S. checks may be cashed for Eritrean currency. Checks may also be cashed for limited amounts of U.S. currency for travel, subject to administrative approval. Traveler's checks are not available. Major hotels, banks, and the airport will also exchange U.S. currency for birr. Salary checks may be either mailed to post or deposited directly in a U.S. bank; the latter is strongly recommended, due to the transit time required by the mail pouch.

Local time in Eritrea is 3 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, and 8 hours ahead of Washington, D.C. (in the months when the U.S. does not have daylight saving time). The metric system of weights and measures is used.

Taxes, Exchange, and Sale of Property

At this time, U.S. diplomatic personnel are exempt from income tax, as well as import and export duty taxes, and an exemption from sales taxes is being negotiated. If Embassy employees want to sell their cars, they are responsible for the payment of import duties. Otherwise, the buyer is responsible for paying any necessary taxes, which can be as high as 200%. Also, according to U.S. Government policy, anyone wishing to sell items when leaving Eritrea must provide a list of the items to be sold and their price to the Ambassador for approval before the sale.



elephants in Eritrea

Recommended Reading

Connell, Dan. *Against All Odds: A Chronicle of the Eritrean Revolution*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1993.

Cliffe, Lionel and Davidson, Basil, eds. *The Long Struggle of Eritrea for Independence and Constructive Peace*. Spokesman: Nottingham, England, 1988.

Eritrean People's Liberation Front. *Eritrea: Dawn After a Long Night*. Department of Information: Asmara, Eritrea, 1989.

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Habte Selasie, B. *Riding the Whirlwind: An Ethiopian Story of Love and Revolution*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1993.

Keneally, Thomas. *To Asmara: A Novel of Africa*. Warner Books: New York, N.Y., 1989.

Kutschera, Chris. *Erythrae/Eritrea*. JJ Productions: Barcelona, 1994.

Mesghenna, Yemane. *Italian Colonialism: A Case Study of Eritrea, 1869-1934*. International Graphics: Maryland, 1989.

Paice, Edward. *Guide to Eritrea*. The Globe Pequot Press: Old Saybrook, Connecticut, 1994.

Papstein, R. *Eritrea: Revolution at Dusk*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1991.

Pateman, Roy. *Even the Stones Are Burning*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J.

Tekle, A. *Eritrea and Ethiopia: From Conflict to Cooperation*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1994.

Tesfagiorgis, Abeba. *A Painful Season and a Stubborn Hope: The Journey of an Eritrean Mother*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1992.

Tesfagiorgis, G. *Emergent Eritrea: Challenges of Economic Development*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1993.

Wilson, A. *The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution*. The Red Sea Press: Trenton, N.J., 1991.

Local Holidays

Official holidays consist of American, Eritrean, Orthodox Christian, and Moslem national holidays. The dates of Moslem holidays vary from year to year and are fixed according to a lunar calendar. These include Ramadan, the month of fasting, which lasts for 29 to 30 days and occurs 11 to 12 days earlier each year. During the fast, no food or drink can be taken after sunrise and before sunset. Ramadan ends with the Id Al Fitr, when government offices are closed. The Id Al Adha Arafa occurs 70 days after the Id Al Fitr, and again, government offices are closed. Finally, the birth of the Prophet Mohammed is celebrated on a holiday called Mawlid.

Other local holidays without fixed dates are Christian and include Whit Day, Good Friday, and Easter, which occur in March or April. The following list includes local holidays that have fixed dates.

Orthodox Christmas	Jan 7
Timket (Epiphany Day)	Jan 19
Women's Day	Mar 8
Liberation Day	May 24
Martyr's Day	Jun 20
Start of the Armed Struggle	Sep 1
Orthodox Church's New Year	Sep 11
Meskel	Sep 27

Liberation Day is a major holiday and therefore would be an inconvenient time for visitors to arrive in Eritrea.

OFFICE OF OVERSEAS SCHOOLS

ASMARA INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 4941
Asmara, Eritrea
Tel: 291-1-112599
Fax: 291-1-122904

1996-97

The Asmara International Community School (AICS) is an independent, coeducational day school which offers its educational program to children from preschool through grade 6. A tutorial high school correspondence program is also available. The school year comprises two semesters extending from September to June with 180 days of instruction.

Organization: The School is governed by a 9-member Board of Directors. Seven members are elected for two-year terms by the members of the School Association. One member of the Board is a representative of the U.S. Ambassador to Eritrea and one member is a representative of the U.N. Resident Coordinator. Membership in the Association is open to the parents or guardians of children enrolled in the School and upon teachers and aides who work at the School.

Curriculum: The School follows an American curriculum which is modified to reflect the international composition of the school in grades PS-6. Teaching assistance, supervision and counseling are available for high school students enrolled in independent correspondence study programs. The School is approved by the local Ministry of Education and is a member of the Association of American Schools in Africa.

Faculty: At the beginning of the 1996-97 school year, there were 3 full-time and 2 part-time faculty members, including 2 U.S. citizens.

Enrollment: Enrollment at the beginning of the 1996-97 school year was 50. Of the total, 25 were U.S. citizens, 6 were host-country nationals, and 19 were third-country nationals.

Facilities: The School is located in a facility located adjacent to the city. The facility encompasses 4 buildings containing classrooms and a library, and includes an outdoor playing field.

Finances: The annual tuition rates are as follows: PS-Kdg.: \$2,625; and grades 1-9: \$3,500. There is an annual registration fee of \$100. The School also charges a one-time admission fee of \$400 and a one-time capital levy fee of \$1,000. (All fees are quoted in U.S. dollars.)

This Fact Sheet is intended to provide general information. The Office of Overseas Schools (A/OPR/OS) may have more detailed information. Prospective users of the schools may wish to inquire further of A/OPR/OS or contact the school directly for more specific and up-to-the-minute information regarding curriculum programs, special programs, and the like.

Information and statistics provided by the School