

05

FENTALLE:

LAND OF THE KARRAYYUU

*Fantalle tai, Mul'adhu!
Be like Fentalle, Prominent!*

As the Eebba (blessing) goes, Mount Fentalle, seemingly emerging from between the sun-scorched Metehara plains surrounding it, is truly a sight to behold. To the Karrayyu Oromo, Mount Fentalle is the most visible feature of their land, and, like the natives, the view of the country's most active volcanic mountain is something to impress anyone. The Karrayyu hold a deep love for their mountain home in Fentalle, which neighbors the land of the Afar and Argobba people, and they have built their center in the town of Metehara.

Fentalle, a stratovolcano surmounted by a huge crater, is located in the depths of the Great Rift Valley. The Karrayyus have incredible legends of volcanoes, such as the Harawa story, the Nogoba formation, and the Basaka (lava stone formation), to name a few. This arid land holds two sites of volcanic fissures as it is also home to the Artu (the one that smokes) volcano, which is located at an approximate distance of 20km from the highway to Djibouti, taking a junction exactly 9 km before entering Metehara town. Artu is famous for its aloe forests, and the Karrayyu women use the roots of these aloes for homemade perfumes known as Qaya.





Mount Fentalle punctuates the land of the Karrayyu and is one of their most sacred locations in the Great Rift Valley they call home

Fentalle Mountain fissures and the summit of the mountain (Harawa rift-crater) is about 30 km from the highway to Djibouti. Driving all the way up to the summit by car while looking at the picturesque view can be quite the adventure. Full of fissures in the early mornings, the landscape looks almost like a patchwork of colors. Around this place, some of the fissures' smoke can be seen, and it is possible to take a rejuvenating steam bath at some of them.

The crater is also home to a diverse avifauna. Large birds such as the Black-Spotted Eagle, Kite, and Brown Eagle, as well as wild animals like the Bushbuck, Kudus, Klipspringer, and many others, can be spotted. The area is also home to an abundance of hot springs, found only a few kilometers away on the right side of the entrance to Metehara town.



The revered river Hawas tumbles down a cliff forming a boisterous waterfall that has long been a destination to the Karrayyuu

THE HAWAS RIVER

The Hawas River might be known nationally as the Awash River, but to the Karrayyuu people, it is called the Hawas. The Awash River Basin is one of Ethiopia's twelve river basins and is fed by and feeds several lakes in the Great Rift Valley. The river starts in Ginchi town west of the capital Addis Ababa, travels along the Great Rift Valley, and ends in Lake Abbei on the border between Ethiopia and Djibouti. The Hawas River has a length of approximately 1,200 km, and the River Basin comprises long, steep slopes separating the highlands and the Great Rift Valley. This river constitutes the main source of water for the Karrayyuu.

The river, which divides the Shawaa, Arsii, and Hararge zones, is a source of life that is sacred to the people of Karrayyuu. The love

and respect that the Karrayyuu harbor for the Hawas River is as beautiful as it is ancient. The fact that the most common name for a Karrayyuu male is Hawas is indicative of the romance that exists between the two, and, as is the way of lovers, these people and their beloved river are inseparable.

The Hawas River offers a majestic view and an abundance of diverse species. One of the most notable ones are the crocodiles that emerge in large numbers. These crocodiles move back and forth, in and out of the water, and can often be seen laying across the large stones that populate the river, basking in the sun. But perhaps the most spectacular scene is watching them wait for food under the waterfall with mouths wide open.

THE AWASH NATIONAL PARK

Located about 225 kilometers east of Addis Ababa, Awash National Park is more than just a park to the Karrayyuu as its boundaries include land they still inhabit as home. Situated in the Great Rift Valley, it stretches across an area of 756 square kilometers, comprising the Hawas River and the extended lowland plain. Some of the biggest attractions that this area has to offer are the breathtaking view of the Fentalle Mountains as well as the mammoth waterfall created by the Hawas River. This waterfall called the Awash Waterfall, is one of the largest waterfalls in the country, second only to the Blue Nile Falls. The Park extends for 12 kilometers east of this waterfall, edging the breathtaking scenery of the Hawas Gorge, which is the largest and deepest gorge in the entire Hawas River flow. The Gorge borders three Zones of Oromia, namely: Hararge in the east, Shewa in the north, and Arsi in the south-east. The park is also home to numerous fauna and flora, some of which are indigenous.

Flora and Fauna

The awash park hosts a staggering eighty-one species of mammals and forty-three species of reptiles. The Park is home to magnificent mammals such as the Gazel, Jackal, Lion, Tiger, Hyena, Hamdarias Baboon, Dik-dik, Greater Kudu, Warthog, and Lowland Nyala. It is also home to about 453 species of native birds, including the Banded Barbet, Golden-Backed Woodpecker, Lappet-faced Vulture, White-Winged Cliff Chat, Abyssinian Roller, Somali Ostrich, Brown Snake-Eagle, and Northern Carmine Bee-Eater, making it an ideal place for bird lovers.

Like its myriad of rich fauna, Awash National Park is also endowed with a vast array of diverse plant species. Although acacia trees and shrubs are predominant across the Park,

other species are also spread along the river basin to create the deep greenery of the Park.

The viewpoints in the Park are divided among the camps. There are spots in the camps where the animals go to drink water; these places offer excellent opportunities to see each animal. The location of Awash Park also offers the best route to other attractions in the country, such as the Babile Elephant Sanctuary and Erta Ale, which is an active volcano in the Afar region.

With the beautifully preserved, centuries-old, culture and traditions of the Karrayyuu, as well as the raw beauty of nature surrounding it, Awash National Park is the perfect feast for the eyes, the soul, and the spirit.



An Oryx (Saalaa) looks on at the Awash National Park in the land of the Karrayyuu

LAND RIGHTS AND ADVOCACY

Having lost a significant proportion of their land to plantations, parks, and conservation efforts, the Karrayyuu are people struggling to be heard.