



## **Intercountry Adoption**

Every child benefits from a loving home in deeply profound ways. Intercountry adoption has made this permanently possible for hundreds of thousands of children worldwide. When children cannot remain with a relative, and new parents within their communities cannot be found, intercountry adoption opens another pathway to children to receive the care, security and love that only a permanent family can provide.

### **Adoption in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia continues to work on re-aligning their adoption program. This comes on the heels of a [almost] complete system shutdown in the middle of last year (2011) that resulted in many prospective adoption cases being delayed. Since then, Ethiopia has stepped up and worked through many of their issues.

Ethiopia is one of the most popular countries in Africa to adopt from. There are many children available and the screening process is monitored. Ethiopia, as a country, is wrought with poverty and disease. The need for adoption is great. The children that are adopted from Ethiopia are said to adapt well when adopted and have pleasant personalities.

The Ethiopian government has authorized very few adoption agencies to operate in that country. If adoptions are attempted by outside means, the children will not be eligible to receive permission to exit the country.

In 2011, U.S. citizens adopted approximately 1,732 children from Ethiopia. Children of all ages are available for adoption including infants, sibling groups, multiples (twins and even triplets), older and special needs children, both boys and girls. These children reside in orphanages.

For the List of agencies please see [LINK](#)

There are many sources for information about daily life after adoption available online. If you are interested in adopting from Ethiopia, consider researching the many blogs and groups that focus solely on adoption from this country. They are said to offer valuable information.



This article will walk you through the basic steps required to adopt a child from Ethiopia.

## How to Adopt

### Ethiopian Adoption Authority

Intercountry adoptions from Ethiopia are handled by the Adoption Team in the Children and Youth Affairs Office (CYAO), a part of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA). There are currently more than 20 U.S.-based adoption agencies authorized by the Ethiopian Government to provide adoption services for American adoptive parents. For a current list, See Link

### The Process

Adoptive parents considering a private adoption are also urged to consult with USCIS or an immigration attorney regarding the child's orphan status as it pertains to U.S. immigration law before the adoption is finalized. **All Ethiopian adoptions are full, final, and irrevocable, so it is important to know whether or not a child qualifies as an orphan before completing the adoption.**

### The Intercountry Adoption Process

The procedures for an intercountry adoption are different from those for a local adoption. International adoption rules in Ethiopia require U.S. citizens to work with Ethiopia's Children and Youth Affairs Office (CYAO) in Addis Ababa, which is under the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), to effect an intercountry adoption. Americans who enter into private adoptions that bypass the CYAO, or that follow local rather than international adoption procedures, will not be able to take the child to the United States on an IR3 or IR4 orphan visa.

### The Private Adoption Process

Private adoption is an alternate process available ONLY to adoptive parents of Ethiopian descent or to Americans who are resident in Ethiopia. Private adoptions are permitted in Ethiopia, but the Embassy encourages all parents using the private adoption process to ensure that their cases are approved by the Federal First Instance Court and MOWA. These steps will ensure that private adoptions do not bypass the process and protections put in place by the government of Ethiopia relating to international adoption.

Individuals choosing to pursue a private adoption should be aware that there may be significant wait times after the initial visa interview. While each case will be reviewed and screened in advance of the consular interview, during the course of the interview the consular officer may discover new information that requires further review in order to complete the required I-604, Determination on Child for Adoption. The I-604 is required whether the adoptive parent already has an approved I-600 filed in the U.S. or is filing the I-600 at the time of the consular interview.



This additional review and/or investigation may take several weeks to several months to complete, and adoptive parents should be prepared for this possibility.

Please note that all private adoptions will be scheduled for interviews on Thursday mornings.

The process for adopting a child from Ethiopia generally includes the following steps:

### **1. Choose an Adoption Service Provider**

- Find a reputable adoption agency. The most important step of the adoption process is the first one - finding the right agency. You will want to make sure that the agency is accredited. You can find adoption agencies and get information on the accreditation process by visiting the website for the Child Welfare Information Gateway at [www.childwelfare.gov/adoption](http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption).
- Check references for your chosen international adoption agency before proceeding with your adoption from Ethiopia. While checking accreditation is critical, you will also want to ensure that individuals have had good adoption experiences through the agency. Check around on message board forums such as the one located on the Bethany Christian Services website at [www.discussion.bethany.org](http://www.discussion.bethany.org).

### **2. Apply to the USCIS to be Found Eligible to Adopt**

- Ensure that you meet the criteria to adopt from Ethiopia. As a general rule, parents should be at least 25 years of age at the time of adoption, but generally no older than 40 years older than the adopted child. For example, if you want to adopt a child who is three-years-old, you should be no older than 43. On occasion, Ethiopian officials have made exceptions to these guidelines for extraordinary cases, however. Singles are permitted to adopt from Ethiopia.
- Complete the initial application process. After you have completed the above steps, you will go through a formal application process. This involved gathering background information and copies of vital records on yourself and your spouse (if you are married) and any other children you have living in the home. You will probably also have to fill out an extensive biography on yourself so that adoption officials can evaluate your suitability for adoption and help match you to the right child.

### **3. Be Matched with a Child**

- Decide on what your requirements for a child are. If you already have a child living in the home, you may be able to specify whether you prefer a boy or a girl. At this point, you should also decide the age range of the child that you are hoping to adopt. As a general rule, the older the child, the more quickly the adoption process may be able to move as older children are often considered special needs adoptions.
- Complete a homestudy. The homestudy is the process by which you and any family members residing in your home are interviewed extensively prior to adopting from Ethiopia. This process also includes a home inspection to ensure that your surroundings are safe and appropriate for an incoming child.



- Complete the dossier. The dossier is the official packet of paperwork you will submit for your adoption. It includes vital records, official adoption forms, health statements, background checks, divorce and marriage certificates, applicable death certificates, mortgage and financial statements, income tax returns, and several other official documents, all of which must be certified and notarized. Your adoption agency should help walk you through this part of the process as it can be quite daunting.

#### **4. Adopt the Child (or Gain Legal Custody) in Ethiopia**

- Submit your dossier to Ethiopia. At this point, your dossier will be authenticated in Washington, DC before being sent on to Ethiopia. Once in Ethiopia, the dossier is again passed through a legal process before a child is referred.
- Receive your referral. Your referral should come from Ethiopia within a matter of months of submitting your dossier. Your referral should include a picture of the child and a limited health and history background.

#### **5. Apply at the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa for the Child to be Found Eligible for Adoption and for an Immigrant Visa.**

- Travel to Ethiopia to meet your child. Once you have accepted a referral, you can travel to Ethiopia, usually within a few months of the referral to bring your child home. You can also use an escort service, if travel is not an option. Once in Ethiopia, you will probably have a court date to finalize the paperwork required in Ethiopia.
- Foreign children adopted from other countries must first obtain a U.S. visa before they can travel or move to the United States. Visas are issued at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in the foreign country where a child resides.

#### **6. Bring Your Child Home**

- Bring your child home! After you bring your child home, you will still have to go through a court process in the United States to finalize the adoption, but your child can live with you during this process. Ethiopia also requires regular follow-up reports with photos following the adoption.

### **Travel advice for adoptive parents**

- **Make Adoption Travel a Family Affair**

Parents often agonize over whether to bring children along on an adoption trip. Common concerns include the expense, the feeling that they'll do better at home than in an unfamiliar place, and wanting to focus on the newest member of the family. But overall, most adoption agencies also like the idea. "It allows the new child to bond with his or her siblings from day one. Giving older siblings a role to play makes them feel integral to the



process,” says Chris Huber, Latin America program manager for Families Thru International Adoption.

- **The Travel Side of Adoption Travel**

Adoption travel is an umbrella term for three separate journeys: the pre-adoption trip, where parents travel to another country to learn about the culture of the child they are to receive; the actual adoption trip, where parents meet and take home a child they've grown to love through pictures; and heritage trips, where the family re-visits the child's homeland, allowing the child to understand his or her cultural roots.

- **Pre-Adoption Trip:** To give an adopted child a sense of their cultural identity as they grow up, it's essential for parents to form a relationship with their child's birth country. Reading travel books is a good start, but experiencing the country firsthand through a pre-adoption visit creates a superior connection.

Understanding a foreign culture imparts invaluable insight to parents as they raise their child, for a day will come when a child asks about his or her homeland. To completely appreciate a country's uniqueness, pre-adoption trips should be taken when a parent can focus on the culture and the people without being preoccupied with the actual adoption.

- **Adoption Trip:** Some parents who adopt internationally are provided the choice of having their child escorted to the United States or traveling to the country to bring the child home. Travel agents agree: traveling to the country is best, especially if the parent was unable to previously explore the country through a pre-adoption tour.

When making plans for the adoption trip, parents often get swamped in all the details of coordinating an international visit while simultaneously filling out countless adoption papers. This is where a travel agent can truly help out.

Some countries require parents to stay for long periods of time to complete an adoption. Some travel agents who specialize in adoption travel know of hotels or furnished apartments in safe areas that offer discounts to adoptive families. Travel agents who specialize in countries like Ethiopia will know much about the country from personal experiences, and they'll help you prepare for the cultural differences you'll encounter while setting up your hotel and plane reservations.

Once the weight of travel planning is off your shoulders, you'll be able to focus more acutely on the adoption itself.



- **Homeland Heritage Trips:** With most cases of international adoption, there comes a time when the adopted child's interest in his or her home country can only be satiated by a visit. Children are innately curious, and learning about the food, people and customs of their birth culture is a vital identity-building experience.

Travel agents stress the importance of creating a wide-ranging itinerary for a homeland heritage visit, for a child should reach beyond general tourist attractions to understand the true essence of his or her culture. Include in your itinerary a trip to a zoo, where the indigenous animals will delight the child, or have your travel agent set up insightful tours away from the main tourist hubs.

### **Adopting a Positive Attitude**

In the end, travel agents insist that parents take one thing along their journeys throughout the adoption process: a sense of wonder. Having a sense of wonder will help a parent adjust to new situations and become actively interested in the culture of their new child, all while keeping their composure in the face of adversity.

### **Staying Safe on Your Trip**

Before you travel, it's always a good practice to investigate the local conditions, laws, political landscape, and culture of the country. The State Department is a good place to start.

The Department of State provides Country Specific Information for every country of the world about various issues, including the health conditions, crime, unusual currency or entry requirements, and any areas of instability.

### **Staying in Touch on Your Trip**

When traveling during the adoption process, it is encouraged to register your trip with the Department of State. Travel registration makes it possible to contact you if necessary. Whether there's a family emergency in the United States, or a crisis in Ethiopia, registration assists the U.S. Embassy or Consulate in reaching you.



## **After Adoption**

### **What does Ethiopia require of the adoptive parents after the adoption?**

Pursuant to Ethiopian law, adoptive parents must submit post adoption reports at three months, six months, and one year. After the first year, the reports must be filed yearly until the child turns 18. This is a commitment that the adopting parents, home study agency, and adoption agency must sign when submitting documents for the adoption.

Adoptive parents are strongly urged to comply with these requirements and to complete all post-adoption reports in a timely manner. Your adoption agency may be able to help you with this process. Your cooperation will contribute to that country's history of positive experiences with American adoptive parents and helps keep the intercountry adoptions viable in Ethiopia.

### **What resources are available to assist families after the adoption?**

Many adoptive parents find it important to find support after the adoption. Take advantage of all the resources available to your family -- whether it's another adoptive family, a support group, an advocacy organization, or your religious or community services.

Here are some good places to start your support group search:

- [Adoption Services Support Groups for Adopting Persons](http://www.adoptionservices.org/adoption_support_groups_family/index.htm)

[http://www.adoptionservices.org/adoption\\_support\\_groups\\_family/index.htm](http://www.adoptionservices.org/adoption_support_groups_family/index.htm)

- [North American Council on Adoptable Children](http://www.nacac.org/)

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