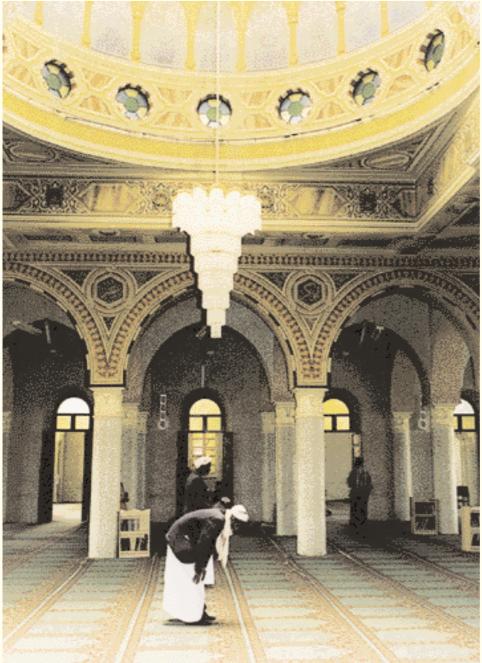
Eritrea

The Pearl of the Red Sea and the flower of the Green Land!

Cairo - Mounir El-Fishawy



An ancient land, as ancient as immemorial history and as new as tomorrow. Its sky is blue and crackless, its water is sparkling and as pure as crystal. White coasts that stretch for hundreds of kilometres, their necks are adorned by a pearl necklace of islands strewn amid a turquoise background of fascinating azure water. Land of utmost prettiness through which mineral fountains lie among splendidly beautiful green silky mountains. The Eritrean people are lively, friendly and have traditions and a heritage that are deeply rooted in the mists of time. This is Eritrea, the bride of the African Horn and the mistress of its charm and beauty, the safe oasis that spread its arms welcoming the delegation of 'Islamic Tourism' magazine. As confirmed by Amina Nurhussein, the Eritrean Minister of Tourism, visiting Eritrea was an exclusive for the Arab travel media even more than an exclusive! >

جامع الخلفاء الراشدين. The Caliphs Mosque.



Imam Abu Hanifa Mosque in Massawa.

Arriving in Asmara

We left the Diibouti airport of Hambouli heading for the Eritrean capital Asmara, with the help and encouragement of the diplomats Mr. Mahmoud Omer Chirum, the ambassador of Eritrea in Cairo and Mr. Mahmoud Ali Jabra the Eritrean ambassador to Djibouti with the high level assistance he rendered to me. The flight took about seventy minutes. We enjoyed the cool air-conditioning of the plane which compensated for the heat of July in Djibouti. When the door of the plane was opened after it safely landed we were surprised by a natural cooling, which was even cooler than that of the plane. This is because Asmara is 8366 feet above the sea level. As soon as we stepped out of the plane, we were welcomed by the diplomat Mr. Mohamed Othman Musa, the Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department in the Eritrean Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He greeted us by touching the top of his right shoulder with our facing shoulders in what seemed like a half embrace, supported by a warm hand shake and a serene smile. That is how the Eritreans warmly greet each other.

Then he accompanied us to the V.I.P. lounge where we chatted before leaving the airport for our hotel. On our journey from the airport to Asmara, the features of the city were gradually coming to light. As we turned the corner we could see 'Simbel' or 'Korea' - luxurous residential areas facing the Intercontinental Hotel to the left and the Expo exhibition area to the right. Mr. Musa acquainted us briefly but

مسجد الإمام أبى حنيفة بمدينة مصوع.

informatively about Eritrea's major attractions. The most important tourist area is the capital Asmara close to bird sancturies artificial lakes and lofty mountains. Kern is the second largest city: a passageway to west and north Eritrea. Aila Bared is the pearl of the twisting agricultural land, the hills of Alaryaf and the health resort of north Bahri. There are unique streaks of equatorial forests and ancient archaeological sites spread throughout the In Nagfa you see the strong country. underground entrenchments of the liberation movement. On the Red Sea coast are resorts such as Mussawa, Assab and other ports. Around 354 Eritrean islands are spread like a necklace of pearls rich in wildlife and endangered birds. Four of these islands are inhabited. Dahlak Kabir the most important lies 60 kilometres from Mussawa. The turguoise water of the sea is abundant in seal life and wonderful coral reefs and gardens.

Eritrea : Name and Location

Eritrea was known to the Egyptian pharaohs thousands of years ago: it was mentioned in their hieroglyphic writings. The Greeks called it Senios Eritrios. Probably the word Eritrea is derived from the Arabic word 'urt' or 'urth' which means 'glowing fire of red flame'. The Greeks added 'ya' which was customary in their names and it became Eritrea to denote the hot climate of the plains or red moss which was floating on the coasts. The map of the Eritrean state looks

Brigadier Hummad Mohammed Karikari, Commander of the Naval Forces.

اللواء حُمَّد محمد كاريكاري قائد القوات البحرية الإرتيرية.

and its blade a little inclined to the west. It leans along the inclination of the western coast of the Red Sea which extends for 1200 kilometres along the length of the Eritrean coast.

Eritrea shares borders with Djibouti to the south-east, Ethiopia to the south and the Sudan to north and north-west covering an area of 124,320 sq. kilometres east of the African continent in the African Horn between the meridians of 36-43 east and the latitudes of 12-18 north.

The country has eight regions and 55 provinces. The Central Region (capital Asmara), Ansaba Region (capital Kern), North Red Sea Region (capital Mussawa), the South Red Sea Region (capital Assab) Gash Barka Region (capital Barenta) and the southern Region (capital Mandefara).

Safe Eritrea

Eritrea has waged many liberation wars throughout its history. After liberation the Eritreans were eager for the quiet life of safety and security. This is what we experienced and enjoyed during our two-week visit. It was reflected on many occasions particularly in that permanently unfailing smile on the faces of Eritrean men and women who deal with each other, as well as with their visitors, with remarkable friendliness. We never saw a single quarrel on the streets, markets or anywhere. Many times we left the doors of the car open with the windows lowered and came back to **>** find everything intact. The good behaviour is also manifested in the good words of taxi drivers who do not attempt to use local or foreign passengers as a walking dollar note. We frequently saw Eritrean girls and ladies walking freely and safely in Asmara after midnight without fear. It was likewise noticeable that there were no security guards at the entrances to minstry buildings or the offices of ministers and senior officials. They were not protected by a motorcade as they drove through the streets of Asmara.

We met his Eminence Sheikh Alamin Othman the Mufti of Eritrea who said that the security that the country enjoys is attributed to the national unity, co-operation and harmony in one matrix combining both the Christians and Muslims who are represented in society in equal numbers. His Eminence appealed to Islamic countries and charitable and civil organizations and societies to participate in building mosques. The government only grants free land for the mosques because of the secular policy adopted. The mufti also called upon Islamic philanthropists throughout the world to help Muslims in Eritrea.

Asmara, the City of Flowers

Asmara is known as the 'City of Flowers' because of the abundant jacarandas and bajophilias. The popularity of the gardens and florists could have come from the influence of the Italian colonisers (1890-1941). The legacy

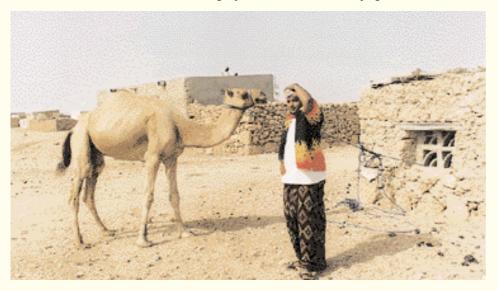


نموذج ضخم للصندل البلاستيكي ''رمز الكفاح'' بميدان الشهداء وسط أسمرا. A model of the plastic Shoe, the symbol of the struggle, in the Martyr's Square in Asmara.

of the Italian colonization is also seen in the architectural mixture of Italian and Eritrean styles of buildings and the villas of Asmara known as 'decorat' - especially in the old part of the city. Mai Srwa Lake on the outskirts of Asmara is one of the most beautiful silky green areas distinct with colourful flowers and roses, and long green and palm trees, which still maintain their Mediterranean characteristics. A cafeteria overlooks the lake. The area has colours of disparate tones forming a live natural picture surrounding the lake. It is a visual delight to enjoy the splendour of the natural beauty that God bestowed on Eritrea.

Asmara, Land and Climate

Asmara has been the capital of Eritrea since 1898 when its first civilian governor Ferdinando Martini shifted the capital from Mussawa. Asmara is also the capital of the Central Region. with lake Mai Nafhi lying 20 kilometres south-



One man and his camel in Dahlak Kabir.

أحد فتيان جزيرة ''دهلك كبير'' مع جمله.

west of the city. In Addi Shaka village there is an artificial fish filled lake surrounded by potato farms and green pastures. Behind the lake is the small village of Zager with coffee farms and green forests full of gazelles, monkeys and bustards. Asmara is considered one of the highland cities as it is 8366 kilometres above sea level. Therefore, visitors may feel from time to time that there is less oxygen and need to take a deep breath to compensate for the shortage. The weather ranges between cold and moderate in the months from November to January, or warm (at most) in the hot months between April and June. The average temperature is about 17 centigrade in general. Touring the streets of the city we saw young people and women in Harnet Street where they stayed until the early hours of the morning in restaurants and cafeterias wearing jeans and the latest fashions Some of them spoke English, German and Italian among themselves. The most important square was Park Simitat with a monument of a sandal in the centre. The sandal is a symbol of great importance to the fighters who used to wear it during the struggle and fighting against hegemony and colonization. The Martyrs' Cemetery is not far from this monument.

The Caliphs mosque, which was built in 1900, lies close to the centre of Asmara. In front of the mosque is a spacious yard where some people pray on mats and wickers. This extremely popular mosque is surrounded by the most important markets of Asmara: the basket market, the spice market and the fruit and vegetable market. This is in addition to shops selling clothes, handicrafts, appliances etc. The palace of the governor Ferdinando Martini, built in 1905 and the Theatre of Asmara, are eye-catching landmarks. Distinguished **>**

City Tourism



الوزير علي عبده القائم بأعمال وزارة الإعلام في إرتيريا مع مندوب المجلة. The Minister of Tourism Mr. Ali Abdu talks to our representative.

hotels were found in most of Amara's districts. The Intercontinental Hotel close to the airport is the only five star hotel. Travolo Alaska, Expo and Polonia Hotels are found in the luxurious district of Alaska in addition to many other important hotels including Sunshine, Savanna, Impasewire and others – mostly three star.

Eritrean tourism is safe

Eritrea's Tourism Minister is a remarkable young woman, rigorous, kind and refined called Amina Nurhussein who provided as with a fascinating insight into the country's policy on tourism.

"The Eritrean government gives priority to tourist investment projects aimed at the development of Eritrea's tourism infrastructure. Those projects include the building of hotels and resorts throughout the country or construction of new airports such as Mussawa International Airport which is about to be inaugurated and operational. Priority is also given to restoring the railway track through the mountains and rough areas. We also want to attract international bodies to excavate and restore antiquities in addition to maintaining and taking care of the old buildings including churches and mosques. Establishment of tourism education institutions and updating and reviewing Arab and foreign investmentrelated laws is another important activity. In general, we want to encourage and facilitate investment procedures. Tangible achievements will be witnessed within two years from now".

Mussawa, the gate of Islam to Africa

Mussawa the capital of the North Red Sea Region is one of the oldest ports on the Red Sea. In the past it was called Basea; the Tegrenea speaking people call it Battea. The name Mussawa was exclusive to the island known as Ras Meder and now encompasses the suburbs as well. The influence of the Umayyads reached Mussawa which they dominated. A sultanate loyal to the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad emerged. In another era Mussawa was a state under Makkah (Mecca); then it was ruled by Jeddah. In more recent times Mussawa was an extension of the kingdoms of Beja. Later it became part of the Islamic-type sultanates and finally the Funj (Alsaltana Alzarga) Sultanate in Sennar in the Sudan between 1504-1820 A. D.

Mussawa and the islands related to have played an important historical role during the Arab migrations, particularly the Islamic ones. In 612 A. D. 132 of the Qurush prophets (PBUH) companions and 53 Yemeni companions migrated to Mussawa and landed in Ras Meder which is in the present-day port of Mussawa. They built a small mosque and covered a wide area in front with tiles called the Sahaba Rest Place. Muslims say their two Eid prayers in this yard. It is considered a good omen because it was the first foothold of the prophet (PBUH) companions on Eritrean soil where they prayed when they landed.

The Sahaba Rest Place in Ras Meder is a small building. There is a platform with a small dome on top. The building is 3.4 metres square. In front is a spacious paved yard surrounded by a wall of about half a metre in height. We did not come across a single guard or tour guide at this important site and we requested the Minister of Tourism to take care of the first foothold of Muslims in Africa at the Ras Meder Rest Place as this would boost tourism in the country. She kindly promised to consider our remarks.

Mussawa has many mosques with unique Islamic architectural styles and of course many modern mosques. The most important of the historic mosques is the Abu Hanifa mosque which dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century i.e. eight hundred years ago.

Mussawa, the Harbour and Toursit City

Our journey from Asmara to Mussawa, which took about two hours, needed a skillful and attentive driver. The smooth paved road encircling the edges of the mountains, which was built by the Italians, tempts any driver to drive fast. The spectacular nature scenes were enchanting and enthralling. The red colour of the soil provided a natural backdrop to the green colour as we drove though villages, scattered here and there with their buildings, churches and mosques. At the beginning of the road there was Emba Debre Bizen abbey, a church hanging high on the top of the mountain on a very steep protrusion. Then we came to the town of Gindaa famous for the local dish Kabrito. After that there was a zigzag road at the town of Dongola which provides the whole of Eritrea with the mineral water from its fountains in the plain of Separgoma overlooked by the castle of Sahatit. After a while we reached the island of Tawalot - one of the two islands, linked by a land road, forming the city of Mussawa.

Going from Asmara to Mussawa a journey in reverse: down from a plateau of a height of 8366 above sea level to sea level. In contrast is the increasing temperature as the difference between the two cities is about 15-20 centigrade. This makes Mussawa is a coastal summer resort throughout the year.

Mussawa is important because in encapsulates vital features which support the Eritrean economy such as the port and coastal and religious tourism. The seaport of Mussawa is the first and main inlet on the Red Sea for the transport of passengers and goods to and from Eritrea. It provides the same services for neighbouring countries as well. This →

effectively enhances commerce and tourism in the country. Mussawa, and its related islands are the most famous Eritrean cities for both coastal and religious tourism. The beach of Gurgusum is full of holidaymakers who move along the coast gleefully. They play coast and sea sports and swim in the pure sea water. Holidaymakers also enjoy the comfort of the services and facilities. We saw a Bedouin leading a camel while people rushed to take photos with him against a backdrop of umbrellas strewn along the beach.

The old town is one of the most significant landmarks of Mussawa, which maintains its distinctive ancient architectural style. It attracts visitors and it has many shops selling gifts and souvenirs. In the old town there are many restaurants where visitors enjoy popular Eritrean dishes like the langera and zagni. These dishes consist of small pieces of meat mixed with hot chilis of specific flavour placed on a special kind of soft bread called kisra made of sorghum flour, distinct for its pleasantly hot and acidulous taste. Mussawa is witnessing modern touristic architectural development as investors and businessmen race to build modern hotels. To add greater momentum to the pace of trade and tourism preparations are underway to inaugurate Mussawa International Airport. We were told by captain Asris Araya the President of Eritrean Airways that it is 15 kilometres north west of Mussawa. In an area with many professional fishermen, the new airport is expected to make a significant contribution to shrimp and fish exports.

> مع سکان جزيرة ''دهلك کبير''. With the folks of Dahlak Kabir.

The World of Eritrean Islands

Eritrea has 354 islands spread along a coast of 1200 kilometres including the Dahlak archipelago made up of more than 100 islands, four of which are inhabited. Dahlak Kabir and Dahlak Sagir are the most significant islands. Historical records describe their importance especially after the Islamic invasion. They were sanctuaries for many who deserted Arabia looking for trade, sustenance and a new home away from the calamities of wars and famines of Arabia and the Islamic world. Those early immigrants brought civilization and knowledge to the islands and Dahlak soon became a beacon for the teaching of religion attracting students from north Africa.

We sailed to Dahlak

Our companion Mr. Mohamed Othman Musa accompanied us to the office of the Commander of the Eritrean Naval Forces in Mussawa. Once again the office was unguarded apart from a secretary in military uniform. He introduced himself in very modestly saying: "I am Hummad Mohamed Karikari, Commander of the Eritrean Naval Forces". We spoke until the time came to move to the harbour where a big boat was arranged to take us to Dahlak Kabir island 60kms from Mussawa.

During the voyage the general told us about the sea. Mr. Karikari's stories were so interesting that we hardly felt 75 minutes had gone by before we reached the island. Before we arrived we noticed some drowned ships, barges and boats between some islands of the archipelago as witnesses of the historical marine battles which took place there.

As soon as we landed we began to walk around the tourist area constructed by the command of the marine forces. The area has many furnished, air-conditioned chalets equipped with all necessities except heaters, which are provided by the sun beams on water pipes. We met General Karikari again who arranged a car which took us around the most important areas of Dahlak Kabir island, 120 kilometres long 60 kilometres wide and permanently ►





The investment policy considers provision of all facilities to investors through facilitation of banking procedures and flexibility for dealing in hard currency. Additionally, the government offers adequate guarantees to investors since Eritrea is a member of the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank and Hague Convention of International Disputes. Mr. Ahmed enumerated the investment opportunities available in Eritrea saying: "The door is open wide to both Arab and foreign investment for the establishment of hotels, resorts, restaurants, diving centres, marine sports, sea cruises, health clubs, conference and meetings centers, golf clubs and sports and recreation centers".

inhabited by 2600 people. Most of the paved roads have macadamized parts.

We visited the village of Dir Bisht and talked to men, women and children. Shepherds looked after sheep and camels, some of the people were fishermen and there were a small number of farmers. They rely on wells for drinking water. Close to this village is the cemetery of Persian Muslims with Quranic verses inscribed on some of the gravestones. Some old wells used by Muslims can be found near the coast. In total there are 365 wells on the islands.

This four hour tour took as inside the grassy island following the herds of gazelle which run freely. We also noticed the stretched splendid virgin beaches of white sand in contrast to the pure sea water. The waters are rich in gardens of coral reefs and various shapes and forms of marine life. Despite the tremendous potential there has been no investment in tourism even though the road to development is paved with roses. Feasibility studies submitted by Italian concerns are being considered by the Eritrean authorities. We further learned that there is a project to construct an airport on the island which will begin shortly.

Touristic Investment in Eritrea

Our visit to Asmara, Mussawa and Dahlak along with the information we gathered about the other tourist sites we did not visit, reflected realistic promising proposals to develop the splendor and beauty of the country. This prompted us to explore the opportunities for investment in tourism and the priority which must be accorded to it by the state. We enquired whether the government provided incentives to attract local, Arab and foreign investors.

Mr. Abdallah Yasin Ahmed, head of the Promotion Section in the Administrative Centre for Investment in Eritrea told us that the government encourages the participation of the private sector in the projects of tourism



The graveyard of the Persian Muslims in Dahlak Kabir.

مقابر المسلمين الفرس في جزيرة ''دهلك كبير''.

investment and development parallel with private sector ventures The government has taken a further step by adopting a privatization policy for many of the already existing projects and institutions. The investment policy considers provision of all facilities to investors through facilitation of banking procedures and flexibility for dealing in hard currency. Additionally, the government offers adequate guarantees to investors since Eritrea is a member of the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the World Bank and Hague Convention of International Disputes. Mr. Ahmed enumerated the investment opportunities available in Eritrea saying: "The door is open wide to both Arab and foreign investment for the establishment of hotels, resorts, restaurants, diving centres, marine sports, sea cruises, health clubs, conference and meetings centers, golf clubs and sports and recreation centers". As far as the commercial aspect of investment

is concerned, Mr. Akbirom Tedla, the

Secretary-General of the Eritrean Chamber of Commerce said: "The country is easily accessible to investors and the transport of goods by sea, air and land. Land routes connect Eritrea through the shared borders with Djibouti, Ethiopia and the Sudan which are internally connected through a network of high quality roads throughout Eritrea. The ports of Mussawa and Assab are equipped to receive giant ships and unload them in record time. Eritrea also has many airports equipped to receive all passenger aircraft".

Filfil- Salamona- Mai Wuoi

Those are names given to areas or towns on one line. We traveled on the Filfil-Salamona route to reach the therapeutic sulphur fountains called Mai Wuoi. It was surprising to find the route more interesting than the destination because of the captivating natural environment. We traveled along the rough green mountainous road which is being paved by ➤



مسجد الصحابة المهاجرين برأس مدر في ميناء مصوع .

destination was Kohayto and its suburbs.

The mosque of the Companions of the Prophet at Massawa.

the Eritrean army in battle against solid rocks. The soldiers were singing and drawing inspiration from the songs as they worked with great zeal. Our journey took four hours despite the short distance of 60 kilometres. We saw monkeys jumping here and there and gazelles. Eventually, we reached Mai Wuoi.

Each sulphur fountain treats a specific ailment. We saw men and women wading in the fountains - some extremely hot. This journey made us taste one of the distinguished flavours of the North Red Sea Region full of rich tourist areas such as 'Jabal Gadam' with its abundant wildlife, especially the endangered gazelle of the Red Sea and various birds. There was also the bay of Zula where people were engaged in farming, fishing and raising livestock. Surfing is common in the pure water of Zula bay where it is possible to see desert ostriches, gazelles and African zebras. Other interesting areas include Dongola Tahtai, Dongola Laalai, Gindaa, Embatkala, Nefasit, the route of the British campaign from the sea to the highlands and the beaches of Ras Artau, Embermy, Adoulis and Ras Gobaa.

The Eritrean 'Everest'

We called the Southern Region the region of (supremacy) because it is the most densely populated and has the largest number of archaeological sites from the Adoulis civilization, the largest number of cities and finally, the most greenery and unique wonderful mountainous nature, valleys, lakes and tourist sites.

The mount of Embasewire, the highest in Eritrea, 9885 feet above sea level is also in the region. Although the capital is Mandefara our

Enroute from the capital Asmara we traveled through Dekmhare the second most important city in the region south-east of Asmara. Just ouside Dekmhare we saw Wakarte Church, built amid the mountains. Architecturally speaking it is the most architecturally beautiful church in the Southern Region. After Dekmhare we passed through the towns of Maaraba, Takhondaa and Segenite. Our driver Mr. Tasfai was almost flying on the top-quality paved road. Suddenly he turned left to drive on a rough macadamized road for about 15 kilometres until we reached the town of Kohayto.

In Kohayto we saw ancient ruins and antiquities some of them dating back to the era of Balgis the Queen of Sheba. The attractions included water reservoirs and irrigation canals. We also saw the ruins of Wagiru: ten pillars half of which are perpendicularly erect and half of them, with carved symbols, lying on the ground Our companion beat the ground with his feet and it reverberated with an echo which



منظر طبيعي في الجبال. A view of the mountains.

confirmed the magnitude of the depth beneath. It may be possible to excavate palaces, houses and probably a whole city underground in that site. The government is steadily striving to bring international archaeologists to the area and work is scheduled to begin soon. A few hundred kilometers away we visited a cemetery called 'The Egyptians Cemetery'. But neither our companion or the citizen on the site managed to convince us that it was indeed an Egyptian cemetery. We may need to refer the matter to Mr. El-Dassuqi Faid, the Egyptian ambassador to Eritrea for his knowledge and experience.

The Media in Eritrea

Towards the end of our visit we had a wonderful impression of Eritrea and predicted a prosperous future for this beautiful country. That is when we asked a crucial question: What is the point of having a beautiful country with tremendous tourist potential if these attractions are not given the maximum publicity in the **>**

منظر من أحد نوافذ فندق ''البحر الأحمر'' في مصوع. The view from the Red Sea Hotel in Massawa.



local, regional and international media, so tourist dollars can bring in revenue for the state.

In reply to this question Ali Abdu the first man in charge of the media in Eritrea said: "Eritrea is a country of beautiful features and we work to develop our local and international media within the resources available to us. We publish newspapers in Arabic, English and Tegrenea. We have a news agency and a local TV station in addition to a satellite TV station broadcasting in Arabic, English, Tegrenea and Tegre aiming to contact Eritreans abroad. This will unite Eritreans inside and outside the country and introduce our culture through media directed at foreigners.

We have vast experience in the broadcast media with three stations, one in Arabic with news in local Belain, Kunama, and Hadareb. The second one broadcasts in Tegrenea, Tegre, Nara and Afar. The third is FM in Arabic, Tegrenea and English. All of these radio and television stations are state-owned and administered and we strive to cover the six continents where our broadcasts comprehensively cover Eritrean traditions and customs, heritage and culture. We also constructed a major web site in June, 2003 visited by about 350,000 people every month. We prepare and produce video tapes about all events, landmarks and Eritrean culture. For the travel media we have a special tourist magazine called Horizon.

Eritrea: How nice it is to come back to you!

Despite our relatively long journey of 15 days, we did not find enough time to visit the Region of Gash Barka, Ansaba and South of the Red Sea, plus many other areas in the regions we visited. It seems that is how Eritrea things are in Eritrea. There is a famous saying: 'whoever drinks from the Nile will definitely come back to it many times'. How nice it would be to return Eritrea to recall all the wonders we have seen and add new experiences from the splendid world of Eritrean tourism. See you on a new journey.

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Information about Eritrea.

Capital: Asmara

Most important ports: Mussawa and Assab

Shared borders: With Djibouti, Ethiopia and Sudan

Population: 3.50 million Approx. **Location:** East Africa (African Horn), Meridians of 36-43 East, Latitudes of 12-18 North

Area: 124320 Sq. Kilometres

Local Languages: Tegrenea, Tegri, Affar, Kanama, Saho, Belain, Hadareb, Nara, Foreign languages: Italian and English Regions: The Central, Southern, North Red Sea, South Red Sea, Gash Barka, Ansaba Provinces of the 6 regions: 55 provinces.

System of the rule: secular Currency: Nakfa Exchange rate: \$ USD 1 : 14-20 Nakfa.

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