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AN INSIDER'S HIT LIST



Sunshine state of mind

TENT WITH A VIEW

WHERE ARE WE? ABACA CAMP, DANAKIL, ETHIOPIA

WHY WE LOVE IT Dervla Murphy used to say Ethiopia gave her the sense of living in different centuries simultaneously. In the Danakil, the great desert depression that lies in the east of the country, you feel it might be the very first century, even the first day, before God got around to filling in the empty spaces with fussy details like hills, vegetation and rivers. The landscapes are skeletal, elemental, thrilling and vast. Its inhabitants, the aloof Afar tribesmen, live in goat-skin tents like upturned coracles and control the salt trade that has been a feature of this place since the beginning of time. This is the northernmost point of the Main Ethiopian Rift, where the earth's crust is breaking apart. In ancient calderas the desert becomes a kaleidoscope of mineral colour as fissures and fistulas, hot springs and geysers, bubble and toil. Further off stands a volcano whose lava lake is a spectacular cauldron of rumbling fire. An hour or so from that spectacle is Abaca, the first camp of this calibre in this part of the world. As the desert dusk gathers, it seems as unreal as a mirage. offering simple pleasures in a wild place: flush loos and a bucket shower, chilled wine and a fine dinner of grilled fish and salads, comfortable beds pulled outside so you can sleep under a blanket of stars. And in the morning when you awake, camel caravans are passing, silently, on those great padded feet as they carry the blocks of salt towards the Highlands, towards civilisation, in a trade that once helped to make the Queen of Sheba rich. STANLEY STEWART *Book Abaca Camp through Journeys by Design* (+44 1273 623790; www.journeysbydesign.com) from £600 per person per night full board, with a recommended three-night stay

