



THE GARDEN CITY ASMARA

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Once sitting at Casa Degli Italiana here in this elegant capital of Eritrea, an Irish tourist asked me if Asmara meant to be 'the garden of peace'. Absolutely, as he had no information about peace and tranquillity prevailing in the city, for him, it is an easily inexpressible city of innocent people, city of flesh angels, unique home for exciting Kaleidoscope beauties and peace.

He confirmed this after he visited Asmara in 2008. And he attested that this was an event which changed his perception completely. With its broad malls lined with palms and bordered with colourful blooms, its busy markets and its elegant Italianate buildings, Asmara is a cosmopolitan capital that brings a breath of Mediterranean sophisticated to Africa. For this is why Asmara is the right place for chasing ecstatic cultural mixes, virgin norms of religious-livelihood, eye-capturing art deco buildings, modernized cosmopolitan heritages are, as it is impossible to decipher all, triumphantly, among the best this replica de Roma has been accommodating to visitors of all interests.

In the dawn hours, Asmara's life is very exotic. As the renowned Eritrean author, Beyene Haile, has cited in his book titled 'Tsibit Ba'hgu', in dawn hours, Asmara is busy to accommodate different prayers; the mosques' muezzin and heart-capturing mass liturgy from different churches overwhelm this romantic city. Eritrean mothers braided with differently styled hair teem in and outside of the church to participate in the congregation which continues for almost two hours accompanied by colourful spiritual performances.

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Similarly, faithful gathered from different places congregate in mosques for praying may Allah to guard this state and the world against destructive wars, perilous floods, hazardous climatic changes and other.

As the Eritrean mothers do dressed in white garb with shawl over to represent their Godly blessed innocence, similarly, the men in mosques also wear white jalabias to symbolize absolution of their bodies and their city from the evil-embedded acts like belligerence, abhorrent crime, religion-centred strikes and clan-oriented factions.

Meanwhile, contemporary Asmara was built as the capital of the Italian colony of Eritrea between 1890 and 1940 and is a mixture of Italian and Eritrean influences. Visitors are unfailingly struck by the Italian charm of its elegant villas, imposing palazzi and grandiose Art Deco cinemas. But, of course, another Asmara exists among the market stalls and the brightly painted houses. Assuredly, mysterious *shuks*, redolent with the scent of spices, provide easily unperceivable beauties to the city additionally.

Especially on Saturday, Asmara renowned avenues are busy to satiate different sellers and buyers demand under the blue clear sky; hot exchange and bargaining skills boredom life, and soon, replace for visitors who were suffering from existential vacuum with new perspectives of multi-colored life scenes. Extended their commodities on the tiled pavements, smiley faces of the sellers and buyers add heart capturing style to the livelihood norms Asmara has. In addition to this, among Asmara's prideful ingredients which escort your stay in this city of tranquillity with unforgettable memories are the long established workshops of silver and brass smiths settle easily with newer shops displaying leather wares, brightly colored fabrics and other distinctive merchandise. Next to, and beside with, the most famous shops of gold-smiths, lies Alkulafae, Al-Rashedin mosque, one of Eritrea's most sacred Islamic shrines. It was built in 1900 from Dekemhare travertine and Carrara marble and is located near the covered markets.

Similarly, the prettily styled lady of the Rosary Church complex also known as "La Cathedral" dominates a long block along Liberty Avenue. Built in 1922 to an unmistakable Italian design,

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the cathedral is a major land mark. Its prominent bell tower and school buildings were built in the Florentine style and patterned after an Italian cloister. Access to the bell tower is permitted. Steps of Cathedral are love creators where multi-pluralism of youngsters is ready for exhibit. Undoubtedly, in summer especially, it harbours pacific youngsters who chat vociferously circumscribed with Angels of mercies, gods of very fine climate and Samaritans for ecstatic life mixes.

As interested culturalist, I am addicted to pace through Harnet Avenue, a street lined with trees as resplendent as those in Berlin's Unter Den Linden. The artistically well designed buildings take my heart by a stormy joyous for they have been waving the banner of contrast and harmony. Over this, Harnet, in a vernacular language- Tigrigna represents 'Liberation.' As one Eritrean short-story teller exposed, name of this Avenue is, as I believe, right, and stands to the easily founded and undeniable Eritreans comprehension about liberation.

This Avenue is, for instance, bordered with differently positioned important buildings. Truly speaking, currently, having well educated and qualified human resources, an administrative mechanism which possess transparency, accountability and judiciousness, home of justice which exerts its integrated effort to avoid moral complexities and failures, are, indisputably, the most valued pillars for building a nation on solid ground in the way that guarantees all nationals rights. Therefore, to remind every visitor to, and resident in, Asmara, Harnet Avenue comprises buildings of these three pivotal institutions education, administration and justice.

Positioned in the Southerly founded location of this Avenue, the "F" styled building of the Ministry of Education takes panoramic glance of a new stranger. With a halted O'clock on the entering wide doors, this building has been remained among the prideful tiara Asmara has. As home of intermittently flopped temptations to cancel Eritrea as independent state during 1960s, now, it is engulfing visitors to endless reminiscences of long political adventure in comparison with its post-independent vital endeavours to ascertain educational opportunities for all nationals unequivocally.

Meanwhile, empires leave their distinctive mark. The gothicrevival public buildings in the centre of Mumbai could only have been created by the British, and the stuccoed classical buildings in Pondicherry look distinctively French. Asmara is the capital of Eritrea, that much fought-over land in the Horn of Africa that was occupied in the 1880s by the new kingdom of Italy as a springboard for conquering Abyssinia. Mussolini finally and brutally realized this belated imperial ambition in 1935-36, which was when concerted efforts began to make Asmara into an important city to attract Italian immigrants. It all ended in 1941 when the British army arrived. What was achieved at Asmara has become known only since Eritrea secured independence on

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May 24, 1991.

However, the legacies Asmara has not to be related only with the Italians marks of buildings. Over it, in view of all this, it might be expected that we modern Eritreans to reject the legacy of our former Italian conquerors. Impressively, however, the Eritrean government has promoted the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project to look after Asmara's architecture and to seek world heritage status for the city. Just as the Soviet government restored Tsarist palaces after 2nd World War because they were built by ordinary Russians, so we Eritreans have indecipherable reasons to consider that Asmara belongs to us and is something to be proud of. As Naigzy Gebremedhin, one of the authors of a book titled 'Asmara: Africa's Modernest City', has written, 'the architecture of Asmara is being preserved because it celebrates the labour of thousands of Eritreans.

Eritreans have appropriated, completely and unequivocally, the colonial architecture in their capital city. This appropriation has never implied minimization of the evils committed by fascist Italy in Eritrea ... But they no longer harbour any quarrel with the buildings that have survived.' Such mature wisdom contrasts with the way the Irish Republic used to treat Georgian Dublin or the attitude of French Canadians to British buildings in Quebec City.

To assure you, as any interested national can witness, the resurrection of Asmara has been accelerating at appreciative level; and truly, as one writer attested, post-independent Asmara has been expanding to capture surrounding villages. Over this, its peace, romantic, nostalgic and heart-capturing life of Asmara shone during this year sport festivities as the ecstatic soccer moment we had for two weeks to host the [5th CECAFA's tournament](#) . Sure, I, apparently give witness that this 'Garden City' was, and has been continuing to give prolific fruits of development, friendship, hospitability, and peace and tranquillity.

I adore you Asmara.