

# Yemen's Island of Untouched Beauty

One of the Yemen's greatest attractions is the remote Socotra Island, which is not used to crowds of tourists at all. Some 6 million years ago, Socotra got separated from the mainland, and ever since, the life has been developing here in its own way. According to scientific research, there are 700 species of plants and animals which are not to be found anywhere else on the planet.

The coastal plains tend to be fairly arid and vegetation is sparse. The foothills of the mountains display a shrubby landscape with incense trees and bizarre bottle-trunked trees. The species for which the island is renowned in evergreen woodland over the centre and east of the island and is the dominant tree in some areas.



The island is, also, one of the most important homes for rare birds in the Middle East, with over a hundred species of which seven are endemic. Around the coasts are large numbers of dolphins and some whales, in particular sperm whales.

Positioned near the southern gateway to the Red Sea, Socotra has been famous since ancient times. By the time of Abraham, traders from Egypt, Africa, India and Arabia called in here.

Ancient Egypt knew Socotra as the Island of the Genie – the spirit of the sacred tree, whose gum they used for mummification, temple offerings and medicine. In the first century AD the Greeks called Socotra, Dioscoridea. The Hadramout kingdom traded here out of Qana, near present-day Bir Ali, and later the Himyarites sailed here from Muza on the Red Sea.

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Today there is only one airport on Socotra. Locals are quite unused to receiving any attention from the outside world and thus anyone who arrives here is likely to draw a lot of attention. Besides the unique flora and fauna the great tourist potential of Socotra are also its numerous wonderful beaches that are completely untouched. Recently, Socotra found itself in the spotlight when its name appeared on the shortlist of the New Seven Wonders of the World contest. Also, it was named the 'New York Times travel destination of the year 2006'.

The local way of life is very simple; no industry, not much agriculture, no quarrels or fights. Socotra is in its own way a striking place – not particularly booming with night life, yet a welcome haven of peace and

quiet.

Photos: TR, Flickr

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