

Have you heard of the Island of Socotra?



Photo Credit: The exams made simple

Socotra, Yemen, also referred to as the Dragon's Blood Island, is a remote archipelago or a collection of islands located in the Arabian sea. It lies between Africa and Arabia and is home to numerous rare plants and species. This island is situated in the Gulf of Aden which is one of the busiest shipping routes, all ships transporting goods between Europe as Asia must pass through this waterway. Due to its strategic position and pristine beauty, the island has been involved in numerous conflicts over the years.

Recently it got caught up in the "Forgotten War" in Yemen. UAE forces supporting a separatist group in Yemen seized control of Socotra and staged a 'full-fledged coup' in order to fulfil their geopolitical ambitions. To read more about the Yemeni war [click here](#).

What's unique about this Island?

Socotra is considered to be a gem of flora and fauna in the midst of the Arabian sea. It boasts 825 plant species, a large number of which are endemic which means that they are native to the island and don't exist elsewhere. These plants include the Desert Rose and the Dragon's Blood tree which was believed to give out dragon's blood in the form of red sap. Furthermore, the island has a panoply of exotic endemic animals including the Ghost crab and the Golden-Winged grosbeak. What's quite unusual is that besides the human inhabitants on the island, bats are the only other mammals found to be living in the rocky caves of Socotra. Until now, the island has been able to safeguard and maintain its rare ecological profile from conflicts such as the Yemini Civil Wars thanks to its isolated position.



The Dragon's Blood Tree

Why does Socotra need to be saved? The island is a UNESCO world heritage site and if damage continues, it may have to be added to the list of world heritage sights in danger. The trouble here began when UAE's interest in the island piqued. With its unique topography and proximity to the Gulf of Aden, the UAE believed it would be a great tourist spot with the added advantage of having direct control over one of the world's most important shipping routes. The UAE backed party recently took over Socotra and launched an attack with heavy weaponry on the island. The remote province that lies off the beaten path is sparsely populated with a population of 60,000 locals; however, this recent conflict has already started to wreak havoc with Socotra's biodiversity and ecosystem that is not accustomed to adapt to these changes.

Nonetheless, the natural habitat of Socotra has been deteriorating for a couple of years now owing to the private investment in the considerably 'exotic' island. Leisure sports have been conducted in ecologically sensitive locations in Socotra, which

destroyed coral reefs and disturbed the turtle nesting beaches. Additionally, the introduction of invasive species* -through uninspected cargo - such as goats - is causing problems. The island is home to the Dragon's Blood trees which take eons to grow and are a part of the island's identity itself, however, goats have begun to prey on the vulnerability of these trees and have been 'chomping down' on the young trees before they're able to grow. If the UAE's plans of modernizing Socotra -by building Dubai style resorts- materializes, the crystal waters and rare species are going to be ruined with the unrestrained development. A dramatic increase in people and cargo traffic will disrupt the otherwise serene island.

Experts have agreed that due to the political tension on the island caused by the numerous political parties and the UAE's aggressive interest in involving Socotra in its future business expansions, this island is going to be greatly exploited. In fact, it is on its path to turn into one of Yemen's greatest environmental disasters.

* These are species that are not native to a particular region and therefore damage the ecosystem and environment if introduced to this area.



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