

Information and Advice for Visitors and Tourists

About Soqatra



Welcome to Soqatra Island! The Friends of Soqatra has teamed up with your Soqotri tour guide to provide some extra information about the island and its people. We hope it helps you enjoy this unique island and enhance your experience whilst helping you to respect the islanders and their traditions.



At 3,625 km², Soqatra is the largest of 4 islands of the Soqatra Archipelago. It has an estimated population of 50,000 people. Soqatra is globally recognised for its unique flora and fauna, beautiful landscapes and the

diversity of its marine environment. It is perhaps most famous for forests of dragon's blood trees. It is thanks to the culture and traditions of Soqotri people that this unique landscape has been preserved.

Did You Know...?

- There are four islands in the Soqatra Archipelago. Soqatra itself is the largest, followed by Abd al Kuri and Samha ("The Brothers") and uninhabited Darsa.
- Soqatra was declared a World Heritage Site in 2008.
- The people of the Soqatra Archipelago have their own unique, unwritten language called Soqotri.
- 100% of the cave crustaceans, 90% of the reptiles, 60% of spiders and 37% of the plants of the Soqatra Archipelago are endemic (found nowhere else in the world).
- At 13.5km long, Soqatra has the longest cave of the Middle East.
- Around 370 people live on Abd al Kuri and less than 200 on Samha.
- During the monsoon winds the people of Abd al Kuri and Samha are completely isolated, as was Soqatra before its runway was built in 1999.
- Abd al-Kuri islanders often spend time on the mainland due to the harshness of life on their island, especially the lack of sweet water.



About Friends of Soqatra

The Friends of Soqatra is a UK registered charity established in 2001 (charity number 1097546). We are a small group of volunteers made up of scientists, researchers, development specialists and Soqatra enthusiasts with many years of combined experience of working on Soqatra.



Friends of Soqatra supports and carries out a wide variety of small but high-impact projects across the islands. Through our projects we aim to:

- **Promote the sustainable use and conservation of the natural environment of the Soqatra island group.**
- **Raise awareness of the Archipelago's biodiversity and the unique culture and language of the islanders.**
- **Help improve the quality of life of the island communities and support their traditional land management practices.**

We have members in Soqatra, Yemen, Oman, the UAE, Jordan, USA, UK and the EU.

100% of our proceeds and membership fees are spent on our projects.

Our Past and Current Projects Include:

- Fighting serious soil erosion problems in Homhil Protected Area.
- Supporting the Soqatra Folk Museum in Hallah.
- A donation of sewing machines to the Local Councils and The Woman's Association of Soqatra (Jam'iyah Soqatra An-Nisawiya).
- Relief projects following the devastating cyclones in 2015 including the mending of fishing boats and the rebuilding and renovation of houses.
- Assisting the regeneration of Boswellia trees in Momi.
- Production of an annual newsletter, Tayf, with news and research related to Soqatra. Copies are sent to the island for free and are printed in English and Arabic.



General Information and Advice for Visitors and Tourists (1)

Miranda Morris

Alcohol

Alcohol is not found on the island and taking your own is strongly discouraged. Non-alcoholic beer is often available in the market.

Clothing [especially outside the capital, Hadiboh]

- Men

Shorts for men are generally frowned upon - they are seen as underpants and indecent unless covered with another garment. T-shirts and short-sleeved shirts are perfectly acceptable, as are trousers rolled up to the knee. Flip flops for wear around the house and in the wash room are useful.

- Women

As a general rule women should cover themselves from the ankle upwards and from below the forearm upwards. Trousers are acceptable but something loose should be worn over them to hide the outline of the buttocks. It is appreciated if some sort of headscarf is worn.

Customs and Courtesy

Foreigners in general have an ambiguous reputation on the island, and whereas the larger settlements of the coast are more used to seeing people from overseas (as are the mainland Yemenis who now live and work on the island), the people of the interior are often uncertain and nervous of those from outside the island.

It is important for all of us and for the future development of the island that we do our best not to upset those on whose full and friendly co-operation we depend. For this reason, the following notes are given as a guideline to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour on

our part.

Soqotrans are extremely courteous and respect the ability to remain so even under severe provocation; it is important that however tired or frustrated you might feel that you do not let this appear in your behaviour towards Soqotrans.

It must be always remembered that Soqatra is a Muslim country, and a devout one. Your Soqotran companions will expect to stop to pray at noon, mid-afternoon, at sunset and at around 9 o'clock in the evening, and will wake you with the call to prayer at around 4 four o'clock in the morning! This rarely takes more than a quarter of an hour. Because it is essential to wash thoroughly before praying, this sometimes means that you will stop before these times in order to be near a source of water. Look on it as an enforced, potentially pleasant break, and if you are fed up at the delay, try not to show it.

All those who have come to Soqatra agree that the two most marked characteristics of the people of Soqatra are their generosity and courtesy. For their part, they often find us abrupt and impatient. It is important that when people meet they go through the formal and lengthy greeting ceremony before discussing the matter in hand, and again on departing. Try and be patient with this, and make a point of politely shaking the hand of every person present (including children); however, see below:

(For men) Women - especially young women - might or might not expect to have their hand shaken. Let them take the lead. In general, Soqotran women are nervous



General Information and Advice for Visitors and Tourists (2)

of foreign men, so it is important that you treat any women you see or meet with respect, and do not stare at them or appear overly interested in them.

(For women) Some Soqotran men have come to believe that it is wrong to shake the hand of a woman. Again, let them take the lead.

Elderly people are held in special respect on the island and you should follow this custom.

Do not show your admiration too markedly for anything you see, as you are likely to have it offered to you as a gift.

You are likely to be invited into Soqotran homes - this can be a house, a hut, a cave, or an area marked out with rocks on the sand. Whichever it is, it is good manners to remove your shoes before stepping over the threshold into their private space. It is then normal to shake the hand of all those present, and then sit down with legs crossed or folded underneath the body.

Tea will be offered: it is polite to accept the first glass, a second can be refused with an upheld hand or shake of the head, saying "*shukran*" ('*thank you, no*').

You will frequently be asked to join Soqotrans in a meal. Please remember that they can ill afford to offer such hospitality, however pressing they might seem: it is their culture which insists that hospitality should always be offered to a stranger or visitor. You can offer to pay for a meal you eat: this may be refused or may be accepted, but such an offer is generally appreciated. If you

consider that a 50 kg sack of rice or flour costs around YR6,000, and then add the effort of fetching water and firewood, you can generally work out an appropriate sum to offer. Be guided by your Soqotran companions and guides.

Gifts

You will not be pursued everywhere by children asking for 'presents' as happens elsewhere in parts of the world (including mainland Yemen). It is important that you do not encourage this habit by giving gifts indiscriminately to children you happen to come across. However, small gifts which are useful or of interest to schoolchildren (posters, postcards, pencils, booklets, badges and so on) can be left at schools or with seniors of the area you are visiting to show your goodwill.

Latrines

Many of the Hadibo and Qalansiyah houses have long-drop lavatories. It is important to remember not to put anything down these that might interfere with the natural composting / drying process (ie. disinfectant).

In the field you will soon notice that your every move in this direction is closely observed by the Egyptian vultures which will rapidly clean up anything you have left behind! Be sure to move well away from any habitation, water or large shade-providing tree to relieve yourself, and take away with you any lavatory paper you might use.

Photography

Soqotrans are getting used to foreigners taking photographs of themselves, views, plants and buildings.



General Information and Advice for Visitors and Tourists (3)

However, it is strongly encouraged that you do not photograph any person without first asking their permission, especially women. To do so could cause distress and confrontation.

Rubbish

We must all do our best to keep Soqatra rubbish free. Bring all your rubbish back to Hadibo with you and dispose of it properly there. Be scrupulous about removing every trace of any picnic or camping site you might use.

Shopping and Souvenirs

Where possible you should try to purchase goods - and especially food - on the island to help the local economy, rather than bring everything with you from home or from the mainland.

Locally-made souvenirs are available in Hadiboh and in the market. The removal of shells, stones, plants and so on is absolutely forbidden, and any such items will be taken away from you at the airport.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected anywhere on the island, nor should this custom be introduced. However, a gift or an extra sum of money for 'help beyond the call of duty' could be offered and will usually be appreciated.

Water In the Field

When selecting a campsite, it is considerate and encouraged to not choose a spot close to any water source - your presence is likely to make the women and

girls whose job it is to fetch water very nervous.

Do not forget that any body of water you see is likely to be an important source of drinking water for the people of the area. It is perfectly acceptable to fill a water container and use this for washing (well away from the water), but it is not normally acceptable to jump in and wash in the water itself, unless invited to do so.

Water is extremely short in most areas of Soqatra, and outside Hadiboh you should try and take with you most of what you will consume yourself, rather than using up the scarce resources of the Soqotrans.

Water For Washing

You will often be faced with a lack of water for washing. A supply of baby wipes or saturated tissues (such as 'Wet Ones' - but not the ones with an added soap ingredient) do the job adequately, interspersed with good washes in Hadiboh.

Weather

Although it is generally hot and sunny, in the winter rainy season and in the winds of the monsoon it can feel surprisingly cold at night, especially in the high mountains, so it is a good idea to bring a sweater. For winter visits it can be useful to bring a light waterproof, even an umbrella!



The Soqotri language is one of a group of six, called the Modern South Arabian Languages (MSAL). The others are Mahri, Bathari, Hobyot, Harsūsi and Shahri (also called Jibbali). They are unwritten Semitic languages, and they represent the last vestiges of a group of closely-related Southern Semitic languages (Arabic is a Central / Northern Semitic language). They are the remnants of a pre-Arabic substrata believed to have once stretched over the whole of southern Arabia and across the Red Sea, into the highlands and littoral of East Africa, giving rise to the Ethio-Semitic languages such as Ge'ez, modern Amharic and Tigrinya. They are among the oldest continuously spoken Semitic languages, noted for their retention of ancient Semitic phonological and morphological features that have disappeared from other Semitic languages, and for innovations not attested in other branches of Semitic.

Today the MSAL are spoken by minority populations in southern and eastern Yemen, western Oman and on Soqatra. The name 'Modern South Arabian Languages' is slightly misleading, as these languages are not dialects of Arabic. Indeed, they are all incomprehensible to an Arabic speaker.

In common with the other MSA languages, Soqotri possesses a rich oral tradition, but no written one. The language with its rich corpus of poetry and song embody the expertise and the unique cultural identity of generations of islanders. The self-sufficient communities of Soqatra have lived close to the natural environment for centuries, and of necessity have relied directly on it, not only for their survival, but also for their cultural and spiritual needs. They have developed a deep

and detailed knowledge of local ecosystems, and have transmitted this across the generations. It is important to remember that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature, and that the language of the island is just as important as its famous flora and fauna.

The intimate relationship between language and culture, and the importance of maintaining a healthy diversity in both, is increasingly appreciated, and UNESCO, in recognition of this, has established the UNESCO Endangered Languages Program. Its website states: "Linguistic diversity is the store of knowledge about how to maintain and use sustainably some of the most diverse, but also most vulnerable, environments. With the death of each language, this knowledge dies too."

Today, Soqotri, like all the other MSAL languages, is steadily falling into disuse, muffled by a spreading blanket of Arabic. A major factor in this decline is the rapid spread of universal education – in Arabic. As more girls attend school, the conservative effect commonly exerted on language by women and the home is eroded. Today most of those who would once have spoken a MSA language now speak Arabic as well, or instead. Importantly, they also read and write Arabic. And here we have the main reason for the collapse of these languages: their lack of any written form. This means that with the death of their speakers, the languages cease to exist.

However, today, many people on Soqatra are experimenting with writing their language in a modified



Arabic alphabet: adding dots and dashes and other symbols to an original Arabic letter-form to express those sounds which do not occur in Arabic. If a script for Soqotri is successfully developed and widely adopted by islanders, then the language and the very special culture and unique expertise it encapsulates have a chance.

The continued survival of all of the MSAL languages depends on their ability to hold their own against the Arabic that dominates their societies. And this depends firstly, on the enthusiasm of speakers to use their

language amongst themselves and in the home, and secondly, on there being enough people from a language community interested in speaking and in studying their language. School, the media, the internet and the drift towards towns where Arabic is the lingua franca, have already compromised the former. Only time will show how many islanders have the enthusiasm for speaking, writing and studying Soqotri which is necessary to keep their language alive.



The Traditional Way of Life (1)

Miranda Morris

Livestock rearing and fishing were two of the most important economic activities that support the people of Soqatra. Where there was adequate water and soil, this was supplemented by date-palm cultivation.

The principal livestock of the island were goats, with cattle being herded in the central and eastern mountains, and sheep along the coast and in the drier eastern and western highlands. In the past, donkeys and camels were reared as baggage animals, though, in areas of the northern and southern coasts, some camels were also raised for milk. Herders were frequently on the move with their animals in pursuit of grazing and water, and in the long dry season when the pastures were grazed bare, much time was spent gathering foliage and dried herbage to feed the animals. Breeding was carefully managed to ensure that livestock gave birth at the beginning of the winter rainy season. Livestock were reared principally for milk, from which their owners extracted the butter oil which they traded for cereals and other necessities. This meant that most male young, of all species, were slaughtered soon after birth, so at this time of year the islanders had plenty of meat and milk.

Most people of the northern coast were full time fishermen, though many islanders fished seasonally. Today the artisanal fisheries target four principal resources: shark - primarily requiem sharks - kingfish, rock lobster and demersal reef fishes. The peak catches are from October to mid-December, and from February to April. Large pelagic fishes such as kingfish and various types of tuna, shallow and deep water demersal fishes, as well as small coastal pelagic fishes (such as anchovies, sardines and various types of herring) are

caught by net, long- and hand-line gear, trolling lines and fish traps. They are sold for local consumption or to visiting boats which transport them to overseas markets.

The earlier important trade in salted and dried fish and shark has declined, and the demand today is for fresh fish. During the summer south-west monsoon (May to September) when the wild seas are 'closed', most offshore fishing comes to an end, and the shallow demersal reef fishes (such as groupers, emperors, snappers, sweetlips and trevallies) migrate inshore to shallower waters where they are caught with fish-traps.

In the past people also dived for pearls and for mother-of-pearl shell, which were found in many of the lagoons, bays and sheltered reefs. The shells and the rare pearls were sold to visiting trade boats. Soqatra and Abd al-Kuri are important nesting sites for green turtles, and hawksbill, loggerhead and leatherback turtles also occur. These were once an important source of nourishment for islanders, but all turtles are now protected.

Many varieties of date-palm are cultivated on Soqatra. The dates are eaten fresh as well as dried, the dried dates being stored in goatskins. Apart from the honey robbed from wild bee nests, or wild fruits and the nectar sucked from flowers, dates were once the only source of sweetness on the island. Men climb the tall date-palms to fertilise the flowers and to harvest the fruit, supporting themselves on slings made from plaited cow hide. Date-palm plantations were communally owned as well as private, and there were penalties for allowing livestock to get into them. All the palms of any one area were harvested at the same time, so the many islanders



who owned no date-palms could travel from area to area gleaning fallen dates and working at the harvest in exchange for a share of the produce. In earlier years terraces were built for the cultivation of finger millet, and tobacco was also grown. In the larger villages and towns, some islanders planted small gardens and grew sweet potatoes, onions, all sorts of cucurbits and climbing beans, as well as bushes of basil to perfume the home.

In addition to dried and salted fish and butter oil, the islanders also traded plant products: aloe juice, frankincense gum and the resin of *Dracaena* ('dragon's blood') trees. Tamarind pods, wild oranges and the fruit of the spiny Christ's thorn plant, *Ziziphus spina-christi*, as well as certain edible roots and tubers were gathered for sale in local markets. Islanders made charcoal, quicklime and lime mortar and gathered and prepared timber. They fashioned wooden tools and shaped the highly valued herding sticks from the many hard woods of the island. Salt was harvested from the sea, and rock salt was gathered from caves. Women collected firewood for home use and for sale, and plaited date-palm fibre into all kinds of baskets and mats. They made fine mats from the skins of the larger animals, and they tanned and stitched other skins to make a variety of bags and satchels, and plaited fine leather threads to make highly-prized belts. They worked local clay by hand into pots of all sizes, and spun sheepswool to weave rugs for their own household use and for sale. Specialists

prepared medicinal and cosmetic mixtures from leaves, roots and fruits, and men worked goat horn to make handles for their precious knives. The civet cat was trapped and milked of the thick secretion that comes from its anal pouch; this material with its strong musky smell was in great demand overseas for the perfumery trade and was bought by the trading boats that went from Soqatra to East Africa, Aden and the Gulf. Cunning traps and snares were set for many different sorts of sea and land birds. At the right time of year the sheer sea cliffs were scaled in the dark to catch the plump shearwater nestlings that crouched on narrow ledges. At times of hunger, freshwater crabs and land snails were collected to stave off starvation.

Life was often hard, but when the winter rains came and the livestock gave birth, there came a time of plenty and relaxation. Weddings were arranged, and celebrations were held, with night-long singing and dancing. The islanders competed against each other in racing and leaping contests, but also in poetry. Poetry and song were part of everyday life on the island, a natural way of communicating with others, be they human, animal, spirits of the dead, jinn, sorcerers or the divine.

Much of this traditional way of way of life is now lost. However, one aspect of the island way of life remains unchanged: the islanders are still known for the warm welcome they give visitors.



Some Special Reptiles of Soqatra

Raquel Vasconcelos

In total, 31 species of reptiles have been recorded on Soqatra Archipelago, including 29 that are found nowhere else in the world. Of those, 35% are Threatened, Near Threatened or Data Deficient, including the dragon's blood tree gecko. This leaflet shows some that are endemic and easy to spot, all non-poisonous.



Günther's Racer

Dityopphis vivax

A relict nocturnal species. Harmless though viper-like in appearance. Eats mice.



Socotran Chameleon

Chamaeleo monachus

A relict nocturnal species. Near Threatened and listed in CITES. Aggressive if disturbed.



Socotra Skink

Trachylepis socotrana

Diurnal skink. Common and widespread, even in urban areas (rockwalls).



Socotra Giant Gecko

Haemodracon riebeckii

Nocturnal and found on vertical habitats (cliffs, trees). Leaf-shaped toes.



Arabian Leaf-toed Gecko

Hemidactylus homoeolepis

The most widespread and common nocturnal reptile; under rocks in the daytime.



Dragon's Blood Tree Gecko

Hemidactylus dracaenacolus

Nocturnal. Found only on the dragon's blood tree. Critically Endangered.



Mangrove Semaphore Gecko

Pristurus obsti

Diurnal and purely arboreal (living on trees). Very mimetic (camouflaged to look like tree bark).



Socotra Rock Gecko

Pristurus sokotranus

The commonest diurnal reptile. Rock-dwelling. Signals with the tail.



Blanford's Rock Gecko

Pristurus insignis

Large with long limbs. On boulders and cliffs. Also on wadis. Sleeps on branches.

Some Special Birds of Soqatra (1)

Ahmed Saeed Suleiman and Richard Porter

Over 220 species of birds have been recorded on Socotra, including 11 that are found nowhere else in the world. 5 are Globally Threatened, including the widespread Egyptian Vulture. Here are some that are special and familiar.



Egyptian Vulture

Neophron percnopterus

Wing-span 150cm. Tame. Globally endangered but common on Soqatra.



Socotra Buzzard

Buteo socotraensis

Wing-span 110cm. Found in the mountains and nests on cliffs. Soars effortlessly.



Common Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Wing-span 75cm. The smallest bird of prey on Soqatra. Feeds on insects and lizards.



Sooty Gull

Larus hemprichii

Wing-span 45cm. Common with other gulls along the coast, often follows fishing boats.



Laughing Dove

Spilopelia senegalensis

Wing-span 25cm. Widespread and very common where there are trees.



Socotra Scops Owl

Otus socotranus

Wing-span 21cm. Listen for its call at night: *woup-woup da-pwoorp*. Soqatra is the only place it is found in the world.



Forbes-Watson's Swift

Apus berliozi

Wing-span 17cm. The only swift likely to be seen – often in large flocks, though it is not common. Nests in caves.



Black-crowned Sparrow-lark

Eremopterix nigriceps

Wing-span 12cm. Can be seen in large flocks in sandy areas, often close to roads.



Socotra Cisticola

Cisticola haesitata

Wing-span 12cm. Small, dipping song-flight over bushes in coastal dunes. Only found in the world on Soqatra.

Some Special Birds of Soqatra (2)

For more information contact Ahmed Saeed Suleiman on Soqatra at qamhem@yahoo.com. For full bird identification on Soqatra we recommend: Birds of the Middle East by Porter & Aspinall. Friends of Soqatra thanks BirdLife International for help with this leaflet.



Socotra Warbler

Incana incana

Wing-span 11cm. Small and secretive, but widespread on Soqatra – the only place it is found in the world.



Socotra Sunbird

Nectarina balfouri

Wing-span 14cm. Only found in the world on Soqatra. Commonly seen taking nectar from flowers.



Socotra Grey Shrike

Lanius meridionalis

Wing-span 25cm. Eats large insects and lizards, which it impales on thorns for a 'larder.'



Brown-necked Raven

Corvus ruficollis

Wing-span 50cm. The only large, black bird on Soqatra. Near the airport is a good place to see it.



Socotra Starling

Onychognathus frater

Wing-span 30cm. Much rarer than the Somali Starling; Soqatra is the only place it is found in the world.



Somali Starling

Onychognathus blythii

Wing-span 35cm. Often seen in flocks flying over woods and villages. The female (here) has a grey head.



Socotra Sparrow

Passer insularis

Wing-span 15cm. Very common throughout Soqatra, the only place in the world that it is found. Often seen in flocks.



Socotra Golden-winged Grosbeak

Rhynchostruthus socotranus

Wing-span 15cm. Yemen's National bird. Cracks nuts with its bill.



Socotra Bunting

Emberiza socotrana

Wing-span 13cm. One of the rarest birds on Soqatra, the only place it is found in the world. It can be seen in the mountains.

Some Special Trees of Soqatra

Lisa Banfield and Sabina Knees

More than 100 of Soqatra's 807 plant species are trees. Many of them are found only on Soqatra and some are very rare. Here are some of the highlights and common species you'll see on your trip. The Ethnoflora of the Soqatra Archipelago (Miller & Morris 2004) is a main source of information.



Desert Rose / Tiriymo or Isfid

Adenium obesum

Endemic subspecies. One of Soqatra's famous bottle trees. Widespread and abundant across the island.



Sterculia / Bohiyn

Sterculia africana

Endemic variety. One of Soqatra's largest trees and an important food for livestock in dry periods.



Cucumber Tree / Qamhiyn

Dendrosicyos socotranus.

Endemic. A large bottle tree and the only tree species in the cucumber plant family.



Dragon's Blood Tree / A'arhiyib

Dracaena cinnabari

Soqatra's most famous species. The red resin has many uses including the decoration of pottery.



Jatropha / Sibru

Jatropha unicostata

One of the most common shrubs on the island. The sap is used to treat cuts, burns and bites but is poisonous if ingested.



Frankincense / Ameero

Boswellia

Soqatra has 7 *Boswellia* species, all are endemic. Frankincense is dried gum that is extracted from the bark.



Euphorbia / Imteh

Euphorbia arbuscula

Endemic. The latex of this tree is poisonous but can be used as a glue and insect deterrent.



Date Palm / Timirih

Phoenix dactylifera

Although not native the date palm is the most important tree for the islanders. Dates are a staple food on Soqatra.



Fig / Tiq

Ficus vasta

Found across the island and said to indicate the presence of water. The sticky latex is used to treat fractured bones.

Some Special Plants of Soqatra

Lisa Banfield and Sabina Knees

Soqatra is famous for its unique flora. While several of its trees are world famous, some of its smaller plants are just as interesting. Here are some plants that you may see during your visit. Many of Soqatra's plants are vulnerable to extinction; please do not disturb or collect any parts of plants, including seeds.



Aloe / Tayf

Endemic. Soqatra has 3 endemic species of *Aloe*. As with the famous *Aloe vera*, Soqatra's Aloes are valued for their medicinal uses.



Trichocalyx / Al'hal

Endemic. One of Soqatra's 13 endemic plant genera, with 2 species. The flowers are sucked for their sweet nectar.



Caralluma socotrana / Mish'hermihim

The deep-red flowering bloom of a *Caralluma* is one of the most attractive sights on Soqatra. The flowers and growing tips can be eaten.



Hibiscus / Diraffan

There are several endemic hibiscus shrubs on Soqatra. Be careful! If touched they shed star-shaped hairs that cause swelling and itching.



Euphorbia spiralis / Qisho

Endemic. Soqatra's only spiny succulent plant, with stems sometimes twisted into a spiral. The latex will cause skin to blister.



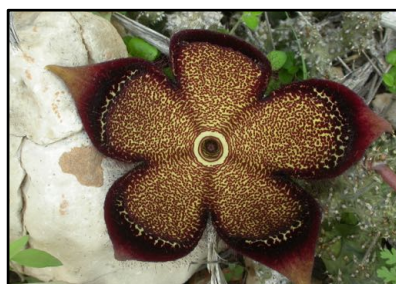
Argemone mexicana / Miranniha

Invasive species. The Mexican poppy is not native to Soqatra but dominates in some disturbed areas.



Senna holosericea / Feriro

Commonly seen legume. The dried, ground leaves are mixed with water and used as a digestive cleanser or laxative.



Edithcolea grandis / Mish'hermihim

Found among rocks and the base of shrubs in open woodland. A succulent with large, foul-smelling flowers. Also found in Africa.



Capparis cartilaginea / Lizafih

Easily noticed, untidy shrub that grows from cliffs and boulders around the island. Its large flowers attract honey bees.

"The Place of the Two Peaks"

Tony Miller, Sue Christie and Miranda Morris



At first glance the coastal area of the Di-Hamri Marine Protected Area appears somewhat low in plant diversity compared with other areas of Soqatra, including the cliffs of Bit Gobehir which rise dramatically from the shoreline. But a closer look reveals a remarkable richness of small plants with most attractive flowers in a variety of colours. Pinks, blues, whites and yellows sprinkle the sand and stones of the dramatic red cliffs.

Over 35 species of plants are present, of which 32 are endemic to Soqatra. Included is *Neuracanthus aculeatus*, a rare endemic (plant only found on Soqatra) which has its stronghold at Di-Hamri. Spend a few minutes walking over the site and see how many of the following plants you can spot. Be careful not to damage any of the plants; a hand lens will help you to appreciate the delicacy of many of the flowers.

Plants with Green Flowers



***Zaleya pentandra* / Hidis**
Rather nondescript, weedy plant with inconspicuous flowers. The leaves may be used to repair clay pottery.



***Cymbopogon jwarancusa* / Dhowtiynih**
Lemon-grass. Pieces of the green plant can be added to the fire to increase the flavour of the cooked food.

Plants with Blue Flowers



***Oldenlandia pulvinata* / Di Qezqaz**
Endemic. A cushion plant with pale blue or rarely white flowers. A very important fodder crop for small animals, with a sweet smell even when dried.

"The Place of the Two Peaks"

Plants with White Flowers



Aerva microphylla / Fe'

Endemic. This small shrub is widely distributed on coastal cliffs. The roots of both species are ground and can be used to treat eye complaints and as a hair dye.



Aerva javanica / Fe'

A medium-sized herb with cotton like flowers which is common throughout Soqatra and Arabia.



Neuracanthus aculeatus /
Hamahamo

Endemic. This low spiny subshrub is common at Di-Hamri but rare elsewhere. Dead plants can be used as tinder and fire lighters.



Convolvulus rhynchospermus /
Noy

Endemic. A mat-forming plant with silvery leaves. An important animal food.



Convolvulus sp.

A small annual herb still requiring identification.



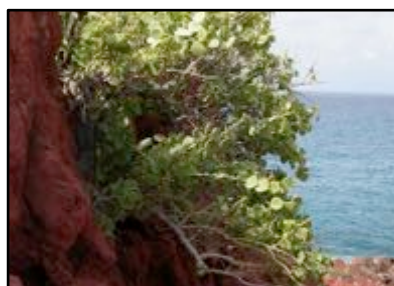
Lycium socotranum / **Su'hur**

Endemic. This spiny shrub with its fleshy orange fruits is widespread on the plains of Soqatra. The berries can be eaten raw or as a porridge.



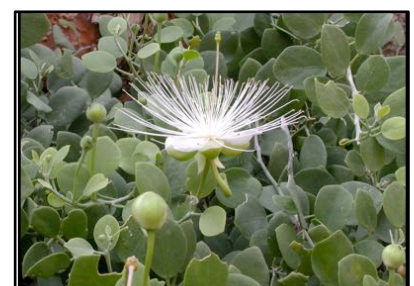
Heliotropium socotranum /
Hariher

Endemic. This low herb, with its white and yellow flowers, is perhaps the commonest of the endemics at Di-Hamri.



Capparis cartilaginea / **Lizafih**

A shrub with large attractive white flowers frequently found clinging on vertical cliffs. Berries are high in vitamin C and protein, and the leaves may be crushed and stuffed up the nose to treat a head cold.



"The Place of the Two Peaks"

Plants with Yellow Flowers



***Cissus subaphylla* / 'Atirheh**
Endemic. This rather straggly shrub is common on the coastal plains. The ash of burned stems may be used both to treat ulcers and to cure leatherwork.



Crotalaria persica
A small shrub in the pea family. On Soqatra it is only known from Di-Hamri – DO NOT DISTURB!



***Cryptolepis intricata* / Gissoh**
This small shrub, with its tiny yellow flowers and glossy green leaves, is widespread but highly variable in form.



***Cleome brachycarpa* / Tamirhen**
A tiny herb with star-like, yellow flowers. Leaves can be strewn in bedding to provide a nice smell.



***Citrullus colocynthis* / Di-Ah'shawih**
The stems of this greyish vine trail for up to a meter across the sand; it is related to the water melon but the flesh of the fruits is extremely bitter. Goats eating the fruit are said to go longer without water, but the fruit has many toxins with strong purgative effects.



***Aizoon canariense* / Kibidinoh**
This tiny herb with star-like fruits is common on sandy plains throughout Arabia. An important dry season forage where little else grows.



***Lindenbergia socotrana* / Ru'ud**
Endemic. A small shrub with tiny "2-lipped" flowers.



***Cucumis prophetarum* subsp. *prophetarum* / Di-Ah'shawih**
Another melon relative with softly spiny, green and white fruits. The fruit can be stuck onto a finger as a dressing.

"The Place of the Two Peaks"

Plants with Yellow Flowers



***Corchorus depressus* / Irsib**

A small herb with yellow flowers and linear fruits. The leaves and roots of both *Corchorus* species can be eaten raw or on cereal as a relish.



***Corchorus erodioides* / 'Irsib**

Endemic. A rosette-forming herb with bright yellow flowers. One of Soqatra's most common endemics.



***Tetraena simplex* / Qalqihal**

A widespread herb with minute succulent leaves. In water-poor regions the fleshy leaves and stems can be crushed and the liquid used for washing and cleansing.

Plants with Pink or Red Flowers



***Tephrosia uniflora* / Tifher**

A ground hugging pea.



***Tephrosia apollinea* / Tifher**

One of the commonest peas on the islands. Often a sign of over-grazing; can cause illness if eaten by livestock. It is becoming a serious nuisance in some areas.



***Fagonia paulayana* / Giyrbab**

A long spiny herb with sharp prickles and pretty pink flowers. A paste made from the heated crushed plant can be used to treat cracked feet.



***Boerhavia diffusa* / Hidiho**

A creeping herb with minute pale pink flowers. The roots may be eaten either raw or cooked.



***Indigofera nephrocarpa* / Tifher**

A small mat-forming pea with tiny pink flowers and minute fruits and leaves. A valued and nutritious fodder plant.



***Calotropis procera* / I'ish'hur**

A large shrub with milky latex, pretty flowers and swollen fruits. The latex can be used to treat a painful tooth and to expel worms.