

Socotra

Overview:

Socotra or Soqatra is a small archipelago of four islands and islets in the Indian Ocean off the Horn of Africa, some 350 km south of the Arabian peninsula. It is a part of the Republic of Yemen.

Territory:

The archipelago consists of the main island of Socotra, three smaller islands known collectively as "the Brothers" — Abd Al Kuri, Samha, Darsa — and other uninhabitable rock outcrops. The main island has three geographical terrains: the narrow coastal plains, a limestone plateau permeated with karstic caves, and the Haghier Mountains. The mountains rise to 5000 feet (1525 meters).

Location:

It is located east of Aden Gulf.

Latitude and Longitude:

Between 12 00' N and 12 42' N; between 52 30' E and 54 30' E.

Time Zone:

GMT +3

Total Land Area:

3625

EEZ:

200

Climate:

The climate is generally tropical desert, with rainfall being light, seasonal (winter) and more abundant at the higher ground in the interior than along the coastal lowlands. The monsoon season brings strong winds and high seas.

Natural Resources:

The Archipelago is often referred to as "the Galapagos of the Indian Ocean." Birdlife International identifies over 22 "Important Bird Areas" on the Socotra Archipelago. These areas include spectacular seabird breeding areas as well as the habitats of the 7 species and 12 subspecies of endemics, which add to the islands' high ecotourism potential.

ECONOMY:

Total GDP:

Per Capita GDP:

% of GDP per Sector:		
Primary	Secondary	Tertiary

% of Population Employed by Sector		
Primary	Secondary	Tertiary

External Aid/Remittances:

Socotra heavily depends on outside support, which mainly comes from the Yemeni Government and some development programs of NGO's and international organisations. An estimated number of 8,000 Socotri live and work in the Emirates, probably contributing considerably to the income of related families on the island.

Growth:

Main economic activities on which the population of Socotra relies upon are livestock, fishing, date palm plantations, primitive household gardens, with some minor forms of primarily opportunistic trade. The main part of the Socotri population living in the rural areas are semi-nomadic pastoralists, living from goats, sheep, cattle, camel breeding and date palm cultivation. Along the coasts fishing from small boats is the main source of income. In the major villages a considerable number of people are employed in government jobs or are involved in small scale trade, building and manufacturing for local demands. Except for modest gardening, agriculture is unknown. Therefore food consists mainly of local fish, meat, milk and dates, supplemented by imported rice and flour. Only a few people occasionally eat locally grown vegetables and fruits. Imported food products are not affordable for the vast majority of population. On the coastal areas and in the vicinities of Hadibou and surrounding villages lives a minority of people of African descent, of whom many are engaged in fishing.

Labour Force:

Unemployment	
Year:	Unemployment Rate (% of pop.)
1995	30%

Industry:

Cattle rearing: This is carried out by the peasants, shepherds, farmers and rural villagers around most parts of the island's territory, as a result of having

a large and variable animal wealth ; goats, sheep, cows, bulls and camels. Besides, pastures and natural green fields are available every where. Fishing: It is considered to be the main skilled craft adopted by large numbers of the island's population, as the whole region is well known for its large fishery wealth. Commerce: This is a secondary activity as it is confined to some owners of grocery and consumer shops found only in the capital Hadibu.

Niche Industry:

livestock and coastal fishery

Tourism:

This important marine location has ecotourism potential.

Imports and Exports:	
The chief export is ghi or clarified butter, which is sent to Arabia, Bombay and Zanzibar. Millet, cotton and tobacco are grown in small quantities. The most valuable vegetable products are aloes and the dragon's-blood tree. The Socotran aloe is highly esteemed; in the middle ages the trade was mostly in these products and in ambergris. The people live mainly on dates and milk. They own large numbers of cattle, sheep and goats. Dates are both home-grown and imported.	
Tot. Value of Imports	0.00 ()
From Eu:	
Import Partners (EU:)	
Partners Outside EU:	
Import Partners:	
Tot. Value of Exports	()
To Eu:	
Export Partners:	Arabia, Bombay and Zanzibar
Partners Outside EU::	
Export Partners:	
Main Imports:	Dates
Main Exports:	ghi or clarified butter

TRANSPORTATION/ACCESS

External:

Number of Airports:

Traditionally, the archipelago has been inaccessible from June to September due to monsoon weather. However, in July 1999 a new airport opened Socotra to the outside year round. Flights: There are two direct flights a week to the island from Al-Rayan (Mukalla).

Number of Main Ports:

Socotra can be reached by small boats just in the good weather, preferably from 15th October until May. It is difficult to reach by small boats during the windy season.

Internal:

Air

Road:

At present there is only a provisional road system, which consists of a series of bulldozed tracks.

Sea:

Other Forms of Transportation:

Economic Zones:

Energy Policy:

Electricity is available only for a few hours a day in the main coastal settlements.

Year	Total Energy Production (Mwh)	Type			Total Energy Consumption (Mwh)	Sector				
		Thermic (Mwh)	Geothermic (Mwh)	Other (Mwh)		Domestic (Mwh)	Commercial (Mwh)	Public Service (Mwh)	Industry (Mwh)	Public Lighting (Mwh)

Official Currency:

Rial (Yemen)

Banking and Insurance:

Number of Banks and Credit Unions:
Number of Agricultural Credit Unions:
Number of Insurance Companies:

Modern and reliable Banking services are available in most cities.

Financial Services:

Major cards are available, and honored in larger hotels, and banks.

Communications/E-Commerce:

The island has a domestic as well as international telephone services.

Public Ownership:

The ownership of land is up to now settled by traditional agreements.

Land Use:

The long geological isolation of the Socotra archipelago and its fierce heat and drought have combined to create a unique and spectacular endemic flora (which may, therefore, be vulnerable to introduced species such as goats and to climate change). Surveys have revealed that more than a third of the 800 or so plant species of Socotra are found nowhere else. Botanists rank the flora of Socotra among the ten most endangered island flora in the world. The archipelago is a site of global importance for biodiversity conservation and a possible center for ecotourism. As with many isolated island systems, bats are the only mammals native to Socotra. In contrast, the marine biodiversity around Socotra is rich, characterized by a unique mixture of species that have originated in far-flung biogeographic regions: the western Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, Arabia, East Africa and the wider Indo-Pacific.

Agriculture/Forestry:

Socotra dwellers rely, to a great extent, on trees whose wood is used for heating, cooking and as construction material. Dead and live timber is widely used for building, roofing and fencing. As the supply of dead wood is no longer sufficient to meet growing demands, live trees are now being increasingly cut, thus posing a serious threat to the survival of important species (i.e. *Maerua Angolensis* and *Metaporana obtusa*). Wood is also burned for the manufacturing of lime, which is used in traditional buildings. In addition, herders burn certain woody species i.e. *Cephalocroton Socotranus* (Ta'an) for their scented smoke, and use it as livestock smudge.

Marine Activity:

Fishing:

The coastal population of Socotra is almost entirely dependent upon fishing as the principal source of livelihood. Along the Socotran coasts, the majority of working males are fishermen. The main stocks targeted are shark, king fish and tuna, which are salted or dried and sold on the mainland. Reef fish and lobsters represent also an important source of income, and are mostly sold to visiting fishing vessels from neighboring countries.

Marine Life:

The marine biodiversity of the Socotra Archipelago is lesser known than the islands' botanical and bird life treasures. Marine biodiversity around Socotra is characterized by a unique mixture of species from different biogeographic regions - the western Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, Arabia, East Africa and the wider Indo-Pacific. Recent surveys indicate that the numbers of species of hard corals and fish are comparable to those of the Red Sea, despite the small size of the archipelago. Recent surveys also extended the distribution ranges of many species, including those previously thought to be endemic to the Red Sea or Arabia.. The Archipelago may provide the crucial "link" for some marine species in maintaining their distribution governed by the duration of their planktonic larval stages.

Critical Issues:

The Socotra Archipelago is in many ways yet a step back in time. The mountainous landscape encircled with passing clouds seems to resist development as it does the prevailing monsoon winds. Nonetheless, development pressures exist on Socotra and have begun to threaten the fragile balance between the Socotris and their environment. Most Socotris live without running water, electricity, or health care. There are few passable roads in Socotra, and only about 20 Kilometres of paved roadway. Meanwhile, the Government of Yemen is attempting to address primary development needs of the archipelago by following an integrated and evolving development plan.

JURISDICTIONAL RESOURCES

Capital:

Hadibu region: it is the capital of the island and lies in the center of Socotra Island located in the north-east of the island, having the largest urban center.

Political System:

Socotra is part of Yemen, and the government there has long-standing plans for the island. Politically, Socotra is administered as a part of the Aden Governorate of the Republic of Yemen. The responsibility for wildlife conservation in the Republic of Yemen lies with the Ministry of Agriculture and with the Environmental Protection Council (EPC). Both have undertaken a variety of tasks setting up a frame for wildlife laws, a site protection system as well as environmental education activities. One of the most recent steps was a UNESCO fact-finding mission to Socotra at the end of 1993. This mission examined the possibility of a Socotra Biosphere Reserve in order to combine development and protection for sustainable development.

Political Parties:

Important Legislation:

The entire Socotra Archipelago is considered by the Government of Yemen and Socotris as a special conservation area of high global importance. The people of Socotra have lived in a sound balance with their environment for centuries, and until recent days effectively conserved the biodiversity upon which they depend. The Zoning Plan focuses on the preservation of existing traditional uses and practices of the local Socotri communities to ensure future sustainable use of natural resources. In most cases, traditional practices are highly compatible with the objectives of biodiversity conservation. The close link between the need to preserve traditional practices of the local communities and the objectives of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use receive full support in the Zoning Plan and at the local level.

Principal Taxes:

Associated Power:

Aden Governorate of Republic of Yemen

Citizenship:

Socotrans hold citizenship of the Republic of Yemen.

Paradiplomacy:

To ensure the long-term preservation and environmentally sound development of the Archipelago, the Socotra Conservation and Development Program (SCDP) Coordination Unit was set-up within the Ministry of Planning and Development (MOPD), Sana'a, in January 2002. The Unit's main task is to

guide, oversee and support the implementation of all conservation and development initiatives of the Government of Yemen and international donors in the Socotra Archipelago. The Unit's team is in continuous contact with all concerned stakeholders in the island and in the mainland. The setup of the SCDP Coordination Unit is part of UNDP project YEM/01/003, for the conservation and development of the Socotra archipelago, supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy and UNDP. The Project started in mid 2001 and extended to mid 2003. The SCDP comprises a wide range of small and medium-scale initiatives supported by the UNDP, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Governments of Italy, Poland, Germany, France, UK, Oman, and Kuwait.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The population of the islands is estimated at 44,000 (source: MOPD-EU Socotra Development Masterplan), mostly living on Socotra, and concentrated in the capital Hadibu and of the eastern town of Qalansya. Abd Al Kuri and Samha have a population of a few hundred people between them; Darsa is uninhabited.

2002			
Island	Area (km sq.)	Population	% of Total Population
Socotra	3,796	43,000	%

Population:	
Year	Resident Population

Age of Population:	0-14	15-24	25-49	50-64	65 and up

Migration:
Although not much is known about the early time of immigration, the island has probably been inhabited by humans for about three thousand years. 2000: 14.5; 2001: 13.2; 2002: 12.9.

Crude Birth Rate:	
1996	130%

Life Expectancy:
There are no statistics on life expectancy for Socotra. In Yemen: Life expectancy at birth: total population: 61.75 years; male: 59.89 years; female: 63.71 years (2005 est.). Yemen's fertility rate, with 8.4 one of the highest in the world, was once balanced by a high infant mortality. On Socotra this rate is still at almost 50%; on the mainland it has in the last years decreased to 130/1000, 72/1000 in 1996.

Crude Death Rate:	
1996	72%

Ethnicity:
The ethnic origin of the people of Socotra is not quite established. The Russian scholar Vitaly Naumkin concludes that the people are a mix, and that they became isolated from the rest of Arabia, from where they must have most of their origin, between 1000 and 500 BCE. In addition to this, traders passing through, Indians, Portuguese, British must have given their contributions too. The people living in the extreme east have blue eyes and are believed to be descendants of Europeans.

Class Division:

Languages:
As in the rest of Yemen, Arabic is the official language on Socotra, being taught in schools and spoken in all external affairs, including Government administration. However the people of Socotra speak a language which is quite different from Modern Arabic. The Socotri is an ancient unwritten language, of pre-Islamic origin, related to the Mahri language spoken in the Mahra region of Southern Arabia. In the coastal areas, most literate people are completely bilingual, but in rural areas and among women and children, Arabic is rarely used and often not well understood.

Religion:
The Socotran are almost 100% Muslim. Approximately 50% belong to the Shi'ite Zaydis sect, the remaining Socotran are either Sunni Muslim (40%) or Ismailis (9.7%).

Literacy:
Male literacy rate : 13.4 % Female literacy rate : 76.9 % Average male and female literacy rate : 54.5 % (Same rate as the rest of Yemen)

Education System:
After the 26th of September 1962 Revolution, the political leadership attached paramount importance to education, it being one of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution, and one of the goals of the 26th of September Revolution. Due to the increase in number of schools and institutes, the development of educational renaissance within the framework of the policies followed by the government and the available resources, and thanks to the efforts exerted, Yemen witnessed a comprehensive educational renaissance which provided, since the early sixties, opportunities for the enrollment of more students, and opened greater numbers of literacy and adult education centres.

Total Pre-schools:()	
Total Primary Schools	
First Level:	
Second Level:	



Third Level:	
Total Secondary Schools:	
Total Professional Schools	
Universities:	

Number of Schools per Island:										
	Pre-school		Elementary			High-school		Prof.	University	
	Pub	Priv	1	2	3	Pub	Priv		Pub	Priv

Students Enrolled:					
Year:	Pre-School	Elementary	High-school	Prof.	University

Teachers							
Year	Pre-School	Elementary			High-School	Prof.	University
		1	2	3			

School enrollment of the 6-15 years age group Male : 79.4 % Female : 33.9 % Average male and female enrollment : 75.4% Enrollment at basic education level Male (6-15 years) : 86 % Female (6-15 years) : 54 % Enrollment at secondary education level Male (16-18 years) : 36 % Female (16-18 years) : 9 % Secondary education According to the general education regulations, secondary education is divided into : general (literary, scientific, commercial), technical, agricultural and veterinary education. Secondary education in Yemen is free of charge, guaranteed by the State.

Medical Services:

Medical services are not more than very basic. The only hospital in Hadibo is still poor in facilities and services. Predominant health problems include malaria, respiratory diseases, especially tuberculosis, intestinal illness, malnutrition and birth-associated disorders.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

History:

Socotra appears as Dioscouridou ("of the Dioscurides") in the Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a 1st century A.D. Greek navigation aid. In the notes to his translation of the Periplus, G.W.B. Huntingford remarks that the name Socotra is not Greek in origin, but derives from the Sanskrit dvipa sukhadhara ("island of bliss"). A local tradition holds that the inhabitants were converted to Christianity by Thomas in AD 52. In the 10th century the Arab geographer Abu Mohammed Al-Hassan Al-Hamdani stated that in his time most of the inhabitants were Christians. The explorer Tristão da Cunha put ashore in the early 16th century and considered Socotra conquered for Portugal. By this time Christianity had disappeared from the island, except for stone crosses at which Alvares said people worshipped. However, during a visit to the island in 1542, Francis Xavier found a group of people claiming to be descended from the converts made by St. Thomas. The islands passed under the control of the Mahra sultans in 1511. In 1886 it became a British protectorate, along with the remainder of the Mahra State of Qishn and Socotra. For the British it was an important strategic stop-over. The P&O ship 'Aden' sank after being wrecked on a reef near Socotra, in 1897, with the loss of 78 lives. In 1967 the Mahra sultanate was abolished. Upon its independence, Socotra became part of the People's Republic of South Yemen (later to become the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen); now it is part of Yemen.

Referenda:

Recent Significant Events:

The people in Socotra live within a subsistence economy. They are therefore particularly vulnerable to environmental change, decreasing productivity of the coastal eco-system, extreme weather events and natural catastrophes such as storms, heavy rains and tsunamis. Socotra was hit by the 2004 Tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

Music, Dance, Handicraft and Patrimony:

Socotra has an extremely rich poetic tradition. This valuable storehouse of Soqotri language and culture is being eroded even more rapidly than the language itself. The western half of Soqotra is the least developed part of the island, its people still largely dependent on their sheep and goats for their livelihood. They are renowned throughout the islands for their poetry, and, with access to schooling as yet limited, the everyday use of poetry is still common here.

Sources:

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Please address queries to:

Institute of Island Studies

University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)

550 University Ave

Charlottetown, PE, Canada, C1A 4P3

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