

## TRIP REVIEW

## Socotra & Mainland Yemen

My husband and I love the beach, and we have traveled to beaches all over the world. But the secluded shores of Socotra, with their white sands and blue waters, were always a dream destination for me. So, when the opportunity arose to travel to this mystical island, we jumped at the chance and headed off for an adventure of a lifetime.

We flew in from Cairo to Seiyun (Yemen). Our guide met us and got us situated in our hotel, then we met with the rest of our tour group for some sightseeing. We were the only 2 Americans and the group consisted of 6 of us with 2 Germans and 2 Japanese guests. We wandered around Seiyun Market, admiring the traditional jewelry and enjoying the exotic smells of the spices. Later, we visited the Sultan Al Kathiri Palace. The nearly 100-year-old building was originally a fort and was the official residence of the Sultan of Seiyun until the 1960s. After,



we headed back to our hotel for a lovely welcome dinner of freshly baked bread and grilled fish and lots of mezzes around the swimming pool, then off to a good sleep getting ready for tomorrow's journey.

The next day, a short one hour flight took us to Hadibo (Socotra's capital). After check-in and a quick lunch of some tasty local cuisine, we made our way to Delisha. The beach at Delisha was the perfect beginning to our Socotra tour, with its sparkling blue waters, soft white sand, and mountains in the distance. We explored the seaport and saw the indigenous birds in their natural habitat. Later, we climbed up some of the sand dunes for a breathtaking view of the Socotra sunset.

We set out for Homhil the following morning. Here, we walked through an enchanting forest filled with the island's famous Dragon's Blood trees. Homhil holds some of the prettiest scenery on Socotra, with many Cucumber Trees, Bottle Trees, and Desert Rose. The trees led us to a natural infinity pool overlooking a valley. We took a refreshing dip in the turquoise waters, then enjoyed a scenic picnic lunch.



After lunch, we drove to Ras Ersel, where we met with some fisherman and had some delightful conversations over tea with some local villagers. Later, we made our way to Arher beach, which was less secluded than Delisha but fantastic none-the-less. The tall dunes leaning up against the mountains are a great spot for sandboarding, and we saw people paragliding over the sea. The cliffs and dunes coupled with the Arabian Sea and the mountainous landscape made for some wonderful pictures. That night, we camped out at Arher, gazing up at the brilliant stars, and falling asleep to the wind whistling through the sand, and the waves gently crashing on the shore.

Our next destination was Hoq Cave. The path to the cave was long, but the pretty views along the way were so nice that we didn't mind. We spent a few hours exploring the amazing rock formations of the pitch-black cave, with only our torches to light the way.



Later, we headed to Di-Hamri Marine Reserve, where we snorkeled in the clear, shallow water. The sea here is just beautiful, and we saw quite a lot of marine life, like clownfish and coral, and even an octopus! From here, we made our way back to our hotel in Hadibo.

We spent the next day visiting many wonderful sights. We had a picnic lunch overlooking a pretty stream at Wadi Difarhur. Later, we toured a nearby village, and saw the distinctive Bottle Trees. Next, we explored Zahik beach and its white dunes. We went swimming in the calm blue waters, took some great photos, and sat down on the soft sand, watching the waves crash over each other as time seemed to stand still.



We left Zahik and made our way to a campsite. We ate dinner under the stars and settled in for the night, the calming sounds of the sea echoing in our ears as we slept.

The next morning, we visited Omak beach. We explored the white sands, and dipped our toes in the water, then continued on to Digub Cave. We had a quick snack in the picturesque mouth of the cave, which overlooks several small villages.

We made our way to the Diksam plateau and gorge, a vast expanse of magical Dragon's Blood trees. We wandered the area, taking pictures and enjoying the wonderful scenery. Our next stop was Wadi Derhur, where we had a peaceful picnic lunch overlooking the turquoise pond and the herds of camels grazing in the distance.

Our adventures the following morning began with a visit to Detwah Lagoon, passing the little fishing village of Qalansia along the way. With its shallow, turquoise sea and long, white sandy beach, this was one of my favorite sights of the trip. The water was easy to walk in, as there was no seaweed or coral, and the only thing we had to share the beach with were the cute little crabs making their homes in the sand.



Later, we visited Koor Gaba, and the nearby salt pans, where the local villagers get their salt. Then, we headed to the campsite at Detwah Lagoon, and settled in for another relaxing night under the stars.

We awoke the next day to the sun rising over Detwah beach, and ate breakfast overlooking the shimmering sea. Then we made our way to a local fishing village, where we boarded a boat that would take us to Shuab Bay. The ride to Shuab was spectacular, with groups of dolphins surrounding us and

leaping out of the water. We even got to try some local fishing techniques. The beach was even more lovely than the boat ride over. Here, we went for a relaxing swim and watched the native birds fly around.

After a wonderful morning at Shuab beach, we packed up and boarded our boat to head back to Detwah Lagoon for lunch. Later, we explored Wadi Ayhaft, a valley filled with trees, plants, and birds. We roamed around the area for hours, taking pictures and dipping our toes in the freshwater pools. Then we headed back to Hadibo, where we went out for a group dinner. We bid farewell to Socotra over a delicious meal of Mandi (lamb and basmati rice).



The next morning, we boarded a flight back to Seiyun, where we spent the day sightseeing. We stopped by a Sufi shrine cemetery on the way to the town of Tarim. Known for its Islamic scholars, Tarim is an important center of religious learning. We wandered the old city, visiting the colorful souq, and seeing the incredible bright white Al-Muhdhar Mosque and its sky-high minaret.

Our last stop in Yemen was Shibam, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The 16th century walled city is often called “The Manhattan of the Desert” because of its towering old mud-brick buildings. Surrounded by a fortified wall, the 16th-century city of Shibam is one of the oldest and best examples of urban planning based on the principle of vertical construction. Its impressive tower-like structures rise out of the cliff. We roamed the city, mingling with the locals, and visiting the majestic palace. The Friday mosque dates largely from the 9th - 10th century and the castle from the 13th century, but the earliest settlement originated in the pre-Islamic period. It became the capital of Hadramaut after the destruction in AD 300 of the earlier capital Shabwa, which was located further to the west along the wadi. Later, we returned to our hotel, where we prepared to fly to Cairo the next day.



We flew into Cairo late afternoon, and spent a few hours exploring the bustling city, shopping for souvenirs, and bartering for handmade crafts. Later, we all met up for dinner at a local restaurant. We feasted on Koshary (a dish with rice, lentils, pasta, and tomato sauce), and shared stories, pictures, and tons of laughter as we reminisced about our time together. The next morning, we flew home, the crashing waves of the Socotra beaches and the sweet smell of the sun-bleached sand etched in our memories. I must thank Spiekermann Travel for helping us to fulfill such a great dream and also must thank Kais our local guide whose team there has done a phenomenal job with every aspect of the trip.

***Review by Ihab Zaki February 2021***

Call us on our toll free at  
1-800-645-3233

Find the itineraries on our website at  
<http://www.mideasttrvl.com>  
Or request them via e-mail at [info@mideasttrvl.com](mailto:info@mideasttrvl.com)

Follow us:   
Facebook page: [Spiekermanntravel](#)