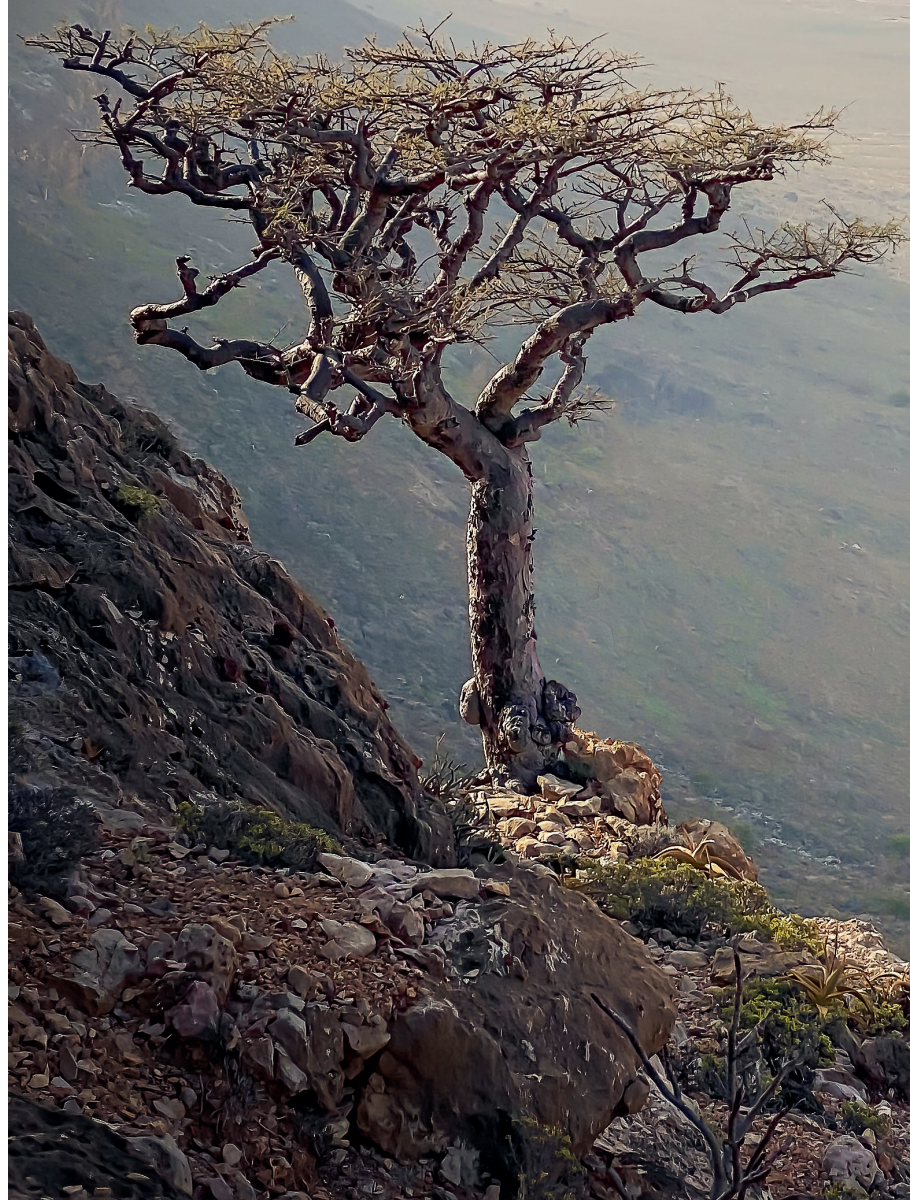




Isle of Wonder

Photographer **Andy Marty** spent a week exploring the ethereal natural beauty of the Yemeni island of Socotra





Socotra is a bit like Jurassic Park, without the dinosaurs,” says Dubai-based photographer Andy Marty.

If this otherworldly Yemeni archipelago, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008, seems untouched, it's largely to do with its remote location between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, where the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf converge. This isolated setting has helped protect its stunning biodiversity; nearly 40 per cent of its plants are found nowhere else on the planet, leading many to describe the area as the Galápagos of the Middle East. The dragon's blood tree may be Socotra's best-known visual reference, but the islands are also home to cucumber trees, bottle trees, varieties of frankincense, rare birds and reptiles, many of which are also endemic. “It's a place that has been isolated

away from the rest of the world geographically, so it has evolved independently,” says Marty. “The landscape changes dramatically – from coastal lagoons to elevated forest plateaus to turquoise gorges and pure white sand dunes.”

There are direct flights from Abu Dhabi to Hadibo, the capital of Socotra; after arriving, Marty spent a week camping, hiking and getting to know locals across the main island. “Somewhere like Socotra is incredible, because it is so different to anywhere else,” says Marty. “As a photographer, when you travel to a lot of places, there are well-known compositions and images that have become almost iconic – the challenge is often to find new ways to photograph a destination. With Socotra, your creativity can be totally unlocked.”

From left: Colourful fishing boats in the coastal town of Qalansia; Diksam Plateau is shrouded in dragon's blood trees and bottle trees.
Previous, from left: The sand dunes of Arher rise out of the ocean; capturing a sweeping view during a hike in Qalansia



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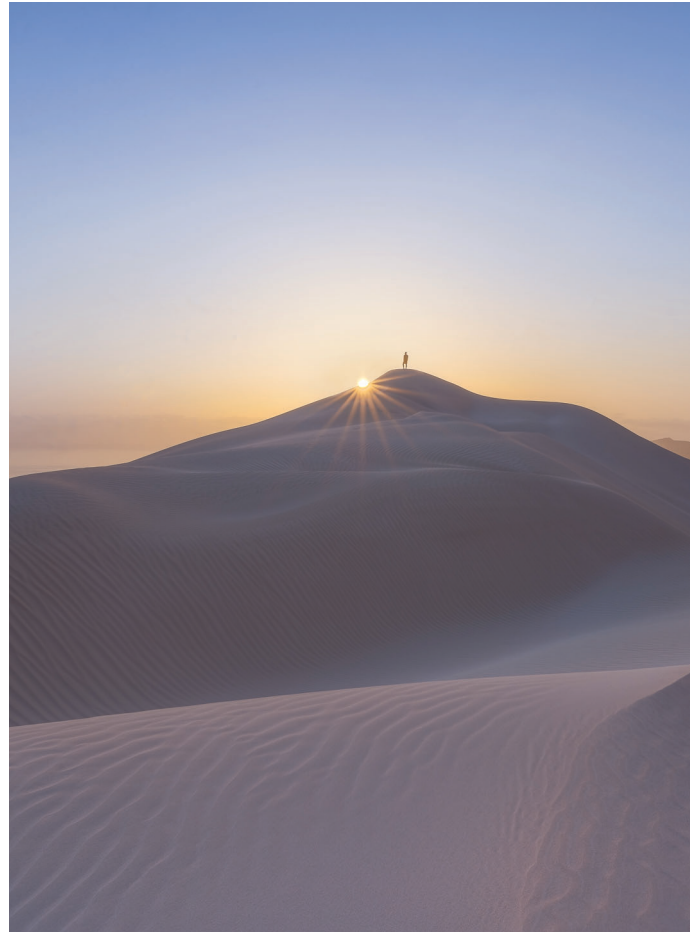
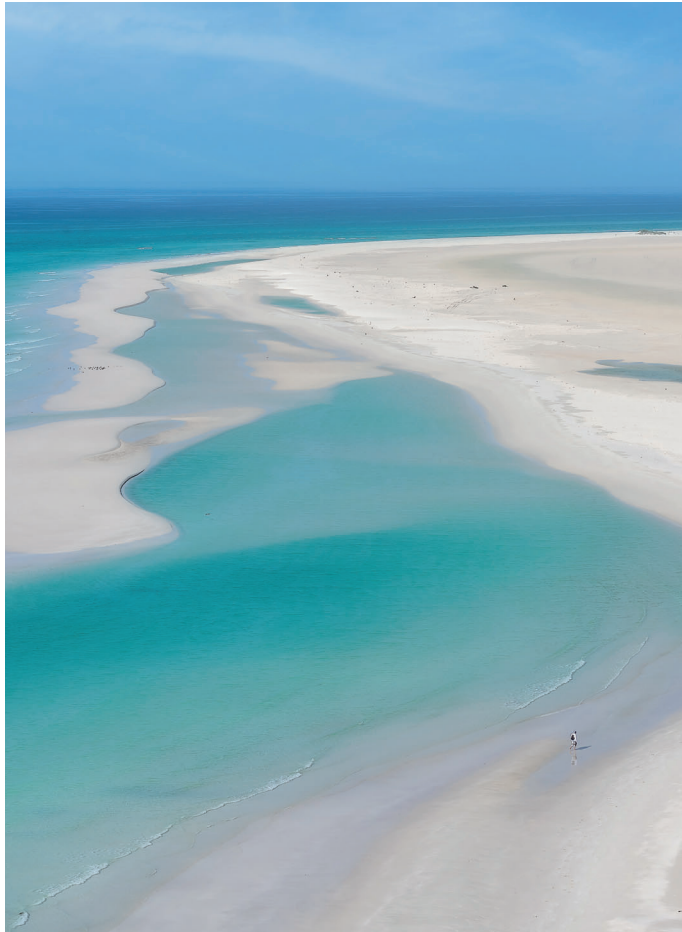


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The iconic dragon's
blood tree of Socotra,
captured during sunset
at Diksam Plateau

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From left: Our first view of Socotra and the Qalansia lagoon; climbing to the top of the dunes at Arher for sunrise; a hike to Kallisan Gorge is rewarded with a swim

