Socotra, a small group of islands in the Indian Ocean, is one of the most isolated places on Earth. It is located some 240 kilometers east of the Horn of Africa and 380 kilometers south of the Arabian Peninsula. There is only one flight a day traveling to Socotra. Anyone who wants to go there by boat will have to contend with monsoons that bring high winds and rough seas. Even after you arrive on the island, you’ll be cut off from the rest of the world. Internet connections and telephone lines are severely limited and only available in the capital city.

So why visit Socotra? The answer is that it’s simply one of the most unique and fascinating places on the planet. Because of Socotra’s isolation from the rest of the world, it has evolved its own special ecosystem free from any outside influence. One incredible example of this special plant life is the Dragon’s Blood Tree, with its canvas of branches and leaves that sprout at an odd angle from a thick trunk. The strange appearance of the tree lends the islands the atmosphere of an alien landscape. This is just one example of the unique forms of nature in Socotra. Scientists estimate that up to 37% of the plant life found on the islands is not found anywhere else on Earth.

The island group also has many unique birds, such as the Socotra Starling, the Socotra Sunbird, Socotra Bunting, the Island Cisticola, the Socotra Sparrow, and Socotra Grosbeak. These birds have a distinct appearance from other species. They also have their own mating calls and rituals. Ornithologists still do not fully understand these birds and each year, scientists sojourn to the islands to study them in their natural habitat.

The inhabitants of Socotra are of Arab, Somali, and South Asian origins. Hundreds of years of isolation have resulted in many distinct cultural traditions among the Socotri. Traditional fishing methods still survive among the people living there. People on Socotra also practice their own conservation techniques, such as alternating between herding and fishing. This way of life has helped to preserve the resources on and around the islands for hundreds of years.

The things that make Socotra special are now beginning to fade. More and more tourists are visiting the islands recently and this has put a strain on Socotra’s delicate ecosystem. Cats have been brought on to the islands and they are hunting Socotra’s unique bird population so successfully that some bird species are now close to extinction. Immigration and media influence from the outside world have rapidly altered the cultural traditions of inhabitants. It is difficult to know whether Socotra’s special status in the world will survive the 21st century.
1. According to the article, where are the Socotra islands located?

   a) in the Horn of Africa
   b) in the Indian Ocean
   c) in the Pacific Ocean
   d) in the Arabian Peninsula

2. The phrase “cut off” in paragraph 1 is closest in meaning to:

   a) isolated
   b) arrested
   c) interrupted
   d) concealed

3. According to the article, what is the primary cause of Socotra’s unique ecosystem?

   a) its tradition
   b) its wildlife
   c) its plants
   d) its isolation

4. The word “it” in paragraph 2 refers to:

   a) the world
   b) Socotra
   c) the planet
   d) the Dragon Blood Tree

5. The word “trunk” in paragraph 2 could be replaced with:

   a) body
   b) case
   c) hatch
   d) shorts

6. The word “rituals” in paragraph 3 could be replaced with:

   a) cults
   b) habits
   c) parades
   d) attitudes

7. The word “there” in paragraph 4 refers to:

   a) Somalia
   b) South Asia
   c) Socotra
   d) Arabia
8. The word “practice” in paragraph 4 could be replaced with:
   a) repeat
   b) study
   c) perform
   d) exercise

9. Paragraph 4 is about:
   a) the culture and traditions of Socotri
   b) how resources are used on Socotra
   c) recent immigration to Socotra
   d) how Socotri herd animals and fish

10. The word “extinction” in paragraph 5 is closest in meaning to:
    a) recovery
    b) renewal
    c) elimination
    d) migration

11. Paragraph 5 is about:
    a) why more tourists are visiting the islands
    b) how the island’s ecosystem is changing
    c) the reasons why cats were brought to the islands
    d) how the bird population is so successful

12. What would be a good title for this passage?
    a) The Wildlife of Socotra
    b) Socotra: A Special Place on Earth
    c) Socotra: The Happiest Place on the Planet
    d) The Unique Culture and People of Socotra