



SAFEGUARDING SILK ROAD HERITAGE FOR TOURISM

Conclusions from the UNWTO Silk Road Ministers' Meeting 2013 at ITB Berlin

Compiled by UNWTO in collaboration with UNESCO, UCL; ICOMOS and a team of international experts

The Significance of Silk Road Heritage

Acclaimed as the 'greatest route in the history of mankind', the ancient Silk Road formed the first bridge between the East and the West and was an important vehicle for trade between the ancient empires of China, Central and Western Asia, the Indian sub-continent, and Rome. The Silk Road was more than just trade routes, it symbolised the multiple benefits arising from cultural exchange. As a result, countless historic and cultural sites remain along the network of famous routes.

Today these routes, or 'heritage corridors' as they have been identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), have the potential to offer economic benefits to local communities and cross cultural exchange through tourism development. The Silk Road's exceptional cultural and living heritage creates incredible opportunities for tourism.

The Silk Road Heritage Corridors Project

In recent years a team of experts at UNESCO, ICOMOS and UCL, have conducted ground-breaking research into the Silk Road's sites and routes as part of the transnational Silk Roads World Heritage Serial Nomination project. This project has involved unprecedented collaboration between 15 State Parties. Moreover, two World Heritage Nominations for the Silk Roads Heritage Corridor in Central Asia and China have been submitted to UNESCO which will commence the final

evaluation of the nominations in 2013-2014. These nominations focus on specific Silk Road Heritage Corridors crossing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, another between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

With a focus on early intervention and upstream processes, UNESCO and UNWTO, supported by the UNESCO/Netherlands Funds-in-Trust, is launching a major project in 2013 that will provide policy guidance to the destinations and will develop a common sustainable tourism strategy for visitor management, site presentation and promotion along these heritage Corridors. This project also intends to promote better understanding and collaboration between different stakeholders at all levels.

World Heritage: Challenges and Opportunities

The promotion and protection of World Heritage has certainly been a success. Currently, there are 190 countries that are signatories to the World Heritage Convention, making it herewith one of the most successful Agreements in the world. Additionally, there are 962 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List from as many as 157 countries. While the protection of the Outstanding Universal Values of our heritage remains the key priority of UNESCO, it is further determined to prove that the implementation of the World Heritage Convention can also be understood as an accelerator for sustainable development, both at the local and national levels.

When the World Heritage Convention was conceived in the early 1970s, the impact of tourism was given little importance. The annual international arrivals at the time totalled about 180 million, in comparison to the 1 billion international arrivals surpassed in 2012. Cultural tourism is growing at an unprecedented rate and now accounts for around 40% of global tourism. When managed responsibly, tourism can be a driver for preservation and conservation of cultural and natural heritage and a vehicle for sustainable development. Tourism to World Heritage Sites stimulates employment, promotes local activity through arts and crafts and generates revenues. However, if not planned or managed effectively, tourism can be socially, culturally and economically disruptive, harming hereby fragile environments and local communities.

The following recommendations have been specifically devised for management authorities dealing with heritage along the Silk Road. The recommendations aim to encourage responsible heritage management systems that ensure a positive dynamic between sustaining conservation and supporting socio-economic development through well-managed tourism.

Recommendations for Effective Heritage Management on the Silk Road

- **Provide quality visitor experiences** that do not degrade or damage the property's natural or cultural values
- **Deliver holistic planning**, with well integrated stakeholder participation for long-term sustainability
- **Identify nodes (large cities) along the Silk Road, the segments of routes connecting them and the corridors** as Silk Road tourism lends itself to attracting travellers along integrated routes and corridors rather than to individual sites or destinations.
- **Collaborate on trans-national approaches** that are key to strengthening Silk Road tourism heritage brand and offer.
- **Share skills, expertise and knowledge** to avoid duplication, build on strengths and implement coordinated management frameworks along the Silk Road with regard to sustainable tourism, conservation, education, research development and interpretation.
- **Develop appropriate standards and protocols** to face key issues for heritage sites, such as boundaries and buffer zones, site selection, buried archaeological deposits, etc.

- **Implement monitoring systems at local, national and transnational levels** to measure change, impacts of actions and changes to the values of the sites.
- **Provide high quality, consistent and informative heritage communication**, delivered throughout the tourism experience, to build tourist expectations and deliver high quality visitor experiences.
- **Invest in Intangible Cultural Heritage** such as traditional handicrafts, gastronomy, rituals, music and other cultural expressions to enhance the visitor experience and contribute to intercultural understanding and exchange. This can be achieved through developing community centres for capacity building, organising cultural festivals and implementing marketing and promotional campaigns.
- **Embrace technology and innovation** such as 3D digital scanning and modelling, digital preservation and archiving. These methods can provide a publicly accessible archive enabling people to visit and learn about cultural heritage sites from around the world. These technologies can also help ensure that heritage sites are effectively managed today as well as protected for tomorrow.

Additional Reading:

- UNWTO, 'Communicating Heritage: A Handbook for the Tourism Sector' 2011 publication available via UNWTO eLibrary
- UNWTO, 'Tourism & Intangible Cultural Heritage' 2012 publication available via UNWTO eLibrary

Useful Links:

[UNWTO Silk Road Programme](http://silkroad.unwto.org) silkroad.unwto.org
[UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme](http://whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/) whc.unesco.org/en/tourism/
[ICOMOS International Conservation Center-Xi'an \(IICC-X\)](http://www.iicc.org.cn/Channel.aspx?Chld=2) www.iicc.org.cn/Channel.aspx?Chld=2
[Silk Roads Cultural Heritage Resource Information System \(CHRIS\)](http://www.silkroad-infosystem.org/) www.silkroad-infosystem.org/
[Ancient Merv Project](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/merv) www.ucl.ac.uk/merv