



DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM STRATEGY FOR THE SILK ROADS HERITAGE CORRIDORS

Introduction to the UNESCO/UNWTO Silk Roads Heritage Corridors Project

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, and another between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

At the 3rd UNWTO Silk Road Ministers' Meeting held on 6 March 2013 at ITB Berlin, the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors Tourism Strategy Project was launched. 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.



Why this Project is needed

When the World Heritage Convention was conceived in the early 1970s, the impact of tourism was not fully addressed. 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.

There are significant opportunities for destinations along the Silk Road corridors to join efforts for building transnational tourism initiatives to promote and develop shared heritage under the Silk Road brand. By taking a collaborative approach to developing tourism for the Silk Road corridors, it is planned that:

- sustainable approaches to destination management will be applied across the region
- dispersal of visitation across the region will improve
- length of stay and yield will increase
- new opportunities for investment will open up
- international relations will be strengthened
- new opportunities for public private sector partnerships will be realised

Project Priorities

A number of priorities have been identified to ensure that the tourism strategy developed for the Silk Road Heritage Corridors optimises the opportunities that tourism presents while safeguarding the outstanding heritage along 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.
- **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, 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 and interpretation**, 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.

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?ChId=2) www.iicc.org.cn/Channel.aspx?ChId=2

[Silk Roads Cultural Heritage Resource Information System \(CHRIS\)](http://www.silkroad-infosystem.org/) www.silkroad-infosystem.org/

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