



BUILDING A STRONGER SILK ROAD:

Strategic Recommendations for Enhancing Tourism with a Special Focus on Central Asia

Compiled by UNWTO in collaboration with a team of international experts

With its richly diverse cultural heritage and wealth of natural tourism attractions spanning across 12,000 kilometres, the Silk Road is a unique network of tourism destinations with significant potential for growth. Commercial interest in the region has grown considerably over recent years, with ancient connections between the Middle East and Asia are being revitalized in a surge of investment and trade in energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing. Stronger economies, improved infrastructure and connectivity, advances in information technology and enhanced mobility are creating new opportunities for tourism.

Yet a number of barriers are hindering tourism development in the Silk Road countries. Visa and border crossing formalities, transport infrastructure, corporate governance and quality assurance are just some of the issues that require the attention of stakeholders to ensure positive growth across the regions.

Tourism today directly and indirectly represents 9% of global GDP, and is responsible for around 235 million jobs, or one in twelve jobs worldwide. This set of recommendations has been developed specifically for Silk Road destinations by UNWTO and a team of experts. It aims to address the most critical issues facing tourism in the region and provide basic recommendations for how Destination Managers can create a better business environment for growth.

1. Marketing & Destination Management

Current challenges:

- Lack of cohesion in promotion of Silk Road destination brand
- Market research on the Silk Road is very limited
- Lack of consumer awareness and understanding of how to travel the Silk Road due to inadequate information available

1. Develop and integrate the Silk Road brand into national marketing strategies

The Silk Road has huge potential for growth as a destination brand. UNWTO research shows that the Silk Road stimulates more discussions online than any other travel route, accounting for approximately 30% of all discussions globally.*

Yet very few Silk Road destinations are maximizing the marketing and promotional potential of their historic and cultural connections with the Silk Road. Implementing market research and better understanding travel motivations and the power of this brand will enable destinations to be more innovative and competitive in their national marketing strategies. Greater provision of practical travel information is also needed to address the information gaps that make it difficult for travellers to plan a Silk Road.

**Source: UNWTO, Social Media Research Silk Road Project (2010)*

Recommended actions: Establish dedicated section for the Silk Road on official destination and partner websites; identify and utilise country's own Silk Road unique selling points, while preserving the destination's uniqueness, and engage consumers through utilisation of social media in Silk Road marketing campaigns.

2. Partner with other Silk Road destinations and private sector on global marketing campaigns

The ancient Silk Road unites almost 30 countries through a shared history. The legacy of the Silk Road is evident today in its destinations' architecture, gastronomy, religion, ideology and technology. National Tourism Administrations (NTAs) should leverage from this by working together, pooling resources and implementing collaborative marketing campaigns that celebrate this shared history and inspire travel to the Silk Road. By working together and developing new trans-boundary thematic routes and experiences focused on the Silk Road, destinations will enhance their shared product offering and stimulate more 'word of mouth' promotion to contribute to a stronger, more globally recognized Silk Road brand.

Recommended actions: Identify key partners and innovative angles for joint Silk Road marketing campaigns; share and combine resources on gathering of market intelligence and partner with tour operators, airlines, and other private sector stakeholders in cross-marketing initiatives and product development.

Additional Reading:

- UNWTO, 'Policy and Practice for Global Tourism' 2011 publication available via UNWTO elibrary [click here](#)
- UNWTO, 'Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding' 2009 publication available via elibrary [click here](#)
- UNWTO, 'Handbook on E-marketing for Tourism Destinations' 2008 publication available UNWTO elibrary [click here](#)
- UNWTO, 'Handbook on Tourism Product Development' 2011 publication available via UNWTO elibrary [click here](#)

2. Destination Management & Investment

Current challenges:

- Lack of cohesion in the promotion of Silk Road destination brand
- Market research on the Silk Road is very limited
- Lack of consumer awareness and understanding of how to travel on the Silk Road due to inadequate information available

1. Improve connectivity along the Silk Road by addressing infrastructure gaps

The Silk Road comprises of the comprehensive network of overland and maritime routes, retracing the steps of some of the world's most celebrated explorers. Yet a general lack of information available and the complex logistics of travelling these routes prevent many potential visitors from choosing to travel the Silk Road. Destinations need to work more closely with their tour operators by conducting audits and identifying problem areas that currently hinder the connectivity of Silk Road routes. International and national private sector players should be engaged in the long-term vision of the destinations' competitiveness and sustainability aspects. Engagement and investment from local private sector players will help guarantee the involvement of the local community. For the long-term attractiveness and survival of the Silk Road, investments in sustainable infrastructure are crucial.

Recommended areas for investment include: Increased roadside infrastructure; enhanced air connectivity via direct flights to major cities in Western Europe and Asia Pacific region; introduction of low-cost airlines to Central Asia; high speed/express trains between major cities; increased number of visitor information centres and services; increased investment in tourist and business class hotels and improved internet accessibility.

2. Invest in industry training and capacity building to support a 'bottom-up' approach

To help ensure a 'bottom-up' approach to destination management, authorities should empower local communities and stakeholders by providing relevant training and capacity building across all aspects of destination management, particularly in regional areas. Improved skills and services in the tourism sector are required to ensure repeat visitation,



while transparency in business is key to building strong business relations and attracting direct foreign investment.

Recommended training programmes include: Information and communications technology; language skills (especially English); hospitality management; good governance and transparency in international business; customer service; tourist information services; sustainable management of natural and heritage resources.

Additional Reading:

- UNWTO, 'A Practical Guide to Destination Management' 2007 publication available on UNWTO elibrary [click here](#)
- UNCTAD, 'Investment Guide to the Silk Road' 2009 [click here](#)
- UNCTAD, 'Promoting Foreign Investment in Tourism' 2010 [click here](#)

3. Travel Facilitation

Current challenges:

- Complicated visa and border crossing procedures create serious barrier for travel along the Silk Road
- Comprehensive and up-to-date information on visas and border crossing procedures is lacking

1. Simplify tourist visa processes

While one of the Silk Road's key strengths is that it is as a unique network of destinations, multiple barriers to the smooth cross-border movement of tourists currently make it virtually impossible for tourists to undertake multi-destination tourism. Information provided by authorities on visa processes needs to be clear and easy to follow, available online and up-to-date.

Recommended long term strategy: Develop a Silk Road tourist visa for all five Central Asia countries

Recommended short-term actions include: Increased provision of visas on arrival and electronic visas, decrease visa charges; standardization of visas – especially single, double and multiple entry visas; eliminate specific entry and

exit dates and replace with periods of 30, 60 or 90 days instead; expand number of nationalities not requiring letters of invitation and visa waiver for selected nationalities.

2. Improve border crossing procedures and services for tourists

Improve the potential for economic stimulus and environmental improvement by taking an innovative approach to cross-border management.

Recommended improvement of services for tourists:

English speaking staff at the borders; regular working hours (6am-midnight daily); tourist information; guided service through buffer zones (for guides, drivers with badges); signage; food and beverage services; transit accommodation; shopping; money exchange; restrooms and first aid facilities.

Recommended innovative approaches to cross border management:

Cultural activities; local craft markets; cross-border job exchange; common tourism development plans; cross-border package tour services; international multidisciplinary master's degree educational programs and cross border e-tourism frameworks.

Additional Reading:

- UNWTO, 'The Impact of Visa Facilitation on Job Creation in the G20 Countries', UNWTO report 2012 [click here](#)
- UNWTO, 'A Strategic Approach to Visa Facilitation in the Silk Road Countries' UNWTO report 2005 [click here](#)
- Watch the video from the 2012 WTM & UNWTO Ministers' Summit ("Open Borders and Open Skies: Breaking Barriers to Travel") [here](#)

These recommendations were formulated following the UNWTO Tour Operators' Forum on the Silk Road - Creating a Stronger Business Environment for Growth event that took place in Berlin on 9 March 2012, hosted by ITB Berlin.

WE WELCOME YOUR FEEDBACK!

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