

2nd International Congress on World Civilizations and Historic Routes

Sofia Hotel Balkan, Sofia, Bulgaria, 15-16 November 2018

Concept Note

Background

Tourism has grown at an accelerated pace over the last decades to become one of the leading global socio-economic sectors. In 2017, over 1.3 billion international tourists travelled around the world and UNWTO forecasts that this growth will continue in the coming years. The desire to explore and experience destinations' cultural heritage is a key driver behind this growth, and the development of cultural resources for tourism purposes has accordingly become an important tool for enhancing destination competitiveness and attractiveness. Moreover, with tourism destinations increasingly looking to enhance cross-border cooperation as a means of diversifying their products and attracting new markets, historic routes, such as Silk Road, provide enormous untapped potential. Cultural heritage lies at the very heart of the collective memory and identity of the citizens of the world. Destinations that boast archaeological sites, ancient architecture, folklore traditions and arts and that find themselves along these ancient routes can assume the role of catalysts for exchange of experience between peoples and cultures through tourism development, and thereby promote sustainable growth, prosperity and peace in their own regions.

Objectives

Recognizing the importance of cultural heritage and tourism, the 2nd International Congress on World Civilizations and Historic Routes will address the possible ways in which world civilizations could be brought to life through tourism, in particular by making use of the networks developed along historic routes. The congress will explore how tourism along these routes can play a leading role in creating new socio-economic opportunities for development at local, regional and national level while safeguarding and promoting tangible and intangible ancient heritage.

UNWTO's Western Silk Road will serve as a best-practice example. Launched in 2017 as a joint initiative between UNWTO and the European Union, the initiative focuses on the development and diversification of the Western link of the Silk Road, an area geographically defined to primarily include European Union Member States, but also partner countries located along the Mediterranean basin, the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. With tangible and intangible Silk Road heritage as its unifying theme, the initiative rests on two strategic pillars: (i) a Western Silk Road research pillar, an integral component of which is the Western Silk Road Tourism Academic Network, and (ii) a Western Silk Road capacity building pillar led by the Western Silk Road Working Group. While the first pillar is responsible for developing joint tourism intelligence and a common

methodological Western Silk Road approach enabling country-specific but comparable Western Silk Road tourism data, the second pillar is to ensure the long-term viability of the Western Silk Road initiative through sustainable transnational tourism cooperation. With two highly successful Western Silk Road workshops held in Greece (April 2017) and Bulgaria (June 2017), and the publication of the Western Silk Road Roadmap in February 2018 that highlighted the potential of untapped Silk Road heritage located throughout Europe, the initiative has reached a development stage that allows the project partners to pursue more ambitious objectives in the areas of product development and capacity building in addition to the previously primary focus on Western Silk Road awareness-raising. A specialized Western Silk Road session will serve to explore available synergies, while the European Year of Cultural Heritage and the EU-China Tourism Year will frame an overarching debate on cultural heritage, tourism and the huge opportunities contained therein.

The participants in the Congress will have the opportunity to build upon the great cultural wealth spanning along the ancient routes, learn from different experiences and generate synergies among themselves and between several networks developed alongside the ancient cultural routes.

Jointly organized by the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria and UNWTO, the Congress will bring together Ministers of Tourism and other public and private tourism stakeholders from around the world, as well as internationally recognized professionals within culture, cultural tourism, experts, and scientists linked to the tourism industry, including related to world civilizations.

Participants

The Congress is aimed at all tourism and culture stakeholders and representatives from related sectors: Ministries of Tourism and Ministries of Culture, National Tourism Organizations (NTOs), Destinations Management Organizations (DMOs), cultural and heritage managers, tourism and culture associations, private sector, culture and conservation experts and practitioners, NGOs and media.

Agenda

The proceedings of the Conference will consist of a High Level Meeting and two interactive discussion panels. The programme of the conference will be followed by technical visits.

- High Level Meeting: Transnational cooperation along historic routes: Leveraging landmark initiatives and new economic perspectives
- Session 1: Creating signature tourism experiences along historic routes
- Session 2: UNWTO's Western Silk Road: from awareness-raising to product development and stakeholder engagement (working title)

The panel discussions will highlight the rapidly growing cultural route tourism exploring the impact of cultural tourism development and sustainability. It will identify the specific opportunities and challenges it poses across world civilizations and cultural routes, how these are being addressed, and the way forward.

The Congress will be developed against the background of the following key crosscutting issues: Governance models (Stakeholder participation), Community engagement and sustainable development, Capacity-building, Quality visitor experience, Innovation and technology, Corporate social responsibility and ethics of sustainable tourism, Public awareness, interpretation and visitor role in promoting and protecting cultural values and heritage.