

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Third International Meeting on the Silk Road Meeting

Tbilisi, Georgia, 2-5 November 1998

The Meeting recognized that the most serious impediment to the healthy growth of tourism along the Silk Road, especially in Central Asian countries are the visa restrictions, the complexity of various procedures for obtaining visas and the general lack of clear and accurate information on visa requirements and costs.

The Meeting called upon all the national tourism administrations to strongly appeal to the highest level of their governments to ensure that government policies on visas should be more favourable to the development of tourism and that tangible measures should be taken to further simplify visa and other frontier formalities. The example of the Baltic States of having a combined visa should be followed by other Silk Road countries as a start, working eventually towards a Silk Road multiple entry and multi-country visa for bona fide tourists.

- i. To declare tourism as a priority industry in the national economy by the highest level possible, e.g. the determination of the President of Georgia by sanctioning a Presidential Decree.
- ii. The Georgian Government has declared to exempt tax on Georgian ground tour operators receiving international tourists to the country.
- iii. Tajikistan has announced that tourists of almost all nationalities will be given a 72-hour transit visa at border points.
- iv. The Meeting observed a practice adopted by the Baltic States that visas issued by any of the three countries were recognized by the other two. This could be a good start for other Silk Road countries to learn with a phased approach heading eventually towards a Silk Road visa recognized by all.
- v. The Government of Greece is developing ways and means to take advantage of the forthcoming Olympic Games for the benefit of tourism.
- vi. A National Company of Silk Road coordinating all related matters has been set up in Kazakhstan.
- vii. The intergovernmental TV & Radio Company MIR intends to launch a long term television broadcasting programme on Silk Road tourism in the CIS countries.
- viii. The meeting observed with interest a caravan restoration programme in Turkey as well as in Iran respectively that strengthened the promotion of the Silk Road tourism.

- ix. The Government of Russia is determined to revive the Siberia section in connection with the Silk Road tourism.
- x. Tajikistan's intention to declare 1999 as the year for charity tourism and tourism for orphaned children and the Government's preparation for an expedition of its highest peak with due endorsement of the UNWTO.
- xi. Tajikistan's efforts to further link with China, Kazakhstan and Pakistan for tourism routes.
- xii. Uzbekistan's on-going efforts to open economic zones for tourism development in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara.
- xiii. Armenia is proposing to develop an Iran-Armenia-Georgia tourism route.
- xiv. Countries are putting more and more of their Silk Road products on Website through Internet.
- xv. The China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) set up a guarantee fund paid by all Chinese ground tour operators as a precondition for license. The fund is drawn on by CNTA to compensate foreign tour operators in case of a failed delivery of services by ground tour operators. This practice has been highly praised by the tour operators of the generating markets as an effective means of ensuring the quality of services.