

Minutes

5th UNWTO Silk Road Task Force Meeting

The Plaza Hotel, Seoul, South Korea
23-24 April 2015

On 23-24 April 2015, the 5th UNWTO Silk Road Task Force Meeting took place in Seoul, South Korea, organized by UNWTO and the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of the Republic of Korea. The meeting was followed by a Silk Road Technical Tour organized by the Ministry and Korea Tourism Organization.

The UNWTO Silk Road Task Force, made up of representatives from Member States, UNESCO, World Federation Tourist guides Association (WFTGA) and other key stakeholders, plays a decisive role in determining key strategies, executing project implementations, and exchanging best practices for Silk Road tourism.

The key objectives of this meeting were to strengthen the role of the Silk Road Task Force and to implement the priorities and strategies of the Silk Road Action Plan 2014/2015. This gathering of Task Force members from across the Silk Road aimed to provide Member States with the opportunity to give direct input into the Programme and contribute to the achievement of tangible and feasible results.

With representatives from 20 Member States including Spain that had joined this year, this 5th Meeting of the Silk Road Task Force was the largest gathering to date. At the Meeting, the UNWTO Silk Road Action Plan 2014/15 updates were announced, and the participants discussed about efficient methods to implement the priorities and strategies of the Action Plan. All representatives of the meeting enthusiastically participated to communicate their successful experiences on promoting Silk Road Tourism.

The Silk Road Programme is focused on three key areas of activity and these were the focus for the meeting:

- Marketing and Promotion
- Capacity Building and Destination Management
- Travel Facilitation

Workshop on Focus Area I: Marketing and Promotion

The participants were asked to provide their input on the following:

- What are the most effective ways to use the Silk Road for branding and promotion?
- How should stakeholders prioritize marketing and promotional activities for 2015/2016?

UNWTO commenced the session requesting that the participants share their marketing and promotion ideas and examples in the Task Force Meeting, the summary of these activities is as follows :

- Participating in international expo and conferences
- Social media promotions
- Transnational marketing campaigns
- Giving high attention to develop tourism products in accordance to Silk Road
- Organizing to send the domestic tourism department officials and business representatives to other countries to carry out special promotions
- Focusing on promoting Silk Road and marketing strategies
- Optimizing marketing opportunities following the World Heritage inscription
- Promoting multicultural destinations on Silk Road
- Active involvement at international conferences, the holding of Silk Road cultural festivals and tourism
- Enhancing development of sustainable eco-friendly routes and products
- Spreading concentrated tourists in leading tourist cities to Silk Road related locations
- Re-evaluating maritime and enhance the route as a product
- Addressing the need for technical support to promote Silk Road destinations and give support
- Integrating with regional clustering countries to develop products
- Conclude MOU with other countries

Workshop on Focus Area II: Travel Facilitation Briefing

The participants were asked to share current status on the following:

- Improvements to visa policies (visa on arrival, e-visa, etc.)
- Aviation growth and route development
- Border crossing management

Introduction

The 2015 Ministers' Meeting at ITB was dedicated to travel facilitation. Over 20 ministers and vice ministers of tourism demonstrated commitment for improving visa policies for the force at the Silk Road ministers' meeting. According to UNWTO Tourism Visa Openness Report for the Silk Road Countries which was launched at the Meeting, 87% of world population required a visa prior to departure to a Silk Road destination. In 2013, this figure was down to 73%, which highlights the overall improvement in openness of the Silk Road.

UNWTO reminded Member States to keep them updated on travel facilitation changes so these can be promoted in UNWTO reports, social media and shared at high level meetings. UNWTO also encouraged the country representatives to use UNWTO reports as demonstrated evidence as to the value of facilitating visas on job creation, economic growth and international arrivals. UNWTO Secretary-General dedicates significant time to lobbying heads of states to take steps to facilitate travel.

Each country was requested to report on progress made over the last 12 months. The key points from this session is outlined below:

Pakistan

Pakistan offers certain countries for visa on arrival for groups of ten or more. Pakistan is progressing visa facilitation for other countries.

Russia

Last year, there was a major change in visa policies. Russia is offering visa waiver programs with few countries. Looking at programs between Russia and Korea (2013), there was 70 % increase in Korean visitors. Turkey is one of top 10 visitors into the country. Russia is trying to promote a larger portion of Silk Road related programs and projects.

Bulgaria

Due to its membership of European Union, there is less flexibility internally of what can be done with regards to visa facilitation in Bulgaria. However, with certain countries such as Turkey and the Russian Federation, Bulgaria has managed to create a more favourable policies and as a result, Bulgaria experienced 30-40% increase of Turkish visitors, last year. Currently negotiating with Ministry of Foreign Affairs for facilitating visas for Ukrainian citizens.

With regards to aviation, Bulgaria is looking to establish a direct air route with Beijing, which should increase flows for Asian markets and create a better perspective for local stakeholders.

Croatia

Croatia has a new tourism strategy for the period until 2020. With the strategy as a basis, Croatia also developed a strategic marketing plan for Croatia National Tourism Board until 2020, and CNTB is in charge of cultural tourism and also for the Silk Road. In last year, alone there were 300,000 tourists visiting Croatia from Korea. From all of Asia, Croatia had more than half million tourists visiting UNESCO sites, Marco Polo house in Korcula etc. Therefore, cultural tourism is one of the main products in Croatia. Croatia will proceed to increase and develop stronger Silk Road tourism programs.

Mongolia

Mongolia is aiming to increase international arrivals by 15% every year. Currently, Mongolia is working to achieve visa-free for an increasing number of countries, and 42 countries were newly added to the list last year. No visa is needed for Russians to enter Mongolia. Mongolia is supporting great visa policies for Chinese tour operators to visit Mongolia. All efforts are the basics to grow cross border tourism management for China, Russia and more contributing to Silk Road. Mongolia will launch new international airport by 2016 which will provide more travel facilities and help increase tourism flows throughout the country.

China

China believes that visa facilitation is a necessary measure for promoting tourism service trade. It has a positive impact on both regional economic growth as well as the world's tourism industry development. Chinese government and tourism sector always pay high attention on the visa facilitation and commit to provide convenient travel services for both Chinese outbound tourists and foreign inbound tourists. Recently, the number of Chinese outbound tourists has been growing rapidly. Based on the data from 2014, the outbound Chinese tourists reached 110 million.

As of now, there are 40 major port cities that are able to issue group visa for inbound tourists, especially for Japan and Singapore. There is also an agreement with Russia and 6 other countries for visa-free travel. Since 2013, China has an agreement with 51 countries when foreign tourists with certain countries' visa or onward ticket, then able to implement 72 hours transit visa free policy in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and etc.

China is supporting inbound group tourism in certain provinces. For example, since 31 October 2000, in Hainan province, implemented a group visa preferential policy for tourists from 26 major source

countries that support the construction of China's Hainan International Tourism Island. The annual growth rate increased to 40% after the implementation of these policies. China National Tourism Administration supports regional tourism visa facilitation, hopes to gradually increase direct flight cities and allies between Silk Road countries, constantly improve the board of tourism channel, and bring convenience to the tourists traveling across borders.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan works with border management department for border crossing procedures. Currently it is in the process of bidding for airport and its environment improvement focusing on logistics. As for the visa, Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement so tourists may travel to or from or to Kazakhstan using an e-visa. Kyrgyzstan is also cooperating with Russia (Novosibirsk airport) to negotiate a deal. Starting from May 9 2015, Kyrgyzstan will be a part of Tariff Customs Alliance, and many existing tariffs will be eliminated. Last year, Kyrgyzstan saw more than 20% increase in tourist coming into the country by following the World Heritage inscription for two sites

Korea

Korea currently holds visa waver program with more than 100 countries. In order to increase foreign tourist, Korea is constantly working to improve visa policies. In 2008, Korea implemented visa waver policy for Jeju Island. In 2012, Korea implemented simplification visa process with Mongolia. A visa treaty with Russia was concluded in 2014. Moreover, less paperwork for visa is needed for China and Southeast Asian countries. For the convenience of medical tourism, Korea has eased related policies. This year, Korea will start e-visa policy for grouped Chinese tourists. Korea's visa policy improvement with China and Russia had an economic impact that is worth 31.5 billion USD in increase, and allowed creation of about 3600 new jobs in 2014. In terms of aviation, because Korea is a peninsula, only way to travel into Korea is by aviation or shipping. It is stated that 94% of the foreign tourists are entering the country by aviation. Korea is aiming to establish 20 million inbound tourists in 2017, therefore actively processing for reducing the cost of airlines coming into Korea, open skies agreement between neighboring countries, and increase the supply of aviation seating to 100 million seats. Aviation is under jurisdiction of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, so Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is cooperating together to proceed with these projects.

Tajikistan

Tajikistan currently has an agreement with Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan to be visa-free. At the international airport, tourists may enter the country with on-site visa arrival program, which is available for 81 countries. Also experienced creation of jobs from last year. With a new international terminal, convenience increased for inbound tourists. Moreover, there was an increase of lodging accommodation for homestay in Tajikistan.

Iran

Visa facilitation is a main priority for Iran and the government has created a working group of experts to deal with this issue. Currently more than 100 countries are able to enter Iran a visa on arrival for two weeks. Iran is currently looking to extend the length of stay on that visa to four weeks. Iran has proposed e-visa as a very important issue to facilitate tourism. By facilitating visa, it not only benefits the economy, but also contributes to increasing security. Azerbaijan and Turkey citizens have visa-free policy to enter Iran.

Iran requested that UNWTO sends the updated reports to Member States and keep them informed.

Azerbaijan

Visa procedures and connectivity are key to increasing visitation to the region. Commonwealth countries and Georgia passport holders do not require a visa to enter Azerbaijan, while countries like Turkey and

Israel may acquire visas on arrival. Since August of last year, Azerbaijan established an admission agreement with European Union that simplified process for the flow of tourists in both directions to/from Azerbaijan. Other nations that do need visa is able to enter Azerbaijan can do so by applying through the new e-visa system launched in 2013. There are an increased numbers of accredited tourist agencies that may process visas. Azerbaijan offers direct flights to more than 20 countries, and plans to add more, such as Baku to Berlin, New York etc.

Workshop on Focus Area III: Capacity Building and Destination Management

In 2014, the first Silk Road Heritage Corridor was inscribed on the World Heritage List. Other heritage corridors and tourism route projects are being developed across the Silk Road and beyond.

The participants were asked to consider the following:

- What are the current priorities for capacity building in destinations along the Silk Road?
- Which destination management planning models are most effective for Silk Road countries?
- How can National Tourism Administrations collaborate more successfully to foster sustainable tourism development?
- What are the two most important Capacity Building strategies to take it to the next level, and what are the obstacles in achieving it?

Each country was requested to share input on Capacity Building strategies. The summary from this session is outlined below:

World Federation Tourism Guides Association

Train the trainers is key to building capacity in official guides in all destinations on the Silk Road.

Russia

Need 'branding' for Silk Road. Tour operators are asking for a specific branding for Silk Road. There are contests to gather ideas to create a brand. The group could utilize this contest for Silk Road for more creative ideas. Another necessity is navigation for Silk Road. Certain navigation are needed to know which road to take. There are many suggestions by UNWTO, however, sometimes coordinates needed by travellers. There is a need for a discussion on navigation and coordinates. The biggest obstacle for Russia is the visa issue. It is quite strict for now and there is a need for improvement of visa policies.

Iran

Iran developed a community development foundation three years ago which supports repairing and redesigning of old caravanserai as accommodation lodges for tourists and locals. Iran has is also working on a strategy for developing eco lodges, by redesigning and repairing houses in the countryside and villages of the region. From this policy Iran is aiming to set up ecology where communities get rebuilt to support tourism and locals living in the area in a harmonious way.

Bulgaria

In response to the question by UNWTO regarding work on the Danube project and how it may be relevant for the Silk Road, Bulgaria provided an overview of the project. The Danube has been in brand development for last 3-4 years with 14 countries involved.

Thanks to the Danube Competitive Centre and donor money from GIZ, the countries have managed to achieve many things. Branding and product development cannot be successful without third party funding. Joint programs are difficult to achieve due to brand development and lack of funding. Brand Development is supported by UNWTO and regional program with the process, and aware of the difficulties that exist at generic level in terms of development.

The priority is public and private partnership. Building trust between public and private sectors in Bulgaria is critical. It is the link for the normal flow of tourism development, and consistence between policy framework and business initiative. In terms of national tourism, data management and current network of destinations are crucial as reliability and finding of data is closely lined with policy interpretation. This should be the base line that is fundamental for the initiatives being processed at the administrative level.

Mongolia

Two issues that Mongolia expressed are on legislation laws and systems working for tourism, and education. Mongolia requested recommendations on how to balance tourism numbers and the impact on sites, especially if there are examples of government organizations and agencies working together on this issue. Silk Road program is ambitious and has a long way to go. Mongolia proposed there should be an educational programme for training on Silk Road in Universities. In Mongolia they have recently introduced regional tourism development subjects into Masters programmes.

Spain

A large supermarket chain in Spain called Mercadona has established a foundation as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility programme that sponsors the restoration of historical buildings in Spain. One of these examples is the college of the art of silk, which is being restored by the foundation. Spain suggested it is worthwhile looking to such commercial partners to support these type of products and initiatives.

Turkey

Adding local community engagements and establishment of local governments are crucial in terms of capacity building, increasing jobs and education, etc. Meanwhile, it is also crucial to be aware of unexpected affects on social issues that might rise from the development. There is a necessity to take the project from a social and holistic approach. Local communities should be allowed for the option of planning process before the assessment, implementation and monitoring process, because the locals will experience a permanent change in the community.

Georgia

Georgia emphasized the importance of community involvements on projects. Georgia encourages local assemblies to get started, especially in the protected areas. In terms of capacity building, small grants are often given to start small businesses located near heritage sites. Many individuals are capable and have an understanding of a business, but do not know how to start a business. By giving possibility to start businesses, it allows for community development.

Italy

The regions need to be more involved in. The Silk Road and we should be proactive as a 'Silk Road' as a brand. It is important to raise awareness of the impact, and participating in a transnational group, economies, societies and culture. Stakeholders, private and public, understand that when you promote per se tourism destination, you are also to preserve local communities and tradition to create virtual circle that is beneficial. Also, having the possibility of collecting and exchanging reliable data among our group of nations would be very helpful to grow the brand.

Croatia

There are problematic cases where the port authorities signing many contract with too many companies. To minimize the issue, the Croatia National Tourism Board has regulated the port to only allow three ships a day. There are about 500,000 beds in houses and etc., and the government is supporting to give subsidiaries but usually locals have little interest.

Ukraine

Agrees with Croatia on ports being too saturated with too many cruise line. Therefore there is a room for improvement in regards to tourism in Black Sea, it is focused on improving harbor infrastructure and tourism businesses and increasing the number of tourists likewise. Ukraine is undergoing a reform, and there are many action plans in place for 2020 to promote Ukraine's tourism industry. There is not a consistent approach for the "Silk Road", yet, and Ukraine needs to work towards it. It is difficult to continue, sustain, and customize product in terms of development. If it persists, it will be difficult to continue with these initiatives. Ukraine has started to collect data and start UNWTO initiatives. If the policies are too strict on certain attractions it will be difficult to bring in investments and tourists.

China

There are two main points in regards to capacity building: policy maintenance and basic infrastructure. For Silk Road constructions, three Ministries are working together for the project: Ministry of Development and Innovation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commotion Service. Capacity building is also important, especially to connect each infrastructure, infrastructure construction and technical standards. Quality standards for different nations is necessary for working together.

Tajikistan

Accommodation facilities are critical. Tajikistan has designated 2015 as the year of Silk Road, and International Tourism. The prime minister and ministers have many interests in facilitating tourism. The government will be designing key site destinations for Silk Road as well as international tourism programs. They want to create a council to improve the domestic and international tourism.

Iran

Developing different mechanisms for e-learning is a part of capacity building.

Bangladesh

Everyone can own its Silk Road destination. A complete website is crucial so people may visit and know of Silk Road and develop destinations. There is a possibility of increasing connectivity through travelers, which may double up the connectivity.

Korea

The Silk Road is an outcome of mutual exchange. All are connected to each other. It is important to educate communities and public on the mutual exchanges, through mediums such as museums. Korea is currently exhibition a special Silk Road tourism at the national museum. With this type of effort, the public is educated on affect of Silk Road on Korean culture. It is also important to educate tour guide, and other human resources on Silk Road.

Building a Tourism Route for Success

The Silk Road boasts an extensive network of overland and maritime routes, which can play an important role in connecting destinations and promoting complimentary products. Yet many routes lack adequate infrastructure, interpretation or marketing to support or encourage visitation. This session demonstrated how to effectively invest in tourism routes to enhance destination marketing, public-private partnerships and job creation while safeguarding natural and cultural heritage.

Mr. Roger Grant, Director of Australia's Great Southern Touring Route (GSTR), moderated this interactive workshop. The GSTR is as a partnership between four Regional Tourism Boards pooling marketing resources to grow visitation and maximize yield across the state of Victoria. This presentation outlined the challenges and triumphs of the GSTR's 20 years of experience in developing one of

Australia's most successful tourism routes. It provided a step-by-step guide to route development on the Silk Road, looking at product gap analysis, economic impact, digital strategies and governance models.

Results of Group Work

Following the interventions by GSTR; delegates were split into groups of 4-5 delegates and were asked to work together to prepare their response to the following challenge:

- Taking the Silk Road to the Oscars: defining your award- winning product

Each group then presented their products:

Group 1: Marco Polo

Members:

Ms. Rusudan Mamatsashvili (Georgia), Mr. Haiyan Zhang (China), Ms. Basak Onsal Demir (Turkey), Mr. Shahid Farooq (Pakistan), Ms. Harmony Lamm (Japan)

Name of the Film: Time Traveller - Back to the Beginning

- Story of a time traveller searching for the future by looking at the routes and asking himself 'how far I can go back'
- Starting his travel in Asia to Cappadocia, Turkey with beautiful horses and surrounding. Then to Georgia to enjoy traditional lifestyle in homestay. After, he flies to Pakistan the search brings him to this fascinating country. He travels around Karachi then goes back to the beginning of the journey.
- Marketing: Social media and interactive apps, share experiences of travellers, make corporate identity with logos
- Attire: Korean Traditional Dress (Han-bok)
- Thanks to: travellers sharing time and contributing to our heritage

Group 2: Genghis Khan

Members:

Ms. Maria Angeles Martinez Minguenza (Spain), Mr. Evgueni Spassov (Bulgaria), Mr. Jalil Jabbari (Iran), Mr. Ali Bagher Nemat Zargaran (Iran), Mr. Shintaro Hori (Japan)

Name of the Film: Silk Romance

- Story: Two students are exchange students at the University of Valencia. One is Japanese and the other is Bulgarian. They met on March 19 at a celebration and fall in love, then went on a cruise from Valencia to Dubrovnik of Croatia. After going back to Valencia, the time comes to meet each other's family members. They visit Nara, Japan where the boy is originally from. In Japan there are many handcrafted products and cultural buildings. Later, visits in-laws in Bulgaria. In Bulgaria are roses and gardens. They travel to Iran to get married on March 21 of the following year. Honeymoon starts in Iran, to Azerbaijan, and cruise to Caspian and countries around and back to Valencia.
- Marketing key words: spice of life, Silk Road, cradle of spices, handcrafts, family activities, and spirituality.
- Attire: traditional dress
- Thanks to: family

Group 3: Hyecho

Members:

Prof. Alessandra Priante (Italy), Mr. Javid Abdulayev (Azerbaijan), Dr. Ivana Curuvija (Serbia), Mr. Milo Srsen (Croatia)

Name of the Film: In Search of a Silk Diamond

- Route: Following the journey of Buddhist Monk who decided to deepen the knowledge of Buddhism. Starts from Gyeongju, Korea traveling to India to visit the five reigns of India.
- Main destination: UNESCO Heritage sites along the ways of Hyecho's destinations
- Main target: flash packers.
- Attractions: to have a strong relationship with the nature being accompanied by very substantial knowledge of the meaning of the trip. so it will be ecologic in accommodations.
- Food and Accommodation: following Buddhism, the journey is very spiritual surrounded by the nature. Finding food and accommodation as you go.
- Marketing: with Samsung, developed interactive map and application that allows adding video and access from remote locations. Sponsorship with Samsung enabled a heavy digital campaign through travel agencies.
- Attire: traditional Buddhist robe designed by a famous Korean designer. Diamond Jewelry made by Van Cleef & Arpels
- Thanks to: the World, Samsung, Korean government, and everyone else

Group 4: Zhang Qian

Members:

Mr. Rizo Nazarzoda (Tajikistan), Mr. Aleksandr Gorokhov (Russia), Mr. Igor Melnyk (Ukraine), Dr. Gansuhk Damba (Mongolia), Mr. Ulugbek Karymshakov (Kyrgyzstan)

Name of the Route: Road of Great Steps

- Mainly outdoor and cultural activities
- Route: starts from Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia ends in Kiev, Ukraine
- Summary: in journey to reconstruct historical locations such as battles and shooting.
- Ride: camels
- Accommodations: traditional housing
- Attire: Traditional Clothes of Jang Sam
- Attractions: fishing, falcon hunting
- Thanks to: Jang Sam