A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO TOURISM IN 10 DESTINATIONS

Maximising the Potential of the Silk Road
World Tourism Organization, 2013

Report produced by UNWTO Silk Road Programme, Affiliate Members Programme and Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL)

Secretary-General: Taleb Rifai

Executive Director of External Relations and Partnerships: Márcio Favilla

Executive Director Member Relations and Services: Zoltan Somogyi

Director of the Affiliate Members Programme: Yolanda Perdomo

Head of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme: Alla Peressolova

EHL/UNWTO Silk Road Strategy Project Coordinators: Demian Hodari and Ines Blal, Professors of Strategic Management (EHL) and Johanna Devine (UNWTO), with special thanks to Sarah Balet, Katja Baldus, Will Hobden

With gratitude to the representatives of the participating UNWTO Member States: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Greece, Islamic Republic of Iran, Russian Federation, Republic of Korea, Turkey and Ukraine.

Authors of 10 country reports: EHL Graduating Bachelor Students 2012

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Maximising the Potential of the Silk Road: A Strategic Approach to Tourism in 10 Destinations

Published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Madrid, Spain.

First printing: 2013

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Printed in Spain.

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World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Tel.: (+34) 915 678 100
Calle Capitán Haya, 42 Fax: (+34) 915 713 733
28020 Madrid Website: www.unwto.org
Spain E-mail: omt@unwto.org

Citation:
World Tourism Organization (2013), Maximising the Potential of the Silk Road: A Strategic Approach to Tourism in 10 Destinations

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CONTENTS

1. Foreword: Acknowledgements / Pg. 4-5
2. Introduction / Pg. 6
3. Executive summary
4. Suggested strategies for the countries prepared by EHL students
   4.1. ALBANIA / Pg. 10
       The value of the youth market
       Enhancing the tourism offer along the Via Egnatia
       Developing rural tourism networks
   4.2. ARMENIA / Pg. 12
       Focus on religious volunteer programs
       Attraction of the diaspora
       Enhance tourism supply
   4.3. AZERBAIJAN / Pg. 14
       Strengthen online presence
       One Village One Product (OVOP) program
   4.4. CHINA / Pg. 16
       Reviving the Silk Road history within the rural provinces
       Launching public private tourism partnership
       Membership status and Silk Road Programme certification
   4.5. GREECE / Pg. 18
       Sharing the lifestyle of local communities
       Silk Road Label
       Focus on food tourism
   4.6. ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN / Pg. 20
       Focus on religious and soft adventure product development
       Reviving the ancient traditions of Caravanserais hospitality
   4.7. REPUBLIC OF KOREA / Pg. 22
       Developing a network of regional Silk Road cultural routes
       Supporting industry cooperation and sustainable initiatives
       Using Korean Wave as a promotional tool for tourism development
   4.8. RUSSIAN FEDERATION (ALTAI KRAI REGION) / Pg. 24
       Sustainable nature and health destination
       Private Public Tourism cooperative
       Ethnic tourism
   4.9. TURKEY / Pg. 26
       Developing tourism in the midland areas
       Reviving the Ancient Silk Road experience in Central Anatolia
       Developing nature based activities and rural tourism
   4.10. UKRAINE / Pg. 28
       Enhancing rural tourism
       Cultural journey offering
5. Bibliography
UNWTO is delighted to partner with the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne, one of the world’s most prestigious hospitality management schools, on the Silk Road Strategy Initiative.

This project is an excellent example of how UNWTO, its Member States and the education sector can work together to address global issues facing the sustainable development of tourism. It is increasingly important to include such projects as part of tourism curricula as they contribute to ensuring that future generations of tourism and hospitality leaders take the right approach to sustainability.

The UNWTO Silk Road Programme is playing a central role in bringing the countries of the ancient Silk Road together to foster growth and development through tourism. Described as the ‘greatest route of all time’, the Silk Road is today a unique network of destinations with immense tourism potential. The EHL students have highlighted much of this potential in the strategies prepared during the project that are now featured in this report. It is encouraging to see such creative and innovative proposals and I would like to invite all countries of the Silk Road to make the most of this comprehensive research.

UNWTO looks forward to continuing its collaboration with EHL as a UNWTO Affiliate Member and thanks all the staff and students involved in making this joint project such a success.
Foreword

Michel Rochat
General Director,
Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne

The hospitality industry is complex: diverse ownership structures and a variety of management contracts, tension between global corporate strategies and local operations make the integration of sustainable and responsible solutions challenging. Nevertheless, CSR has become a pivotal issue for industry leaders and of utmost importance for responsible educators all over the world.

The Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne, as a leader in hospitality management education, has a special responsibility to provide future hospitality leaders with the sensitivity and the tools they need to promote innovative approaches in these areas.

Events such as the Silk Road Strategy Initiative are crucial in order to ensure that the matter of sustainable tourism development becomes and remains a priority. We are therefore extremely honored to support this UNWTO innovative project and integrate it in our student cursus.

Hospitality has always been a link between people and culture, and our students have proved that they can foster their imagination in order to continue this long tradition.

We look forward the next edition of the strategy challenge.
Launched in the Spring of 2012, the EHL/UNWTO Silk Road Strategy Challenge provided the opportunity for 200 final-year students at the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL) to work with ten UNWTO Member States in order to develop innovative, feasible and sustainable tourism development strategies for each country. The participating countries included Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Greece, Iran, the Republic of Korea, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. This special initiative was coordinated by UNWTO and EHL to promote the Silk Road Programme and determine strategies for long-term growth in sustainable tourism.

The initiative was the first formal collaboration between the UNWTO and EHL. Founded in 1893, EHL is one of the world’s leading institutions in the field of hospitality management education. With over 90 nationalities represented in 1,600 students, the school is highly international and works closely with the industry and a vast network of educational institutions globally.

The UNWTO, as the United Nations’ specialized agency for tourism, has been supporting the development of sustainable tourism along the Silk Road for many years. UNWTO’s mission is to establish the Silk Road as an internationally renowned network of destinations, stimulating investment and employment, promoting responsible destination management and inter-cultural understanding. The UNWTO carries out its activities on this program within the framework of its global ‘Silk Road Action Plan’ for tourism, focusing on three key focus areas: i) marketing and promotion, ii) capacity building and destination management; and iii) travel facilitation.

The EHL Strategy Challenge in 2012 saw 200 EHL students research and analyse the tourism and hospitality infrastructure situation in ten countries, then produce an outline for a 5-10 year strategic plan on how each country could best position itself as part of the Silk Road with a unique and sustainable tourism offer and infrastructure. The strategies focused specifically on marketing/promotion and capacity building/destination management. In order to best help the students develop and communicate their strategies, a unique course was developed by EHL consisting of 12 bespoke lectures/discussions on strategic management theory, as well as workshops and seminars with industry experts from leading hospitality management and consulting organizations such as Price Waterhouse Coopers, Wade & Company, STR Global, WATG and ICTHYS, as well as the International Labor Organization (ILO).

On 4 June 2012, the EHL students had the opportunity to bring their strategies to life by presenting them to representatives of the countries, UNWTO officials and other invited guests at the Silk Road Strategy Think Tank. The opening ceremony featured a video from UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai who stated that UNWTO was delighted to be working with EHL and that this joint initiative would “bring the countries of the Silk Road together again to foster growth and sustainable tourism development…and help shape the Silk Road of tomorrow.”

At the Silk Road Strategy Think Tank, the student teams presented their strategies, including the key data, analysis and solutions to a judging panel consisting of Member State representatives, UNWTO officials and EHL staff. The ten top teams from each country were invited to present in front of the full audience of students and the panel of judges selected the winning team based on the feasibility, profitability and creativity of their strategies. The winning teams developed strategies for Azerbaijan (first place, group 15), Altai Krai-Russia (second place, group 22) and Iran (third place, group...
The winning project created a 7 day self-guided tour across 5 regions that included educational game where visitors learn about the culture and heritage of Azerbaijan and can to redeem points for discounts to encourage local spending. The strategy also included a comprehensive social media plan and outlined necessary infrastructure development relating to visitor information centres, transportation and accommodation.

The Think Tank’s programme also included an interactive brainstorming session where students debated how the UNWTO Silk Road Programme can tackle issues relating to the Millennium Development Goals, investment, peace and international cooperation.

The EHL/UNWTO Silk Road Strategy Initiative proved to be an excellent way of bringing the UNWTO, its Member States and the students of EHL together to share ideas and devise practical strategies on how to manage tourism development along the Silk Road. The ideas and strategies outlined in this report ‘Maximising the Potential of the Silk Road’ are the product of the hard work and dedication of the 200 EHL students involved and the EHL/UNWTO management team that made this innovative project possible.

In the words of one of the EHL students Veronica Waldthausen, “This experience has been invaluable as it has not only allowed me to use the knowledge I have attained over the past four years, but has also given me the opportunity to work on a real project with the UNWTO. This Strategy Challenge has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my academic career since the solutions that we as students proposed will be integrated into the tourism plans of the participating countries. Furthermore, through this experience, I am now able to better understand the positive impact that responsible tourism can have on developing countries around the world.”
Proposed strategies for the Silk Road: Summary of EHL Student Reports
Albania and the Silk Road
The value of the youth market

As underlined the students’ research, youth tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing segments of the global tourism industry, representing 20% of international tourist arrivals in 2008 (UNWTO, 2011). Because young people are often driven to travel for longer periods of time, spend more on local goods and visit areas not often frequented by traditional tourists, they can be an economical and cultural value for destinations. In 2010, the international youth travel market generated US$ 165 billion and, according to the WYSE Travel Confederation New Horizon survey, young travellers spend a total of US$2,600 on their main trip, compared with an average of US$950 per trip for international tourists (UNWTO, 2011).

Known as “Europe’s last secret”, Albania’s folklore, culture and pristine countryside make it attractive to the youth market. As research showed, young travellers seek unique experiences by discovering other cultures and meeting local people (UNWTO, 2011). Albania is easily and inexpensively accessible within Europe:

- Tirana International Airport is serviced by low-cost carriers
- EU passport holders can travel in the country without a visa up to 90 days

The Europe is the major source market of global backpacker and coincidently Europe is also the main source market of international arrivals to Albania, with 68% of inbound tourists originating from neighbouring countries (SNV, 2009). Consequently, students suggested Albania focus on the youth market by implementing the following measures:

- Raising potential stakeholders’ awareness to the benefits of the youth travel market
- Establish a youth travel industry association or forum which can act as a focal point for information exchange, innovation, marketing and development activities
- Enhancing marketing with a focus on viral marketing to attract the youth market who tends to be heavy users of social networking sites and other ICT forms

Expansion of the tourism offer along the Via Egnatia

Albania is home to the Via Egnatia, an ancient Roman trading route that was built to link Rome with its empire in the Eastern Mediterranean. It runs through territory that today is part of modern Albania, Republic of Macedonia, Greece and European Turkey. As did the Silk Road later, Via Egnatia played an important role in the exchange of goods and culture between countries.

Therefore, according to the students’ research, the variety of experiences and attractions along the Via Egnatia offers great touristic potential. Students recommended the following steps:

1. Launch network of tourism offices in key locations along the route of Via Egnatia from Durrës to Lake Ohrid
2. Identify and protect relevant cultural and natural attractions
3. Market the route with three distinctive colors referencing based on backpackers’ main interests
   a. Cultural and historical heritage: THE HERITAGE
   b. Urban experiences and sites: THE CITY AND THE TOWN
   c. Natural parks and outdoors activities: THE WILD ALBANIA
4. Standardize existing accommodation infrastructure by creating quality guidelines

5. Focus on online marketing

Rural tourism networks

In order to differentiate Albania from the other Mediterranean destinations offering principally beach, sun and sand tourism, and address the seasonality issue of coastal tourism, students proposed to focus on rural tourism development. 44.5% of the population is employed in agriculture earning 32% less than the average Albanian salary (Euromonitor International, 2011). As youth travel mainly for exploring other cultures, they tend to be content with basic facilities, which is in line with the low accommodation and transportation supply in Albanian rural areas.

As rural tourism development is complex, considering the wide variety of actors and resources to be jointly managed, students proposed encouraging the development of specialised networks (Friás, 2010). Indeed, actions undertaken by networks help achieving each member’s objectives and improving rural destinations:

- Encourage the engagement of small-medium enterprises
- Promote training, particularly on management skills and business opportunities generation
- Contribute to wider strategic plans and goals through collaborating with other national and international stakeholders
- Create opportunities to collaborate with intermediaries that would enable small rural enterprises access to the international market

By implementing these measures, Albania could differentiate itself from other Mediterranean destinations and attract the youth travel market, a growing segment, from whom the country could benefit economically and socially.

Did you know?

From the second century B.C, the territory of Albania was divided in provinces, which were part of the Roman Empire. During this period, silk was transported from China to Rome, transiting through the provinces. However, Romans were kept ignorant of China because they traded principally with Parthians, who acted as middlemen along the Silk Road.

See report numbers 7, 17 and 27 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Armenia and the Silk Road

Focus on religious volunteer programs

Armenia is recognized as the first country to formally adopt Christianity. The country is rich in religious and cultural heritage and its monuments, such as old monasteries, churches and UNESCO World Heritage Sites have been well preserved and promoted by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia, in cooperation with public and private stakeholders. The students’ research revealed that religious travel is increasing and holds a high potential, as currently 300 million people travel annually for religious reasons (UNWTO, 2012). With the growing importance of Corporate Social Responsibility within the tourism industry, programs encouraging tourists to get involved with local communities are also experiencing an upward trend (Stowell, 2010). Therefore, the students see an opportunity for combining volunteer programs with religious tourism. In order to achieve this purpose, they recommended the following actions:

- Developing initiatives that combine religious sightseeing with volunteer programmes that assist local populations
- Promoting the tours to specialized religious organizations, such as the World Religious Travel Association (WRTA), as well in religious fair and exhibitions
- Collaborating with churches abroad, as many religious travelers seek and plan their travel through their local churches

Attraction of the diaspora

The students’ findings highlighted the tourism potential within Armenian diaspora. The Armenian diaspora represents around seven million people and has an annual income of USD 50K in comparison to USD 2.7K earned by the local Armenians (Keghart.com, 2010). The Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia has established various programmes, such as Pan Armenian Games, Ari Tun or Baze which encourage engagement and connection between the Armenian diaspora and the local Armenians. Students recommended extending such programmes to incorporate tourism, as it could help to strengthen Armenian diaspora’s perception and emotional connections towards Armenia (Darieva, 2011), while supporting economic development and capacity building of the local populations. Indeed, not only the diaspora have an enhanced comprehension of local needs in comparison to foreigners, but 97% of diaspora travelers displayed interest in wanting to contribute towards the development of Armenia (USAID, 2007).

Research revealed that there is a common pattern for diaspora to seek travel information from the following sources: 84% internet access, 77% church, 67% community functions and 57% Armenian TV channels. Thus, students proposed the following marketing strategy:

- Reinforcing partnerships with existing volunteer programs, supporting humanitarian projects in Armenia
- Promotion of Armenia’s official tourism videos across social media and online channels
- Focusing the collaboration with Armenian-American churches, as the majority of diaspora is residing in the United States and 77% of American-Armenians attend the Armenian Church occasionally.

Consolidation of the tourism supply

Student’s findings showed that Armenia, with its natural and

Armenia

Fast Facts
Capital: Yerevan
Population: 3,100,200 *
GDP per capita PPP US$ (2011): 4,794 *
International tourist arrivals (2011): 758,000 **
International tourism receipts in $ (2011): 446,000 **
Official tourism website: www.armeniainfo.am
** UNWTO Barometer Vol. 10 September 2012
untouched beauty, such as the lake Sevan, has great potential to develop nature-based tourism. A survey about Armenian international visitors has revealed that natural attractions are the main reason for leisure travel to visit the country (CAPS, 2007). Furthermore, the AMAP project, which collaborated with the Armenian government, is focusing on protecting natural areas, developing nature trails and information panels. However, student’s research underlined that a gap remains within tourism supply: in 2011, Armenia tourism and travel business environment and infrastructure was graded 3.09 out of 7 from the World Economic Forum. In consequence, students propose the following actions:

- Create a label for independent Armenian hotels based on sustainable values and underlying the authenticity of the buildings, in order to help them compete against international brands
- Develop a homestay network with an online platform from where tourists can book accommodation directly
- Construct eco-hotels along the nature trails
- Improve the Food and Beverage offering outside the capital

Furthermore, students recommended that all efforts to improve tourism supply should be done in collaboration with the Armenian Hotels Association (AHA).

By implementing these measures, Armenia would support increase tourism expenditure and tourism contribution to GDP, in addition to enhancing, protecting and preserving cultural rich sites and natural areas.

Did you know?

Situated at the crossroads of trade routes, Armenia served as a transit point between Europe and Asia. Merchandises coming from the far regions of China and India transited there before being transported through the Black Sea and Byzantium to Constantinople

See report numbers 6, 16 and 26 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Azerbaijan and the Silk Road
Strengthen online presence

Students’ research showed that the Internet is undoubtedly playing an active role in the travel industry. Travelers on average spend 8-9 hours on research and planning their leisure trips and 80% of Europeans stated that Internet is their main source of information, higher than travel agencies (NH Hoteles, 2008). Therefore, students underlined the importance of strengthening Azerbaijan online presence by enhancing the official tourism website and stimulating online buzz. Currently, according to the website analysis www.webbyawards.com, Azerbaijan’s official tourism website could add more key information to improve its search engine optimisation (SEO) and make it a more trusted online source of information for travelers. In order to implement an effective Information & Communications Technology (ICT) strategy, students recommended taking the following measures:

- Update and centralize all necessary information that would facilitate trip planning and better promote Azerbaijan’s tourism product and resources
- Enhance the visual aspect of the website and design the content in way that increase its online visibility
- Include a direct tab “The Silk Road” that will link online visitors to all Silk Road related products
- Develop a smartphone application for enabling tourists’ access to key information through their mobile devices
- Choose social channels and messages according to the target market
- Facilitate commenting and sharing content for a two-way communication

However, for this strategy to be successful, students underlined that Azerbaijan’s government should upgrade its current ICT infrastructure, namely expanding internet accessibility in regional areas and offering free public Wi-Fi points. Indeed, Azerbaijan ICT infrastructure scored 2.76 out of 7 by the World Economic Forum’s Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2011.

Students’ findings also underlined the importance of the fun aspect of traveling. Thus, in order to feed online buzz, Azerbaijan could transform the discovery of the Silk Road sites into a game concept in the form of a quest. A Silk Road Pass could be issued, allowing travelers to gain access to cultural sites and perform activities. Performance related to these types of activities would be published online and would allow visitors to acquire points which are redeemable in the form of discounts that encourage spending in local shops, hence promoting local businesses.

One Village One Product (OVOP) program

According to the students’ findings, the One Village One Product (OVOP) program, which has proven to be very successful in various countries, would offer the opportunity for community-based tourism development (United Nations, 2007). The program is based on three principles, which are (1) the creation of globally acceptable products/services based on local resources, (2) self-reliance and creativity and (3) human resource development (Kiyoto, Tembo, & Wille Te, 2012). The OVOP program would encourage tourists to travel to areas outside Baku for visiting regional towns specialized in the production of crafts or services related to the cultural heritage of the Silk Road. In order to facilitate tourist’s journey, students suggested the implementation of a wider bus or public transportation system. Visitor information centers could be established in the OVOP towns, delivering information on the

Fast Facts
Capital: Baku
Population (2011): 9,306,000 *
GDP per capita PPP US$ (2011): 8,752 *
International tourist arrivals (2011): 1,562,000 **
International tourism receipts in $ (2011): 1,287,000 **
Official tourism website: azerbaijan.travel

** UNWTO Barometer Vol. 10 September 2012
program and related products in Azeri and English. Potential OVOP product that could be of value for Azerbaijan includes:

- Shamakhi: silk and carpets
- Basgal: headscarves, silk weaving
- Lagich: crafts and copper-smith's utensils (e.g., Lamps, coffee makers)
- Gabala: Cultural sights
- Sheki: jewelry, pottery, leathery, woodworking

The program, which offers capacity-building through digital learning, sharing of experience and virtual networking would help to address the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan Republic goals of promoting employment of local people in private tourism enterprises. Indeed, students’ research revealed that it would bring direct income for the rural citizens, encourage entrepreneurship, which would in turn generate employment and promote local resources and knowledge.

With the implementation of these steps, overall visibility of Azerbaijan and the tourism actors would be increased, attracting foreign investment, increasing inbound tourism and related expenditures in remote areas outside the capital, fostering employment in the small villages.

**Did you know?**

Azerbaijan was one of the most important silkworm breeding regions in the Middle East and silk goods today are a specialty of Azerbaijan’s artisans. Ambassadors and merchants traveling along the Silk Road helped to spread goods produced in the region such as local carpets. Azerbaijani carpets embodied all art traditions and styles and were exported to Europe from the 14th century.

See report numbers 5, 15 and 25 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
China and the Silk

Revival of the Silk Road history the rural provinces

Students’ research showed that there are five key regions in China historically linked with the Silk Road that have good potential for tourism development: Shaanxi, Gansu, Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Ningxia. Students recommended initially focusing on the province of Ningxia because it hosts the Helan Mountain Culture, which offers great opportunity for sustainable tourism development, thanks to its natural and historical attractions. Along the road to Yinchuan, the province’s capital, tourists could explore the protected Suyukou State Forest Park or Helan Mountain Rock Carvings, a place with hundreds of rocks adorned with mystical carvings and imprints. The well preserved Baisikou Twin Pagodas, which were once the summer resort of the Emperor of the Western Xia Empire, also remind travelers Ningxia’s connection with the Silk Road (Ellen Schliebitz, 2012). The dynasty occupied from 1038 to 1227 AD the Hexi Corridor, an important trade route between North China and Central Asia that was part of the Northern Silk Road. Developing tourism in the area would bring economic and social benefits to Ningxia, which has the third smallest GDP of all provinces in China (The China Perspective, 2011).

Public Private Tourism Partnership

According to the students’ research, creating a sustainable association involving local travel agencies, hotels and the government could increase tourism development and benefit all stakeholders. As success of the project heavily depends of stakeholders’ management, the association should be organized as a private-public partnership and encourage marketing, capacity building and the development of local communities. Private sector members, by paying a membership fee that would cover administrative expenses, could benefit from the support of the association. Additional income could come from taxes on the tourism products, the cost being supported by the tourists. Students recommended that the association initiate and implement the following actions:

- Create of an online platform that will promote sustainable Silk Road Tours and redirect guest to local travel agencies and hotels where they will able to book directly. By eliminating international intermediaries, it would diminish economic leakages while strengthening local operators
- Offer training courses for its private sector members and partners
- Elaboration of sustainable projects and tourism activities in Ningxia that would improve the environmental protection, create new opportunities for employment, integrate minorities and encourage cultural exchange

Furthermore, the association could develop contracts with international partners for further branding and international recognition. According to the students’ findings, a potential partnership could be developed with the National Geographic based on the Geotourism concept, which “aims to sustain or enhance the geographical character of a place, its environment, heritage, culture and the wellbeing of its residents” (National Geographic, 2002).

Membership status

In order to attract members, students recommended that the association propose an incentive system. As membership reinforces partners’ involvement (Council of Europe, 2010), students encourage the creation of a system of points that will determine the status of the members according to their performance in different categories:

Fast Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>China</th>
<th>Capital: Beijing</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (2011):</td>
<td>1,347,565,300 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita PPP US$ (2011): 6,200 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International tourist arrivals (2011): 57,581,000 **</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International tourism receipts in $ (2011): 48,464,000 **</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Official tourism website: <a href="http://www.cnta.gov.cn">www.cnta.gov.cn</a></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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** UNWTO Barometer Vol. 10 September 2012
- Customer: supply in line with international customer’s needs in order to ensure long term competitive advantage

- Human resources: the policy in place should encourage capacity building and personal development, as human resources play a key role in the tourism industry

- Corporate Social Responsibility: responsible management and tourism products that have a social and environmental dimension

Members with superior status would be listed higher on the platform, ensuring better visibility, and would receive more incentives.

**Silk Road Programme certification**

Students’ research also stressed the role of certification for reassuring the tourists on the quality of the product and reinforcing the brand awareness. Developing a certification in collaboration with the UNWTO Silk Road Programme would permit to anchor the association in a more global network. Thus, criteria for the certification should be based on sustainable principles and in line with UN Millennium Goals. Students proposed to consider the following aspects:

- Ecologically: limit the group size in order to reduce the negative effects on the environment due to mass tourism, providing tours that are ecologically educational, preserving the local cultural heritage

- Socially: international working conditions (OIT, 2012), equal gender job opportunities, prohibition of child labor and collaboration with the local people

- Economically: committed to improving the local economy through tourism (ATES, 2011)

By developing a sustainable tourism association, China would not only respond to the growing tourism trend but also encourage economic and social value within the rural areas, by diversifying the source of revenue, educating local population and protecting natural and cultural resources.

**Did you know?**

Chinese explorer Zhang Qian was one of the first Silk Road pioneers. He trekked to the West in the 2nd century B. C to search for military allies against the Huns and returned home 13 years later full of fascinating tales. His missions brought the Chinese into contact with the outposts of Hellenistic culture established by Alexander the Great which opened the way for exchanges of envoys.

*See report numbers 1, 11 and 21 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.*
Greece and the Silk Road

Life style sharing with local communities

As we shift towards a more globalized world, consumers are increasingly seeking authentic experiences. Based on Pine and Gilmore’s Experience Economy theory, students recommended promoting a genuine experience for tourists by enabling them to share the life style of local communities through their participation in local traditional festivities and diverse activities. Travellers will have the opportunity to choose among activities based on three main themes: (1) adventure, (2) culture and (3) culinary, while staying with family in their home. Participation of hosting families that could accommodate travellers should be of a non-lucrative nature. The core of the concept lies in the authenticity of the relationship built between the Greek families and international travellers. Therefore, students recommended building a common web platform for facilitating the exchange, which would describe the families and activities proposed and offer a direct connection between the tourist and its local host.

It would also provide capacity building for host communities with e-learning courses in areas such as English language, hospitality management, etc. According to the students’ findings, with a small investment, this concept could achieve the following results:

- Fostering intercultural exchange and authentic experiences
- Capacity building and promotion of entrepreneurship
- Additional revenue for the small providers of local services

It was also recommended to launch a marketing campaign in collaboration with local associations or churches to ensure the participation of local communities.

Silk Road Label

Research of the students has shown that Greece’s role in the Silk Road is not as evident as with other more ‘traditional’ Silk Road destinations. Therefore the implementation of a Silk Road Label that reinforces Greece’s role in the Silk Road and at the same time serves as a quality assurance to the travellers has been suggested. Once applied to the entire Silk Road, the label will reinforce the idea of the Silk Road as a trading road consisting of many different countries and also identify the participating Silk Road destinations as such. Furthermore the Silk Road Label will certify hotels and accommodations participating in the above named concept ‘Sharing the life style of local communities’.

As nowadays a major part of travel bookings are made online rather than with travel agents, there is a strong need for labels or certificates that serve as a quality assurance to the travellers. Since the number of existing labels/certificates is steadily increasing and consumers prefer to rely on the ‘big ones’ it is recommended to work with an established certifier rather than creating a new label. The students suggested working with ‘Travelife’, an international certification scheme that offers an affordable and fair system. Travelife is a quality management tool for sustainability issues of hotels and accommodations. After having been assessed in 99 sustainability areas, hotels can be awarded with a bronze, silver or gold label.

Hotels or accommodations applying to be certified as a member of the Silk Road Label first need to make a prior assessment. According to the outcomes of the assessment, the applicant has to follow a number of tailored E-learning courses to fill identified gaps. Subsequently there will be another test and the results will be the foundation for the final certification. Assessed areas for the certification procedure might consist of the following:

- Fostering intercultural exchange and authentic experiences
- Capacity building and promotion of entrepreneurship
- Additional revenue for the small providers of local services

It was also recommended to launch a marketing campaign in collaboration with local associations or churches to ensure the participation of local communities.
Focus on food tourism

According to the students’ research, activities related to gastronomy are good opportunities for revitalizing local economy and employment. Food tourism is a growing trend and accounts for approximately 30% of tourist expenditure globally (OECD, 2012). As 2012 UNWTO Global Report on Food Tourism underlined, food is an essential expression of local culture and identity.

According to the students’ research, the special character and simplicity of the Greek cuisine, as an integral part of the Mediterranean diet, as well as the quality and freshness of its products offer good potential for the development of a tourism portfolio of gastronomic products. Therefore, Greek tourism should continue the promotion of local traditional cuisine, with an emphasis on the importance of the complete food chain procedure (cultivation, breeding, cooking, consumption), by reinforcing its presence on the official website. For instance, the website could enhance the interactive and visual part by completing recipes with pictures, allowing comments sharing, proposing gastronomic quizzes or adding hyperlinks in the introductory text.

Did you know?

Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) was one of the first Silk Road travellers from the West. While being on the road with his army for around 10 years, he travelled across Central Asia, the Persian Empire and North India. Through his military conquests he opened maritime routes and enabled trading between the East and the West.

See report numbers 10 and 20 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Iran and the Silk Road

Focus on religious and soft adventure product development

The students’ report identified that developing package tours crossing several destinations could be a great opportunity for encouraging travel beyond the major cities into the rural areas and extending the length of stay in Iran. Through including various suppliers in different industries, package tours can generate more exposure and revenue for small-medium enterprises. They can also play a role in educating visitors on the destination and encouraging sustainable travel behavior.

The students suggested that Iran focus its package tours on religious and adventure tourism while at the same time enhancing product development in these two areas.

Religious tourism

Taking into consideration the fact that visiting sacred sites is a key part of the Islamic faith, Iran has significant potential to attract an increased number of religious travellers to its destinations, such as the city of Mashhad. The importance of Shiism Islam within the population (89%) makes Iran distinctive from the majority of its country’s Sunni neighbors (UNWTO, 2011). Consequently, there is particular potential for targeting the Arab market within the religious tourism segment. The findings of the students’ research suggested that in addition to this, increasingly travellers are looking for ‘authentic’ experiences, thus Iran should focus on religious package tours that mix tangible with intangible aspects. These could include:

- Workshops in Islam religion, such as the history of Islam, the beliefs and traditions, religious food, important festival and religious ceremonies
- City tours including lunch with locals for cultural exchanges
- Participation in religious festivities

Adventure tourism

Adventure tourism has been a new traveling trend in the past years with an ever-increasing annual growth rate of 17% (Xola Consulting Services, 2010). In 2011, Iran’s natural environment and protected areas have been rated 5.43 and 6.84 out of 7 respectively from the World Economic Forum, which demonstrates that Iran possesses great natural resources for adventure tourism.

Research by the students revealed that booking independent travel to Iran can be difficult due to the lack of information available in languages other than Persian, as well as limited facilities for making online payments. Consequently, in order to attract this market, students recommended that adventure tours offered by Iran:

- Are professional and practice international safety standards
- Demonstrate sustainable practices and involve local communities, catering for adventure tourists that respect nature and are eager to learn about local culture
- Are accessible online via social media, because adventure travelers predominantly prepare their trips by researching information online

It was also recommended that Iran enhances cooperation between tourism stakeholders by developing a consortium of sustainable tour operators that could market and distribute the product internationally. As part of this process, the students’ report recommended that Iran improves and centralizes its communication and distribution channel by creating a central...
reliable booking and review website specifically for Adventure Tourism in Iran. According to Deloitte’s research in 2011, 48% of consumers read review by other travelers on internet before booking a holiday.

**Revival of the ancient traditions of Caravanserais hospitality**

Between the 16th and the 19th century, there was an extensive network of caravanserais along the whole network of trade routes in the Middle East and Central Asia. These caravanserais were used to provide travellers with accommodation, security, food and amenities along the Silk Road. In Northern Iran, along the Khorosan Road, they are over 25 Caravanserais. However, according to the students’ findings, caravanserais are currently not being maintained nor utilized to their full potential. Students recommended preserving this unique heritage and developing Iran’s infrastructure by restoring the caravanserais into 4-5 star hotels, which would achieve the following:

- Address the gap in supply of accommodation outside major cities and create incentive to travel in regional areas
- Involve local communities through local procurement and create direct and indirect jobs outside the main cities
- Local communities could benefit from international tourist expenditure that represented half of the tourism expenditure in 2011 (Euromonitor, 2011)
- Preserve Iranian cultural heritage and help develop Iran’s sustainable tourism product offer.

By implementing these measures, Iran could raise the profile of its image as a religious and adventurous destination globally, increase tourism expenditure on local products and contribute to the social and economic development of the more remote areas of the country.

**Did you know?**

Persians, along with Indians, are known to be the creators of the game of chess, which was an important part of their culture. As various board games were available for travellers in the caravanserais along the Silk Road, chess entered the Islamic world and later spread throughout Europe.

*See report numbers 4, 14 and 24 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.*
Republic of Korea and the Silk Road

Network of regional Silk Road cultural routes

The students identified the southeastern area of the Republic of Korea as having huge potential for tourism development. This region currently represents 44% of the total World Heritage Sites of the country and will boast a further 7 sites that are on the tentative list. The region has been identified in the South Korean Tourism Plan for 2012 to be the cultural core specialized in Korean history and culture (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2011) The students’ research underlined that there is a great potential for culture tourism as the international market is currently undervaluing the historic cities of the area. Taking into account the rich legacy of the Silla Dynasty in this region, students recommended to link hub cities to World Heritage Sites (WHS) by developing regional cultural routes. Indeed, cultural tourism is essentially about journeys and cultural routes can play an important role in anchoring a narrative aspect in the cultural spaces through which tourists travel (Council of Europe, 2010). For instance, routes could depart from the city of Deaegu and stretch into four different directions, to include the following sites:

1. The Eastern route: to Gyeongju, highlighting the rich culture of the Silla Dynasty and the Gyeongju Historic Areas, Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple WHS
2. The Western Route: exploring the Gaya Dynasty Haeinsa Temple WHS
3. The Northern Route: showing the significance of Confucianism in South Korea and extending to Andong with the Folk Villages WHS
4. The Southern Route: linking Daegu and Busan, working as connection between the entry point (Busan) and departing point (Daegu)

Support to industry cooperation and sustainable initiatives

Cultural routes involve network of partners from various industries and geographical places. The students’ research highlighted the importance of engaging local authorities and stakeholders to ensure consistent management, cohesive policies, guidance and effective planning. Students’ findings underlined that, by carefully selecting members responding to the criteria of sustainable tourism, the network could contribute positively to the employment rate and local economy by increasing the proportion of travellers while preserving the cultural and natural resources of the region. Indeed, promoting sustainable cultural tourism would be in line with the Green Growth National Policy declared by the South Korean government (Green Growth Korea, 2012). Thus, students suggest the following propositions:

- Giving preference to stakeholders involved in industry initiatives for sustainability, such as the Tour Operators Initiative (TOI)
- Encouraging the use of railroad and ferry as a sustainable and nostalgic mode of transportation between Korea and its neighboring Asian countries

Research showed that thanks to its advanced and comprehensive modern transport system that includes roads, railroad, air and sea transportation system, South Korea can rely on its transport infrastructure for better
incorporating the World Heritage Sites and proposing a unique and nostalgic journey. Cultural and historical concepts based on the Food and Beverage’s offer or design can also be developed in trains or ferries.

**Use of Korean Wave (K-Wave) as a promotion tool for tourism development**

The Korean Wave refers to the growing popularity of Korea’s entertainment culture, particularly in TV shows and pop music, in South Korea and across many countries in Asia. According to the students’ research, due to the scale of K-wave and its growing popularity internationally, inbound tourism from China and Japan has increased (Chen, 2008). For this reason, students encourage the use of K-wave for raising awareness about the World Heritage Sites of the Southeastern region and suggest the following marketing actions:

- Organizing annual events, as film or music festivals, in the cities of Gyeongbuk region and inviting K-wave celebrities
- Producing films or TV dramas featuring the history of the Silla Dynasty

By implementing these measures, South Korea could enhance the sustainability of its tourism while carrying out the image of a rich cultural and historical destination that can attract an international market.

**Did you know?**

During the Unified Kingdom of Silla (A.D 668 – 935), Korean artisans created sculptures and built temples, shrines and castles in Japan, thus extending the Silk Road across the East Sea. Silla brassware was very popular and only the top five noblemen in Japan had the right to purchase articles from Silla.

See report numbers 9 and 19 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Altai Krai and the Silk Road
Sustainable nature and health destination

According to the students’ findings, the Russian region of Altaiisky Krai boasts bountiful nature and health resorts which present great potential for promoting the development of sustainable nature-based and health tourism. Indeed, Altai Krai region is perceived as ecologically pure (Altai Region, 2011) and is well-known for its rich health and wellness traditions. The Altaiisky Krai, Russian part of the Altai Krai region, is the most developed touristic areas of the region and possesses a special economic zone called SKY-Blue Katun SEZ. It is a recreation area based on sports and wellness. Taking into consideration the existing supply, students suggested increasing domestic market awareness of the region’s offer. Indeed, SKY-Blue Katun SEZ zone proposes various sports and activities, which correspond to the rising demand for adventure and trekking holiday’s packages from the Russian market. In order to promote the area, students suggested the following measures:

- Development of a brand “My Altai Krai” for reinforcing emotional link and tourists’ loyalty to the region
- Implementation of a specialized tourist office in the SKY-Blue Katun SEZ zone that would deal with all requests linked with health, wellness and sport activities.
- Reinforcing offline marketing in Barnaul’s tourist office
- Development of a website in Russian, so that Altaisky Krai’s tourism is prepared to meet future demands of the growing number of Internet users (NMTW, 2012).
- Uniting region’s activities and lodging facilities under one common platform

As research revealed, demand for integrated travel platforms, like OTAs, rose by 41% in Russia between 2010 and 2011 (TravelDailyNews, 2011). A common platform would also increase overall product by enabling synergies, economies of scope, communication and availability of knowledge between the different members (Verma, 2008).

Private Public Tourism cooperative

In order to increase awareness of the region, students suggested developing a Private Public (PPP) Tourism cooperative. This type of PPP would be a strategic alliance where the government would be responsible for the infrastructure while cooperative members take charge of the development and promotion of the tourism supply. Therefore, the cooperative could develop a rating system for accommodation and activities. It should establish clear objectives and related metrics for measuring progress.

According to the students’ findings, financing the project through micro-credit companies would make a positive economic impact on the local economy (Lohlein & Wehrheim, 2003). Thus, the cooperative could facilitate process for micro-loan approval for its members. In order to facilitate access to the cooperative, students recommended not instituting fixed membership fees but rather a variable percentage of the room or activities sales.

Ethnic tourism

The students’ research found that Russia possesses numerous and diverse ethnicities but indigenous culture is currently decreasing (Joshua Project - U.S. Center for World Mission, 2011). According to the students’ findings, the ethnicities of Tubalars, Kumandins, Chelkans, Teleuts and Telengits, living...
in the region of Altai Krai, could be great potential for the development of ethnic tourism, as they kept their own beliefs and traditional way of living. Students recommended Ethnic tourism for the following reasons:

- The development of tourism activities related to indigenous heritage would help preserving indigenous culture (Hinch and Butler, 1996) and cultural exchanges.
- Ethnic tourism is in line with tourists’ increasing desire for authentic experiences.
- Integration of local producers into the global value chain would help reducing leakages associated to high tourism (Ashley, De Brine, Lehr, & Wilde, 2007).
- As ethnic tourism is a niche market, it is not associated with any negative effects imposed by mass tourism (Ohridska-Olson & Ivanov, 2011).
- Income generated by tourism can be reinvested in preserving natural and cultural assets of the region.

As a result, students suggested developing workshops through a program called “In the Footsteps of Ethnicities”. This offering is a custom fit itinerary, which features the exploration of the ethnicities in the region, each of them being called a “footstep”. It should be run and supervised by a governmental regional organization in collaboration with the assistance of local NGOs.

By relying on its existing assets, increasing domestic market awareness and supporting its local ethnicities, Russia would be able to rise tourism expenditure in Altai Krai region without a major initial investment.

**Did you know?**

To avoid the deserts and mountain ranges, early Silk Road trading routes are likely to have gone north across the Altai Mountains. As a result of trade and cultural exchanges between the ethnicities, products made of felt, which originates from Altai, were also used for building yurts in other Asian regions, as well as on the Balkan Peninsula.

See report numbers 2, 12 and 22 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Turkey and the Silk Road

Development of the tourism in the midlands areas

Research undertaken by the students revealed that Turkey’s economic growth has been concentrated in urban areas located in the western part of the country. Antalya and Istanbul attracted 60% of all domestics and international arrivals (Deloitte, 2010) and the biggest share of Turkey’s tourism industry remain sun, sea and sand offers. The students’ reports identified that there is an opportunity for developing sustainable tourism in the midland areas where rich natural and cultural resources exist, such as the historic region of Cappadocia.

Revival of the Ancient Silk Road experience in Central Anatolia

Central Anatolia is culturally significant as a region of the Silk Road. Being the crossroad of caravan routes transporting silk, spices or precious stones, it served as a bridge linking Asia to Europe and many archeological remains, such as the ruins of ancient Caravanserais, can be found in the major cities lying on the Anatolia Silk Road. The findings of the students show that the strong link between Turkish history and culture and the Silk Road offers the opportunity for reviving the local heritage of the region. Moreover, students’ findings underline that tourism, being a labor intensive industry, would help in tackling youth unemployment issue, decreasing the economic gap between western and eastern parts of the country and promoting women employment. Consequently, in order to attract cultural tourists, students recommend focusing on the following points:

- Restoring original caravanserais along the towns of Konya, Aksaray, Nevsehir and Kayseri in accordance with international treaty “Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites”
- Converting Caravanserais into boutique hotels offering authentic experiences
- Employing local people and allocating one Caravanserai as a hotel vocational training center which would act as a support pillar for the hotel while reinforcing the local’s hospitality skills
- Organizing traditional markets within the Caravanserais

Nature based activities and rural tourism

European travelers represent the major part of the tourism arrivals in Turkey, with France, Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Bulgaria and Russia representing almost half of it in 2010 (Euromonitor, 2011). As 43% of travelers from those markets have stated their interest for soft adventure trips and responsible tourism (World Economic Forum, 2011), students believe there is a great potential for nature and rural tourism development in Turkey. According to the students’ findings, nature and rural tourism could be developed in the region around the city of Trabzon. Indeed, the city was the main port of the historic Silk Road and is located in stunning natural scenery while being close to several major airports. Therefore, students propose that:

- Trabzon would be the cultural center of the region with its high number of museums and rich cultural history
- Macka, a mountain region located 30km from Trabzon, would be promoted as the adventure capital where nature based activities could be performed
- Existing towns and villages nearby Trabzon would be used

Fast Facts

Capital: Ankara
Population (2011): 73,639,800*
GDP per capita PPP US$ (2011): 11,209*
International tourist arrivals (2011): 29,343**
International tourism receipts in $ (2011): 23,020,000**
Official tourism website: www.goturkey.com

** UNWTO Barometer Vol. 10 September 2012
as hubs in close proximity to various activities, helping to develop local communities whilst reducing construction to a minimum

- The village of Ayder, an alpine summer resort containing thermal springs, could offer unique health treatments in line with the old Ottoman tradition
- The high agriculture industry would also provide an opportunity for the development of Agro-tourism, offering a genuine experience to the tourists by enabling them to share the everyday life of the local communities

By implementing these measures, Turkey would assure sustainability into its tourism offering by diversifying its source of tourism income and offering additional revenues to the inland regions, which would help to address the economic gap between the coastal and rural areas.

Did you know?

The caravanserais were not only built along the major trade routes for keeping safe travelers and providing them hospitable services, but were also pious endowments from wealthy men and women of the Seljuk Empire. Thus, at the center of each caravanserai, a small mosque or prayer room, called mescit, was erected on a stone platform.

See report numbers 8 and 18 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Ukraine and the Silk Road

Rural tourism

With its variety of influences from Eastern and Western cultures well preserved in its small historical villages, Ukraine is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. It has 213 rural country estates, mainly situated in Western Ukraine and this heritage is closely linked with rural tourism and nature-based attractions. Rural tourism is defined as “recreation in rural territories, usually with overnight stay in country estates, private hotels or houses not belonging to visitors.” This recreation entails being in contact with nature, as well as getting familiar with local life through hiking, excursions in the neighborhood, entertainment and local food tasting” (UNDP, 2010). According to Eurogites Congress on Rural Tourism in 2003, overnight stays in rural accommodation in Europe is estimated to bring in 12 billion in direct spending. Taking into account multiplier effects brings the total to more than 25 billion. Moreover, by diversifying the tourism product, longer length of stay and spending on items other than accommodation will make these figures much higher. Apart from the financial benefits, rural tourism could also achieve other positive impacts:

- Emphasise a nation’s authentic characteristics by promoting traditional lifestyle, ethnic food and educational experiences
- Create a new dynamic between the urban centers and the rural areas
- Help raise female participation in the workforce and empower women in the Ukrainian tourism sector

As previous examples have shown the success of these types of projects relies heavily on the authenticity of the experience and the support offered to facilitate tourists’ access to numerous and various products. Therefore, students recommended that Ukraine tourism focus on upgrading accommodation supply and promotion by:

- Categorizing independent hotels, which represent more than 82% of hotel supply (STR, 2012) for facilitating travelers’ accommodation choice
- Developing a sustainable certification in collaboration with a local tourism organization, such as the Union of Green Tourism Promotion
- Establishing a systematic data collection process for supporting statistics and strategies
- Using the Balance scorecard tool for aligning business activities to a chosen strategy and helping monitoring overall performance

Cultural journey offering

According to the students’ research, Ukraine’s rich cultural diversity could be emphasized through the development of a cultural journey that would link the regions. A printed information booklet, detailing the cultural diversities of each region, online quizzes and other interactive activities would help tourists develop their knowledge of the area. Indeed, by emphasizing the fun and competitive aspect of the tour, travelers would be encouraged in an interactive relationship with the locals.

To facilitate travel and expand the network for the cultural journeys, it was suggested that Ukraine invests in improving its public transports systems by offering a bus network and
enhancing rail services. Students recommended enhancing railways transport because it would represent an opportunity to attract Western market while ameliorating the country’s carbon footprint:

- Train is the greenest means of transport as it releases 3 to 10 times less carbon emissions than road or air transport (Euromonitor, 2010)

- By investing in railways infrastructure, Ukraine would be able to tender for a position in the Eurail network. This would reinforce its links with Western Europe and enable its tourism to benefit from a well-known and trusted brand affiliation

By supporting its Carpathian region and promoting its cultural diversity, Ukraine could attract international market and enforce tourism in rural where tourism impact could benefit economically and socially to the regions.

Did you know?

Crimea, in present day Ukraine, was once part of the Silk Road. The city of Sudak was initially a trading base for the Greek merchants of the Byzantine Empire, making it one of the most ancient cities on the peninsula. It gained prominence in the 13th century, when it became an important trade center on the Silk Road, later to be conquered by the Genoese who established the famous Sudak fortress.

See report numbers 3, 13 and 23 on silkroad.unwto.org for more information.
Bibliography

Albania


Armenia


China


Greece


**Iran**


**Russia**


**South Korea**


**Turkey**


**Ukraine**


The World Tourism Organization, a United Nations specialized agency, is the leading international organization with the decisive and central role in promoting the development of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. It serves as a global forum for tourism policy issues and a practical source of tourism know-how. Its membership includes 155 countries, 7 territories, 2 permanent observers and over 400 Affiliate Members.

UNWTO Affiliate Members bring together over 400 companies, educational & research institutions, destinations and NGOs whose activities are related to tourism and which contribute to the UNWTO their knowledge and expertise to promote the development of tourism that’s responsible, sustainable and accessible for everyone. Over 80 countries are represented among the Affiliate Members, the world’s premier forum for exchanging tourism knowledge.