

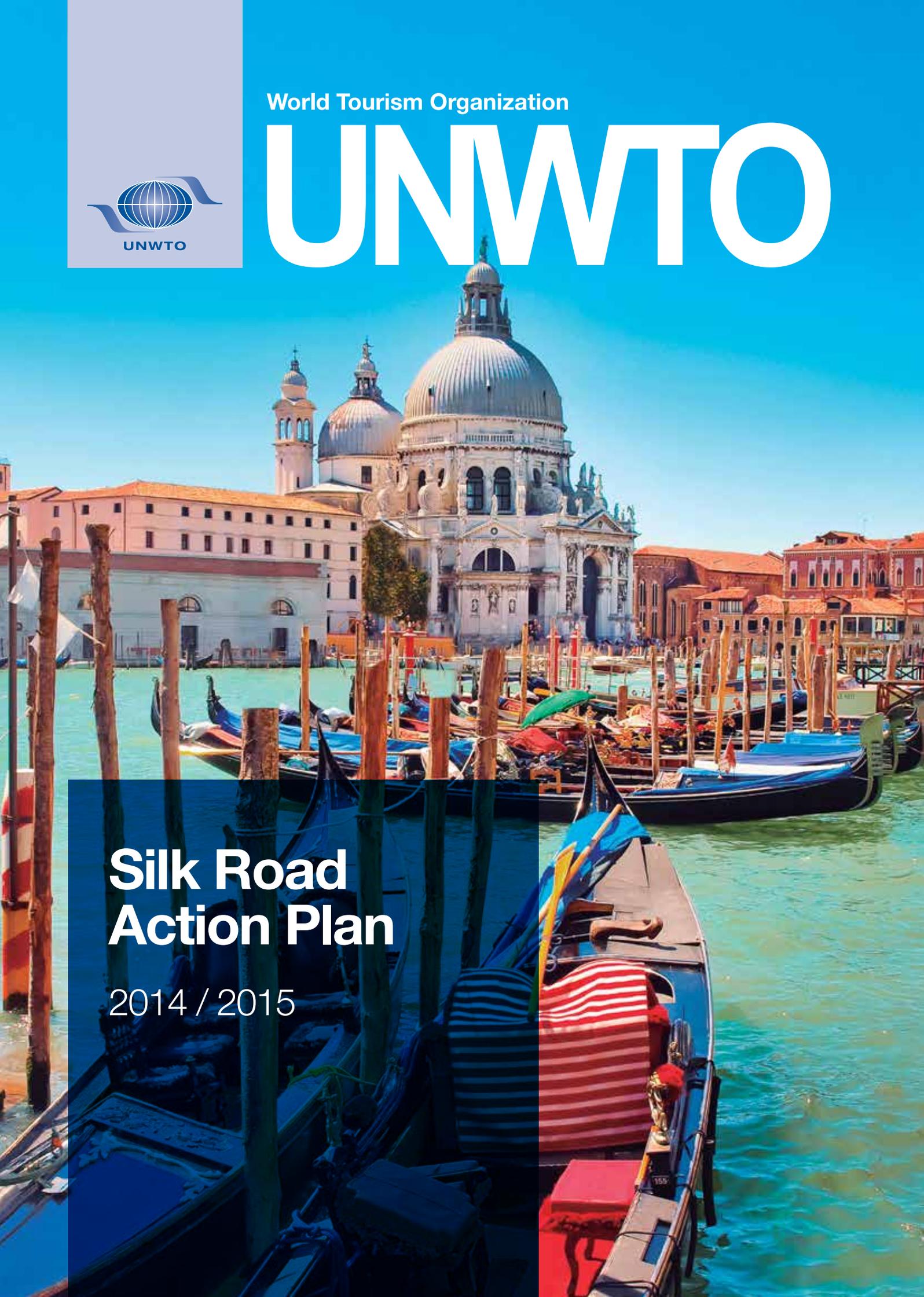
World Tourism Organization



# UNWTO

## Silk Road Action Plan

2014 / 2015





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Front cover image: Venice, Italy. In 2014, UNWTO is working with the Council of Europe Venice Office, the Veneto Region of Italy and Marco Polo Systems on the VeRoTour project, an initiative aimed at developing maritime tourism along the Venetian routes of the Silk Road.

Image this page: Cappadocia, Turkey.

# Foreword

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## **Silk Road Tourism: Celebrating 20 years of the Samarkand Declaration**

In 1994, 19 countries joined UNWTO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, to launch the Samarkand Declaration. This was a milestone event for Silk Road tourism, with the Declaration calling for "...a peaceful and fruitful rebirth of these legendary routes as one of the world's richest cultural tourism destinations".

Twenty years later, an increasing number of stakeholders are working together to foster tourism development along the Silk Road. The results are notable: trans-boundary tourism projects are growing, trade and consumer interest in the Silk Road continues to rise and the UNWTO Silk Road Programme already works with over 30 Member States.

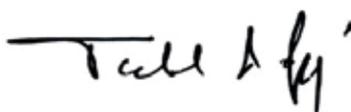
Over the last twenty years, tourism has grown to become one of the most important global economic sectors; a sector that drives growth and development, creates millions of jobs, spurs exports and investment, and transforms the lives of countless people for the better. Over one billion international tourists now travel the world every year, up from 508 million in 1994. By 2030, UNWTO forecasts international arrivals to reach 1.8 billion.

To maximize the opportunities arising from tourism's growth among Silk Road destinations, a number of key challenges remain to be addressed, including visa facilitation and connectivity. Despite the significant progress made in recent years, destinations around the world still require a visa from about two-thirds of the world's population (66%) prior to travel. We must work together to improve the policies and processes governing visas, particularly if Silk Road destinations are to benefit from the growing source markets of China, Russia and India.

On the issue of connectivity, UNWTO has made it a priority to bridge air transport and tourism policies globally, considering that over half of the world's international tourists arrive to their destinations by air. Improved policy alignment and further liberalization along the Silk Road will surely lead to growth in both sectors.

Finally, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Samarkand Declaration, we cannot forget the overarching challenge of sustainability. It is up to us to shoulder this responsibility and place sustainability and ethics at the core of tourism development along the Silk Road.

I am confident that with the input, engagement and support of our Member States, partners and industry, we will achieve great success on the Silk Road throughout 2014/2015.



**Taleb Rifai**  
Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)





# How to use this Action Plan

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The Silk Road Action Plan 2014/2015 is a comprehensive overview of UNWTO's strategies and initiatives designed to help Silk Road tourism grow more robust, competitive and sustainable. The Action Plan aims to foster collaboration between stakeholders to stimulate investment and poverty reduction along the Silk Road, while safeguarding its cultural and environmental resources.

The Silk Road Member States are in a unique position to leverage from each other by collaborating in a number of areas such as marketing, product development, tourism route development, travel facilitation and cross border initiatives. The Silk Road Action Plan 2014/2015 is designed as a platform to facilitate this.

The Action Plan begins with an introduction to Silk Road tourism and UNWTO's vision for its development. It highlights the roles of the key stakeholders and provides an overview of Silk Road tourism activity led by UNWTO over the previous years. Global trends impacting tourism are also included to highlight the implications and opportunities for developing Silk Road tourism now and in the future.

The Action Plan outlines goals and objectives that have been developed based on the priorities set by Member States in the UNWTO Silk Road Action Plan Survey (2013). The priority actions are designed to be realistic and achievable short term steps that work towards the ultimate vision for Silk Road tourism.

Success on the Silk Road will rely on dedicated input, engagement and support from all industry stakeholders. The UNWTO Silk Road Task Force will continue to play a key role in identifying priorities and measures that best represent industry needs. Stakeholders are encouraged to address the priority actions by working in collaboration at the local, national and regional levels. Member States are invited to align their national masterplans with the priority actions outlined in this Action Plan. All stakeholders are encouraged to take initiative and provide input on how these goals can be reached.

This Action Plan emphasizes the extensive opportunity for developing sustainable tourism along the Silk Road. Building on the increasing international recognition of the Silk Road as a vehicle for transnational growth and development, this Action Plan seeks to revive the historic routes as a tourism concept fitted to the globalized age we live in.

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Image: Nara, Japan.



# Introduction to the Silk Road

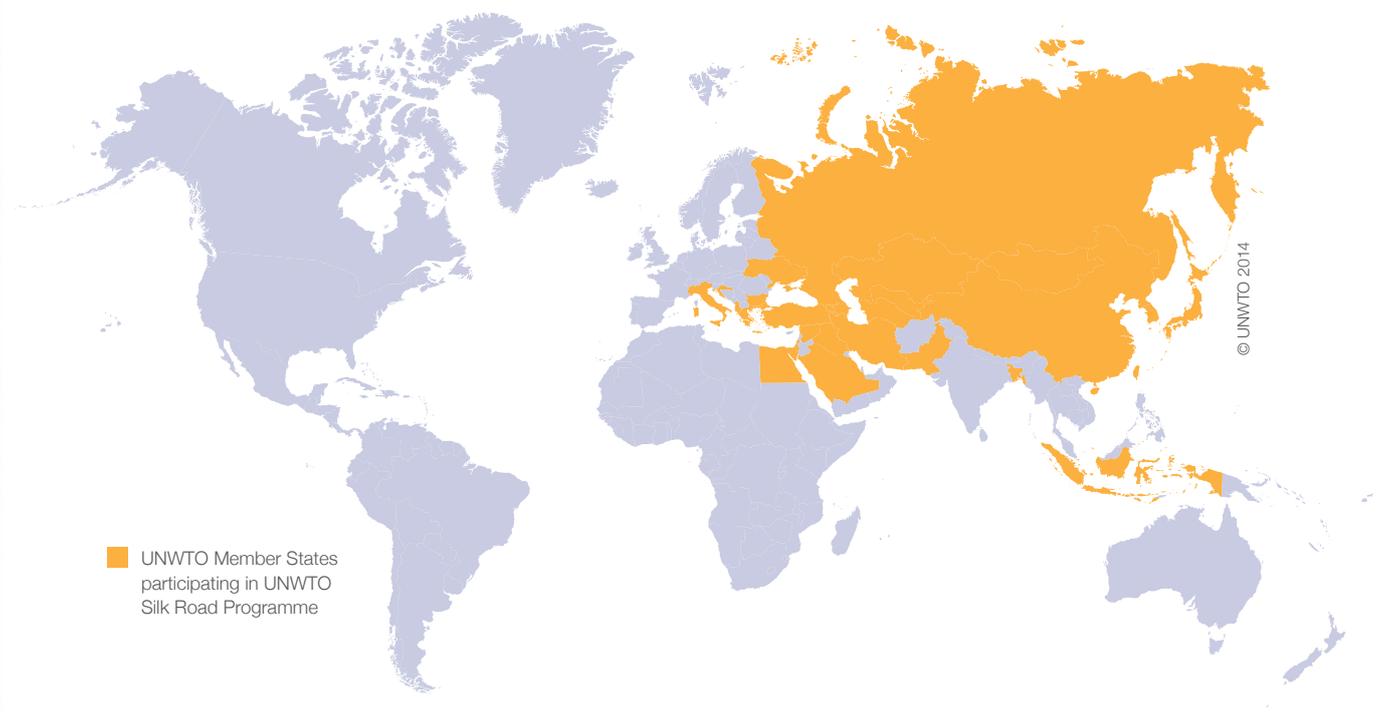
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Acclaimed as the 'greatest route in the history of mankind', the ancient Silk Road formed the first bridge between the East and the West and was an important vehicle for trade between the ancient empires of China, Central and Western Asia, the Indian sub-continent and Rome. As routes of integration, exchange and dialogue, the Silk Road contributed greatly to the common prosperity and development of humankind for almost two millennia.

With its richly diverse cultural heritage and its wealth of natural tourism attractions spanning across thousands of kilometers of ancient routes, the Silk Road today offers visitors the opportunity to experience a unique network of destinations linked by a shared history. By venturing along the ancient Silk Road, tourists can walk in the footsteps of famed explorers such as Alexander the Great and Marco Polo.

UNESCO experts and state parties have dedicated years of research to identifying and analyzing the routes and corridors of the Silk Road. Through their findings, a vast array of ancient cities, caravanserais, mountain passes, forts and watchtowers, religious sites and archeological sites have come to light. While there is significant potential for tourism development and local economic growth along the Silk Road, many of the route's cultural and natural sites are under threat, and significant investment and attention is required to ensure that they are safeguarded for the enjoyment of future generations.

Member States participating in the UNWTO Silk Road Programme include: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, DPR Korea, Rep. Korea, Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, San Marino, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (at time of printing, June 2014).





# Vision

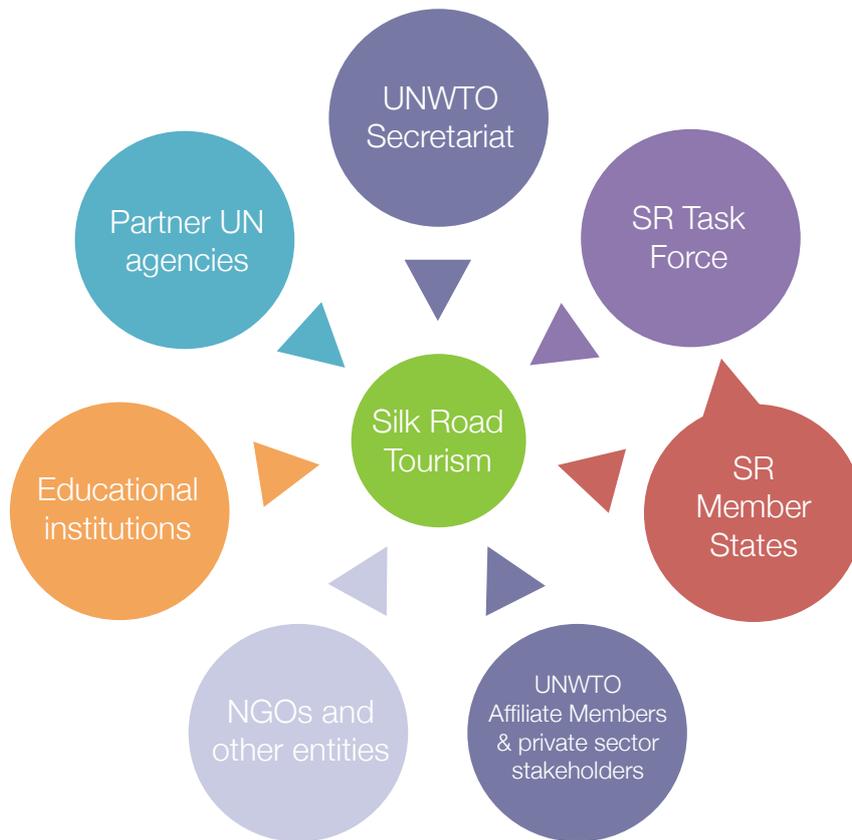
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The Silk Road Action Plan 2014/2015 works as a collaborative platform for marketing and capacity building, raising the profile of Silk Road tourism while driving development that is sustainable, responsible and internationally competitive. The Silk Road Action Plan works towards implementing the following multi-faceted vision:

The Silk Road will be an internationally renowned, seamless travel experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ The Silk Road will be an established brand, supported by extensive cooperative marketing campaigns</li><li>○ High quality infrastructure will facilitate smooth travel across international borders</li></ul>
The tourism sector will be prosperous across all Silk Road destinations, stimulating ongoing investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Governments will value and support the tourism sector and gain significant return for their investment</li><li>○ The Silk Road will offer high quality tourism infrastructure</li><li>○ Tourism will generate significant direct and indirect employment</li></ul>
Silk Road stakeholders will work closely together for mutual benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Strong co-operation between Silk Road countries</li><li>○ Profitable partnerships between public and private sectors</li><li>○ Increased visitor length of stay and yield across all regions</li></ul>
Tourism will drive improved cultural and environmental management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Advanced cultural management systems in place</li><li>○ Environmental sustainability will underpin every aspect of tourism development</li></ul>
Silk Road tourism will act as a vehicle for fostering peace and cultural understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Promotion of cultural pluralism and intercultural dialogue</li><li>○ Intercultural cooperation as a key instrument to strengthen social cohesion, solidarity and peace</li></ul>

## Key Stakeholders

The input, endorsement and engagement from a variety of stakeholders are key to ensuring the success of the Silk Road Action Plan:



Four key stakeholder groups are responsible for managing and implementing the main activities outlined in the Silk Road Action Plan:

World Tourism Organization	UN Agencies	SR Task Force	SR Member States
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lead and drive the Silk Road Programme</li> <li>○ Provide a collaborative platform for building alliances</li> <li>○ Coordinate logistics of major events</li> <li>○ Communicate on progress</li> <li>○ Seek and manage donor funding/ sponsorship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide expertise and input</li> <li>○ Galvanise support</li> <li>○ Promote the activities in the context of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)</li> <li>○ Example institutions: UNESCO, UNDP, UNCTAD, FAO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine key strategies and actions</li> <li>○ Endorse and drive implementation</li> <li>○ Encourage sharing and exchange of best practices</li> <li>○ Example bodies include: NTOs, private sector stakeholders, finance/ investment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure representation and involvement in SR Task Force</li> <li>○ Actively participate in all meetings and events</li> <li>○ Promote collaboration and cooperation amongst SR Member States</li> </ul>

# Outcomes of Previous Silk Road Action Plans 2011-2013

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UNWTO's role in promoting the growth of Silk Road tourism dates back to 1994, when 19 countries called for the 'peaceful and fruitful re-birth of these legendary routes as one of the world's richest cultural tourism destinations'. Over the years, UNWTO worked closely with key UN agencies such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to advance sustainable development imperatives across the regions of the Silk Road.

It was in 2010 that UNWTO developed a specialised programme dedicated to advancing tourism along the Silk Road. The first Silk Road Action Plan 2010/2011 was launched at the 5th International Meeting on the Silk Road in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where the three key focus areas were established as:

- a) Marketing and promotion
- b) Capacity building and destination management
- c) Travel facilitation

In 2013, UNWTO launched its first Silk Road Action Plan Survey, which enabled Member States to give their feedback on activities and priorities for the future. The results of this survey were integrated into the current edition of this Action Plan.

## Marketing and Promoting the Silk Road

As a unique network of destinations linked by a common cultural heritage, the Silk Road presents significant opportunities for collaborative marketing and promotional initiatives. Over the years, UNWTO has collaborated with major international travel fairs on numerous promotional activities to highlight the tourism potential of the Silk Road. ITB Berlin is the established meeting place for Silk Road Ministers, as they convene annually to address key challenges and opportunities for cooperation. Social media activity continues to increase with Silk Road events being held on an annual basis within the context of WTM's Social Media Mart. Bloggers have competed to create innovative Silk Road blogs, and the winners have been sent across the Silk Road to promote its multiple attractions.

UNWTO recognizes the importance of market intelligence as key to developing effective marketing and promotion campaigns. Market research conducted in 2011 showed the prominence of the Silk Road as the world's most discussed travel route online, from a total of 300,000 blogs and social media sites reviewed, 26.5% of all discussions focused on the Silk Road.

To raise the profile of the Silk Road on the international stage, UNWTO has invited major institutions to its meetings, such as UNESCO, World Bank, UNCTAD, ASEAN, ICOMOS, PATA and the Council of Europe. The aim of this multi-sectorial approach is to tackle important issues and explore opportunities arising from global collaboration.

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Image: Turkish celebrity chef Musa Dagdeviren shares his expertise with local Azeri chefs at the UNWTO 'Flavours of the Silk Road' Conference 2012, Baku, Azerbaijan 2012.



## Capacity Building and Destination Management

Since the Silk Road Programme was launched in 2010, thousands of delegates have gained knowledge and expertise by participating in UNWTO Silk Road conferences and seminars. Topics have ranged from city tourism, urban development and destination marketing to heritage management, food tourism, investment, travel facilitation and product development.

UNWTO Silk Road conferences, seminars and press trips have taken place in Samarkand (Uzbekistan), Tokyo (Japan), Baku (Azerbaijan), Dunhuang (China), Lausanne (Switzerland), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Berlin (Germany), London (United Kingdom), Altai Krai (Russian Federation) and Shiraz (Islamic Republic of Iran).

UNWTO, in close collaboration with UNESCO, has also run a series of capacity building workshops aimed at building closer collaboration between heritage and tourism stakeholders along the Silk Road.

In 2013, following years of ground-breaking research by UNESCO, ICOMOS and University College London (UCL) on sites and routes of the Silk Road, the UNESCO/UNWTO Silk Road Heritage Corridors Tourism Strategy Project was launched as part of the transnational Silk Roads World Heritage Serial Nomination initiative.

With an unprecedented level of collaboration between 15 countries, two World Heritage Nominations for the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors in Central Asia and China were submitted to UNESCO with the final evaluation of the nominations due to take place in 2014. The nominations focus on two specific Silk Road Heritage Corridors: the first crossing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, and the other between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Following extensive consultation with experts at a workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in 2013, UNWTO and UNESCO launched a Roadmap for Development, a guideline document which sets out the objectives and steps for maximizing tourism development for the heritage corridors while safeguarding the Silk Road's unique natural and cultural resources.

In 2013, UNWTO also established a new partnership with the Council of Europe Venice Office, Veneto Region of Italy and Marco Polo Systems. The VeRoTour project, a pilot maritime tourism initiative along the Venetian routes of the Silk Road, aims to develop transnational thematic tourism products and enhance competitiveness and sustainability along the western link of the Silk Road. The final stages of the VeRoTour project will be implemented over the course of 2014.

UNWTO has also worked closely with educational institutions to engage young students and young professionals in Silk Road tourism initiatives. UNWTO works with Member States to enable local students to volunteer at its meetings, allowing them, herewith, to gain knowledge on the issues surrounding sustainable tourism development.

In 2012, UNWTO ran a very successful EHL/UNWTO Silk Road Strategy Challenge, where 200 final year students developed hospitality and marketing strategies for 10 Silk Road destinations. The students that developed the best strategy won a trip to the Altai region of Russia in 2013. Here they worked with local tourism authorities, private sector stakeholders and students in developing a hospitality management strategy for the region focused on health and wellness. The EHL graduates ran a series of interactive capacity building workshops involving over 200 local participants that attracted significant media coverage.

## Facilitating Travel to connect the Silk Road

Travel facilitation has many facets, including: abolishing or liberalizing visas; improving border procedures; abolishing or minimizing taxation on travel; and air transport liberalization.

Visa policies are among the most important governmental formalities influencing international tourism. The development of visa policies and procedures, as well as other important travel documents, such as passports, is closely linked to the growth of tourism. UNWTO carried out extensive research on visa facilitation during 2012/2013 and commenced plans for a specialized report on the Silk Road to be launched at the 4th UNWTO Silk Road Ministers' Meeting 2014.

Travel facilitation was included as a key topic in all UNWTO Silk Road meetings during 2012/2013. Specialists and countries that have advanced in visa facilitation and air transport liberalization were able to share their best practices and positive results with Member States, thereby encouraging them to facilitate travel across the region. The UNWTO Secretary-General lobbied governments at the highest level during his discussions with heads of state to improve visa policies, while emphasizing the positive impacts in terms of economic growth and job creation.

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Image: UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai with delegates during a technical tour of the Yadan National Geographic Park during the Sixth UNWTO International Meeting on Silk Road Tourism, Dunhunag, China, August 2013.



# Looking Ahead: Global Trends Impacting Silk Road Tourism

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While significant progress has been made in terms of raising the profile of Silk Road tourism since the launch of the first Action Plan in 2010, much work remains to be done to achieve the ultimate vision for Silk Road tourism. Looking ahead, there are a number of global trends that demonstrate the potential for tourism. Success will rely on the ability of stakeholders to embrace these opportunities.

- **International tourist arrivals are forecast to reach 1.8 billion by 2030** which means that 5 million people will be crossing international borders for leisure, business or other purposes every day<sup>1</sup>
- **Asia and the Pacific will be the fastest growing outbound region** between 2010-2030<sup>1</sup>
- **Advances in technology**, such as increased internet accessibility and the expansion of smartphone usage and technology, will continue to impact tourism trends
- **Improved connectivity on the Silk Road** via new transnational rail links and air route expansion will change the way people travel across the regions
- **The rising affluence of Asia's middle class** will create huge potential for tourism growth
- **Social media and user-generated content** are influencing consumers' travel decisions like never before, creating herewith new opportunities and risks
- **Cruise tourism continues to grow**, with increasing demand from source markets Australia, Scandinavia and Finland, Germany and Brazil<sup>2</sup>
- **Young travellers represent one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism sector** accounting for 20% of all international arrivals, generating an estimated 160 million visitors and a global market worth US\$182 billion per year<sup>1</sup>
- **Increasing demand for cultural tourism**
- **Culinary tourism is an increasing motivation to travel** with tourists seeking local, authentic experiences linked intrinsically to the places they visit. Accounting for 30% or more of tourist expenditure, food plays an important role in the development of tourism services<sup>1</sup>
- **Heightened consumer sensitivity to climate and sustainability issues** has increased the demand for responsible business practices and corporate social responsibility in tourism

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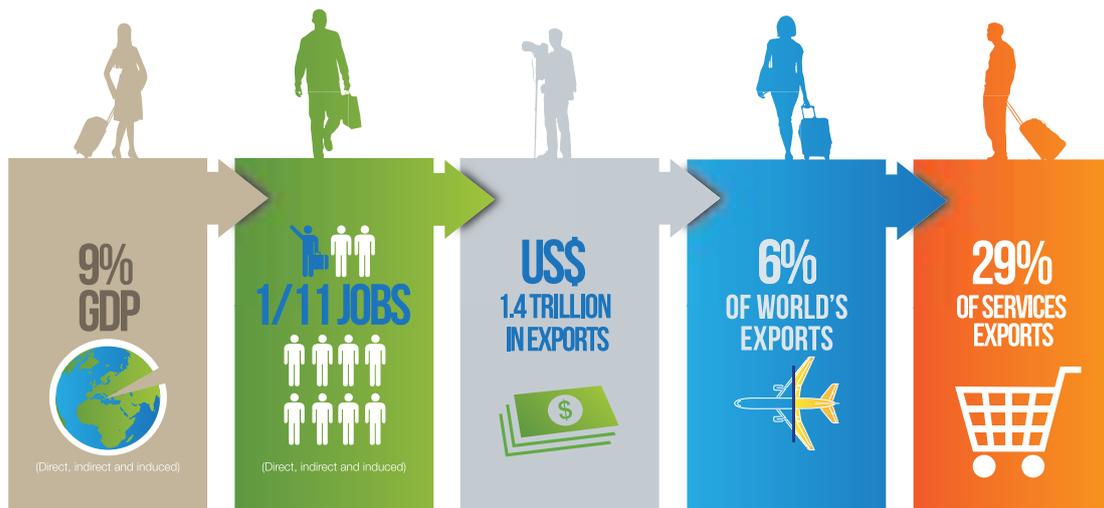
1. <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2011-10-11/international-tourists-hit-18-billion-2030>

2. [http://www.cruising.org/vacation/news/press\\_releases/2014/01/state-cruise-industry-2014-global-growth-passenger-numbers-and-product-o](http://www.cruising.org/vacation/news/press_releases/2014/01/state-cruise-industry-2014-global-growth-passenger-numbers-and-product-o)

3. <http://wysetc.org/research/youth-travel-fast-facts/>

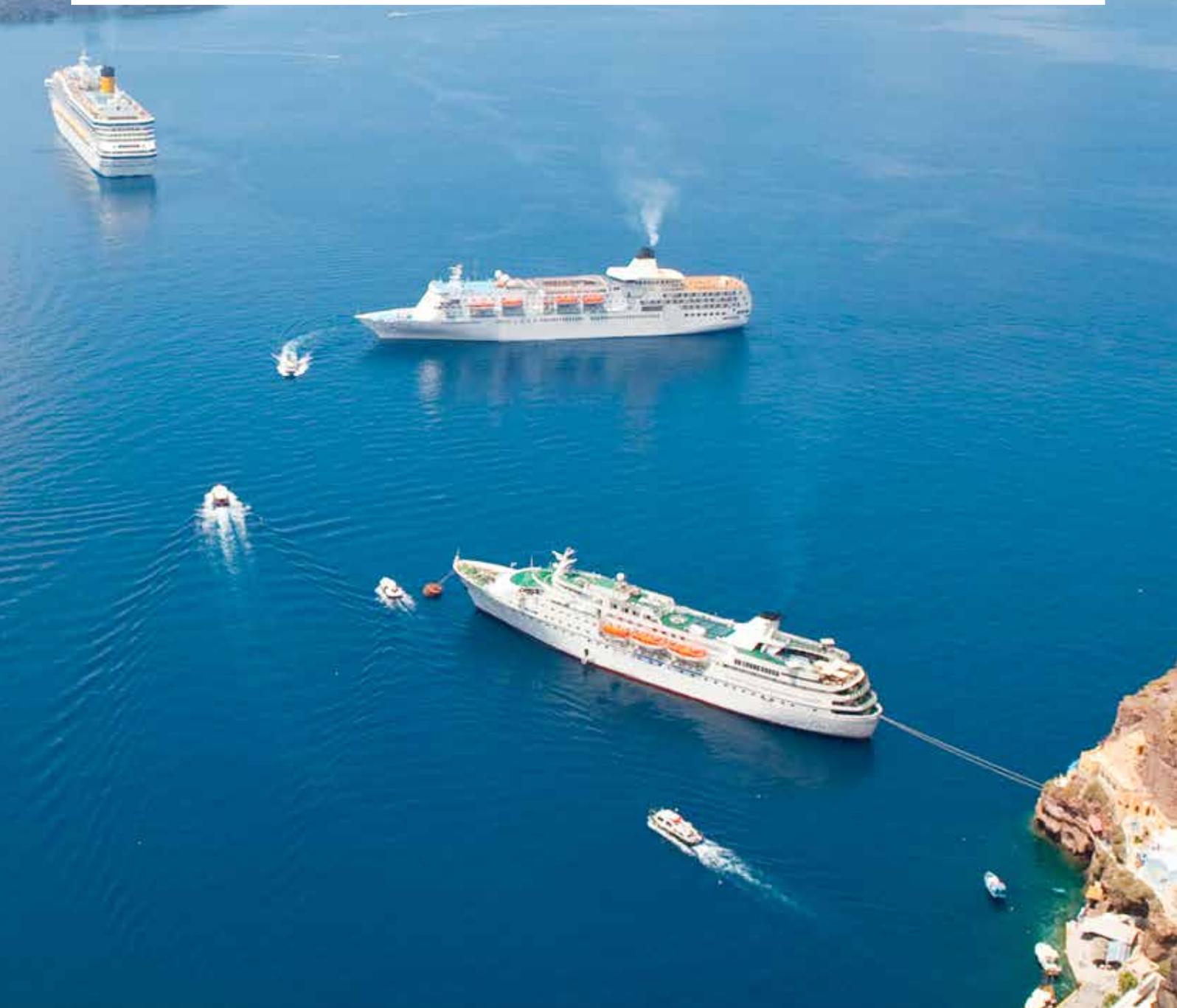
4. <http://www.oecd.org/cfe/tourism/foodandthetourismexperientheoecd-koreaworkshop.htm>

Image: Santorini, Greece.



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## WHY TOURISM MATTERS



# Focus Area 1: Marketing and Promotion

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## The importance of cohesive branding

Cohesive and powerful marketing is key in an age of fierce competition in the globalized marketplace. A strong brand with a positive reputation inspires trust; while quality delivery encourages consumers to willingly adopt the story they are being told.

In terms of destination marketing, the Silk Road has a significant and strong foundation to build upon. UNWTO research has shown that the Silk Road is currently one of the world's most discussed travel routes online. Destinations must take a collaborative approach to marketing and promote messages defined by a shared set of values. Consistent marketing messages are required to enhance the brand image of the Silk Road and improve the efficiency of all marketing and promotion efforts.

## Priority Actions 2014/2015

Based on stakeholder input and the results of the Members Survey 2013, priorities for 2014/2015 include:

- **Engage with the industry and strengthen the Silk Road's presence at major international fairs** such as ITB Berlin and WTM London, while expanding activity into other regions
- **Develop data, research and intelligence** to create an effective Silk Road brand strategy, to enhance collaboration between Silk Road destinations and to increase consumer awareness
- **Increase the online profile of Silk Road tourism**, through an established destination website and/or industry marketing portal
- **Develop marketing strategies in line with key source markets' interests and expectations** both at the individual destination level and collectively
- **Enhance international Silk Road festivals and events** by increasing international participation in existing events, while expanding the type of activities in other destinations
- **Create new marketing opportunities through collaborating with other related international thematic routes** such as the Maritime Silk Road, Spice Routes, Amber Routes, etc

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Image: Korčula, Croatia.



# Did you know?

Croatia promotes its Silk Road legacy through its Homeland of Marco Polo campaign. The campaign encourages visitors to discover the Silk Road in Croatia's history, architecture, arts and nature, and also highlights the importance of other Silk Road destinations around the world.

# Focus Area 2: Destination Management and Capacity Building

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## Working together to deliver consistently high quality products

Effective destination management maximizes tourism value and strengthens the national brand identity. By applying effective management strategies, destinations can foster economic growth, safeguard local arts and culture, diversify business and reduce visitor seasonality. Training and development has an important role to play in this. Training can enhance service delivery, improve product quality, boost productivity and increase profitability.

There needs to be more a more consistent approach to managing destinations across the Silk Road. The route's rich cultural heritage and the distribution of interrelated tourism sites make it ideal for cross-border initiatives and regional investment opportunities. Yet a number of challenges are currently impeding its growth and development. The level of product offer, service delivery, hospitality and language skills vary greatly across the route. Tourist information services are sporadic and interpretation can be non-existent in some areas. Poor heritage management has also placed intangible and tangible heritage under threat. Community engagement in tourism has also yet to reach its full potential.

## Priority Actions 2014/2015:

Based on stakeholder input and the results of the Members Survey 2013, priority actions include:

- **Facilitate industry engagement for decision-making and strategy development** through established forums, such as Silk Road Ministers Meetings and Task Force Meetings
- **Promote community engagement in sustainable tourism development projects**, such as the UNESCO/UNWTO Silk Road Heritage Corridors project
- **Enhance industry training and development** through online courses, manuals and workshops
- **Implement capacity building programmes in regional areas** focused on destination management and heritage conservation
- **Product development that delivers quality experiences, excellent service and innovation**
- **Increase connectivity between destinations and products** through developing Silk Road travel routes
- **Develop preliminary capacity building standards and guidelines**
- **Raise the profile of Silk Road tourism as an investment opportunity** by collaborating with national investment agencies



## Did you know?

In 2014, two Silk Roads Heritage Corridors crossing Central Asia and China will be evaluated for World Heritage Nomination. In preparation, UNWTO and UNESCO are designing a destination management strategy that will promote sustainable tourism growth along the Heritage Corridors, while safeguarding the unique natural and cultural heritage.

# Focus Area 3: Travel Facilitation

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## Overcoming the barriers to boost growth

While the Silk Road continues to be a hub for commerce and travel, barriers such as inefficient and outdated visa policies, border crossing procedures and customs regulations continue to hinder tourism growth in the region. There are extensive opportunities for enhancing connectivity by air, rail and sea along the Silk Road.

UNWTO is committed to working with its Member States to increase international arrivals, foster economic growth and job creation on the Silk Road by promoting a common approach to visas and connectivity .

## Priority Actions 2014/2015:

Based on stakeholder input and the results of the Members Survey 2013, priority actions include:

- **Build on existing research** to raise awareness about the value of facilitating visas on the Silk Road with regards to international arrivals, economic growth and job creation.
- **Continue to monitor visa policy improvements and showcase best practices** to encourage openness through the modernization of visa procedures, encourage reciprocity and work towards a 'common visa' for the Silk Road.
- **Bring together visa policy decision makers and industry** to raise awareness about the value of facilitating travel
- **Enhance connectivity and route development** through increased collaboration between airports, airlines and aviation ministries in order to make the Silk Road more accessible, and to promote trans boundary travel and dispersal of travel.

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Image: Gyeongju, Republic of Korea.



## Did you know?

**Russia & Turkey** introduced free visa regime in 2011, resulting in a **300% increase** in Russian visitors to Turkey.

In 2013, **China** introduced a **72 hour transit visa-free policy** for nationals of 45 countries visiting its major city destinations Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

**The Republic of Korea** has been easing its visa policy for Chinese visitors since 2008, resulting in an increase in Chinese arrivals of 19% annually.



World Tourism Organization

Capitán Haya 42, 28020 Madrid, Spain  
Tel: (34) 91 567 81 00 / Fax: (34) 91 571 37 33  
[www.unwto.org](http://www.unwto.org)  
[silkroad@unwto.org](mailto:silkroad@unwto.org) / [silkroad.unwto.org/](http://silkroad.unwto.org/)