

Minutes

7th Task Force meeting

30-31 April 2017

Valencia, Spain

Hotel Barceló Valencia

The 7th UNWTO Silk Road Task Force Meeting was held in Valencia, Spain on 30-31 March 2017. Held within the framework of the International Year of Sustainable Development for Tourism 2017, public and private Silk Road Task Force representatives from 24 countries convened to discuss strategies and best-practice examples on how to adapt the Silk Road to the challenges and opportunities of the globalized tourism age.

The meeting focused on the three key pillars of the Silk Road Action Plan: i) marketing and promotion ii) destination management and capacity building and iii) travel facilitation, while a specialised workshop session was also dedicated to the development of the Western link of the Silk Road.

With representatives from 24 Member States including Romania that had joined this year, this 7th Meeting of the Silk Road Task Force was a great success. All representatives of the meeting enthusiastically participated to communicate their successful experiences on promoting Silk Road Tourism.

Overall, the meeting showcased the good work being carried out by Valencia in terms of Silk Road promotion and public-private cooperation. Since Spain's inclusion in the UNWTO Silk Road Programme in 2015, best-practice examples implemented by the Valencian region have included branding Valencia as the "city of Silk" in 2016 and the rehabilitation of important Silk Road heritage located within the region.

Greece, the host of the upcoming First Western Silk Road Workshop (Alexandroupoli, Greece; on 26-27 April 2017), and Bulgaria, who has expressed its interest in hosting the Second Workshop, underlined their support and commitment to an initiative aimed at reviving Silk Road heritage located across Europe.

The 7th UNWTO Silk Road Task Force Meeting was jointly organized by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Agència Valenciana del Turisme and the Fundació Turismo València. Turkish Airlines supported the event and shared its actions in promoting route development and connectivity across the Silk Road.

Workshop on Focus Area I: Marketing and Promotion

Over the last 6 years, UNWTO has been working with a growing number of Member States on joint marketing initiatives to raise the profile of the Silk Road to consumers and trade alike. This workshop provided an overview of what has been achieved until date and discussed the challenges and possibilities of working towards a common Silk Road brand identity.

Roundtable discussion of the workshop discussed following issues:

- How destinations currently use the Silk Road for branding and promotion
- How destinations can work more effectively together in marketing and promoting the Silk Road
- Update and Strategies for 2017

University of Valencia

Ms Aurora Pedro, the UNWTO Silk Road focal point, proposed to hold a Silk Road Summer School under coordination of the University of Valencia in September 2017 in Valencia. The University of Valencia is seeking for support of the Silk Road member states.

Greece

Greece expressed its support to the idea of holding a Silk Road summer school in Valencia.

Armenia

Armenia suggests to create a wine route and thereby to establish sub-regional cooperation under the Silk Road umbrella. As a part of wine route, Armenia plans to use local wine and brandy festivals and events as promotion tools. Armenia has discussed possible cooperation with Romania, BSEC, Georgia, Spain and Italy for the wine route, which is eligible for the EU funding bidding.

Mr Mekhak Apresyan was appointed a leader of this initiative.

Black Sea Economic Region (BSEC)

BSEC proposed to hold capacity building workshops in their premises in Istanbul, gathering BSEC members, the WFTGA and the UNWTO.

Pakistan

Pakistan drew attention to the importance of the festivals. The festivals in Pakistan are very well attended and popular events. Pakistan proposes the UNWTO to get involved into the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar. Mr Shahid Farooq volunteered to be the ambassador of the Silk Road in the Gulf countries and to Thailand to encourage them to join the UNWTO Silk Road Programme and participate in the activities of the Programme.

Iraq

Iraq informed the participants about the successful development of religious tourism in the country. Lately 3-4 millions of more than 50 nationalities have come to Iraq for religious purposes. Iraqi authorities foresee to organise a conference on religions tourism in Bagdad in December 2017. Among the invitees of this event Iraq has envisaged inviting Vatican's representatives. Iraq actively works on development of Abraham house and path and established good relationships with neighbouring countries -Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

Italy

Italy drew attention to the following issues:

Silk Road trans-regional cooperation project

In the view of upcoming EU-China year, Italy will be launching a project on the Silk Road trans-regional cooperation, involving Italian regions, Adriatic - Ionian region and other countries. The project aims at creating a bridge between Italy and China through cooperation on the base of the Silk Road heritage. The kick-off meeting of the project is tentatively appointed to be in Venice, which will simultaneously be a launch of the EU-China year as well.

Awareness building

Italy suggested to take advantage of TripAdvisor and to use it to create awareness as well to strengthen links with industry. Italy proposed to use the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development to increase the visibility of the Silk Road and embrace traditions and cultures.

Modern Technologies

Italy put forward an idea to use modern technologies such as digitalisation, virtual reality, augmented reality to promote the Silk Road through collaboration with Silicon Valley companies. Ms Alessandra Priante took an initiative to create a working group on technologies within the Task Force.

Spain

Spain drew attention and suggested the following:

Showcase of Valencia

The example of Valencia should be used as a blueprint of the Silk Road regional tourism development. Attention should be drawn to the Tourism Governance in Valencia is a winner of the 2008 UNWTO Ulysses Awards.

Valencia has published a leaflet with a reduced environmental impact. Such an example of environmental awareness should be used as a part of the International Year of Sustainable Tourism.

Cooperation

The country has recently signed the Memorandum of Understanding with Russia, the memorandum included a pillar on tourism cooperation.

Sponsorship opportunities

Spain advises to look for sponsorship opportunities. On the international level Spain suggests to involve China bank and the European funds for the European and COSME countries.

Ms María Ángeles Martínez Minguenza will prepare a proposal on funding possibilities and will lead the initiative on funding.

Gastronomy

Attention should be paid to the importance of gastronomy –in particular case of Valencia that is rice and paella. It is important to indicate real name of meals– as for instance “*paella valenciana*” – the names of meals are ambassadors of regions and countries.

Chinese friendly

It is crucial to explore and understand the heritage first before the promotion As there is Silk Road heritage which we don't know: for instance not everyone is aware how many days the camel can walk without food and drinks or how many kilogrammes it can carry. As Chinese Friendly works closely with

the municipality of Xian, the mayor of this municipality organises an event to discover and celebrate local cultures and traditions, including Spanish flamenco. The municipality of Xian invites all the Silk Road countries to present their cultures during this event.

Workshop on Focus Area II: Capacity Building and Destination Management

The Silk Road has an extensive array of outstanding cultural and natural heritage. Effective destination management strategies and capacity building foster economic growth, helps safeguard local arts and culture, diversifies business and reduces seasonality.

Roundtable Discussion of this workshop addressed the following:

- Silk Road Programme feedback
- How to improve the quality visitor experience
- Silk Road tourism and heritage management

Spain

Spain drew attention to importance of asking tour operators about their needs and feedback – which challenges they have sending tourists to the Silk Road destinations.

Mongolia

Mongolia is focusing on its intangible heritage and prepares the intangible heritage inventory.

BSEC

BSEC organises an event for the BSEC regions and envisages to invite a representative of Valencia to present their blueprint and use them as a benchmark in regional tourism development. BSEC would ask its member states to include Silk Road issue to their agenda.

WFTGA

Replying to the question – to become a member of the WFTGA, there is a membership fee, which amount depends on the level of a membership and a country.

Armenia

Armenia fully supports the WFTGA and hosts a WFTGA training centre.

Workshop on Focus Area III: Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative

The Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative is a project that aims to strengthen and diversify the tourism offer of the countries located along the Western link of the Silk Road. This workshop presented the initiative to the Task Force members and discussed possible partnerships and linkages to be pursued.

This workshop sought feedback on the following:

- Ideas on how to contribute to this project: possible project proposals, focus areas, potential partners, especially tour operators interested in transnational tourism partnerships
- An idea of Silk Road heritage (for example, arts & crafts, gastronomy, intangible heritage, etc.) available in your country and how this could be linked to the Western Silk Road project
- Roundtable discussion focused on the overall future viability of the project

Italy

Italy is in favour of capacity building activities. Italy encourages work with students on creation of an application and development of software and smart games to enhance the Silk Road promotion. In its upcoming cooperation project Italy envisages to work closely together with private sector, industry and creative arts.

SOENT

SOENT gave a suggestion to involve historic hotels as local landmarks which can tell stories.

Chinese friendly

Chinese friendly drew attention to “Caravansaray project” — a chain of traditional caravansaray hotels. The project used techniques of experience engineering to create traditional hotels.

Workshop on Focus Area IV: Travel Facilitation Briefing

Task Force representatives were requested to report on progress made over the last 12 months relating to:

- Improvements to visa policies (visas on arrival, e-visas, etc.)
- Aviation growth and route development
- News/ Updates/ best-practice examples in the field of travel facilitation that could applied to the Silk Road
- How to facilitate internet access while travelling?

Armenia

Accessibility is a key issue for Armenia.

They also recognise the positive economic impact of increased openness and accessibility.

Free visa regime for over 50 countries for up to 180 days, including EU Member States, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine.

China: diplomatic or official/service passports of China do not require a visa upon arrival.

Since February 2017:

Internal passports of citizens of the Russian Federation are accepted when entering, staying or departing from Armenia

E-Visa:

Nationals who require a visa-on-arrival can also seek to obtain an e-visa.

Georgia

Free-visa regime, up to a year, for over 90 countries, including: EU Member States, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Inclusion of Jordan in visa-free regime

Novelty: For citizens from Iran: free-visa for up to 45 days

Pakistan

The delegate from Pakistan proposed to count upon the presence of tourism stakeholders from the private sector in order to learn about their needs and requirements.

Private sector input would be valuable and allow for the adoption of practical strategies.

Business Friendly List:

Visa On Arrival (VOA) for 30 days validity applicable to 67 countries, including Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Romania, Russia, Spain and Ukraine

Tourist Friendly Countries:

Countries designated as Tourist Friendly Countries (TFC), may obtain a visa on arrival for a maximum stay of 30 days, if they are travelling as part of a group through a designated tour operator. This applies to most EU Member States, USA, Japan, Canada, etc.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan recognises the importance and beneficial outcomes of increased interconnectedness and accessibility: since the visa-regime for over 60 countries were dropped (up to 60 days stay), mostly for OECD countries, they have registered a 35% rise in arrivals.

12 countries do not require a visa for entering Kyrgyzstan (indefinite stay), including: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Russia, and Tajikistan

Bilateral Agreement with Kazakhstan: visa of either country accepted for crossing border (important: not if single entry visa) – cross check information.

Mongolia

Mongolia

The Mongolian delegate expressed the importance of practical information on visa policies. The lack of concrete and secure information is a problem for many citizens of Silk Road countries:

Where and how can one get a visa? How much will the visa cost? – These are central questions that need to be addressed: user-friendly access to relevant information.

The Mongolian delegate also informed participants of the construction of a new international airport in Ulaanbaatar with which they expect to increase international arrivals to 2 million.

Iraq

Iraq recognises the advantages of visa liberalization and aims to increase accessibility.

Citizens of Turkey may enter Iraq without a visa, and only if arriving at Baghdad International Airport, directly from Turkey or (for max. 15 days) at Erbil and Sulaimaniyah

Visa process takes 2-3 days / costs start from 40 Euros