

ALMATY MANIFESTO

Background

The United Nations proclaimed 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development as well as the Sustainable Development agenda 2030 provide opportunities to strengthen the positive dynamics between tourism and heritage in all of its forms.

UNESCO recognizes the tremendous potential of tourism to eliminate poverty, support the development of local communities and foster mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue through cross-cultural exchange. Tourism can play a vital role in the preservation and safeguarding of cultural and natural heritage and can be a vehicle for sustainable development by promoting local activity, strengthening livelihoods of the local communities and presenting the integrated heritage throughout the tourism supply chain.

However, if not planned or managed effectively, tourism can be socially, culturally and economically disruptive, harming fragile environments, local communities and cultural and natural heritage. It is important to shift the mindset from location and ethnicity – specific heritage to the notion of shared heritage that recognizes cultural exchanges and influences on the cultural heritage of different cultures and civilizations in different parts of the world.

Situated on the ancient Silk Roads, the roads of economic and cultural exchanges likewise bears witness to the various cultures and civilizations who have crossed these countries over the centuries. Today, the UN WTO recognizes the Silk Roads as a strong brand name with an enormous potential for heritage tourism development. It is clear that there are significant opportunities for destinations along the Silk Road heritage corridors to join the efforts to build transnational tourism initiatives that promote sustainable tourism under the Silk Road brand.

In this regard, the Central Asian Silk Roads Sub-regional meeting on “Reinforcement of sub-regional management coordination and knowledge: Sustainable Tourism and development initiatives”, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 24 May 2017, aimed to facilitate the management and development of sustainable tourism along the Silk Roads through the participation of all stakeholders in the region so as to raise awareness and build capacities to protect the cultural heritage and the Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage-listed sites, as well as safeguard intangible cultural heritage in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The Main Outcomes of the meeting

The Central Asian sub-regional meeting participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, including experts and representatives of concerned institutions in the fields of heritage management, sustainable tourism, national parks and the National Commissions for UNESCO, supported the idea of developing sustainable tourism based on the heritage along the Silk Roads and agreed on the following:

1. Call on the national governments to strengthen legislation that would preserve and safeguard heritage and facilitate cross-border heritage tourism development.
2. Recognize the UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes as a framework to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts. Promote a balanced approach between safeguarding, preservation and promotion of cultural and natural heritage that would benefit local communities.
3. Recognize the need for wide awareness-raising and capacity-building amongst local administrative bodies at all levels and in different sectors.
4. Bring all the documents pertaining to each Central Asian heritage in all its forms, including the World Heritage properties, up to the international standards and ensure that they are archived appropriately and easily accessible to the public.
5. Recognize the need for wide awareness-raising amongst the population, especially young people, about this common heritage on the Silk Roads.
6. Strengthen new opportunities for the public -private partnerships as well as inter-agency coordination, in particular to promote heritage sites as part of the Silk Roads Heritage corridors. Explore possible synergies and opportunities for the development of an action plan to reinforce the existing and new initiatives.
7. Develop tourism and visitor management guidelines for Central Asian World Heritage properties and heritage in all its forms along the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors, covering all areas of management and including a Silk Road handbook for tourist guides, in an effort to provide a consistently high-quality visitor experience.
8. Design a marketing, branding and promotional strategy to develop an attractive international brand for the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors and provide comprehensive information for visitors via online and communication mediums as well as other promotional materials, including brochures and publications.

9. Strengthen coordination and cooperation among the countries of Central Asia, as well as other Silk Roads countries on the promotion of the Silk Roads heritage tourism using the existing platforms of UNESCO and UNWTO.

Participants in the Central Asian sub-regional meeting expressed their gratitude to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the UNESCO Office in Almaty and the UNDP Office in Kazakhstan, for organizing the event, as well as to the international resource persons from UNESCO, UNWTO, Xi'an Silk Road Culture Tourism Research Association (China) and Deakin University (Australia) for facilitating the meeting.

Moreover, they expressed appreciation for the financial support provided for the organization of the meeting from the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for the Central Asian Silk Roads project.

24 May 2017

Almaty

Kazakhstan