

## Case Study 3

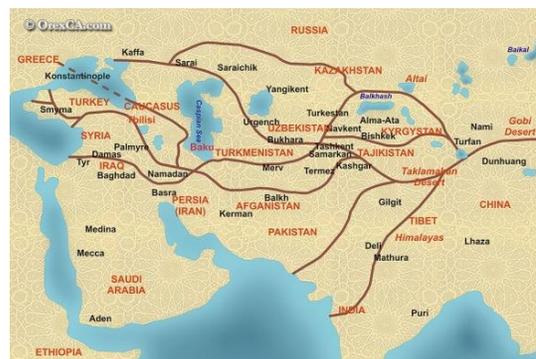
# The Silk Road



**Location:** Central Asia, 24 countries<sup>1</sup> from Japan to Italy  
**Time Frame:** 1993-Present

### Background

The Silk Road is a historical network of interlinked trade routes extending 6,500 km, receiving its name from the lucrative Chinese silk trade along it. For over 2000 years the route was a significant factor in developing civilizations along its path through trade in goods and exchanges in ideas- both philosophical and technological.



After the 1991 break-up of the Soviet Union, the idea was revived as a thoroughfare for tourism, interlinking heritage sites along this historical route. In 1993, with assistance from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), UNESCO and UNDP, representatives from 19 countries signed the Samarkand Declaration of Silk Road Tourism, which called for governments to *'create and implement joint strategies and programs to promote both international and domestic tourism'* along the Silk Road<sup>2</sup>. The program focused on joint promotion, facilitating travel, planning coordination and capacity building along the route.

The program began by identifying the main bottlenecks to Silk Road Tourism, which were visa procedures and restrictions, the provision of mid-range (2-3 star) accommodation, the need for a sustainable focus, the lack of destination-level marketing and uncoordinated and expensive air access<sup>3</sup>. To this end, an inventory and evaluation of touristic assets were carried out along the route, focusing on cultural, natural, archaeological, religious, man-made and ecotourism resources.

The program components included travel trade programs and familiarization trips, relaxing border restrictions and involving of air carriers to improve scheduling. A unified logo and image was conceived and a heavy focus on online marketing through blogs, dedicated business to business websites, online partnerships and social media was implemented.

#### The **Great Silk Road Tour Operators**

**Group** is a UNWTO-incubated marketing consortium formed in 1998, comprised of trans-national tour operators. Its mandate is to carry out joint advertising to attract tourists to Silk Road Countries.

By joining forces operators are able to increase their promotional reach and decrease their expenditures at tourism fairs and events.

<sup>1</sup> Japan; Republic of Korea; China; Mongolia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Pakistan; Tajikistan; Uzbekistan; Turkmenistan; Azerbaijan; Ukraine; Georgia; Armenia; Russian Federation; Iran; Syria; Egypt; Saudi Arabia; Greece; Turkey; Israel; Italy; India

<sup>2</sup> UNWTO, 1997

<sup>3</sup> UNWTO, 2012

The program key focus areas are the following<sup>4</sup>:



### **Innovative Activities**

*UN Silk Road City Awards* – The title of *UN Silk Road City* is given on an annual basis to cities demonstrating their historic links to the Silk Road, a commitment to sustainable tourism and cultural, environmental and socio-economic development. Cities are selected by an independent panel of experts known as the *Eminent Persons Group*.

*Silk Road Knowledge Camps* – The UNWO Themis Foundation, in cooperation with UNESCO is in the process of developing Silk Road Knowledge Camps, which provide short-term training opportunities to junior tourism professionals and local communities in the field of cultural heritage management. The goal is to contribute to the development of responsible tourism, help actors safeguard World Heritage properties and increase awareness of sustainable tourism systems.

*Tourism Competitive Clusters* – In Uzbekistan a smaller-scale competitive cluster has formed among the country's two Silk Road World Heritage Sites, Bukhara and Khiva, along with an important town on the route, Samarkand, in which its touristic sites have been upgraded, authorities trained and enterprise development promoted. Its ministry began promoting the nation as '*the center of the ancient Silk Road*' and combined with improved air access and ground transport has created a spike in heritage tourism to the three cities, with estimates for significant growth over the next decade<sup>5</sup>.

### **Coordination Arrangements**

The Silk Road Tourism Office, established by UNWTO in 2004 and advised by multi-stakeholder task force has begun developing yearly Silk Road Action Plans. Member states are encouraged to build localized action plans in line with the key overarching focus areas. One of the office's main roles is the coordination of stakeholders, which has been done with a varied portfolio of activities to ensure sector-wide involvement. Events include:

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<sup>4</sup> UNWTO, 2012

<sup>5</sup> *A Protected Areas Ecotourism Competitive Cluster Approach to Catalyze Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Growth in Bulgaria*. Donald Hawkins, 2004. The George Washington University

- *International meetings on the Silk Road* are the largest collection of stakeholders involved in the initiative, with 24 countries present
- *Silk Road Task Force* annual meetings to advise the Silk Road Tourism Office on its strategies and action plans
- *UNWTO Silk Road Ministers' Summit*, first held in 2011 is set to be a high-level annual meeting held at ITB Berlin
- *UNWTO Tour Operator's Forum* on the Silk Road is the main private sector coordinative arrangement
- *EHL/UNWTO Silk Road Strategy Think Tank* is a partnership with a preeminent hospitality management university in order to develop innovative Silk Road Strategies
- *Silk Road Mayor's Forum* brings the international initiative to the local level and promotes new opportunities for supporters

### Entities and Responsibilities<sup>6</sup>

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 endorsement of SR initiatives</li> <li>• Galvanise support through networks</li> <li>• Example institutions: UNESCO, UNDP, UNCTAD, UNEP</li> <li>• Promote the activities in the context of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)</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 SR Ministers' Summit</li> <li>• Promote collaboration and cooperation amongst SR Member States in accordance with SR Programme Objectives</li> </ul>

### Critical Success Factors

- Its **focus on only three key regional-level aspects**- marketing, capacity building and travel facilitation is an appropriate focus for regional programs. Investments in infrastructure, site management and national enabling environment facilitation should be administered and implemented at the country-level
- The establishment of the **Silk Road Tourism Office** as an independent entity with a limited mandate- responsible for its own planning, coordination and fund raising has allowed it to set and achieve realistic objectives
- **Strong focus on travel trade**, such as holding its meetings at ITB, including business to business events, tour operator's forums and media marts generates for market-focused solutions
- **Its wide breadth of events** organized during key travel forums increases stakeholder involvement and participation
- **Strategic partnerships**- such as with the UNWTO Themis foundation, EHL, UNESCO and the Tour Operators Initiative leverage key competencies in succinct project areas

<sup>6</sup> UNWTO, 2012

- Its **self-contained project components** such as the *Silk Road City Awards*, *Knowledge Camps* and *Competitive Clusters* are tangible, applicable and replicable models.

### **Issues and Challenges**

- Tourism along the silk route remains a series of separate products united under a common theme rather than an integrated product
- Lack of a sustainable funding model jeopardizes projects' continuity and new initiatives
- Slow progress on travel facilitation, with visa restrictions remaining a prohibitive roadblock
- Low buy-in to the Silk Road initiative by local tour operators

### **Key Considerations for the World Bank**

The Silk Road shares several characteristics with South Asia, both covering large areas with countries with differing development levels and institutions but sharing natural and cultural attributes. The UNWTO has unofficially served as secretariat for the initiative, mainly focused on marketing and convening stakeholders. The Bank could play its convener role assisting in the formation of multiple key partnerships.