New publication

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Tourism opportunities and impacts
The UNWTO study “21st Century Maritime Silk Road: Tourism opportunities and impacts”, supported by Beijing Sunny International Communications Ltd, China, was coordinated by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme and written by Robert Travers.

This research examines the possible implications of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to thematic tourism, based on Maritime Silk Road heritage.
Background

The study examines the possible implications and impact of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to thematic tourism, based on Maritime Silk Road heritage. The themes explored include maritime heritage attractions, cruise tourism and land-based services. Opportunities and impacts identified with UNWTO member countries.

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is a component of China’s Belt and Road Initiative announced in 2013. It is expected to play a vital role for the maritime infrastructure development through regional integration and cooperation. The Initiative is not occurring in isolation: other countries are also supporting maritime infrastructure development.
A rich maritime heritage

Primarily associated with inland routes, the historic Silk Road comprises an extensive network of maritime itineraries, offering exceptional experiences, heritage and culture.

There is a clear link between the historical development of the trading seaports of Asia and tourism. Many features of the ports and their hinterlands reflect their rich maritime heritage. It is possible to experience much of the history of the region through maritime destinations, and to learn of cultural interaction, innovation and trade in delightful places. Port cities, some very ancient, are gateways to this tourism resource and to the hinterlands that surround them. Several important maritime heritage features are included on the NESCO World Heritage list. Case studies from China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and other Silk Road countries were used in the publication.
Every Asian country has recorded increases in international tourist arrivals between 2010 and 2016, with the leading five receiving destinations being Hong Kong and mainland China; Thailand; Malaysia; and Japan.

Cruise tourism in Asia has accelerated its growth in recent years due to the rapid increase in demand from the Chinese market. Between 2012 and 2016 passenger volumes in the study area grew from 775,000 to close to 3.1 million, with over two-thirds (2.1 million) of these passengers coming from China. While overall demand rose by an average annual rate of 41.3% over the period, Chinese demand grew by over 76% a year.
Impacts

Economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts will arise from 21st Century Maritime Silk Road developments. There is potential to stimulate the establishment of new maritime tourist routes and product, based on the ancient maritime silk and spice routes, and on the history of maritime trade, as well as around cultural and environmental resources. The proposed infrastructural developments will over time have a significant impact in terms of the geography of travel and tourism, the scale of the industry and its tourism product offering. Coastal and overland themed route and experiential product development opportunities are many. The opening up of new tourism gateways will provide an excellent opportunity for tourism growth for many regions.
Way forward

- Research: Researching tourism potential, historical and contemporary linkage opportunities of the Maritime Silk Road.

- Destination management and capacity building: Sharing best practice in maritime tourism, heritage tourism, cultural events, etc. and destination management.

- Marketing: Facilitating member countries to cooperate in joint marketing initiatives.

- Impact: Sharing ways of measuring and managing the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism on maritime tourism destinations; as well as cooperating in benchmarking progress.

- Building partnership between Maritime Silk Road destinations.
To be published in May 2018, this research is available at the UNWTO Elibrary: www.e-unwto.org and www.silkroad.unwto.org
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