

Mission to Khiva – Mosques, Madrassas, Minarets (and Fortresses)

Khiva, one of the three fabled Silk Road cities that include Bukhara and Samarkand, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites and all located in Uzbekistan, was the focus of a consulting assignment undertaken earlier this year by TCN member Jim Fletcher, alongside a small team from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, on behalf of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

Khiva, in the far west of Uzbekistan, is over one thousand kilometres from Tashkent, the capital city and principal gateway to the country. It is located in Khorezm, one of the nation's most remote regions geographically and in tourism terms, one of the nation's weakest, but also one of the nation's richest in cultural heritage terms.

It is this combination of characteristics, opportunity and potential that has drawn the attention of the EBRD which has recently approved a Cultural Heritage Framework initiative 'to fund sovereign, sub-sovereign and private sector projects located in or near cultural heritage sites, or which directly contribute to their preservation, management, and economic utilisation, with objectives to enhance the connectivity and accessibility to cultural heritage and other tourism amenities, as well as expand the availability and quality of amenities that support heritage sites.' To this end, the EBRD is currently reviewing tourism and heritage development opportunities in Uzbekistan in order to formulate a Pilot Project under this Framework.



An initial financing opportunity associated with the modernisation of the Khivan based hotel company, Khiva Malika Hotel Group, is under consideration, and this has led to a focus on the significant cultural resources of the greater Khiva region and their strengthening, to support economic and regional development and thus to this region being chosen as the location for the Pilot Project.

The Khiva UNESCO World Heritage Site is known as the Ichon Qala, an essentially traffic-free medieval walled city and so-called 'Museum City', containing some 40 sites of visitor interest – mud-brick built walls, gates, mosques, madrassas, minarets, mausoleums, palaces, museums and craft workshops (silk carpet weaving, silk and cotton textiles and wood carving). The Ichon Qala is also home to numerous local residents and a few small hotels, guesthouses and restaurants while a partially walled, 19th and early 20th century outer city called the Dishon Qala, contains further madrassas, mausoleums and palaces. The wider Khorezm province offers a range of archaeological, holy, intangible heritage and ecotourism sites, including the remarkable and little-visited 4th and 5th century mud-brick built desert fortresses of Southern Karakalpakstan.

The assignment scope of work was designed to utilise the vast experience of both UNWTO and the Smithsonian in the field of tourism and cultural heritage research and preservation and the development and promotion of the Silk Road as a transnational tourism destination, to assess ways of strengthening Khiva region as a tourism and cultural heritage destination and of reviving its eco-ethno-cultural sites. UNWTO focussed on assessing the condition of the wider tourism sector, particularly as it applied to Khiva, including issues such as the enabling environment, policy framework relevant to the sector, issues of market and audience and formulation of a long-term Tourism and Cultural Heritage Strategy and Master Plan for Khiva. Smithsonian focussed on issues of strengthening the city's cultural sector, identifying and prioritising key opportunities for leveraging Khiva's cultural resources and more effectively managing them as key assets for a successful and sustainable tourism market.

The assignment output was the preparation of a project document which integrated the recommendations of both UNWTO and Smithsonian and presented them in two linked phases with the first phase focussing on immediate actionable priorities and the second phase taking a wider, medium to longer term strategic planning approach. Project descriptions, outputs and activities, indicative timeframes, budgets and job descriptions of the recommended international consultant team members were also presented.