
The Origins of Hospitality and Tourism

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Along the Silk Routes

The Silk Routes or Silk Road is one of the best known of the world's historical trading routes, traditionally running from Xian in northern China through Iran and on to Istanbul. This ancient route had a regular supply of traders and travellers. This chapter first considers the provision of caravanserais (hostels for travellers) and then looks in more detail at the provision of hospitality in Iran and Mongolia.

9.1 Caravanserais

From at least the 7th century AD there is a strong Middle Eastern literary tradition based around hospitality, particularly that of the Bedawīn. The collection of poems gathered together in the 9th century AD, known as the *Hamāsa al-sughrā*, make frequent references to hospitality (Hamāsa, 1970). The poets observe that at night the fires attract travellers, without inquiring about the stranger, or even when the stranger is known to be an enemy, a meal is prepared for the guest; then he is given a place to sleep; sometimes they sleep with the family, at other times a special tent is erected. Even if they are a timid and gentle household, they will endure any hardship or inconvenience and are always ferocious in defence of their guests. Hospitality is frequently mentioned in Islamic traditions known as *hadīths*, one such tradition notes that if the guest stays longer than the 'three days' it becomes charity, and it is forbidden for a guest to stay when he becomes a burden to his host (ibn Anas, 1999).

Caravanserais were hostels for travellers, where accommodation was often given for free for the traditional three days, although in reality most travellers would continue with their journey after just the one night. In contrast to the mediaeval western monasteries, caravanserais could also be used as commercial centres for merchants. Establishing caravanserais to provide hospitality for travellers is often reflected among the traditions and writings, for example the historian al-Tabarī (c. AD 910) records how the governor of Samarqand (now called Samarkand, Uzbekistan) in AD 719 was ordered to:

Chapter extract

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