Climate Change and World Heritage Sites

Why in news?

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A recent study reveals that the World Heritage sites were threatened by climate change.

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What are the highlights?

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- The study assesses the risk due to sea level rise by the end of the century at 49 UNESCO coastal Heritage sites.
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- It presents a risk index that ranks the sites according to the threat they face from today until the end of the century.
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- The sites featuring highest on this index in current conditions include Venice and its Lagoon, Ferrara, City of the Renaissance, and its Po Delta and the Patriarchal Basilica of Aquileia.
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- All these sites are located along the northern Adriatic Sea in Italy where extreme sea levels are the highest.
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- This is because high storm surges coincide with high regional sea-level rises here.
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- Dozens of UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Mediterranean are under severe threat of coastal erosion and flooding.
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- By the next century flood risk may increase by 50% and erosion risk by 13% across the region.
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What are the challenges?

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- The Mediterranean region has a high concentration of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.
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- Many of these are in coastal locations as human activity has historically concentrated around these areas.
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- The steep landscape and small tidal range in the area has meant settlements often located close to the waterfront.
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- So rising sea levels pose a threat to these sites and settlements.
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- But more information on the risk at a local level is needed.
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- Also, the approaches to adaption and protection vary across the region due to large social and economic differences.
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- Besides, Heritage sites face many challenges to adapt to the effects of sea-level rise as it changes the value and ‘spirit of place’ for each site.
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What lies ahead?

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- Further monitoring is required to better understand the effects of climate change on heritage sites and other natural hazards.
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- The study has identified areas with urgent need for adaptation planning.
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- The iconic nature of such sites can be used to promote awareness of the need to take action to mitigate climate change.
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- In some cases, relocation of individual monuments may be technically possible too.
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Source: The Hindu

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