Indian Tourism

Why in news?

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The World Economic Forum's (WEF's) travel and tourism competitiveness index, released in the first week of April 2017, showed that India had moved up 12 places and now ranks 40/136.

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What are the facts?

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- The report noted that this was the largest leap made by any country in the top 50, thereby making India, a prime candidate to lead the so-called **Asian century in travel and tourism.**
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- On the one hand, foreign tourist arrivals have been on an upward trajectory at least since the turn of the century.
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- According to the ministry of tourism, India hosted **8.89 million tourists** last year compared to only 2.65 million tourists in 2000.
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- But when compared with other countries, India's performance leaves much to be desired.
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India and the World:

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- While India hit an all-time high last year, it was still nowhere close to France, which topped the list of foreign tourist arrivals with 84.5 million visitors.
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- Europe's dominant position on the list can be explained through the **Schengen agreement,** which allows citizens of member states to travel

freely across international borders.
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- The US too has a visa-waiver agreement with most European Union countries as well as a handful of others for easy access.
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- But non-Schengen states like China or Turkey (39.4 million), Mexico (32.1 million) and Russia (31.3 million), all of which have significantly higher tourist numbers than India.
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- In 2015, India earned more than $23 billion in revenue from international tourism, a significant hike from the $3.5 billion (2000).
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- However, the US earned $204.5 billion from international tourists and China $114.1 billion, in 2015.
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What are the problems with Indian tourism?

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- The lowering of trade barriers and the rise of the middle class in many emerging economies mean that North America and Europe, which have dominated the travel markets till now, may give way to international travel from Africa, Asia and the Middle East.
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- Also, while the average tourist spends about $2,610 in India, in France, the number drops to $543 per tourist.
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- It means that when they are here, tourists are clearly willing to spend; but **they are simply not coming here** in adequate numbers.
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- Is this because of India's many problems, such as **cumbersome visa regulations, bad travel infrastructure, poor sanitation, collapsing law enforcement systems and concerns about women's safety**.
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- On each of these counts, India ranks poorly on the WEF index.
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- Currently, India receives the maximum number of tourists from the US, followed by Bangladesh. Western Europe and North America make up for a large chunk of the country's foreign tourists.
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- But, what is of concern is that other regions that are expected to send out tomorrow's tourists **don't seem to have India on their radar.**

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Source: The Hindu

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