

WHY INDIA'S TOURISM SECTOR NEEDS CLOSE MONITORING

Relevant for: World & Indian Geography | Topic: Factors responsible for location of Tertiary sector Industries
incl. Tourism in world & India and related issues

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation, a specialised agency of the UN, has said that international tourist arrivals in India grew from 14.57 million in 2016 to 15.54 million in 2017 and receipts increased from \$22.42 billion to \$27.36 billion. This is good news for India because tourism is one of the mainstays of the economy. In fact, almost 300 leading tour operators from across the globe will be in New Delhi later this month to participate in an event that focuses on marketing India as a destination. This is part of the government's efforts to make a renewed attempt at selling its tourist destinations to the world, aiming for 20 million tourist arrivals over the next three years.

This is not an ambitious target. India can reach it provided the Centre and the states take care of certain basic issues: security, infrastructure and connectivity (the latest round of the UDAN regional connectivity scheme has awarded 325 routes to airlines as well as helicopter operators for enhancing air connectivity to 73 new airports and helipads in tier 2 and tier 3 cities).

While the rush of tourists is good news, this is also an opportune moment to be cautious about the way we expand the sector's footprint. For example, look at what has happened to Barcelona and Venice. Fed up with constant streams of tourists, both places are now resisting them. In other places, the situation has come to such a pass that Airbnb and the so-called sharing economy have been accused of "hollowing out our [western] cities". Amsterdam is restricting short-term renting out of properties by residents after protests against the swamping of the city by tourists last year. Problems have beset Shimla, Ladakh and Goa in India where the unregulated tourist rush has led to serious environmental problems. Recently, the Uttarakhand High Court banned trekking after local people said irresponsible trekkers are destroying the meadows in the state.

There is no doubt that India needs tourists, but it's also imperative that we plan for the long haul, and not focus on just the quick, short-term gains.

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