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Q17

The states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are reaching the limits of ecological carrying capacity due to tourism. Critically evaluate.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS I · 12 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

Core demand of the question

- Critically evaluate the claim that Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand are hitting ecological **carrying capacity** because of tourism
- Admit tourism's load, then add other pressures and a balanced close

Revision summary

Western Himalayan slopes have a low natural **carrying capacity**.

Mass pilgrimage and leisure tourism add vehicles, hotels, sewage, and floodway building.

Kedarnath 2013 showed the cost of infrastructure in harm's way.

Hydropower, roads, and climate change also push the same limit.

The claim is largely true for many valleys, but incomplete if tourism is blamed alone.

Flow diagram

Mass hill tourism -> Waste water slope load
Hydel highways defence -> Waste water slope load
Climate extremes -> Waste water slope load
Waste water slope load -> Carrying capacity stress
Caps sewage land-use law -> Carrying capacity stress

Conclusion

- Set valley-wise visitor and vehicle caps, ban building on floodways, treat sewage before the river, and share revenue with villages. **Carrying capacity** is a planning number, not a slogan against all guests.

These three hill states are near ecological limits in many valleys, and mass tourism is a clear reason. The claim is still only partly true: hydropower, roads, climate, and weak regulation share the damage. The fair evaluation is that tourism has pushed several landscapes past a safe load, but it is one driver among several, and the answer is regulated access, not a myth that the hills would be safe without visitors.

Facts & figures

Char Dham and Kedarnath, 2013

Pilgrimage landscape hit by extreme rain and debris flows, made deadlier by riverside building.

Rohtang / Manali peak load

Classic Himachal choke point where vehicles and waste exceed valley capacity in season.

Vaishno Devi yatra

High-volume Jammu pilgrimage that needs tight waste and crowd management on a steep path.

Hydropower in Uttarakhand and HP

Dam and tunnel projects that alter rivers and slopes beside the tourist economy.

Carrying capacity

The visitor and built load an ecosystem can take without lasting damage.

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