

*Article***Tourism, Environmental Stress and Human Well-being in Uttarakhand: Rethinking Development Pathways in the Himalayan State***Vidushi Dobhal Naithani¹* Arvind Singh Rawat² M M Semwal¹**¹Department of Political Science, Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India.**²Dr. Ambedkar Centre of Excellence (DACE), Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India.**¹Department of Political Science, Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University, Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India.***Email: vidushi.dobhal@yahoo.com***Abstract**

Uttarakhand's economy has been driven significantly by the tourism sector. It is estimated to contribute approximately 15% to the state's GSDP. This paper examines whether tourism development and rising tourist footfall remain aligned with the host population's well-being. Quantitative data on recorded tourist visits and revenue are supplemented by a qualitative analysis of available digital documentation reflecting public sentiment and resentment toward growing overtourism in the state. The paper also discusses in detail the challenges of overtourism for the fragile Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. The paper uses recorded visits to major tourist destinations in Uttarakhand over the years and the projected resident population to estimate the Tourism Intensity Ratio (TIR) of approximately 5.19 in 2025. The findings suggest a shift in policy approach to evaluate the tourism sector's success and align it with the long-term goals of sustainable development and human well-being.

Keywords: Overtourism; Carrying capacity; Uttarakhand Tourism; Tourism Intensity Ratio.

Introduction

For Himalayan states like Uttarakhand, which offer a wide range of tourism opportunities, the challenges associated with growing tourism are multifaceted. The sector is recognised as having evolved considerably into a significant source of employment and long-term economic development, rather than merely being associated with holidaying (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Uttarakhand, 2026).

The United Nations and World Tourism Organisation (WTO) define tourism as an activity in which people travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment. This can be done for leisure, business or other purposes (United Nations & WTO, 1994). It also defines sustainable tourism, which considers the current and future impacts of activities on visitors and host communities.

The conceptual shift towards sustainable tourism was encouraged as the world began engaging more with sustainable, long-term development. Organisations such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) have emphasised the government's role in ensuring the proper implementation of sustainable tourism policies. Additionally, it holds stakeholders and tourists responsible for ensuring policies are effective (UNEP & WTO, 2005). Tourism can no longer be looked at as an isolated industry. It is embedded throughout the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including crucial areas such as job creation, support for local culture and employment, sustainable settlements, and climate action (United Nations, 2015). The SDG 2030 framework also

establishes that tourism's value is not merely economic but is assessed through sustainability and other qualitative outcomes.

In line with these developments, discussion of sustainable tourism has grown as global scholarship moves toward a stance that examines development 'beyond GDP'. This approach aims to distinguish tourism *scale* from its overall long-term impact on the host community's well-being (Dwyer, 2023). The approach argues that the tourism industry's success was traditionally defined by quantitative metrics such as tourist footfall, revenue, hotel occupancy, and GSDP contributions. Beyond GDP, the well-being approach broadens the discussion to include quality of life, resource competition, and the ecological challenges associated with a growing, unregulated tourism industry. Reports such as the OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2024 also note that tourism pressure adversely affects communities and the environment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2024).

Growing scholarship justifies this shift in approach. Studies on residents' perceptions and quality of life have repeatedly emphasised long-term impacts on host communities rather than visitors' momentary experiences (Kim et al., 2013; Uysal et al., 2016). These considerations matter in the Himalayan region. The fragility and inaccessibility of the mountain regions make development conditional on numerous natural factors. At the same time, growing tourism and resource exploitation further intensify the challenges. Thus, developmental and tourism policies must first focus on safeguarding the natural system on which the industry itself depends (Wester et al., 2019). This is especially important in Uttarakhand, where geographical diversity drives a wide range of tourism opportunities. In its report on Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region, NITI Aayog calls for tourism policies centred on sustainability, inclusiveness, and the long-term goals of mountain development (NITI Aayog, 2018).

Against this backdrop, the current paper aims to understand the development and growth trajectory of Uttarakhand's tourism industry. It also discusses the growing need to assess scientific carrying capacity and develop inclusive government policies. By approaching tourism development through traditional and well-being lenses, the paper aims to highlight pressing issues, including public resentment, civic mismanagement, and residents' well-being, in the context of Uttarakhand's tourism policy. It also aims to initiate a conversation about a restructured, holistic tourism policy approach that can help achieve long-term goals for the well-being of the Himalayan state.

Study Area

The study focuses on the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. The state is in northern India in the central Himalayan region. Uttarakhand lies between 28° 44' & 31° 28' N Latitude and 77° 35' & 81° 01' East longitude. With a geographical area of 53,483 sq. km. (Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board, n.d.), Uttarakhand constitutes approximately 1.6% of the country's total area. The state contains both hilly and plain terrain that spans across 13 districts. The state can be divided into three physiographic zones: the Himalaya, the Shivalik, and the Terai Region. Given its unique geographic location, the state offers a vibrant opportunity for growth in the tourism industry. Uttarakhand's principal tourism assets include the Char Dham Yatra, trekking and adventure activities, river rafting, and scenic hill stations like Nainital and Mussoorie. The region's fragility also raises concerns about responsible and sustainable tourism.

Methodology

The study uses secondary data, including official government reports and statistics, policy documents, newspaper reports, and publicly available content from social media and other relevant electronic platforms. Information gathered from social media is not treated as a quantifiable, statistically representative source. It is, however, perceived as documentation of citizens' day-to-day lived experiences, particularly locals in the state directly affected by the pressures of overtourism in Uttarakhand.

In today's age of widespread digital reach and rapid information sharing, one can no longer dismiss the importance of such content. The large volume of content available online for public consumption, including posts, videos, comments, and discussions, often captures the reality and the perception of citizens. This version of information remains missing from official documents and government narratives. In Uttarakhand, digital media has emerged as an important platform for independent journalists and social and civic commentators to address the state's social, economic, and development issues.

We accessed publicly available videos on social media platforms such as X, Instagram, and YouTube using thematic keywords including carrying capacity, public resentment, traffic congestion, waste management, and *overtourism in Uttarakhand*. This paper discusses only incidents also covered in news reports. Many incidents found duplicate coverage across platforms or lacked media coverage. However, several posts could be traced to the original account and had generated substantial online discussion. The absence of journalistic reporting should not be interpreted as evidence that these incidents did not reflect resident sentiment; rather, it reflects the study's decision to adhere to stricter criteria. While not cited, such posts helped develop the authors' contextual background and sensitised them towards recurring themes. Keeping research ethics at the centre, the social media content analysed was sourced from reliable sources within the strictly defined time frame of 2024 to 2026 to ensure analytical consistency.

Results

Tourism as the Growth Driver for Uttarakhand

Since its inception as a separate state, Uttarakhand has aimed to brand itself as a vibrant tourist destination. Uttarakhand is among the few states with a diverse and unique mix of geographical and spiritual significance, making it not only a sought-after tourist destination but also a pilgrimage destination. With its Himalayan landscape, the religious presence of the Char Dhams, adventure tourism potential, and wellness potential through cities like Haridwar and the yoga capital, Rishikesh, the state has a clear vision for long-term development and a significant boom in the tourism sector.

The state developed its first tourism policy in 2001, with a committed focus on sustainable tourism and on using tourism to create more jobs and opportunities for the local economy. The state formulated a second dedicated tourism policy only 17 years after the first. The Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2018 aimed to consolidate more than a decade of experience and the challenges faced by Uttarakhand's evolving tourism sector. The policy identified tourism as an 'industry' to put Uttarakhand on the global map as a sustainable, world-class tourist destination. However, the policy was guided by the principle of aggressive marketing for Uttarakhand tourism. The state used marketing strategies to attract investment, improve

infrastructure, and support local entrepreneurship (Department of Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, 2018).

Uttarakhand currently functions under the Tourism Policy 2023, which is in force for 7 years, till 2030. The policy highlights Uttarakhand as an environmentally sensitive and land-scarce state. It thus aims to revamp tourism to be not only unique and unmatched but also inclusive, benefiting local communities, safe, and disaster-resilient. It states that high-value, low-volume tourism would create an ecologically manageable impact on the state's resources while offering tourists a quality experience (Department of Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, 2023).

Currently, the tourism sector contributes an estimated 9% directly to the state's GSDP; this contribution is estimated to increase to 15% if allied sources are also considered (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Uttarakhand, 2026). Given the annual growth in tourist inflows, the sector's economic significance cannot be ignored. Uttarakhand also aims to attract private investment by offering incentives for tourism projects through platforms such as the Global Investor Summit 2023, where the Prime Minister highlighted the state's tourism potential and encouraged investment in yoga, Ayurveda, pilgrimage, and destination weddings (Prime Minister's Office, 2023).

Demographic Imbalance and Tourism Pressure

Over the past two decades, since the state's inception, tourist inflow has increased fivefold. According to government reports, 11.14 million tourists visited Uttarakhand's major tourist destinations in 2000 (Fig. 1). This number declined significantly in 2020, down from as many as 39.23 million tourists. As COVID restrictions eased and connectivity improved, the most recent data from 2024 show a significant footfall of approximately 59.55 million. According to government records, the number of tourists reached a record high in 2025, with the state welcoming nearly 60 million visitors (Singh, 2026).

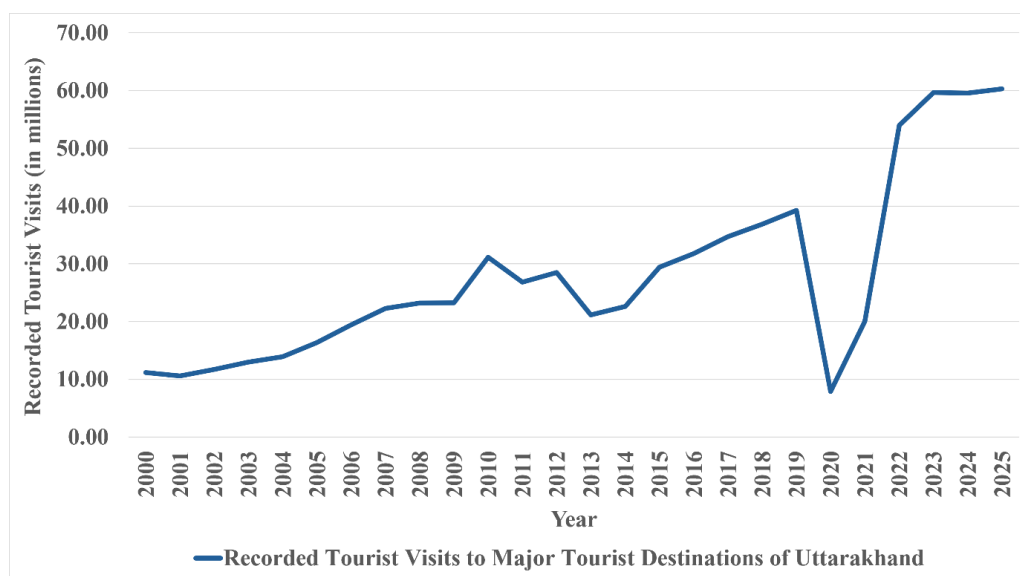


Fig. 1. Recorded Tourist Visits to Major Tourist Destinations of Uttarakhand (2000-2025)
Source: Authors' compilation based on Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (n.d.-a, n.d.-b, 2023, 2024) and Singh (2026) for the 2025 provisional figure.

Demographic statistics matter at this point. Based on the 2011 Census, Uttarakhand's population is approximately 10.086 million. Based on projections of the National Commission on Population (2020), the resident population in 2025 would be approximately 11.61 million. This suggests that, in 2025, the state is handling recorded tourist visits that are approximately five times its population. Population projections from the National Commission on Population (2020) indicate that Uttarakhand's population is expected to reach nearly 13 million by 2036, with an annual growth rate of 1.01%. Given that Uttarakhand's official geographical area is 53,483 sq. km, the population increase would also raise density from 189 to 243 persons per sq. km by 2036.

Using the annual growth rate, the estimated population for each year can be calculated. The demographic pressure can then be determined using a Tourism Intensity Ratio (TIR), which divides annual tourist footfall by the estimated resident population for a specific year. Table 1 includes the calculated annual tourist footfall against the estimated resident population projections. Using these numbers, we calculated the TIR.

The estimated population for any year can be calculated using:

$$P_t = P_{2011} (1 + r)^{t-2011}$$

Where:

- P_{2011} is the base population = 10.086 million
- t is the year of the estimated population
- r is the rate of annual growth ≈ 0.0101 or 1.01% per year

Tourism Intensity Ratio (TIR): the ratio of tourists visiting the state to the state's resident population.

$$TIR = \frac{\text{Annual Tourist Footfall}}{\text{Estimated Population}}$$

By using the estimated population for 2025 and the latest recorded annual tourist footfall of 60.30 million, the TIR for the year 2025 can be determined as follows:

$$TIR (2025) = \frac{60.30}{10.086 (1.0101)^{14}}$$

$$TIR (2025) \approx 5.2$$

Thus, given the most recent projections and estimates, the state is handling tourist pressure nearly five times its resident population. The ratio does not measure the simultaneous presence of tourists per resident at a given time, as tourists may visit multiple sites and their presence may be recorded at multiple instances. Hence, rather than directly measuring capacity, the ratio discussed here shows aggregate tourism intensity relative to the resident population (Table 1).

Table 1: Calculation of Tourism Intensity Ratio (TIR)

Year	Recorded Tourist Visits (T) (in millions)	Estimated Resident Population (P) (in millions)	TIR = T / P
2016	31.78	10.60	3.00
2017	34.72	10.71	3.24
2018	36.85	10.82	3.41
2019	39.23	10.93	3.59
2020	7.87	11.04	0.71
2021	20.02	11.15	1.80
2022	53.98	11.27	4.79

2023	59.63	11.38	5.24
2024	59.55	11.50	5.18
2025	60.30	11.61	5.19

Over the last ten years, the Tourism Intensity Ratio (TIR), despite pandemic-related interruptions in 2020 and 2021, has increased from 3.0 to 5.2, a roughly 73% increase. This is significant compared with the modest population growth of nearly 1% per annum. This pressure intensifies because tourist inflow is concentrated during peak tourist season, the months coinciding with the Char Dham Yatra and summer vacation across the nation. This trend is even more concerning because, as many government sources confirm, the current population is concentrated only in the state's plains. The population in Uttarakhand's hill districts has declined over the years due to migration (Mamgain & Reddy, 2016). This is also where development occurs and where policies are focused geographically. This demographic divide matters when analysing the state's tourist inflow. Uttarakhand faces not only overtourism but also collateral damage, as shown by pressure on transport corridors and civic amenities, which bear the brunt of the surge in visitors during peak tourist season.

Thus, the point of contention among civil society and citizens in the state is gradually shifting. The questions are no longer whether Uttarakhand can attract tourists, but whether the state's already-pressurised civic, administrative, and ecological systems can absorb seasonal surges that leave long-term impacts.

Beyond the Carrying Capacity

The term carrying capacity has been widely discussed across academic literature and policy documents in the context of Uttarakhand tourism. However, the on-the-ground implementation reflects a different reality. In 2022, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) Panel recommended a check on the tourist inflow in Mussoorie. Citing the hill station as Uttarakhand's most popular, the panel highlighted concerns about growing pressure on civic amenities, infrastructure, and parking in the hill city (Press Trust of India, 2023).

A GIS-based mapping study calculated the sustainable daily visitor threshold of the Char Dhams as 15,778 (Badrinath), 13,111 (Kedarnath), 8178 (Gangotri) and 6160 (Yamunotri) (Kuniyal et al., 2025). The state government also announced similar daily visitor caps earlier in 2023, rolled them back a day before the Yatra began, and did so again in 2024. However, it did not implement the restriction. In 2023, the National Green Tribunal directed the state government to develop a scientific action plan to limit visitors and vehicles at the shrine. Until then, the NGT directed that the previous carrying capacities be treated as limits pending the finalisation of a study. The Wildlife Institute of India drafted an interim report on the carrying capacity, which is currently under consideration in the ongoing NGT proceedings (National Green Tribunal, 2026).

Public Resentment

This paper uses digital evidence and documented coverage of online content shared by residents across Uttarakhand to depict their plight due to the growth of overtourism. This resentment can be understood through broad themes of unruly tourist behaviour, public safety and local well-being, disregard for pilgrimage sites, environmental consciousness, lagging

civic sense, and administrative lapses. Evidently, the ‘tourist vs. resident’ tension has been on the rise across major tourist destinations of Uttarakhand (Sharma, 2026).

Widely shared videos on social media and other journalistic content have been treated as documented evidence of resident sentiment. The mere variety of such content available online suggests that the ‘tourist vs. resident’ conflict is not a standalone incident but rather a crucial part of a pattern that is becoming increasingly routine and being expressed as everyday civic frustration among the locals. A detailed news report by *The Print* (Sharma, 2026) documents statements from residents who agree that incidents of public nuisance and civic disturbances have become more frequent in recent years. Government officials also point out the stark difference in attitudes towards the tourist site between the tourists' and the residents' perspectives. Tourists come for recreation, whereas residents view their presence and behaviour as disrespectful to their culture and ecological traditions. Therefore, conflicts related to public drinking, littering, loud music, and unruly behaviour have become more common, especially due to overlapping tourist themes at certain sites where religious/spiritual tourism intersects with other themes, and the consistent underlying ecological fragility and how the local community regards it.

Earlier, the public resentment was reflected through verbal spats, civic correction, and critical comments across social media and other digital platforms. Although these still continue, a growing concern since the previous year is reports of conflicts that have turned into physical confrontations and assaults.

For example, a video from Nainital (July 2025) went viral, showing a resident confronting a tourist who appeared indifferent to their littering (DH Web Desk, 2025). A similar incident was reported from Nainital in December 2024, where a woman confronted tourists for littering in the Lover's Point area despite having a dustbin just a few feet away. The video titled ‘*this is how most tourists treat mountains...*’ gathered massive online support for the woman who corrected the tourists' behaviour (TOI Trending Desk, 2024). A more recent incident was reported by *The Indian Express*, where environmental advocate Anoop Nautiyal was seen confronting tourists who threw plastic waste out of a moving taxi on their way to Mussoorie. The video and Nautiyal's sense of civic responsibility were widely appreciated, as the act sparked conversation about tourists' environmental responsibility (Trends Desk, 2026). More recent incidents of tensions turning violent have been reported at tourist sites such as Mussoorie and Rishikesh, where confrontations have arisen over issues such as parking spaces, loud music, and traffic disputes (Rawat, 2026; Mishra, 2026). The recurrence of such incidents over near-identical triggers suggests underlying tourist stress across Uttarakhand's sites rather than isolated, unrelated disputes.

Digital documentation from Uttarakhand pilgrimage sites also suggests growing concerns. Videos circulated from the Char Dhams show overcrowded hill paths, poor crowd management, and pressure on waste management systems, along with indifferent and unruly visitors, suggesting pilgrimage sites are becoming viral locations for digital consumption and recreational tourism. Locals' responses indicated unease about the growing influencer culture and ‘reels-based’ tourism, which they believe diminishes the importance and sanctity of pilgrimage sites and turns these destinations into mere picnic spots (ET Online, 2026; Tiwari, 2024). Such criticism was already visible during the 2024 Char Dham Yatra season. Numerous news reports documented growing concerns among priests and locals about reel-based tourism and its impacts. Several videos circulated online showing loud musical performances, constant filming, and even loud musical instruments being played near the shrine. Locals believed this not only compromised the sanctity of the religious site but also significantly disturbed the ecologically sensitive high-altitude Himalayan landscape (Singh, 2024).

Public resentment with pilgrimage pressure is not confined to the Char Dham circuit. News reports from Haridwar over the years have indicated growing concern among residents about the annual Kanwar Yatra. These include traffic congestion, unsafe driving, public fear, noise pollution, and a waste management crisis (Jaiswal & Talwar, 2019). More recent reports from 2024 and 2025 raised concerns about excessive waste generation, traffic congestion, and noise pollution. Haridwar generated 6,000 tonnes of Kanwar-related waste in 2024 (Nawaz, 2024; Nawaz & Jaiswal, 2025). The examples of Haridwar and Kedarnath show the civic costs local residents bear in accommodating mass visitors.

Excessive visitor pressure in the Himalayan region is not just a number; it creates real risks in the mountains with limited carrying capacity. In June 2026, the Garhwal Post reported that an ambulance carrying a critically ill patient was stuck in a traffic jam due to roadside parking on Mussoorie's narrow roads, which hindered its movement. The ITBP ultimately diverted it. This instance demonstrates how vehicular pressure directly affects public safety and access to essential services during emergencies (Garhwal Post Bureau, 2026). The strain of overcrowding is not confined to pilgrimage routes; urban tourist spots like Robber's Cave in Dehradun have also reported large crowds crammed into narrow cave passages during the peak tourist season. This also suggests a clear strain on local infrastructure and raises public safety concerns (Times Travel, 2024).

The digital dimension associated with this evidence is particularly important to the current analysis. Firstly, records of incidents such as littering and confrontation would not even have entered the academic domain or been part of the journalistic inquiry if the videos had not been widely circulated on social media. Moreover, digital platforms are becoming sites where incidents are not merely posted but circulated, discussed, and even analysed.

Such digital platforms also serve as means of organising resentment through campaigns and appeals. The most recent example emerged in May 2026 when a video was circulated in which two tourists from Haryana were assaulted by the locals after a verbal confrontation. After this incident, several social media and travel influencers took to their platforms to join the #BoycottUttarakhand campaign, calling for a year-long boycott of tourist destinations such as Haridwar and Rishikesh. The tourist industry's importance to Uttarakhand's economy became a trigger. The Boycott Uttarakhand movement reflected reciprocal hostility from visitors and organised itself just days after the incident video went viral, entirely through a hashtag-driven campaign.

As mentioned earlier, social media content, though not statistically representative, serves as an evidentiary source that captures residents' lived experience in the state. This reflection remains absent from government documents, official reports and policy documents. Thus, as supplementary qualitative evidence, it reinstates the underlying argument that the tourism industry, although economically beneficial, requires a reoriented approach. The success of the tourism industry cannot be gauged by footfall, revenue, and investment numbers alone. Rather, the quality of life of the host community, the dignity and ecological sanctity of the destination, and the everyday lives of residents must be assessed against the growing inflow of tourists.

Discussion

The growing resentment of locals against tourists finds theoretical grounding in Doxey's (1975, as cited in Pavlić & Portolan, 2015) Irritation Index, or "Irridex," which posits that residents' attitudes evolve as tourist volume increases relative to the host population. The index proposes that the destination goes through four stages of attitudinal response: euphoria, in which tourism is welcomed because the benefits outweigh the costs; apathy, in which residents

become accustomed to tourists' presence. As recorded tourist visits increase, the destination goes through the next stages: irritation, then antagonism. This contextualises tourism growth with adverse socio-cultural impacts, to the extent that the host community, which welcomed tourists in the first stage of euphoria, eventually holds tourists responsible for social, economic, and ecological impacts on their community in the last stage of antagonism.

Read against this framework, some characteristics of the present response of the citizens of Uttarakhand appear consistent with the third stage of irritation, described as the phase in which residents become concerned about the growing number of tourist arrivals and the competition for resources that arises from it. This competition is evident in Uttarakhand through its already overburdened road network, limited parking capacity, civic security challenges, inadequate waste management infrastructure and the eroding ecological harmony for which the hills were once famous.

Although there is no defined 'optimal' tourist-to-resident ratio in available literature about tourism, the carrying capacity of any area may be dependent on a variety of factors. Even the United Nations World Tourism Organization does not quantitatively define the parameters of carrying capacity but rather examines it through the lens of lived experience, resident-visitor satisfaction, infrastructural preparedness, and ecological impact. It defines tourism carrying capacity as the maximum number of tourists that may visit a tourist destination without disrupting the socio-economic, physical, economic and environmental quality and causing an unacceptable decrease in visitor satisfaction (World Tourism Organisation, 1981, as cited in Yusoh et al., 2021, p. 4).

Independent research, institutional reports and digital documentation point towards pressure on the carrying capacity of tourist destinations in Uttarakhand. The government must therefore adhere to a scientifically determined daily visitor limit, especially at ecologically fragile and sensitive pilgrimage sites. In ecologically sensitive mountain areas, such as Uttarakhand, exceeding carrying capacity not only strains limited resources but also compromises administrative capacity to respond to unforeseen events, such as natural disasters. Uttarakhand has a complex geographical terrain. This intensifies during peak tourist season, when demand for effective civic management is highest. Addressing this intensification requires leadership from senior, experienced bureaucrats capable of coordinating a quick response under resource pressure. As the resident-visitor relationship evolves across Uttarakhand, administrative officials must be especially trained to manage these dynamics. A policy's effectiveness is realised only through its implementation. If the governance lacks the administrative capacity to implement a well-conceived policy, its impact remains contingent.

Given the vast pool of academic, journalistic, and institutional reports, it is evident that the administration lacks no means to reach an informed judgment on tourism policies. Tourism policies must align the immediate goal of revenue generation and regional prosperity with the long-term goal of human well-being and sustained growth. This requires administrative efforts that are not only responsive but also vigilant and accountable.

Holding a destination-specific, multi-stakeholder dialogue, keeping in mind the economic, socio-cultural and geographical demands of the tourist destination, is essential. Policies like Winter Char Dham tourism and branding offbeat locations must not be treated as a substitute for enforceable regulations, waste management, and other environmental monitoring and auditing measures that the government and administration must actively implement.

Local communities, business owners, hotel associations, tour operators, and guides must be organised and trained on a destination-specific basis. This matters because many destinations in Uttarakhand fall under multiple, overlapping tourism themes. A single site, like Rishikesh, might operate as a pilgrimage centre, an adventure experience for rafting

enthusiasts, a wedding destination, a camping site, or a wellness yoga retreat. Thus, a clear and strict Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is necessary for effective management. These can be circulated through hotel helpdesks, tour guides, skilled tour operators, and 'Paryatan Mitras' (Department of Planning, Government of Uttarakhand, 2018). This would not only improve visitor management but also generate skilled employment, strengthen civic sense and promote responsible tourism practices.

Lastly, policy reforms would not succeed without dedicated political will. The state must resist its tendency to dilute and ease regulations for short-term economic benefits. Instead, the state must negotiate and engage stakeholders, keeping the well-being of Uttarakhand's people at the centre. Heritage conservation, respect for local sentiments, environmental clearances, and public reporting must move at the same pace as tourism branding.

Conclusion

The core of this argument lies in the need to restructure the way growth and development are visualised for the Himalayan state. The growing importance of tourism in Uttarakhand positions the industry not only as a beneficiary of infrastructural investment but also as an active means of attracting national-level attention regarding sustained development. By extension, the local and transient tourist populations become the twin nodal points in the state's developmental narrative. This raises the question that has been central to the query of this paper: whether policies designed to accommodate transient, peak season demands of tourists can have long-term, durable benefits for the host population, or does it risk drawing ecological and social adversities that embed deeper in the system and surface even beyond the tourist season.

Policies in Uttarakhand require a 'beyond GDP' and 'beyond footfall' approach. Measuring the success of the tourism industry solely by footfall numbers, hotel occupancy, and revenue fails to capture the everyday lived experience of both the visitor and the host. The costs of unregulated tourism are evident in traffic congestion, public resentment, ecological challenges, and administrative incapacity. Thus, economic success must be viewed through the lens of long-term consequences and their impact on sustainability. Given the state's current model, the trade-offs are steep, with irreparable costs to the fragile mountain landscape. An urgent reorientation in approach is required.

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