

The Great Indian Desert

The Great Indian Desert, well known as the Thar Desert, is a large and arid region in the northwestern part of the Indian subcontinent. Covering about 200,000 km² in terms of area it forms a natural boundary between India and Pakistan.

India has about 85% of the Thar Desert while the rest is in Pakistan. Of the total geographical area of India the Thar Desert covers around 4.56%.

This article will further give details about the Thar Desert within the context of the IAS Exam. The information from this article will be useful in the geography segment.

General Overview of the Thar Desert

The Great Indian Desert lies between the Aravali Hills in the northeast and stretches to Punjab and Haryana to the north, to the Rann of Kutch along the western coast and the alluvial plains of the Indus River in the northwest.

There are several protected areas located in the Thar Desert. Some of them are as follows:

- 1. Desert Natural Park:** About 3162 km² in the area. One of the largest of the Thar Desert ecosystems, it includes 44 villages with a wide selection of flora and fauna
- 2. Tal Chhapar Sanctuary:** Covering 7 km², It is located in the Churu district. The sanctuary is home to a large population of foxes, blackbuck, partridge etc.
- 3. Sundha Mata Conservation Reserve:** The reservation covers 117.49 km² (45.36 sq mi) and is located in the Jalore District.

Flora and Fauna of the Great Indian Desert

The Thar Desert has a wide collection of Flora and Fauna. Some of the Fauna are as follows:

1. Blackbuck
2. Chinkara
3. Indian Wild Ass
4. Caracal
5. Red Fox
6. Packcock
7. Wolf
8. Sand Grouse

9. Leopard
10. Asiatic Wild Cat

The region produces herbaceous plants like cactus, neem, khejri, acacia nilotica among others. All these plants can accommodate themselves to high or low temperatures and difficult climatic conditions.

Topography of the Great Indian Desert

The soil of the Great Indian Desert remains dry throughout the year and is prone to erosion from the wind. High-speed winds blow solid from the desert, depositing some of it adjoining fertile lands. These high-winds cause shifting sand dunes within the desert. Canals such as the Indira Gandhi Canal provide water to the Thar Desert. These canals also prevent spreading the desert to fertile areas.

Very few local species of trees can survive the harsh desert climate, hence species of trees not native to the region are planted. Species of trees like Eucalyptus, Jojoba, Acacia, Cassia etc from Israel, Australia, Zimbabwe, Chile and Sudan have been planted. Of these, Jojoba has proven to be the most promising as well as being economically viable for planting in these areas.

Further Facts about the Thar Desert

- It is the world's 17th-largest desert, and the world's 9th-largest hot subtropical desert.
- The Lal Suhanra Biosphere Reserve and National Park in Pakistan's portion of the Thar desert is a UNESCO declared biosphere reserve.
- The region is a haven for 141 species of migratory and resident birds of the desert.
- About 23 species of lizards and 25 species of snakes are endemic to the region.
- About 40% of the total population of Rajasthan lives in the Thar Desert. The main occupation of the people is agriculture and animal husbandry.
- The Thar Desert provides recreational value in terms of desert festivals organized every year. Rajasthan desert festivals are celebrated with great zest and zeal. This festival is held once a year during winter.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Great Indian Desert

What is the importance of the Great Indian Desert?

Despite having an extreme climate, the Thar Desert can provide development opportunities. These include: Mining - the desert has valuable reserves of minerals such as feldspar, phosphorite. These minerals are used to produce a range of things from cement to fertilisers and are therefore valuable.

Why is the Thar Desert known as the wealthiest desert in the world?

The Thar desert is called the world's wealthiest desert because it is the largest producer of wool in India and in the world. And there are some minerals found in the Thar desert like gypsum and kaolin.