

## **Potential of Eco-Tourism in Reasi District**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. It is both environmentally and economically feasible activity, which helps in environment conservation on one hand and provides economic opportunities to the local people on the other. The study is based on primary and secondary source of data (field-work and in-depth discussions with district authorities and local people, in and around tourist spots). Sustainable tourism, if practised in letter and spirit, would help in keeping tourism a viable economic activity. Reasi often called as home of Mata Vaishno Devi (Trikuta Rani) is a district of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India. In this paper the author made an attempt to analyze the prospects of ecotourism in Reasi district. Despite having large tourism in southern part of district especially in Katra where according to Shrine Board Katra in 2022 more than 91 Lakh tourists visited the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi, Tehsil Arnas, Throo, Bhamag, Thakrakote, Mahore and Chassana have absorbed very small number of tourists, finding indicates that lack of basic facilities like road connectivity, resorts, hotels, power supply and negligence of tourism development authority Jammu and Kashmir are hindrances to the development of tourism in these areas. It has been found that Reasi has extensive prospects of ecotourism. Reasi is entirely affluent in religious, natural, historical and cultural sources essential for ecotourism. Eco-tourism, eventually improves the socio-economic conditions of the local people by providing them with livelihood opportunities. At the end certain suggestions have been made to give impulse to the ecotourism in Reasi.

**Key words:** Ecotourism, environmental resources, religious tourism and historical.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism plays an important role in terms of employment generation, growth in GDP and generation of foreign exchange. It is both environmentally and economically feasible activity, which helps in environment conservation on one hand and provides economic opportunities to the local people on the other. Numerous significant tourist activities like

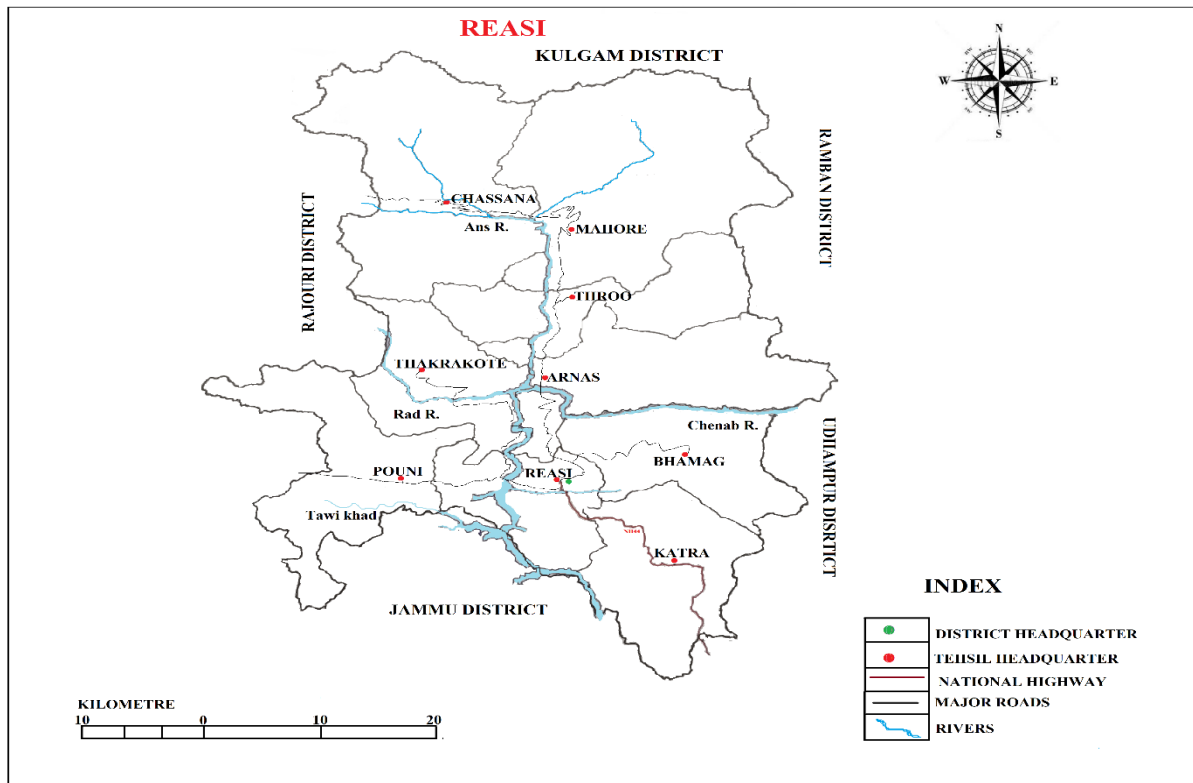
Meadow tourism, Water fall tourism, rural tourism,trekking etc. in the district have been pointed out.

Ecotourism refers to the form of tourism in which the main motive of tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional culture prevailing in the area, minimise the negative impacts upon the nature and socio-cultural environment, generating economic benefits for the host communities and increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists. (UNWTO)

Ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet. By increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities, ecotourism is an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development. With an emphasis on enriching personal experiences and environmental awareness through interpretation, ecotourism promotes greater understanding and appreciation for nature, local society, and culture. (The International Ecotourism Society)

There have been path-breaking advancements in science and technology and rise in disposable incomes world over, but mankind has grown apart from its roots in nature. This dissociation of humans with nature has resulted in erosion of natural resources and human understanding of nature world over. Numerous documentaries, movies and television programs have sought to bridge some of the gap between nature and humans. Educational institutions also play a great role in mobilisation of the youth towards environment conservation and sustainability of natural resources. There is “no substitute for the ecotourism programs that uniquely provide actual immersion into nature and the experience of the wonder that exists therein, first hand.” (William E Sampson II)

However despite all these advantages, we can't ignore the impact of tourism on natural resources. There has been gradual rise in ecotourism world over, and as more and more people seek to explore the natural wonders that exist therein, first hand, it has no substitute. Reasi is predominantly a hilly District, which enjoys variable climatic conditions, ranging from sub-tropical to the semi temperate, it has geographical extent between 32<sup>o</sup> 54' North to 33<sup>o</sup> 45' North latitude and 74<sup>o</sup> 18' East to 75<sup>o</sup> 9' East longitude in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.



Source: jamabandi and latha of patwari.

The general relief of the study area is 1529 feet above mean sea level. The northern boundary of Reasi is marked by Pir Panjal mountain range. It is bounded by District Kulgam in its north, District Ramban on its north-east and District Udhampur on eastern fringes. On its South lies the District Jammu and is surrounded by District Rajouri on its Western and north western ends. The District headquarter is connected by NH44, and is 65 km from the winter capital of Jammu. According to census handbook 2011 the total area of the District is 171900 ha (1719 sq km). The general terrain is moderate and represents hill topography with deep gorges and ravine. Chenab River is the main river of the district. Reasi has a population of 3,14,667 according to 2011 census and it constitutes 2.51 percent population of the total population of the State. Out of the total population 8.6 percent people lives in urban area while 91.4 percent lives in rural area. Number of rural households in the district are 51,659 and that of urban households are 5,030 from a total of 56,689. It covers an area of 2, 84,184 acres. And has 84,140 acres of land under forest. It is a mountainous region with the exception of a very small number of low lying valleys. It's Sky touching mountain peaks covered with shining snow and luxuriant lush green forests, crystal clear streams and pleasing atmosphere in an enjoyable weather present an eye-catching landscape.

**Objectives:**

To find-out the potential of ecotourism in district Reasi.

To identify the locations of Meadows, Waterfalls, Trekking routes etc. in the study area.

To study the so far unexplored tourist destinations of district Reasi

To provide suitable suggestions for highlighting ecotourism in district Reasi.

**Methodology:**

This research study is empirical in nature and is based on both primary (field work) and secondary source of data. For the collection of primary data simple random sampling method was used for which 10 per cent villages and wards have been selected from each tehsil at first stage. From each village 10 percent households have been selected for sample. For sample collection the author visited the area to conduct the direct personal interviews from locals, also in depth discussions with tourist officials of Tourism department Reasi, Empirical observation of different eco-tourist destinations consists a major part of the study area during which photographs and videos were collected. Secondary data was collected from government and non-government sources which includes JamaBandi and Latha of Patwari, Census abstract of India, Newspaper Articles etc.

**Findings and discussion:****Sources of ecotourism in reasi****I. Natural sources****Gulabgarh**

Gulabgarh is a village in a narrow valley bounded by steep grassy mountain peaks of Mahore Tehsil and is located at a distance of 50 KM from Tehsil headquarter and 120 KM from District Headquarter. Gulabgarh Nalah (rivulet) that flows through the village makes it more fascinating to the eyes. Gulab Singh, Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir visited this village in 1817 after capturing Reasi, established a fort and the village got its name Gulabgarh. Remains of the fort are still present there. Gulabgarh is the last inhabited village on the northern part of Reasi district and can be used as a base camp for trekking to the higher reaches from there. It falls in the way of the route taken by the Gujjar Bakkarwal community towards Kashmir during summers and back. (pic.1)

**Chankah**

Chankah is a village in Thakrakot Tehsil of district Reasi. It is located at a distance of 21 KM from district headquarters. On September 04, 2022 Chankah got identified as tourist

Village under the Tourist Village Development Programme of Mission Youth, for its picturesque beauty and cultural significance. (pic.2)

### **Sungri**

Sungri (Channa) is a small village in Chassana situated at the confluence of Parai rivulet with Ans River. The crystal clear water and a playing ground which attract local tourists throughout year. Several small resorts and a Tourist Bungalow are the facilities for tourists. Sungri is 85 KM from Reasi on Budhal-Gool Road. (pic.3)

### **Ghoda gali**

Ghoda gali, which is located at a height of 6000 feet above mean sea level, in Village Jamasalan of Tehsil Mahore has historical importance as ancient stone sculptures of Ghoda gali have been sculptured by the Pandavas during the age of Mahabharata and is an important tourist attraction. It is 70 KM from Reasi city. (pic.4&5)

### **Meadows:**

Although the whole of Kashmir is a beautiful heaven keeping in view its majestic landscape and favourable climatic conditions, but the real paradise is located behind the lofty mountains surrounding the valley. Numerous waterfalls and meadows in the northern part of Reasi have not yet been discovered, some meadows found in the upper reaches of Reasi include:

### **Aagshi**

One such meadow (dhok) in village gulabgarh at an altitude of around 6000 feet (AMSL) is a vast green sun-alpine meadow. The meadow of Aagshi is used for multiple activities, nature lovers come here for horse riding, playing cricket and camping during summers and is called as "Riders paradise." The mountain (Munni mall) on its north has a stunning view for visitors. (pic.6&7)

### **Ishni**

Another beautiful meadow in the upper reaches of district on bank of Ishni (Parei) rivulet, with lush green grassland in the lap of Pir Panjal ranges in village Sarsot. The sound of fast flowing water bubbling over rocks produces a soothing effect that touches one's soul. The dense forests of Ishni dhok, salubrious weather and elegant mountains (shrangla) are a sight to behold. (pic.8)

### **Dagantop and Ramakunda**

Ramakunda and Dagantop are two most beautiful meadows in mahore sub-division of Reasi district these two meadows spread over an area of around 3 km, at an altitude of 5500 feet (AMSL). The spot had a potential of horse riding, cable cars (gondola), camping and

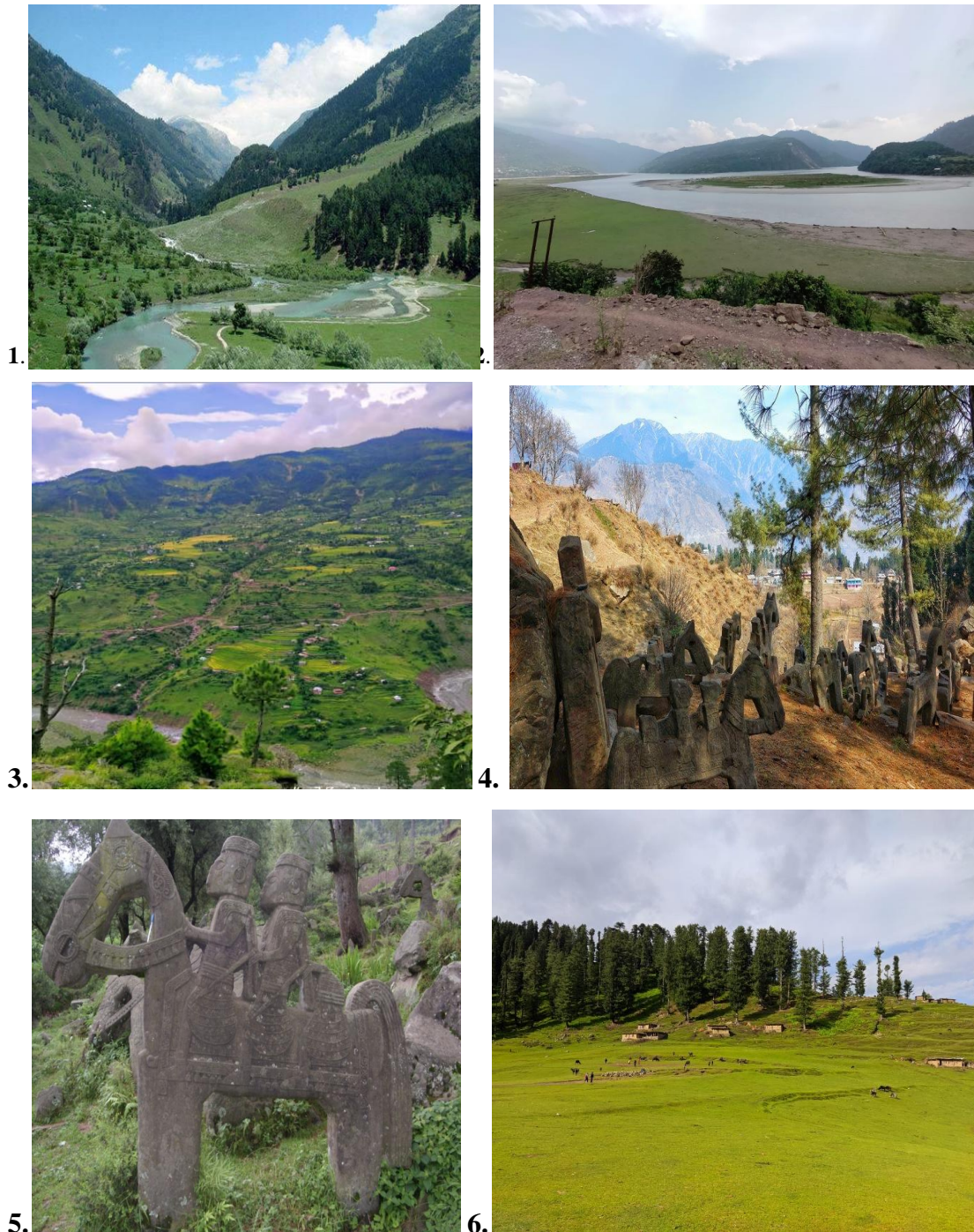
resorts. It is situated on mahore-gool road, 38 km from mahore, and around 90 km from Reasi. (pic. 8&9)

**Leon Gali:**

Leon gali is a small table land in village Badder of Mahore tehsil,surrounded by mountains and forests is an other important tourist attraction point. (pic.10)

**Makhi Dhar**

Makhi dhar ( dhok), another important unexplored tourist attraction site, located in village Bana and Tuli.





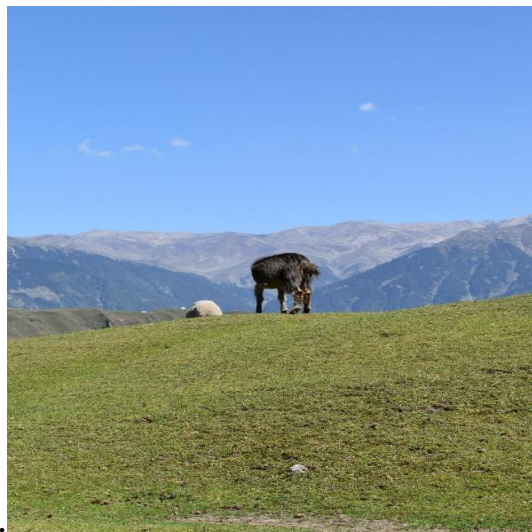
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## II. Historic sources

### Bhim garh fort

This is an historical and attractive fort initially built by Raja Bhim Dev 8<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1817 Maharaja Gulab Singh directed Diwan Amir Chand to re-construct Bhimgarh fort. The fort was built on a hillock surrounded river Anji from south and river Chenab from West. According to Nawab Khusru Jang ADC of Maharaja Hari Singh Bhimgarh Fort is a pattern of twenty-four Forts of Chitorgarh. Bhimgarh fort is in the list of state protected monuments of Jammu Division declared under SRO-336 dated 31-08-1989. (pic.16)

A part from Bhimgarh fort, Salal Fort Batal Gale, General Zorawar Singh Palace Vijaypur Reasi and numerous monuments are needed to be utilized for ecotourism.

## III. Religious Sources

Reasi often called as home of Mata Vaishno Devi. It is a prominent centre of religious visitors belonging to different faiths, World over. About 43 per cent of tourists to the union

territory of Jammu and Kashmir are pilgrims to two Hindu shrines Vaishno Devi ji Katra and Amarnath in Kashmir. (The Hindu News Paper)Some important religious places includes:

### **Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine**

The holy cave of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine (Bhawan) is situated at an altitude of 5200 feet (AMSL) on Trikuta hills at distance of 14 KM from base camp. Katra town the base camp for the pilgrims surrounded by green forests of Trikuta hills is situated 50 KM north of Jammu city. A large number of Dharamshalas, resorts, tourist Bungalows, Hotels are facilities for tourists. Electric vehicles and helicopter services are available for pilgrims. A new ropeway inaugurated from Bhawan to Bhairo Baba Mandir, reducing the journey to just three minutes. According to Shrine Board Katra in 2022 more than 91 Lakh tourists visited the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi.(pic. 11)

### **Shri Shiv Khori Shrine**

The holy cave of Lord shiva nearly a kilometre long that houses a naturally formed 'shiviling' of four feet high. Every year on the eve of Maha Shivratri Shiv Khori festival is celebrated. Shiv Khori is located in Ramsu Village of Pouni Tehsil, of District Reasi, about 30 KM from Katra and 75 KM from Jammu, at an altitude of 1528 meters (AMSL). (pic 12)

### **Shri Dera Baba Banda Bahadur Ji**

A 300 year old historic Gurdwara has the smadhi of baba banda bahadur and his ashes kept in this gurdwara. Situated on the bank of river chinab, 18 km, in south direction from district headquarter and 68 km from Jammu. (pic.13)

### **Ziarat Sayid Ghulam Rasool shah**

The renowned shrine of sayid Gulam Rasool is located in Nihoch village of Tehsil Mahore the shrine is a site of pilgrimage for people of all religions and is visited by scores of people from various districts adjoining Reasi. It is situated on a hilltop and the surrounding view of the pir panjal ranges adds aesthetics to spirituality which leaves a lasting impact on the visitors of the shrine. (pic 14).

### **Shri Shiv Tharra**

Also known as Dhamni Tharra is in Village Chana of Tehsil Chassana. This place is regularly visited by followers of different religious beliefs. (pic.15)

### **Shri Bawa Aghar Jitto Ji**

Baba jitto a supreme devotee of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, it is situated on katra reasi NH44 and is 7 km from katra town, in Aghar Jitto village.



**Shri Siarh Baba Ji**

Famous waterfall approximately 400 in height, located about 10 KM from Reasi in village Tilwara.

**Shri Baba Dhansar Ji**

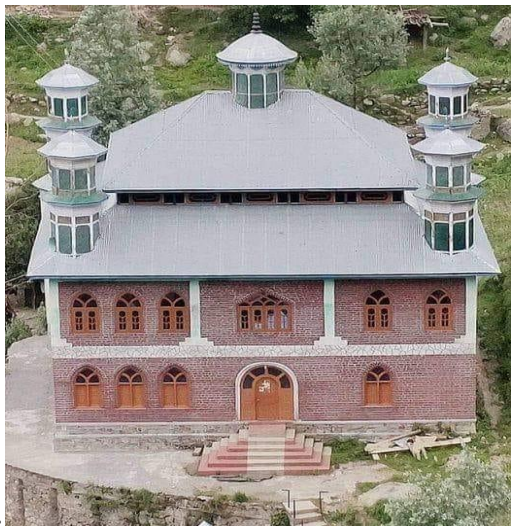
The holy cave of Dhasar baba is located in karua village at karua jheel, It is 15 KM from district headquarter Reasi on Reasi katra NH44.

**Nav Devi Mandir**

The shrine has naturally formed nine pindies symbolizing nine avtaras of Maha Shakti. The shrine is located on NHH44, about 7 KM from Katra towm of Reasi.

**Ziarat Baji Ismail Sahib:**

This shrine is located at jandi morh in bharak village of Pouni Tehsil of district Reasi.





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### Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings that Reasi often called as home of Mata Vaishno Devi (Trikuta Rani). However, despite having large tourism in southern part of district especially in Katra where according to Shrine Board Katra in 2022 more than 91 Lakh tourists visited the holy shrine of Vaishno Devi, Tehsil Arnas, Throo, Bhamag, Thakrakote, Mahore and Chassana have absorbed very small number of tourists, despite of its pristine natural beauty, multitude and uniqueness of its cultural diversity, finding indicates that lack of basic facilities like road connectivity, resorts, hotels, power supply and negligence of tourism development authority Jammu and Kashmir are hindrances to the development of tourism in these areas. It has been found that Reasi has extensive prospects of ecotourism, but majority of which is unknown and has still not gain attention of policy makers. Reasi is entirely affluent in religious, natural, historical and cultural sources essential for ecotourism. In order to develop Reasi as Eco-tourism industry, that eventually improves the socio-economic conditions of the local people by providing them with livelihood opportunities. The very first step is its advertisement and serious concern of state govt. towards vital and necessary infrastructure facilities. By increasing local capacity building and employment opportunities, ecotourism is an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development.

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