



Hill station tourist satisfaction: An empirical study of Aharbal

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Abstract

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world which is playing a vital role in economic development and in generating employment opportunities across the globe. Kashmir Himalayas has achieved world fame as a famous tourist hill resort. The snowy mountains, Water Fall, kounser naag (spring), vast stretches of green forests and pastoral land represents the famous destination in south Kashmir known as Aharbal. For the fame of any tourist destination, tourist satisfaction is very important. Therefore, in order to study the tourist satisfaction towards the tourism services offered to tourists in Aharbal, an empirical study was conducted in which, besides the tourist demographic profile, 25 study objective oriented variables were asked to randomly selected 110 tourists in Aharbal; out of total number of respondents, 78 were domestic and 32 from foreign lands. After using 5 Point Likert Scale, in questionnaire, for getting responses from tourists, their responses was measured by percentage, mean and Std. Dev. techniques by SPSS software version 16. The study results reveal that tourists are satisfy with the tourism services offered in Aharbal. Almost, the satisfaction graph is higher in all variables; however, the dissatisfaction portion is either lower or invisible in the all graphs. The variables like, natural beauty, unspoiled nature, no food problems, accessibility, accommodation quality, and tourist information availability are satisfying tourists fully with a few numbers of neutral tourists. Moreover, the findings indicate that around 80% tourists are satisfied followed by around 20% of dis-satisfied and neutral tourists. Therefore, less than 20% dis-satisfied tourists is not a matter of worry but, in spite of this high tourist satisfaction, enhancement of tourism services is very essential for maintaining the tourist satisfaction and increasing the tourist loyalty in Aharbal for future existence.

Keywords: Kashmir, Aharbal, tourism, tourists satisfaction

Introduction

Tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world which is playing a pivotal role in economic development and in generating employment opportunities across the globe. Tourism is basically a tangible and intangible mix industry (Kandampully, 2000) ^[10] of goods and services for tourist experience and satisfaction. This smokeless industry is generating approximately US\$ 2 billion as daily international revenue and world GDP investment of 12% (Balakrishnan 2009) ^[2]; due to this reason, WTTC (1995) has considered tourism as the fastest emerging industry of the world and today, the need of tourism development is felt by every nation worldwide (Tabibi and Rohani, 2011) ^[20] because of its several benefits.

Geography is an unavoidable topic for tourism, because climate, site, situation and other elements of any destination are framing a real image of a tourist destination. However, when it is supposed to enhance the destination image and the analysis of tourist perception towards a destination or towards a particular tourist spot, then assessment of tourist satisfaction is key, especially for the development authorizes. So, the scope of knowing the tourist views about the different tourist services (local transportation, accommodation, food, rates, shopping etc.) they are consuming/consumed at the destination is very important. Moreover, the adoptable and friendly guest/tourist and host/locals attitude between the two parties brings them closer for future interactions and this is a

'Win Win' situation for both the parties; ultimately, this bond or the good relationship between tourist and local is also increasing the destination popularity in general.

The Study Area: Aharbal

In recent times, mountain regions have experienced "tourism revolution" cause significant economic, social and environmental change. Aharbal is known for its waterfall, Aharbal Falls, where the Veshu falls noisily 25 metres and 7 metres through a narrow gorge of granite boulders. Aharbal Falls are also referred to as the Niagara Falls of Kashmir, owing to the volume of the water that falls. Aharbal lies in the Kulgam district's Noorabad Constituency of Jammu and Kashmir. It is located on the Veshu River, a tributary of the Jehlum River, in an alpine valley covered in pine and fir trees within the Pir Panjal mountains, 18 km It lies at an altitude of 2266 metres above sea level. Aharbal is sources of mental peace, joy and happiness which one can get from its unexplained natural beauty. However, Aharbal is also home of adventure lovers where they are getting unforgettable adventure memories and experiences of horse riding to kunsar naag.

No doubt, Aharbal has its own importance as a tourist destination, Aharbal is a base for adventure tourism. The Veshu River is stocked with trout. The fishing permit can be obtained from the Fisheries department stationed at Aharbal. The alpine meadow of Kungwatan lies at the halfway point of

the two-day trek to the high-altitude Konsernag Lake, which is the source of the Veshu.

Research Problem

The Aharbal is visited by a number of tourists every year where they are consuming the different tourism services (transportation, food, accommodation, shopping etc) provided by different service providers and besides this, they are experiencing the other things (natural beauty, safety and security, behavior of hosts etc.) by their feelings and observations. Hence, there is scope to know that what the tourists are saying about Aharbal during/after using the different tourism services and experiencing the other things in Aharbal. Therefore, this study is focusing on to analyze the satisfaction of tourists towards the Aharbal as a tourist destination.

Review of Literature

Satisfaction is an attraction to tourists and tourism pulling power of behavior is the main element. A developer is producing successful attraction, its plans and installations user satisfaction (Richards, 1996) ^[16] should elicit. Services for organizations and for the satisfaction of each of these components came together to form a composite whole of the components and the components were services, features, experiences and information. Looking further their understanding and assessment of satisfaction and behavior was a concept that was required (Burns, 2000) ^[1]. Customer satisfaction discrepancy between the expected and perceived performance refers to the performance exceeded expectations, satisfaction is found (Oliver, 1980) ^[14]. This is not the time and place fixed with satisfaction is the key to understanding and change. In case, if a tourist perceives a low service quality, of course, visitor would be dissatisfied and would not be a repeat tourist of the destination. Lau, Anita L. S. *et al.* (2004) ^[11] for the first time in the intentions and activities aimed to study and repeat visitors to Hong Kong pleasure. The study has been keen to take part in various activities that showed significant differences in motivation. Repeat visitors came to consume, while first-time visitors to travel to Hong Kong to explore were pushing. Deborah Edwards *et al.* (2009) ^[5] use Expectation↔Importance↔Performance compared with thirty-nine attributes grouped into five categories such as 'city experience', 'range of attractions', 'Environment city' and 'food services', Domestic and international tourists, considered the significance of the differences in their expectations of the performance of the destination attributes. This will require different strategies, managing expectations and the destination of these two broad areas indicates that the market attributes.

A picture of happiness as a destination is a gestalt. It is a holistic construction which to a greater or lesser extent, is derived from positions on perceived tourism destination attributes. Lancaster (1966) ^[12] suggests that consumers choose products itself, but rather the attributes are possessed of the goods, and consumers as input factors to assess utility characteristics shows that perceptions of spend. Potential travelers generally have limited knowledge of the attributes of a destination that they are experiencing first time at the destination. Therefore, the image and attitude dimensions of a place as a destination is likely to be critical elements in the

destination selection process, whether they are true representations of what this place has to offer.

Several pleasure travel destination choice studies have been engaged in exploring the relationship between attitudes to a place or its image and preference for the site as a travel destination (Scott, Schewe and Frederick 1978; Matejka 1973; Goodrich 1978) ^[19, 13, 8]. However, the results of these studies are limited to preference and do not include the actual destination choice behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) ^[7] stressed that the attitude measurement should be based on the view of the effect of traveling to a specific destination, rather than on the approach to the destination. The effect of this approach has been consistently confirmed by empirical work reported in consumer behavior literature.

There has been some effort to describe the true destination of choice by exploring how individuals develop a set of alternative destinations, as they make a final selection (Thompson and Cooper 1979 Woodside, Ronkainen & Reid 1977; Woodside & Sherrell 1977). The findings reported in these studies targeted number of alternative destinations that were considered and the role of attitudes to each alternative in choosing the set of alternative destinations. These studies have tried to apply the concept evoked set for area tourism, but their conclusions were based on a hypothetical destination selection process rather than an actual destination selection process. This distinction is important because have been reported significant differences between those in making a proper decision factors and involved in a hypothetical decision (Beaulieu & Schreyer 1985).

Attitudes have been one of the most popular variables used in the field consumer behavior to try to predict consumer choice behavior. Several multi-attribute models have been developed, which measures attitudes and attempts to relate attitudes to behavior (eg Fishbein and Ajzen 1975; Rosenberg 1956) ^[7, 18]. A considerable amount of literature using these models have emerged, and one of its prominent conclusions is that when situational constraints specified and integrated in consumer choice models, their predictive power improved (Hansen 1976 Park 1978; Belk 1975; Tybout and Hauser 1981) ^[9, 15]. Multi-attribute models that ignore this component are unlikely to accurately reflect consumer choice processes. In relation to tourism, Crompton (1977) ^[4] suggested that the destination choice must be conceptualized as a function of the interaction between pragmatic constraints such as time, money and skills and destination images. Recently this method was approved by Woodside and Lysonski (1989) ^[22] in their general model for traveler's choice.

The purpose of this study was to conceptualize and empirically test the role of attitudes in the pleasure travel destination selection process. Destination choice has been conceptualized as having two phases (Crompton 1977) ^[4]. The first is a generic phase dealing with the fundamental question of whether or not to have a holiday at all. Once the decision in favor of a vacation is made is the second phase deal with where to go.

Research Methodology

This is an attempt to assess the tourist satisfaction towards the Aharbal as a tourist destination. Several aspects (especially tourism services) of tourist destination were asked to the

tourists through the self administered questionnaire; besides the tourist demographic profile (Part-I), there were 25 variables in questionnaire related to study objective (Part-II). In order to file the questionnaires, during tourism season of Aharbal, total 110 tourists were randomly selected for their views in which 78 were domestic and 32 were foreigner. For Part-II of questionnaire, 5 Point Likert Scale was used to note tourist views in which 5= *Highly Satisfy*, 4= *Satisfy*, 3= *Neutral*, 2= *Dis-Satisfy*, and 1= *Highly Dissatisfy* was considered. Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviations techniques were used in order to calculate the results by the SPSS 16.0 version software.

Data analysis and interpretation

A) Table-I Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=110)

Table-I is all about the demographic profile of the respondents which shows the different figures and facts of tourist profile. It is noted that 45.5% (N=50) respondents belong to the age group of 21 to 35 years which is the highest group of respondents; furthermore, 18.2% (N=18), 17.3% (N=19), 12.7% (N=14) and 6.4% (N=7) belong to 36 to 50 years, up to 20 years, 51 to 65 years and above 66 years age groups respectively. However, the respondents' occupation indicates

that *Employee* (45.5%) is the highest scored variable followed by *Study* (25.5%), *Business* (15.5%), *Others* (9.1%) and *Agriculturist* (4.5%) orderly. The gender of respondents reveals that Male are 70.9% & Female are 32.7% and, out of total number of respondents, 71.8% are married and 28.2% are unmarried in which 70.9% are Indian and 29.1% are foreigner. The annual income of respondents shows that mostly tourists are budgeted, because 43.6% respondents have their annual income 01 to 02 lacs followed by 25.5% respondents above 04 lacs then 22.7% respondents with 2 to 3 lacs income per annum and 8.2% respondents having their annual income just Up to 01 lac. Talking about the educational background of the respondents, it is shown in table that the *Graduate* (39.1%) and *Post Graduate* (35.5%) have maximum responses orderly followed by *Others* (17.3%) and *Up to 10+2* (8.2%) variables accordingly.

B) Analysis and interpretation of tourist satisfaction

1. Aharbal is a beautiful tourist destination

With the *Mean* value 4.61(N=110) and *Std. Dev* 0.49 (N=110), 60.9% respondents are highly satisfy with the statement that '*Aharbal is a beautiful tourist destination*' followed by 39.1% of satisfied respondent.

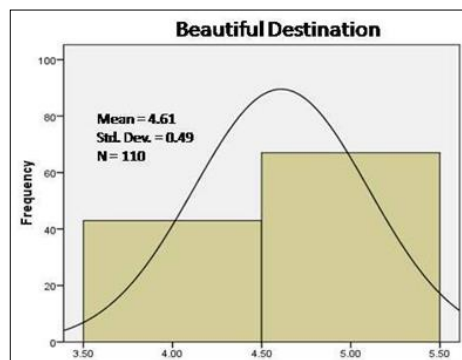


Fig 1

2. There is unspoiled nature in Aharbal

54.5% respondents are satisfied with the statement '*There is Unspoiled Nature in Aharbal*' followed by 43.6% highly satisfied respondents; moreover, 1.8% respondents are neutral

as well with the same statement. However, the Mean of respondents is 4.42 (N=110) while as Std. Dev. is 0.531 (N=110) for the above mentioned statement.

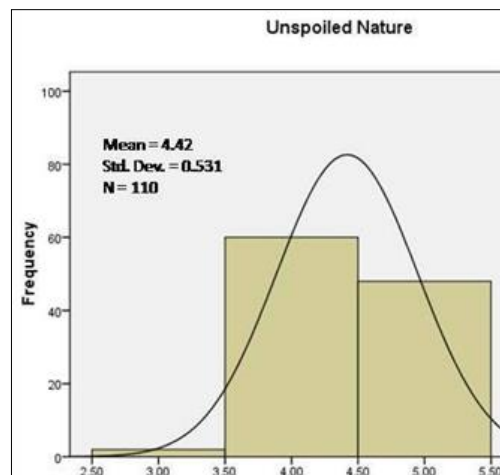


Fig 2

3. Aharbal has rich Socio-Cultural attractions

'Aharbal has rich Socio-Cultural attractions' statement satisfies 63.6% respondents followed by 26.4% highly satisfied respondents. In addition to this, this statement dissatisfies 8.9% respondents and makes 1.8% respondents neutral. The Mean and Std. Dev. results of this statement are 4.08 (N=110) and 0.78 (N=110) respectively.

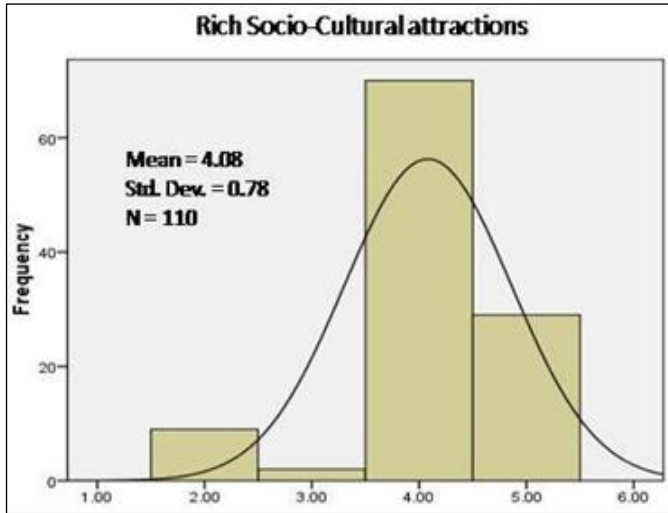


Fig 3

4. Aharbal is a clean tourist destination

With the Mean = 4.26 (N=110) and Std. Dev. = 0.501 (N=110), the statement 'Aharbal is a clean Tourist Destination' is satisfying 70.9% respondents and highly satisfying 28.2% respondents. Besides this, 0.9% respondents are neutral in this statement.

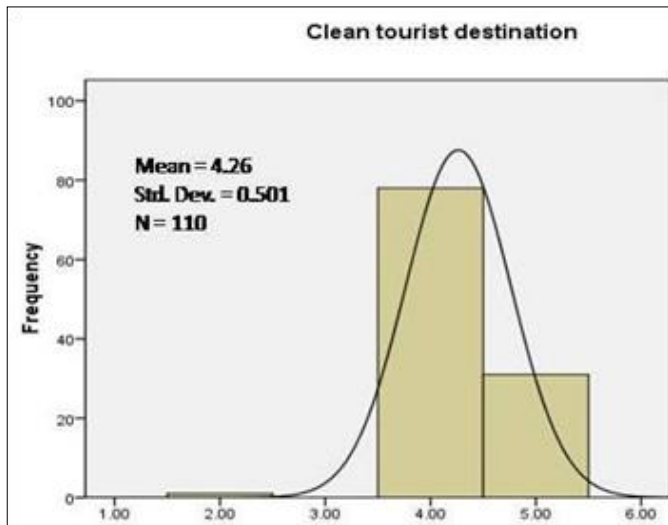


Fig 4

5. Aharbal is easily accessible Tourist Destination

In statement 'Aharbal is easily accessible Tourist Destination', there are satisfied, highly satisfied and neutral respondents 63.6%, 32.7% and 3.6% respectively with the Mean = 4.29 (N=110) and Std. Dev. = 0.531 (N=110).

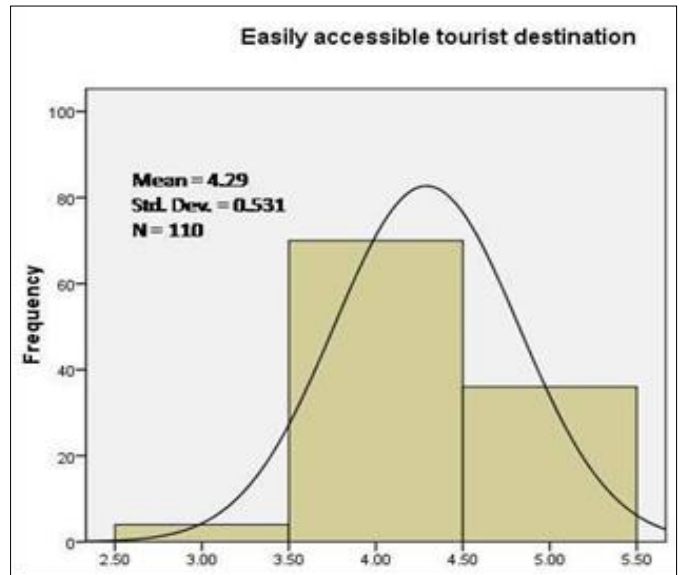


Fig 5

6. Aharbal has defined accommodation quality

50.9% respondents are satisfied with the statement 'Aharbal has defined accommodation quality'. Moreover, 36.4% and 12.7% respondents are highly satisfied and neutral respectively with the above mentioned statement with the Mean of 4.24 and Std. Dev. 0.663.

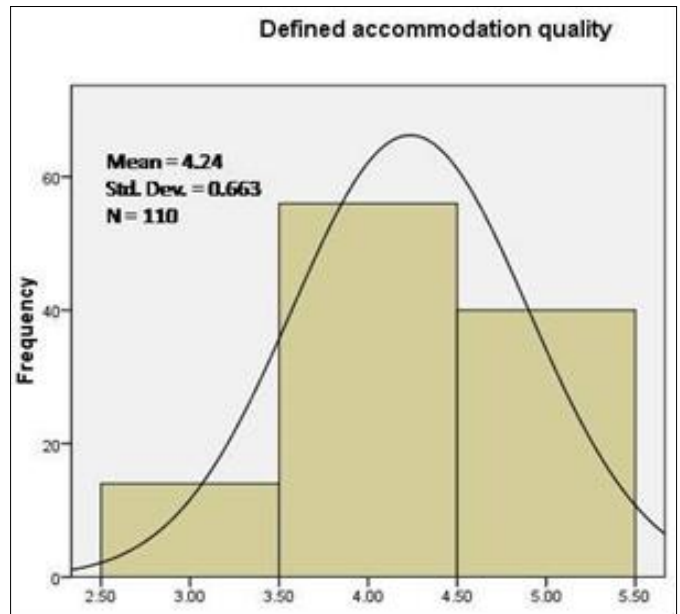


Fig 6

7. Local transport availability in Aharbal is appropriate

In Aharbal, availability of local transport is satisfying 54.5% respondents, highly satisfying 16.4% respondents and 23.6% respondents are neutral, while as 5.5% respondents are dissatisfied with availability of local transport in Aharbal. 3.82 (N=110) and 0.768 (N=110) are the Mean and Std. Dev. respectively results of the statement.

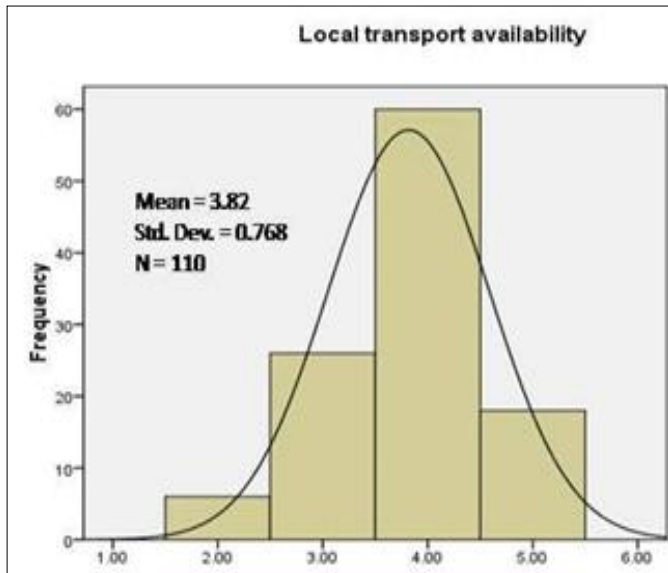


Fig 7

8. In Aharbal, waste disposal facilities around the tourist attractions are functional

48.2% respondents are highly satisfied with the waste disposal facilities in Aharbal which is followed by 44.5% satisfied respondents and 3.6 % neutral and dis-satisfied respondents each with the mean = 4.37 (N=110) and Std. Dev. 0.728 (N=110).

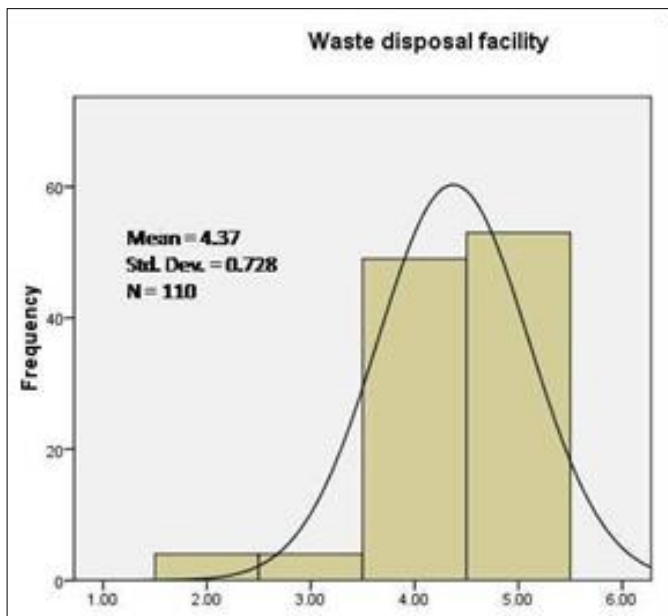


Fig 8

9. Aharbal is safe to go around

56.4% respondents are satisfied with the statement 'Aharbal is safe to go around' which is followed by 36.4% highly satisfied, 5.5% neutral and 0.9% dis-satisfied and highly dis-satisfied respondents each, have Mean = 4.26 (N=110) and Std. Dev. 0.686 (N=110).

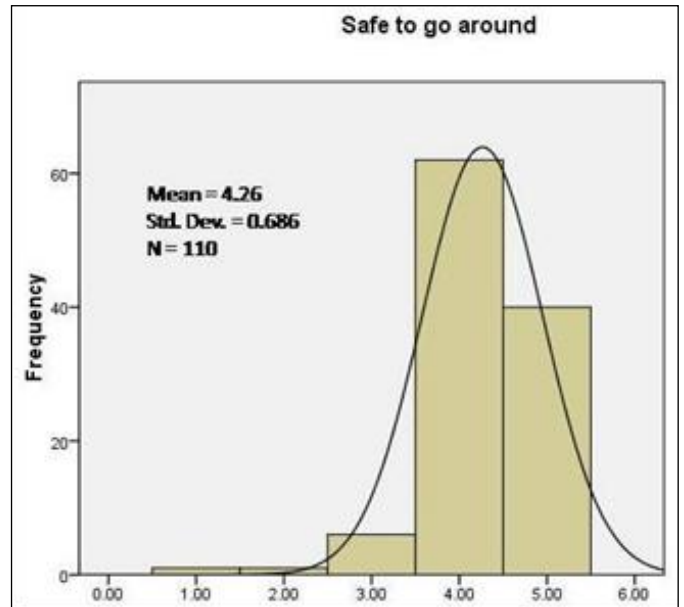


Fig 9

10. The local people of Aharbal are friendly

With the Mean= 4.03 (N=110) and Std. Dev. = 0.818 (N=110), 'The local people of Aharbal are friendly' statement is satisfying 52.7% respondents, highly satisfying 28.2% respondents and dis-satisfying 6.3% respondents, while as 12.6% are neutral in this statement.

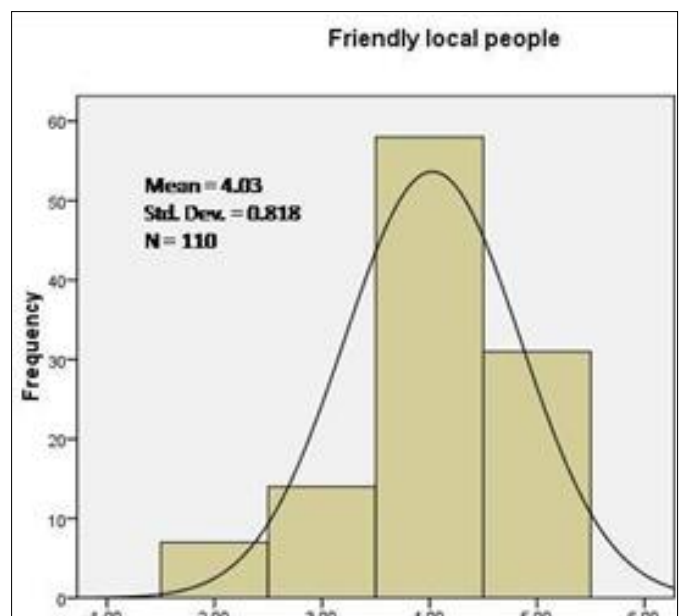


Fig 10

11. Shopping opportunities in Aharbal are sufficient

Shopping opportunities in Aharbal satisfies 69.1% respondents, highly satisfies 20.0% respondents and dis-satisfies 7.3% respondents with the mean of 4.02 (N=110) and Std. Dev. 0.729.

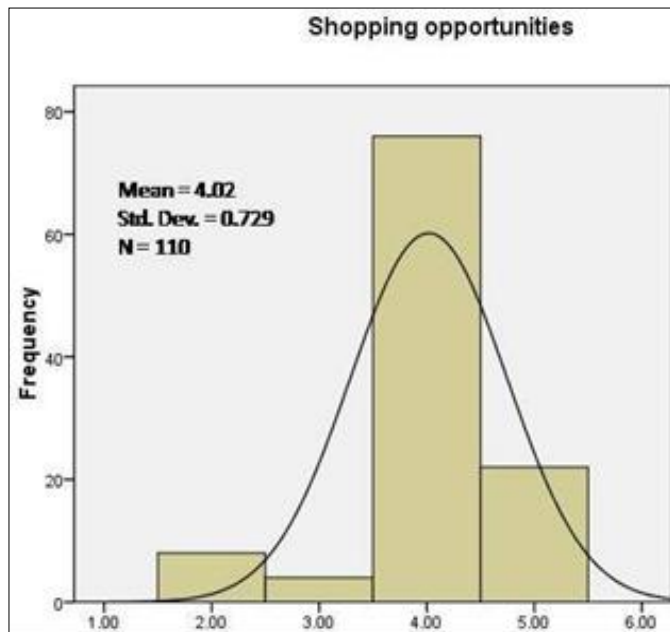


Fig 11

12. Aharbal is well leisure tourist destination

Overall, Aharbal is considered a well tourist destination which is satisfying 54.5% respondents and highly satisfying 36.4% respondents having it's Mean and Std. Dev. results 4.25 (N=110) and 0.963 (N=110) respectively. However, there are 6.4% respondents neutral and 2.7% respondents dis-satisfied with the above mentioned statement.

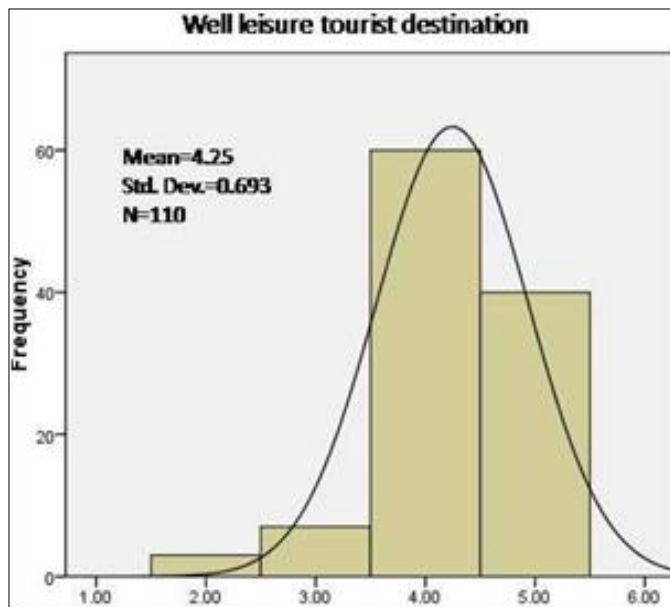


Fig 12

13. Aharbal is well adventure tourism destination

47.3% respondents are satisfied with as Aharbal is well adventure tourism destination. The same statement highly satisfies the 33.6% respondents and dis-satisfies 9.1% respondents with the mean of 4.05 (N=110) and Std. Dev. 0.897 (N=110). Furthermore, there are 10.0 respondents neutral as well in this statement.

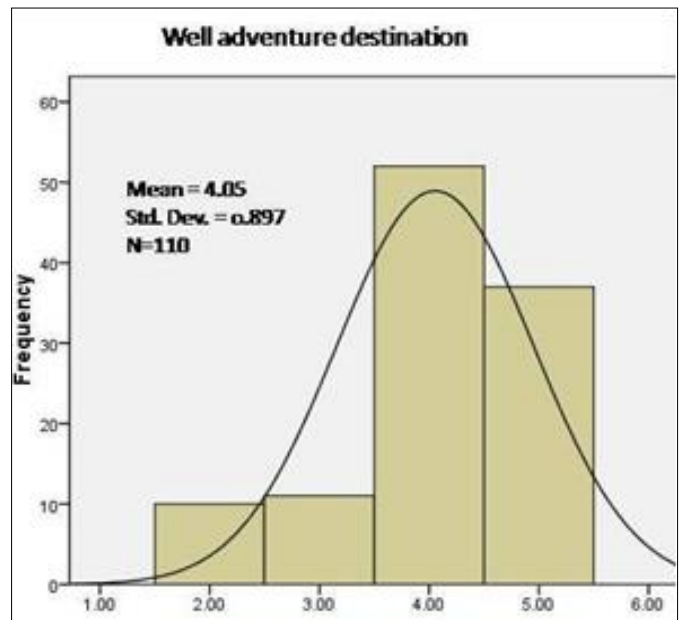


Fig 13

14. Transport charges are genuinely charged for and around the Aharbal

55.5% respondents are satisfied with local transport charges in Aharbal which followed by 30.9% highly satisfied, 8.2% neutral, 3.6% dis-satisfied and 1.8% highly dis-satisfied respondents with the Mean = 4.10 (N=110) and Std. Dev. = 0.834 (N=110).

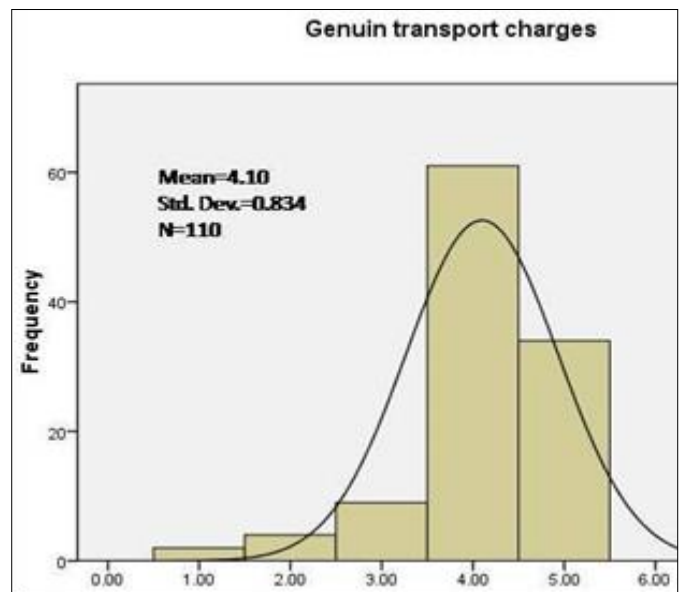


Fig 14

15. Accommodation charges are reasonable in Aharbal

Like other variables, accommodation charges in Aharbal got also more positive responses as 51.4% respondents are satisfied and 40.0% respondents are highly satisfied while as 8.2% respondents are not satisfied with the accommodation charges in Aharbal. The mean and Std. Dev. values of above mentioned variable are 4.24 (N=110) and 0.823 (N=110) respectively.

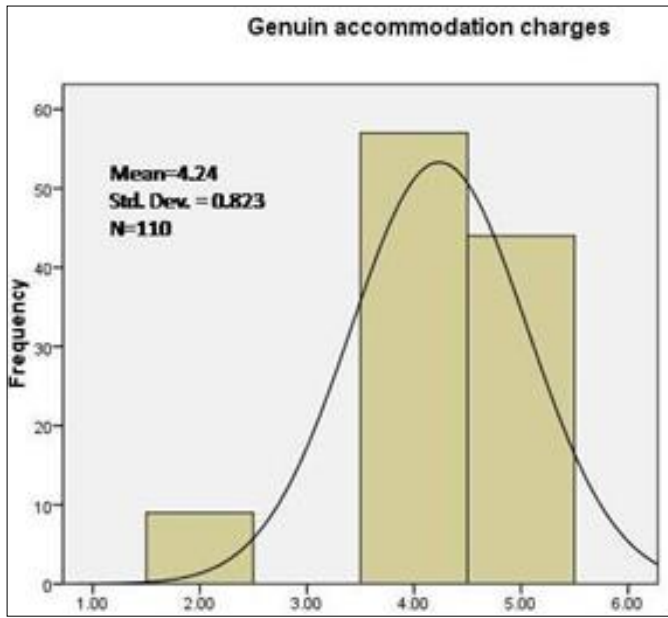


Fig 15

16. Food charges are genuinely charged in Aharbal

After getting the Mean (M= 3.83, N=110) and Std. Dev. (SD = 0.756, N=110) values, the ‘Food Charges are genuinely charged in Aharbal’ statement is satisfying 65.5% respondents followed by 13.6% highly satisfied respondents, 12.7% neutral respondents and 8.2% dis-satisfied respondents.

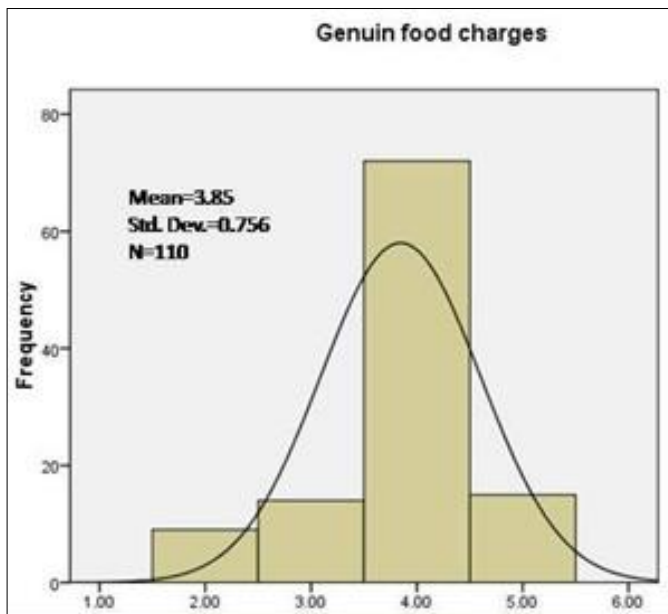


Fig 16

17. There are sufficient food outlets in Aharbal

The 46.4% respondents are satisfied with the availability of food outlets in Aharbal. The same variable is highly satisfying 42.7% respondents and dis-satisfying 4.5% respondents, while as 6.4% respondents are neutral in it. The Mean= 4.27 (N=110) and Std. Dev. = 0.777 (N=110).

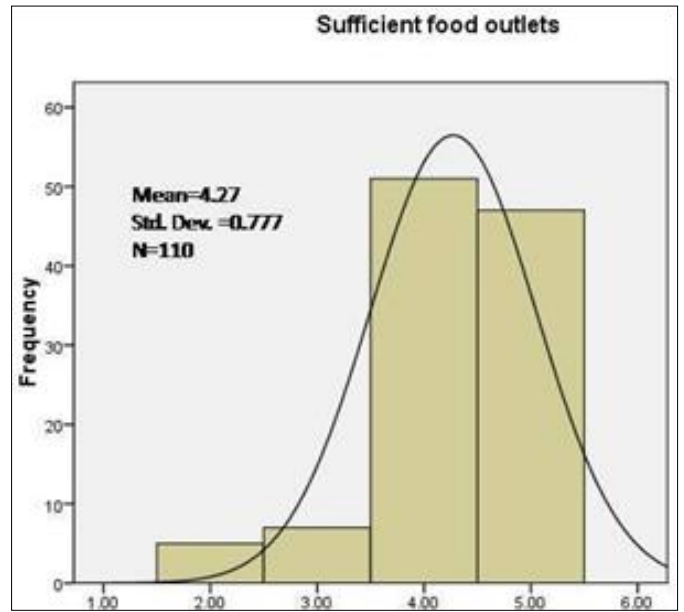


Fig 17

18. Climate of Aharbal is Pleasant

45.0% respondents are satisfied with the local climate of Aharbal, 41.8% respondents are highly satisfied and 4.5% respondents are dis-satisfied, while as 8.2% respondents are found neutral. The Mean and Std. Dev. values of this statement are 4.25 (N=110) and 0.792 (N=110).

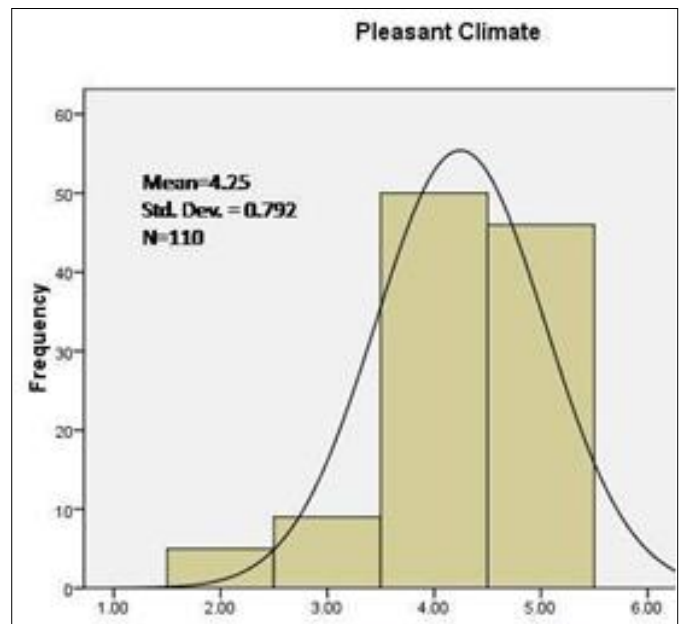


Fig 18

19. Emergency services are sufficient in Aharbal

The above statement satisfies 64.5% respondents, highly satisfies 23.6% respondents and dis-satisfies 2.7% respondents. However, there are 9.1% respondents neutral in this statement and the total Mean and Std. Dev. of the statement is 4.09 (N=110) and 0.657 (N=110) respectively.

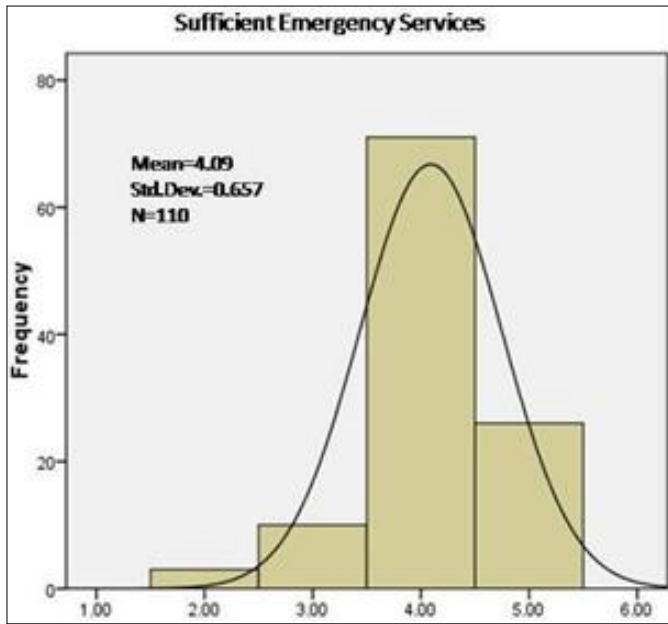


Fig 19

20. Parking facilities are enough in Aharbal

57.3% respondents are satisfied with parking facilities in Aharbal which is followed by 35.5% highly satisfied and 7.3% dis-satisfied respondents. The same statement got Mean = 4.21 (N=110) and Std. Dev. 0.771 (N=110).

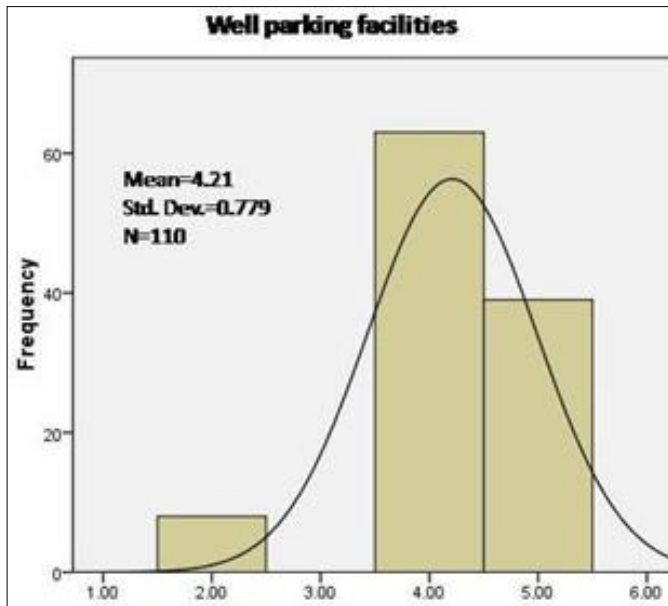


Fig 20

21. There is no language barrier in Aharbal

Mostly, the respondents are satisfy with communicating with local and other people in Aharbal, therefore, No language barrier in Aharbal is satisfying 53.6% respondents and highly satisfying 39.1% respondents. However, there are 3.6% respondents neutral and dis-satisfied in each and the overall Mean of variable is 4.28 (N=110) and its Std. Dev. value is 0.706 (N=110).

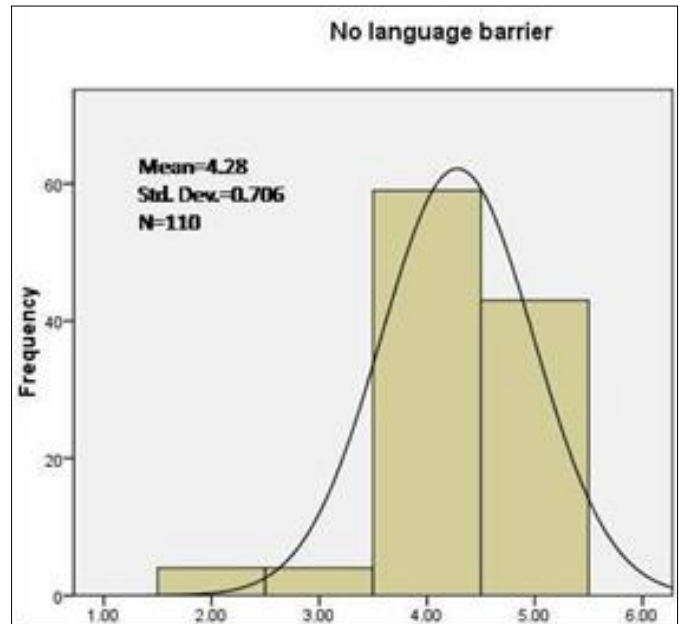


Fig 21

22. There is well tourist information available in Aharbal

The availability of tourist information in Aharbal is satisfying 50.0% respondents and highly satisfies 39.1 respondents, while as there are 10.9% respondents neutral in the same variable. In addition to this, the above mentioned variable has Mean value 4.28 (N=110) and Std. Dev. value 0.561 (N=110).

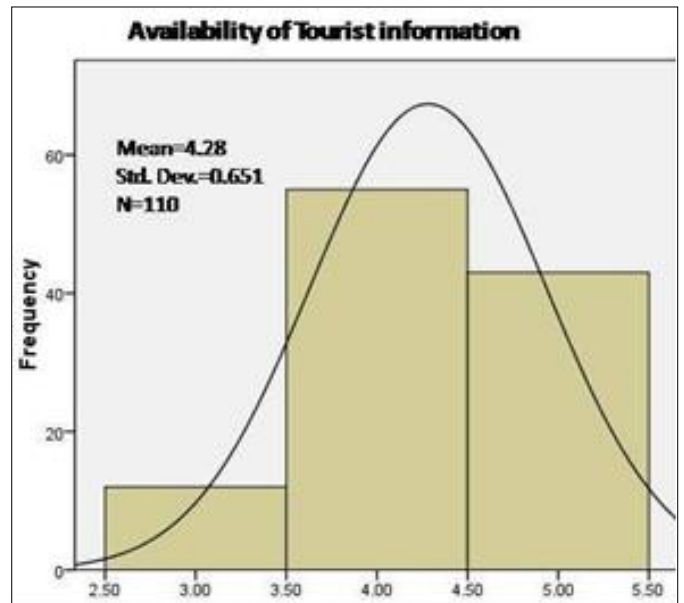


Fig 22

23. There is no food problem (Veg & Non-Veg food are available) in Aharbal

The Mean and Std. Dev. values of food varieties in Aharbal are 4.43 (N=110) and 0.515 (N=110) respectively. Here, 55.5% respondents are satisfied and 43.6% respondents are highly satisfied in this statement, moreover, 0.9% respondents are neutral also.

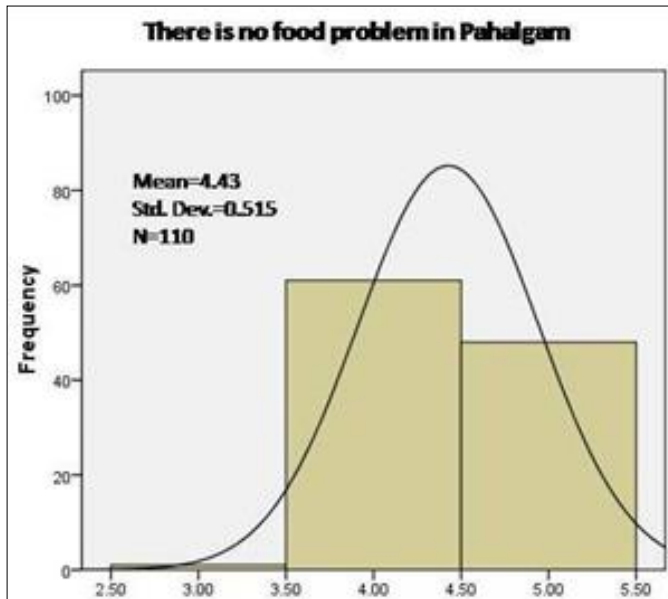


Fig 23

24. The local products are available on reasonable prices in Aharbal

52.7% respondents are satisfy with the prices of local products in Aharbal, then 26.4% respondents are highly satisfied and 16.4% respondents are dis-satisfied with the prices of local products, besides it, there are 4.5% respondents neutral as well in the same statement. The total Mean and Std. Dev. values of this statement are 3.89 (N=110) and 0.98 (N=110).

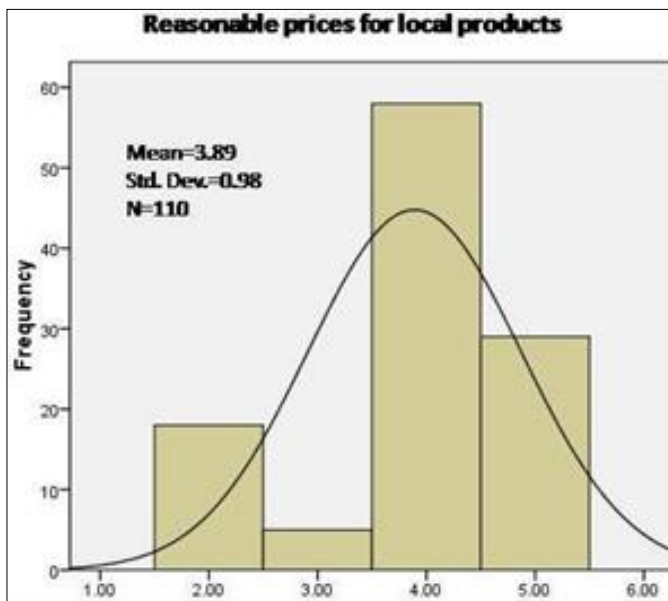


Fig 24

25. My visit to Aharbal is value for money

Finally, overall satisfaction of respondents is observed by the 'My visit to Aharbal is value for money'. This statement is satisfying 60.9% respondents which is followed by 27.3% highly satisfied respondents and 10.0% dis-satisfied respondents while as, 1.8% respondents are neutral in this statement. The Mean value of this variable is 4.05 (N=110)

and its Std. Dev. value is 0.833(N=110).

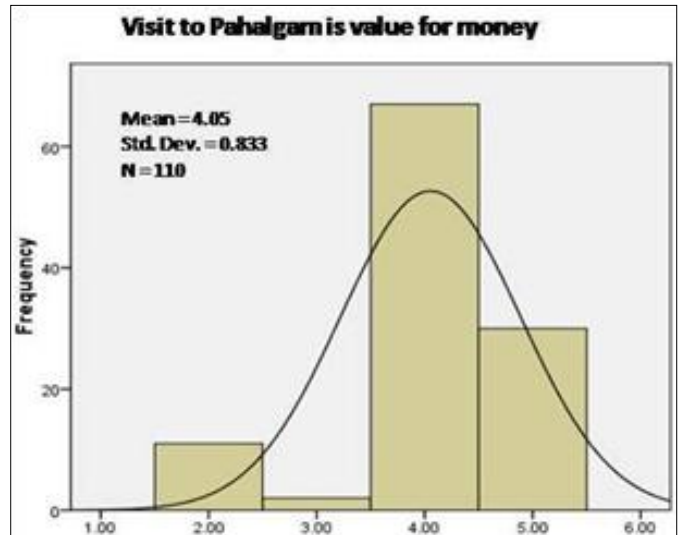


Fig 25

Conclusion

As an empirical study, the study aims to examine the tourists' satisfaction in Aharbal. Several objective based variables were asked to 110 tourists comprising 78 domestic and 32 foreign tourists. However, the demographic profile of tourists' is sound as mostly, tourists are well educated involved in employment, business and study; it is also noted that majority of tourists are up to 50 years old but, Aharbal is receiving budgeted tourists as whole.

The tourist views are calculated by using percentage and standard deviation methods and the tourist responses are indicated through bar graphs. Tourists' satisfaction is high in this study; in all graphs, satisfaction portion remained very high in all variables while as, dis-satisfaction graph remained lower or invisible often. About 80% respondents are satisfied in Aharbal and the rest 20% are neutral and dis-satisfied. The variables like, natural beauty, unspoiled nature, no food problems, accessibility, accommodation quality, and tourist information availability are satisfying tourists fully with a few numbers of neutral tourists. Moreover, out of total neutrals, majority of neutrals are in variables like, local transport charges, behavior of local people, accommodation quality and Aharbal as adventure destination. There are reasons that why they are neutrals as, because transport was part of their group tour, they had not used hotel accommodation at that time, there was no interaction between tourist & local people and tourists have observed less adventure opportunities in Aharbal at the time when they responded and filled up the questionnaires.

According to the study, tourist dis-satisfaction is not up to that mark which is a matter of worry, because less than 20% dis-satisfied tourists are acceptable and less number of dis-satisfied tourists can be satisfied in short period of time. Even good numbers of tourists are satisfied in safety, prices (food, accommodation, products etc.), and behavior of local people and accessibility which could be assumed for negative responses from tourists. However, in spite of this high tourist satisfaction, enhancement of tourism services is essential for

maintaining the tourist satisfaction and increasing the tourist loyalty in Aharbal for future existence.

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