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Tourist Industry Outgrowing Itself

ONE problem with vacationing is that nearly every place you go is jammed with tourists. If you could stay out of their way and out of tourist traps, it would be more fun. It would be cheaper, too.

People have more free time than ever before, and they are almost frantic to find some way to use it. They might not want to work, but they don't want to do nothing, either.

According to reports, recreational and leisure time spending is going up like the national debt. More than 80 million Americans go on picnics, 70 million swim, 35 million ride bikes, 40 million are boaters, 60 million go for games and participation sports, while another 60 million attend concerts and spectator sports events. Others fish, sleep, hunt and hike.

Oklahoma has been trying to encourage tourists from other states and countries to visit Soonerland, apparently with considerable success. Official estimates indicate that last year more than 32 million persons from out of state came here and spent about \$30 million.

That doesn't count what Oklahomans spent driving their campers and dragging their boat trailers from one lake to another looking for places to enjoy life more than if they'd stayed home.

Many national parks have limited the number of people who may visit them to view the beauties and wonders of nature because the hordes of tourists were trampling down the beauties of nature. Oklahoma lacks a great deal of being that crowded.

The large number of people looking for some place to go and some-

thing to do with their time and money explains the profusion of huge theme parks being developed, such as Disneyland, Six Flags over Everypplace, and sprawling zoos in simulated natural surroundings, where usually contented wild animals thoughtfully munch scientifically compounded synthetic feeds as they watch the colorfully dressed tourists pass by.

In a year or two, Oklahoma will have one of these big theme parks located at Stroud. It will be called the Seven Continents, which is easier than naming them and their countries.

It used to be a lot of fun driving around the country to visit cities and interesting small towns, or backwoods communities. This has declined because some cities aren't safe, and the chain stores in smaller places look very much like the chain

stores in the shopping centers back home.

Even the rural communities aren't as distinctive as they used to be. The natives cultivate the tourists, while real estate promoters try to persuade any likely prospect to settle down to an easy life in a cabin on a rocky hillside covered with scrub timber.

The United States became one nation because a diverse people were allowed to retain their individuality, but modern technology has brought the people so close together that they are being combined into a population that looks alike everywhere.

As Daniel J. Boorstin observed in his book, "The Americans, The Democratic Experience," "When any place became more like every place, it became harder to believe that any place was some place special."