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Our State Isn't Ready for Tourists

EVER since someone observed that a tourist was worth twice as many dollars to Oklahoma's economy as a bale of cotton and twice as easy to pick, efforts have been made to harvest the crop.

Not that Oklahoma is ready to accommodate and entertain a lot of visitors. We may not have mountains, seashores or huge amusement parks but we do have scenic lakes, art museums, the Cowboy Hall of Fame, Enterprise Square USA, Omniplex, the State Fair of Oklahoma and interesting historic spots all over.

A determined tourist could come here and after considerable exertion and snooping find out where to go and what to see. But if you think that's easy, just try it. We have attractions but we haven't got it all together for receiving company.

The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce has organized a group called the Ambassadors Program to promote conventions by building more hotels and restaurants. Those are essential, but there is more to entertaining tourists than places to

stay.

There ought to be more to tourism than just inviting the public to drink and gamble, too. We should have something better than the usual merchandise found in "tourist traps."

But where can you go to get a list of interesting places to see or things to do, including times of operations? I have seen a sketchy publication of that type but a couple of years ago I looked in vain for a copy in places that should have them.

Oklahoma ought to develop some distinctive foods to offer visitors, as well as wholesome entertainment. You can find Mexican, Oriental, European and other cuisine locally but where can you find a genuine OKIE or American Indian meal?

While Dewey H. Bartlett was governor one of his committees devised a special cut of sirloin strip labeled the "Okie Steak." The Oklahoma Restaurant Association got behind it and it was being served and selling well in quite a few places. Then a Democratic governor came into

office who taxed the "fat cats" and exterminated everything he could that might be associated with Republicans.

Beef and wheat are two of Oklahoma's principal products and we eat them in quantity, but a hamburger is about as distinctively Oklahoman as a room in a chain motel. Can't we do better?

While we are promoting tourism we ought to start with our home folks. Urban people here often amaze me with how little acquaintance they have with our forests, plains, lakes, etc. that can't be seen from interstate highways.

Alistair Cooke, who may be regarded as somewhat of an authority on travel and tourism, once commented:

"I don't know who said travel broadens the mind, but he could have added that the broader the mind, the thinner it gets. Some of the shallowest people in the world have been everywhere on every continent and seen everything through the eyes of a travel folder."