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THE CONTRIBUTION OF AUTOMOBILE TRAVELERS
TO THE ARKANSAS TOURIST INDUSTRY*

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A nationwide study of the vacation travel market, undertaken by the Curtis Publishing Company,¹ indicated that vacation travel in the United States is a seven billion dollar business. This figure is an underestimate of the importance of the tourist industry because vacation trips were defined as three days or longer and estimates were made only of tourist expenditures. Few other statistics evaluating the tourist industry have been prepared on a national basis but many states, realizing its importance to their economy, have attempted to study tourist habits and expenditures. These studies have revealed that the tourist industry, both in dollar value and in total payroll, is one of the most important industries in many states. In California, for example, this industry is ranked higher than the movie industry.

In order to expand and develop the tourist trade many states have engaged in extensive promotion and have set up agencies whose sole function is the stimulation of the tourist business. Florida and California both spend in excess of \$1,000,000 a year to advertise their recreational attractions. Arkansas' neighboring states of Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, each spend more than \$150,000 a year for the same purpose.

In view of the importance of the tourist industry and the fact that Arkansas is competing for tourist dollars in a national market, it is essential to study the characteristics of this Arkansas industry, the facilities and attractions the state has to offer, and the factors restricting or stimulating further development. Several steps have been taken in this direction. The Tourist Industry Committee of the Arkansas Economic Council, functioning as a part of the CED program in Arkansas, has carried on research in several directions: a study of tourist habits and expenditures in Arkansas; an analysis of Chamber of Commerce programs, local problems, and suggestions for increasing the attractiveness of the state; a study of programs and plans of Arkansas private and public agencies which are concerned with the tourist business; an analysis of budgets, organization, programs, and plans of tourist promotion agencies in other states; a compilation of an inventory of existing recreational attractions and facilities in Arkansas.

In this paper, discussion will be restricted to studies which have been made of expenditures and habits of out-of-state tourists. The several methods which have been used to obtain this information will be described and the results of a study covering the period September, 1949--August, 1950, will be summarized.

The University of Arkansas Institute of Science and Technology and the Arkansas State Highway Department, in cooperation with the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, have conducted experiments with methods for studying tourist habits and expenditures in Arkansas. Two distinct approaches were tested. The first approach, employed during the period July--September, 1949, involved distribution of questionnaires to tourists through Chambers of Commerce, service stations, state police, national forests, national and state parks, Corps of Engineers lakes, hotels, restaurants, and tourist courts. This method attempted to obtain a random sample of tourists visiting Arkansas by distributing questionnaires widely throughout the state. However, two sources of bias existed: the primary distributor and the tourist. Differences in effort put forth by various distribution channels could easily have caused over or under representation of certain

¹*The Vacation Travel Market of the United States*, The Curtis Publishing Company, Philadelphia 5, Pennsylvania (1950).

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groups.² There was the added difficulty that tourists contacted within the state tended to lose the questionnaire or mail it in Arkansas before they could give complete answers to all the questions. Because of these difficulties less than a 1 per cent return was obtained and a very small sample resulted. In addition, there was no way in which total figures could be estimated since information was not available concerning the total number of tourists visiting Arkansas.

The second approach, employed during the period September, 1949--August, 1950, involved distribution of a similar questionnaire by Arkansas State Highway Department personnel stationed on highways leading into the state. The number of survey stations manned varied during the year in roughly the same proportion as the flow of tourist traffic. For one day each month Highway Department interviewers stopped all out-of-state passenger cars which passed the station during daylight hours. Stations were manned on different days of the week in order to avoid the bias resulting from concentration of personnel at any one station on heavy-traffic days. For several months incoming tourists were stopped but because of the low percentage return--about 5.5 per cent--it was decided to contact outgoing tourists. This proved to be a superior method and resulted in a 12 per cent mail return during the first month it was in operation and a 20 per cent mail return thereafter. In November, survey crews began testing the practicability of interviewing tourists rather than giving out questionnaires. The method finally adopted involved interviewing as many outgoing tourist parties as traffic volume would allow and passing out questionnaires to the rest. This method resulted in high percentage returns which ranged from 20 per cent in December, 1949, to 87 per cent in May, 1950.

During the year September, 1949--August, 1950, 1,735,911 out-of-state tourist parties visited Arkansas of which a sample of 15,014, or 1 per cent, was obtained.³ Although sample size varied from month to month, both in absolute terms and as a per cent of total tourist traffic, coverage was broad enough to justify analysis by months. The questionnaires employed during the year covered by the study permitted analysis of the following points: home state or region of tourists, occupation, size of party, accommodations used, length of stay, expenditures in Arkansas by type, reasons for visiting Arkansas, attractions visited, suggestions for improvement, and favorable impressions.

Out-of-state visitors to Arkansas came from 46 states, the District of Columbia, three territories, and seven foreign countries. More than 52 per cent of the total, however, came from the neighboring states of Texas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Tennessee. The neighboring regions--South Central and North Central--were the most highly represented, accounting for 47 and 38 per cent of the tourist parties respectively.

The most important occupational group was that including proprietors, managers, and officials, followed by the groups including clerical, professional, and skilled workers. The average party size was three persons. However, nearly 39 per cent of the parties covered by the study were made up of two persons, the most common party size. Tourist courts and homes of friends and relatives were the most popular types of accommodation, resort and commercial hotels together being patronized by only 16 per cent of the tourists. The average length of stay was 3.8 days but nearly 70 per cent of the tourists stayed less than four days, resulting in a modal or most common stay of 1.5 days. Large parties generally did not remain long in Arkansas but as length of stay or party size increased, homes of friends or relatives increased in popularity.

Tourist expenditures in Arkansas were small; more than 40 per cent of the tourist parties spent less than \$20 and about 85 per cent spent less than \$100 during their stay in Arkansas. During the year average per party expenditure in Arkansas ranged from \$45 in May, 1950, to \$84 in October, 1949. The weighted

²It has since been determined that the excellent cooperation received from hotels in the state caused over representation of tourists who used these facilities. Since these tourists typically spend more than those using other facilities an overestimate of total expenditures resulted.

³It must be noted that only automobile tourists are covered by this method. An accurate procedure for evaluating the contribution to the tourist industry of visitors using other means of transportation has yet to be devised.

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average for the 12-month period was approximately \$60. The application of this average to the Arkansas State Highway Department estimate of the number of tourist vehicles entering the state during the 12-month period indicated that total expenditures in Arkansas of out-of-state automobile tourists were approximately \$100 million.⁴

Average expenditure increased as length of stay increased but, contrary to expectations, did not show a tendency to increase as party size increased. Visitors from neighboring states tended to spend less than visitors from more distant states. The three occupational groups, proprietor, manager, and official, clerical, and professional, made higher average expenditures than other groups. Average expenditures varied substantially according to accommodations used, the highest being made by those staying in resort hotels and the lowest by those staying with friends and relatives.

A breakdown of total expenditure revealed that food and meals, the most important category, was responsible for 34 per cent of total expenditure. Other types of expenditure accounted for the following proportions of total spending: automobile expense, 23 per cent; lodging, 19 per cent; miscellaneous, 13 per cent; entertainment, 11 per cent. Tourists visiting friends and relatives spent proportionately less for lodging and more for automobile and miscellaneous expenditures than did those using other types of accommodation. As length of stay increased tourists tended to spend proportionately less for food and more for entertainment, the other percentages remaining fairly constant. As party size increased expenditures for food rose proportionately while those for lodging and entertainment fell. The professional, proprietor, and clerical groups tended to spend proportionately more for lodging and less for automobile expense than did the other groups listed in the study.

The most important reasons listed by tourists for visiting Arkansas were to visit friends and relatives, to reach other states, and to sightsee. The most popular attractions were Hot Springs, the Little Rock area, the Ozark National Forest, Norfolk Lake, Eureka Springs, Bull Shoals Dam and the Boston Mountain area. Arkansas highways were the most frequently criticized--more than 74 per cent of those making suggestions for improvement indicated the need for better roads. The scenery and the hospitality and friendliness of the Arkansas people created the most lasting impressions; they were listed by 56 and 36 per cent of the tourists respectively.

This study emphasizes the importance of the tourist industry to Arkansas. An expenditure of \$100 million by out-of-state automobile tourists was reached in spite of the short length of stay and small expenditure of the typical visitor. Average expenditure was small because of the large number of tourists who were en route to another state or who came to Arkansas for the primary purpose of visiting friends or relatives. A program to develop the tourist industry should attempt not only to increase the number of tourists visiting the state but also to increase the average length of stay and average expenditure of these tourists. Such objectives could be accomplished by exploiting the recreational assets of the state, by improving the highway system; by increasing knowledge of the state's attractions on the part of the people of Arkansas, and by making additional publicity efforts both within and outside the state.

⁴This estimate excludes expenditures of tourist parties who did not stay overnight in Arkansas. Although individually these expenditures would be small, the large number of parties involved--934,778 from neighboring states--would add a considerable amount to the total.

