Tourists And The Bicentennial

To tour or not to tour? That is the question more and more Americans are asking as the nation's Bicentennial commemoration moves into the focal years of 1975 and 1976.

While some have already made concrete plans, the answer for many others lies in answers to a series of related questions.

Where is the best place to go for the Bicentennial? Will there be so many tourists that there is a serious threat to health and safety? Will we have to stay? Will it be so crowded that we won't be able to see and experience the things we have traveled far to visit? Would we be better off staying home?

There are no simple answers to these questions but the problems they raise are of concern not only to prospective Bicentennial travelers but to local, state and Federal officials involved in the Bicentennial, the tour and travel industry and sponsors of Bicentennial events.

Recognizing the dilemma facing both travelers and communities, the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) is working with all concerned in an effort to focus attention on potential problems.

John W. Warner, administrator of the ARBA, stated recently: "Under law, the ARBA cannot become directly involved in tourism but it is our hope to stimulate cooperation and encourage advance preparations and specific solutions."

Problems expected by long list of celebrations from one end of the country to the other

Unlike most other nations, the United States does not have a national tourist agency to promote travel, develop tourist information and assistance programs, compile statistical data needed for accurate forecasting, or develop and disseminate specific information on events and attractions for tourists.

Instead, on an official level, tourism is the responsibility of state travel or economic development bureaus which strive to attract visitors to their respective states for economic reasons. In some states — Florida, Virginia and Hawaii, for instance — tourism is a major industry, vital to the economy. In others, it has less importance.

To tour or not to tour? during bicentennial is a major question for thousands of families

Regardless of the normal impact of tourism within each state, there is general agreement that the Bicentennial will increase the number of visitors in just about every region and locality — putting unusual stress on available spaces and sanitary facilities.

The problems of tourism are complicated by the very nature of the Bicentennial which is literally being celebrated from one end of the nation to the other. The Bicentennial is a commemoration of the full 200 years of the nation's history, from revolutionary roots through the walk on the moon. Thousands of events of varying magnitude will take place over the next two years, presenting many choices for short and long-distance visitors.

In an effort to provide Americans with a full choice of places to go and things to do, the ARBA will publish national and regional calendars of Bicentennial events beginning this summer. The calendars will be made available to the travel and tour industry and the nation's print and broadcast media in the hope that the information will then become available to the general public.

As an added assistance to travelers, the ARBA has authorized the use of the national Bicentennial symbol on informational materials issued by the travel and tour industry; and on highway signs and markers across the country to guide tourists to Bicentennial sites.

A number of larger cities with Bicentennial events oriented toward large audiences have greatly increased and improved visitor facilities and transportation systems.

These include Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. For the most part, it is too late to begin major construction. The ARBA does believe, however, that much can still be done in the area of visitor services.

Visitor services range from accommodations and simple courtesy to the special problems of foreign visitors involving language barriers and money exchange problems.

Though visitor services and related problems can be described generally, solutions can only be found on a community basis. What is a critical need in one city may not be a problem in the next town.

In 1973, the ARBA undertook a Home Hospitality Survey which revealed that almost one half of the respondents would be willing to have a foreign guest in their home without compensation and nearly as many would house an American visitor.

Most places welcome visitors regardless of race, religion or national origin

Of those responding positively, most would welcome visitors regardless of race, religion or national origin and many would be willing to accompany guests to local attraction sites.

ARBA also conducted a study of low cost accommodations. The listing of actual facilities was shared with the Council on International Education Exchange (CIEE) for inclusion in their directory "Where to Stay, USA" which is available for $2.95. The paperback contains details on approximately 1,250 low cost (under $9.00) accommodations, as well as information on bus, train, plane and bike transportation and hitchhiking.

The booklet can be purchased in book stores or from CIEE, Department EH, 977 U.N. Plaza, New York, New York 10017 or 235 East Santa Clara Street, San Jose, California 95113.

Another result of the study will be a handbook outlining the problems and potential solutions for setting up low cost accommodations in a community. The ARBA will soon be sending it to Bicentennial Communities and others with known interest.

The ARBA has also awarded a grant to Boston's official Bicentennial organization to develop a hosts program as a model for other communities to copy. Based on Boston's experience, the ARBA will prepare a visitor services handbook with information on emergency services, currency exchange, and the special needs of international travelers, the handicapped, and families with children.

In another area, the ARBA has formed the National Bicentennial Hospitality Alliance, which is an association of national voluntary service organizations whose aim is to provide various visitor services and increase opportunities for person to person exchange.

Working with the travel industry, the ARBA has formed "Travel Associations in the Bicentennial" to seek expert advice and insure communications within the industry.

As a matter of policy, the ARBA is supporting the concept of tour packaging and mass transportation through the travel industry to move large numbers of people more efficiently, with less fuel consumption and lower individual expenditures.

The ARBA will also provide the industry with updated data from travel surveys which will be conducted in two waves in 1975 and 1976.

Calendars, informational materials available to assist travelers

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Tourists

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The dimensions of the problems are well illustrated by a recent survey on potential visitors to Bicentennial sites and events on the East Coast during 1976. In the survey, each person was counted as one visitor at each historical location or event visited per day. The survey was conducted for the Bicentennial Council of the Thirteen Original States by the Washington Center for Metropolitan Studies.

Sometimes dreams turns quickly into nightmares

Presented as estimates rather than predictions, the survey revealed a maximum potential of 875 million visitors to the East Coast during 1976. The minimum potential is 422 million. It is the difference that highlights the problem.

While the maximum potential creates some apprehension, the travel and tour industry reports that at present there is no sign of overbooking in high impact areas.

John W. Warner, Administrator of the ARBA, in discussing Bicentennial travel, makes the following points.

(1) The Bicentennial is the celebration of America. There will be thousands of programs and events, commemorating local and regional heritage and the varied ethnic and racial cultural backgrounds of the nation's people. Seeing America in its rich diversity is a good way to see the Bicentennial. People should consider shorter trips without overnight stays.

(2) Many Americans will want to visit the Nation's Capital, and the many historic revolutionary war sites in the original 13 states, but they should make sure they have confirmed reservations before embarking on long-distance trips.

(3) Visitors to heavily trafficked sites should make use of special public transportation and other public services provided.

For Americans generally, whether planning a trip or not, Mr. Warner has these words: "The Bicentennial is a time for coming together. The World has been invited to come visit us and see the results of this great experiment in self-government. It is a time for a renewal of our spirit of hospitality.

"If each of us, as individuals, makes a special effort to make visitors welcome, in small towns and large cities, the experiences of our guests will be present and memorable."

COMING JANUARY, 1976, a special examination of Blacks in the U.S.

Hall of Fame

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Board of Officials; assisted in organizing the Virginia State high school basketball tournaments at VSC and was a member of the executive committee of the Virginia College Athletic Association.

When he retired from VSC in 1973, he was the interim director of athletics. Since retirement, he has been employed as director of Petersburg's (Va.) A. P. Hill Community Center.

Verdell is married to the former Miss Susie Robinson of Columbia, S.C. They are parents of Dr. Thomas J. Verdell, a New York City dentist, and Dr. Vivan Verdell Goldon, assistant professor in the department of sociology at the University of Virginia.

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