What the Tourist Sees

This summer, according to statisticians, 81 million Americans will become tourists for periods ranging from a few days to several weeks. During this time they will blanket the United States in search of unusual and enlightening places to visit, photograph and send post cards from to the folks back home.

Quite a few of these 81 million tourists will head southward in their search for something different to see and do. The Deep South holds several unique appeals to the visitor. It combines balmy weather, varied scenery and an abundance of recreational spots with fascinating historical points and a modern appearance that has to be seen to be believed.

Of the travelers who visit the South, many will come to Baton Rouge — and over a year’s time those visitors will pour over $6 million into cash registers here. To some it will be a stopping point on their way to other vacation lands. To others it will be the center of their travels, the main attraction of their vacation.

What will these visitors see here, what will interest them the most, what will they tell the folks back home about?

First among the tourist attractions is the State Capitol and grounds, most beautiful in the nation. The 450-foot tall capitol and its 27 acres of landscaped gardens are a must to Baton Rouge visitors.

Second in tourist appeal is the giant industrial complex in the north of the city. The refinery of Humble Oil and Refining Co., largest in the nation, is the center of a petrochemical area second to none.

Third in visitor appeal is Louisiana State University, with its scenic campus, unusual buildings and massive Tiger stadium.

These rankings are made by a man who should know—John P. King, manager of Sightseeing Baton Rouge, which arranges guided tours around the city.

King says that some of the most interesting points about the city from a tourist’s view are things that the average citizen takes for granted. Here are some of the things visitors find interesting about the city.

FASCINATING FERRIES

—The ferries across the Mississippi River. “Local people see the ferries so often they don’t think them unusual, but to a person from, say, the Midwest, they’re fascinating and glamorous,” King says.

—The Governor’s Mansion on North Blvd. “It’s a replica of the White House as originally designed by Thomas Jefferson.”

—The Old State Capitol. “The only pure Gothic building in America. Built in 1847, it boasts the largest cast-iron spiral staircase and the largest stained glass dome in the country. It’s also rich in history, for it was here that the Legislature met during the Reconstruction days.”

—The new Spanish Arsenal museum on the Capitol grounds. “The building was of historical interest even before it was made into a museum, and today it’s a real tourist attraction.”

LEGEND OF LONG

—The legend of Huey P. Long. “Tourists are interested in his statue on the Capitol grounds and his part in the building of both the Capitol and the LSU campus. They never tire of hearing stories about him.”

—The Pentagon barracks near the Capitol. “These are very original and beautiful buildings.”

—The Audubon Sugar School at LSU. “Its students represent all sugar-producing countries of the world.”

MIKE THE TIGER

mascot (“a must for children,” King says); and ante-bellum homes such as Afton Villa in St. Francisville and the Doherty-Prescott home in Baton Rouge—all these are attractions.

Tourists also are interested in seeing the stucco and red tile fire stations built like residences, the ranch-style brick homes in the suburbs, the Chamber of Commerce Building, one of the most modern in the nation; the original Louisiana State Penitentiary building on Laurel, across the street from the East Baton Rouge Parish Library—how many of these would you have listed as “tourist attractions”? But all of them, as commonplace as they may seem to the Baton Rougean, attract the interest of people from other places. Even intangibles, such as the cleanliness of the city, the school system, the handling of traffic, bring comment from visitors, King says.

“Local people don’t often stop to realize it,” he adds, “but we live in one of the most interesting cities in the nation. Just look around some time and see if you don’t agree with him.

Have YOU been thinking of Baton Rouge as a tourist center?