



*The Stone Forests are a natural attraction in China.* Photo by Cathy Hsu

Up through the Middle Ages, there were fairly distinct differences between fairs and festivals. However, over time, many of the same types of activities such as food, shows, and musical entertainment could be found at both fairs and festivals. The idea of having fun at these events is probably not surprising because the word *fair* comes from the Latin word *feria*, meaning “holiday.”

As commerce grew, so did the idea of fairs that were designed to be large and last for longer periods of time, maybe as long as several months. Many major exhibitions highlighting achievements and industries were held before the first “World’s Fair.” Two of these were the Paris Exhibition of 1889 and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis, Missouri.

The idea of these very large fairs that bring together exhibitors and visitors from all over the world proved to be so popular that international leaders decided to bring some uniformity to the concept. With the signing of a diplomatic convention in Paris in 1928, 43 countries agreed to the frequency and basic operational goals of events that would officially be recognized as World’s Fairs. This agreement created the International Bureau of Exhibitions (BIE), which divided the world into three zones: Europe, North and South America, and the rest of the globe. It also stipulated that fairs would not be held in consecutive years in any one country and that no fees would be charged for the exhibits of foreign governments. Since its formation, there have been a number of notable World’s Fairs including the New York World’s Fairs (1939); Brussels Universal and International Exhibition (1958); Expo ’67 in Montreal, Canada; Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan; Expo ’92 in Seville, Spain; Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany; Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan; Expo 2010 in Shanghai, China; and Expo 2015 in Milan, Italy.

Another very popular visitor attraction is the regional, state, or county fair. Most of these have evolved around the display of agricultural and livestock exhibits, but they often include industrial exhibits and many other entertainment activities. The Eastern States Exhibition, or “The Big E” as it is called, is an annual regional 10-day fair held each summer in West Springfield, Massachusetts; it celebrates the crafts, industries, and agricultural products of the northeastern states of the United States. Some of these fairs, such as the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, the State Fair of Texas, and the National Western Livestock Show in Denver, draw tens of millions of visitors. However, whether it is a World’s Fair, state fair, or county fair, people still travel from all over to exhibit and participate in the festivities.