



INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Melody Goeken, publicist
Cell: +(1) 210-315-4655
Email: Melody@thewoodagency.com

**INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION
ANNOUNCES RESULTS OF COVID-19 SURVEY**

Data Confirms Financial Devastation of Show Caves Industry Around the World

Frasassi/Genga-Italy (December 10, 2020) — While recent news has been consumed with huge layoffs at large name brand theme parks, little has been said about the scope of loss in smaller entertainment venues that rely on travel and tourism for their livelihood.

One of those industries is represented by the [International Show Caves Association](#) (ISCA). Show caves around the world protect and preserve caves and provide a place for people to learn about these special, natural, cultural, and historical resources. There are more than **1600 show cave businesses throughout the world.**

ISCA surveyed show caves worldwide and the sampling represented 1/16th of the worlds' show caves. The **first goal of the project was to establish a baseline for the significance of the show cave industry** worldwide and to educate the world on how show caves contribute to the global economy. The **second purpose was to find out to what degree the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted show caves**, employees, the economy, and our mission of preservation, conservation, and creating interest in our subterranean world. The third goal was to highlight protocols, the show cave industry implemented to keep employees and visitors healthy and safe.

Brad Wuest, President of ISCA and a co-owner, President/CEO of [Natural Bridge Caverns](#), located in [San Antonio, Texas](#) said, "Show caves play an important role in nature tourism and sustainable economic development, providing jobs, and helping the economy. We all know this to be true, but the data had never been collected to quantify the significance of the show cave industry on a worldwide basis, Wuest said. "We hope these [results](#) will create more awareness and support for the show cave industry."

-MORE-

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE AND JOBS

On the first goal of identifying the significance of the show caves industry, the data showed that **in 2019, 144 million people visited show caves worldwide generating €1.72 billion (\$1.93 billion) in visitor spending.** The actual economic benefit is likely higher due to multiplier effects. Show cave visitors also stay in hotels, eat at restaurants and shop locally too which helps the economy and quality of life for the entire region including generating tax revenue. During show caves' 2019 peak season, **69,000 people were employed by the industry with a payroll of €699 million (\$786 million).** These numbers suggest that show caves offer a vibrant, important contribution to the economy of the regions where they are located.

COVID-19 IMPACT

During the first half of 2020, **94% of show caves worldwide closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.** COVID-19 closures and operational constraints have caused **devastating losses** in both revenue and numbers of visitors in comparison to the same time frame in 2019. During the first half of 2020, worldwide, show caves were down €514 million (\$577) million in revenue or 61%. **Visitation is down 42 million people worldwide equating to a staggering 59% in the first half of 2020.** The overall economic impact of these losses is far greater due to multiplier effects.

LOSS OF SCHOOL FIELD TRIPS

Visitation losses include not only locals and vacation travelers but educational groups too. Show caves hope the **traditional school field trip will not become a thing of the past.** Each year millions of school children visit show caves to learn about geology, hydrology, paleontology, archeology, conservation, and ecology. The educational value of field trips cannot be replaced by in class or remote learning. **School children / students amount to 13% of the visitation loss worldwide or 5.44 million. Until school field trips resume, the loss of this revenue stream will continue to hurt the show cave industry.**

EMPLOYEE LAYOFFS AND FURLOUGHS

Closures resulted in employee layoffs and furloughs affecting 58% of show cave employees worldwide with 40,000 people losing their jobs. Fortunately, 83% of those employees or 33,300, have been rehired as many show caves have reopened.

WORLDWIDE PANDEMIC WITH LOCAL FALL OUT

As countries around the globe looked for ways to help their sagging economies, countries offered employers financial assistance in the form of loans, credit guarantees, payroll protection, and in some cases direct payment to citizens which helped to keep local economies afloat.

André Querido Jorge Nuno, a member of the ISCA board of directors, runs [Grutas de Mira de Aire](#), located about an hour north of Lisbon, Portugal. This small town's population of 4,000 depends on travel and tourism for their livelihood.

ISCA RELEASES RESULTS OF WORLDWIDE SURVEY

PAGE 3

"Money was not given to us, our staff received monies from Portuguese Social Security which paid 2/3 of the employee's income and we, as a business, didn't have to pay the 23% Social Security income fee per staff member.

Tourism of Portugal Public Institute gave us 12.000€ aid for sanitation and staff protection acquisitions, to help with purchasing equipment to make sure our guests have a safe and sanitized experience," said Nuno.

Despite the financial help, in many cases, the money was not enough to cover the severe financial losses.

"COVID-19 has devastated our business. 'Do Not Travel' restrictions have meant the loss of tourists at area hotels and restaurants. Our revenue is down almost 41%. That impact is felt throughout the local economy," he continued.

Survey respondents represent a sampling of show caves in 20 countries across six continents, including Europe, Asia, Oceania, North America, South America, and Africa. [Click here](#) to see the list of participants. Respondents included caves such as [Gruta da Torrinha](#), located in Brazil, which sees less than a thousand visitors a year to [Zhijin Cave](#) located in China, which entertains over 1.3 million guests each year.

Here are the [survey results](#):

OWNERSHIP AND OPERATION TYPES

- 40% are privately owned and operated.
- 35% are government-owned and operated
- 16% are government-owned and privately operated
- 9% other

OPERATIONAL SEASONALITY OF SHOW CAVES

- 27% are only open seasonally
- 73% are open all year

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF SHOW CAVES IN 2019

- Visitation: 144 million people
- Revenue: €1.72 billion (\$193 billion)
- Employees: 69,000
- Employee wages: €699 million (\$786 million)

-MORE-

ISCA RELEASES RESULTS OF WORLDWIDE SURVEY

PAGE 4

WORLDWIDE CLOSURES

- **94% of show caves worldwide closed for some time due to COVID-19.**
- By July 2020, 77% of show caves were able to reopen with reduced capacities and new health and safety protocols.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SHOW CAVES IN 1ST HALF OF 2020

- Visitation Lost:
 - 42 million or 59%
 - school children accounted for 13% of the visitation lost
- Revenue Lost:
 - €514 million (\$577 million) or 61%
- Employee Layoffs or Furloughs:
 - 58% of the workforce or 40,000 employees worldwide
 - Of those, 83% or 33,300 back to work upon reopening

REOPENING

As show caves began to reopen, their organizations took on additional costs of operating to keep employees and visitors healthy and safe during COVID-19. This includes installation of additional handwashing and sanitizer stations, additional cleaning, and disinfecting, providing PPE masks/gloves for employees, designing and printing of health and safety/directional/instructional signage, plexiglass protective screens for customer service areas, stations and social distancing barriers, upgrades in ventilation and HVAC filtration in buildings among many other measures.

Add those costs to the continual training of staff and COVID-19 screening and testing for employees, all while honoring government and health officials' guidelines and industry best practices requiring businesses to reduce occupancies and tour sizes, effectively limiting the number of guests that can visit all directly correlates to an increase in expenses and a reduction in income.

Despite the damage wrought by COVID-19, the show cave industry is prepared and positioned to continue to offer guests safe, enjoyable, inspiring, and educational experiences.

[Please click here for video interviews, b-roll, photos, and complete survey results including a list of health and safety protocols implemented by show caves.](#)

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION:

The [International Show Caves Association \(ISCA\)](#) was founded in 1990 and is headquartered in Frasassi/Genga, Italy, ISCA is an international organization of persons, associations, corporations, and government agencies who own, manage or operate [show caves](#) that are open to the public. ISCA provides a critical forum for show caves to network and collaborate on matters that pertain to their caves. ISCA aims to promote, encourage, and support the cooperation of show cave operators, speleologists, and cave enthusiasts through the sharing of information and to promote the preservation and conservation of caves, while increasing public interest in the world of show caves by way of unique marketing and the evolution of methods to enhance the show cave experience.

Click [here](#) to see the latest news and trends from the Show Cave industry, or follow us on [Facebook](#).

-END-