



INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION

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Cave Enthusiasts to Celebrate the International Day of Caves & the Subterranean World on 6th June 2018

Frasassi/Genga-Italy (3rd June 2018) —Members of the International Show Caves Association (ISCA), national cave associations from many countries, and other cave enthusiasts worldwide are celebrating the International Day of Caves and the Subterranean World on 6th June.

“Caves are places of wonder, mystery, and majestic beauty. We see the recognition of the importance of our subterranean world increasing worldwide,” said Brad Wuest, president of ISCA. “Show caves worldwide are embracing their role of protecting and preserving caves and providing a place for people to learn about these special, natural, cultural, and historical resources. Show caves also play another important nature tourism role of sustainable economic development, providing jobs, and helping the economy of their regions.”

As part of their combined efforts to increase awareness on 6th June, show caves around the world are hosting special events, extending special offers, and providing unique educational opportunities for people at their caves and on social media.

“Everyone is touched by caves and karst. Water, food, cultural history, and scientific research that supports all of our lives benefits everyone on the planet—not just those living in the 20% of the land that is cavernous and karstic,” said George Veni, President of the International Union of Speleology.

“Almost everyone knows about caves, but only a small percentage of people have even heard of karst,” said ISCA President Wuest. “Karst is a landscape that’s typically characterized by rocky hills and outcroppings, sinkholes, caves, springs and aquifers. Caves are incredibly diverse, and although most caves are found in karst, there are also lava tube caves, sandstone, and glacial caves. Caves can be decorated with speleothems or ice in colder climates. They can be filled with fresh water or under the ocean. Caves are also rich in biodiversity and home to many plant and wildlife species -- some only found in caves.”

Caves are diverse in length, size, and shape as well. Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, USA, has a length of over 651 kilometers and is considered the longest cave on Earth. China's immense Miao Room cavern, hidden beneath rolling hills and reachable only by an underground stream, is the world's biggest cave chamber with 10.78 million cubic meters in volume. Sarawak Chamber in Mulu National Park in Malaysia is still the world’s largest by surface area, with some 154,500 square meters of expanse.

Exploration and scientific research is taking place in caves around the world by speleologists. Caves are being discovered, surveyed, and studied, yet the world is full of caves that have never been seen by a human. Researchers sample formations to track historical weather trends dating back hundreds of thousands of years to learn about climate. Rain and surface water is traced as it percolates through karst landscapes and caves into aquifers to create modeling and better understand how to protect our precious water resources.

“Caves are repositories of pre-history,” said Wuest, “rich in paleontology with fossils and the bones of prehistoric creatures. Caves are also known to have provided shelter to mankind’s earliest ancestors. This occurred so early in human history that it is not possible to reliably trace the time that it commenced. The oldest known cave paintings in Europe are estimated to be 64,000 years old in the caves of Maltravieso, Ardales and La Pasiega, Spain. Treasures have been excavated by archeologists from the river at Grottes De Han in Belgium ranging from the Mesolithic up to Modern Times.” Wuest continued, “Caves have played roles in more recent history, ranging from the mining of bat guano for making gun powder, to Bedeilhac Cave which held a French (then German) aircraft hangar during World War II.”

The task of establishing the use of a cave for our modern term “speleological tourism” is easier, but it is still not possible to be certain when this use began. The oldest known show cave in the world is believed to be Reed Flute Cave in China with inscriptions from 792 in the time of Tang Dynasty. The first recorded cave tour in Europe was at Postojna Cave in Slovenia in 1213. Vilenica Cave, in Slovenia holds a record for being open to visitors and collecting entrance fees since 1633. “Today, perhaps close to 100 million people visit show caves each year learning about our subterranean world” said Wuest.

“For centuries, the use of caves, as show caves, was carried on in very rudimentary ways. Then, the development of electric lighting enabled the illumination of show caves. Early experiments with electric light were carried out in 1880 at Jenolan Caves, Australia. In 1881 Sloupsko-Šošůvské Jeskyně, Czech Republic, became the first cave in the world with electric arc light. The first cave in the world with electric light bulbs as we know them today was the Kraushöhle in Austria in 1883. Show cave visitation is as diverse as the caves themselves, with some only receiving a few thousand visitors per year to show caves, such as Postojna in Slovenia and Ali-Sadr Cave in Iran, bringing in over one million visitors. Several caves in China boast even greater visitation.

There are many benefits to spending time in a cave. Caves can provide an experience to foster quality family time and form memories together during vacations. Caves can spark a child’s interest in science that could shape their future. Spending time in nature, as evidenced in many studies, can also boost mental and physical well-being, improve concentration, increase energy, reduce stress, and lower blood pressure and heart rates. Activities such as hiking to or in a cave is great for physical fitness too.

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.

For more information on the International Show Caves Association and its members, please visit www.i-s-c-a.com. For more information on the International Union of Speleology, please visit www.uis-speleo.org.

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