



INTERNATIONAL SHOW CAVES ASSOCIATION

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** Melody Goeken, publicist

**Cell:** +(1) 210-315-4655

**Email:** [Melody@thewoodagency.com](mailto:Melody@thewoodagency.com)

***INTERNATIONAL DAY OF CAVES AND THE SUBTERRANEAN WORLD  
ON JUNE 6 BRINGS ATTENTION TO THE IMPORTANCE OF  
CAVES, THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND SHOW CAVE REOPENINGS***

Frasassi/Genga-Italy (June 3, 2020,) — Members of the [International Show Caves Association](#) (ISCA) join cave enthusiasts around the world celebrating the **International Day of Caves and the Subterranean World June 6** to increase awareness about the significance of caves to our environment, culture, history and economy, and how their economic impact has been effected by COVID-19.

June 6 is usually a day of celebration when it comes to the show cave industry. In the USA, it's known as **National Caves and Karst Day**. Outside those borders, the **International Day of Caves and the Subterranean World** is used to bring attention to the wonder and importance of caves and karst landscapes. This year, ISCA is using the day to also bring attention to the **economic devastation the show cave industry has experienced due to COVID-19** and to spread the word that **show caves are reopening** with new operating procedures and health protocols to provide safe and enjoyable nature experiences for visitors.

As travel and tourism destinations around the world learn how to operate in a new normal, the show caves industry is also trying to ascend from the depths of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brad Wuest, [ISCA](#) President and Co-owner and President/CEO of [Natural Bridge Caverns](#), Texas, USA, commented on the COVID-19-related economic devastation that his and so many other show caves have witnessed worldwide. "Travel and tourism is one of the hardest hit industries and show caves like other tourist attractions are often some of the last businesses allowed to reopen after COVID-19 closures. Many show caves are only supported by revenue from their operations including cavern tours, café and gift shop sales," said Wuest.

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“We are fortunate that our show cave, [Natural Bridge Caverns](#), has been able to reopen after closing March 17. **I estimate we will lose more than 40% of our total income for 2020.** This hurts our business, employees and the local economy. It also reduces tax revenue for government programs and services. In many cases, show caves are the largest employers in their area, with those employees currently furloughed or laid off. Many show caves worldwide are still closed, and uncertain as to when and if they will be able to reopen,” continued Wuest.

The cost to reopen show caves under the new normal adds to the financial burden. Employees must be brought back, new employees hired, and all trained on new policies and procedures. Additional equipment and supplies must be purchased, and costs incurred for advertising that the cave has reopened. Many of these expenses are incurred before the show cave opens to the public and starts to generate any income. After opening many of the show caves will operate with smaller tour groups to provide adequate physical distancing between family groups and tour guides. This method of operation requires more employees, increasing expenses while income is reduced with less visitors, resulting in show caves operating less profitably.

A part of the financial hit for show caves has included the loss of school groups. Each year show caves educate millions of children through school fieldtrips and educational outreach in classrooms. Because schools around the world closed, the loss for children’s education, as well as the financial impacts for show caves, has been substantial.

Despite all these challenges, show caves are developing and implementing new protocols based on government and health official recommendations and industry best practices to keep their employees and visitors healthy and safe. These include health screening, physical distancing, face coverings, disinfecting touch surfaces, hand sanitizer, reduced tour capacities and numerous other health and operational measures. **Show caves are prepared to welcome visitors back safely and provide enjoyable, inspiring and educational experiences.**

Aside from the impact of COVID-19, show caves continue to raise awareness of the importance of caves and [karst](#), and assuring the public that caves are safe, educational, unique, exciting places to visit. Caves and karst make landscapes diverse, fascinating and rich in resources, including the largest springs and most productive groundwater on Earth, not to mention at least 175 different minerals, a few of which have only been found in caves.

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These landscapes provide a unique subsurface habitat for both common and rare animals and preserve fragile [archaeological](#) and [paleontological](#) materials for future generations.

“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 around the world are embracing their role in 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.”

A U.S. National Park Service [report](#) showed that 533,000 visitors to Mammoth Cave National Park in 2018 spent an estimated \$45.1 million in communities near the park. That spending supported 599 jobs in the local area and had a cumulative benefit to the local economy of \$61.6 million. Economic contributions by show caves such as this are seen all over the world.

There are more than 1,600 show caves worldwide, over 650 in Europe and more than 120 in North America. Show caves are both publicly and privately owned and managed. Show cave visitation is as diverse as the caves themselves, with some only receiving a few thousand visitors per year, while others, such as [Postojna](#) in Slovenia and [Ali-Sadr](#) Cave in Iran, bring in over 1 million visitors annually. In total, more than **150 million people visit show caves each year**. That’s 150 million opportunities for show caves to educate the public about the importance of caves, karst landscapes and the value of our [subterranean](#) world. Considering the visitation and the number of employees, the economic impact of the show cave industry is robust – with estimated visitor spending at more than 3 billion euros worldwide.

Caves are diverse in-depth, length, size and shape. [Veryovkina Cave](#) in the Eurasian country of Georgia is the deepest cave in the world at 2,212 meters. [Mammoth Cave](#) in Kentucky, USA, has a length of over 663 kilometers and is the longest known cave on Earth. [Sarawak Chamber](#) in [Gunung Mulu National Park](#) in Malaysia is the world’s largest chamber by surface area, with 164,459 square meters of expanse. [Hang Sơn Đoòng](#) in Vietnam is the world’s biggest cave passage, measuring 38.5 million cubic meters, with an internal, fast-flowing subterranean river and a forest ecosystem where sunlight enters the cave from giant [sinkholes](#).

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Although slowed, and in many cases halted temporarily, by COVID-19, exploration and scientific research has been 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. Caves are also important natural resources because of their unique beauty, history, and their role in a healthy environment. They play key roles in groundwater movement and serve as habitat for threatened and endangered animal species. Caves provide outstanding opportunities for studying and gaining a better understanding of the geology of landscape and the relationships between the environment we see at the surface and the one that is hidden underground.

Caves can provide an experience to foster quality family time and form memories. 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. Hiking to or in a cave is great for physical fitness too. These are all activities that are especially important at a time when most people have been kept inside their homes and want to get out and explore new things.

A searchable directory of ISCA show caves and photo galleries may be found [here](#).

Other photos and electronic assets may be found [here](#).

#### **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.

Address: Largo Leone XII 60040 Genga Ancona, Italy Email: [iscasecretary@i-s-c-a.org](mailto:iscasecretary@i-s-c-a.org) Tel: + (39) 0732 972108  
[www.i-s-c-a.org](http://www.i-s-c-a.org) - [www.facebook.com/InternationalShowCavesAssociation/](https://www.facebook.com/InternationalShowCavesAssociation/)

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