



# INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CAVES AND KARST 2021

*„Explore, understand and protect“*



The International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK) is an initiative of the International Union of Speleology (UIS). The UIS is a non-profit organization, headquartered in Slovenia, dedicated to the exploration, study, and proper management of caves through international cooperation. The UIS is comprised of 54 member nations which support the International Year of Caves and Karst.

The UIS hosts an International Congress of Speleology every four years, which is the world's most significant gathering of cave and karst scientists, managers, educators, and explorers. The 18th International Congress of Speleology will be held in 2021 in Lyon, France and will be expanded into the major international event that will celebrate the International Year of Caves and Karst. Many other scientific and educational events for the International Year will be organized. The long and growing list of events is at:

[www.iyck2021.org](http://www.iyck2021.org)

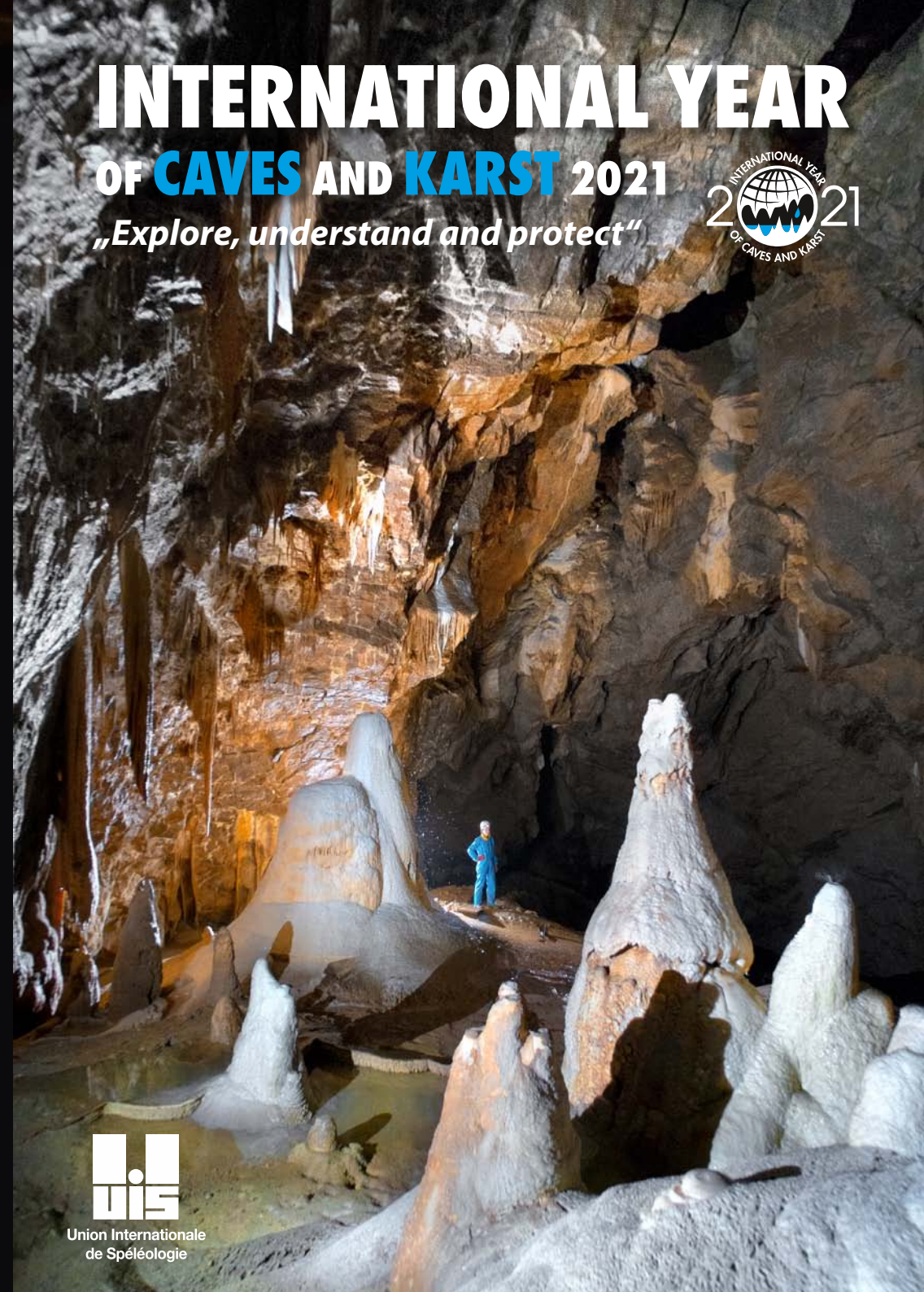
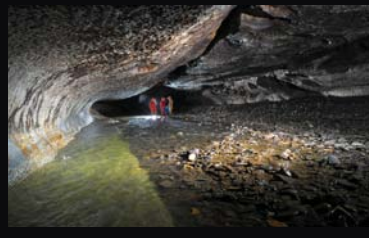
In addition to the work of the UIS member nations, the International Year of Caves and Karst is supported by dozens of international and national organizations. All supporting organizations are also listed on [www.iyck2021.org](http://www.iyck2021.org)

The complete and most current information about the International Year of Caves and Karst is on the official IYCK website:

[www.iyck2021.org](http://www.iyck2021.org)



Union Internationale  
de Spéléologie



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## „EXPLORE, UNDERSTAND AND PROTECT“

is the main goal of the International Year of Caves and Karst.

With your help, we seek to:

**K**arst is a type of landscape that covers an estimated 20% of the world's land surface. Karst is created by dissolution of bedrock. On the surface it takes many forms, which makes it difficult for the average person to recognize. Some are dramatic and scenic. Much of karst landscapes are also hidden from view in caves.

**C**aves and karst are priceless resources. Hundreds of caves are open to tourism around world, many in World Heritage sites. About 150 million tourists visit caves each year, providing vital support to many national economies. Karst aquifers provide an estimated 20% of the world's drinking water, and include the largest wells and springs on Earth.

**C**aves and karst are home to many of the planet's most diverse, important, and rare ecosystems, supporting ecological diversity above and below the ground. The world's most significant cultural and archaeological sites often are found in karstic and non-karstic caves. While caves and karst benefit all societies, they also present some unique challenges.

**T**he caves and related conduits of karst aquifers offer essentially no filtration of pollutants. Karst aquifers are the most complex, least understood, most difficult to model, and most easy to contaminate water supplies. They are often able to rapidly transmit pathogens and chemicals tens of kilometers undetected to vital human and ecological water sources. As often hidden features and landscapes, caves and karst are generally poorly understood. Few scientists and natural resource managers are adequately trained to properly study or manage them. Many governments do not recognize caves and karst at all, or fail to recognize their importance.



- **improve** public understanding of how caves and karst touch the daily lives of billions of people
- **promote** the importance of caves and karst through sustainable development, particularly in water quality and quantity, agriculture, geotourism/ecotourism, and natural/cultural heritage
- **demonstrate** how the study and proper management of caves and karst is critical to global economic and environmental health
- **build** worldwide educational capacity through activities targeted on cave and karst science
- **promote** awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of cave and karst science and management, and emphasize how interactions between different areas of science and management will be needed increasingly in future research, education, and environmental protection
- **establish** durable partnerships to ensure that these activities, goals and achievements continue in the future beyond the International Year of Caves and Karst.

