

# Postonja-jama, Slovenia

By Tim Moore AM

In May of this year, my wife and I visited two of the major karst tourist attractions in Slovenia. They are Postonja-jama and Predjama-grad (“jama” meaning cave and “grad” meaning castle in Slovenian). This article describes our visit to Postonja Cave. A report on our visit to Predjama Castle - what is described as “the largest castle in a cave” - will appear in the December journal.

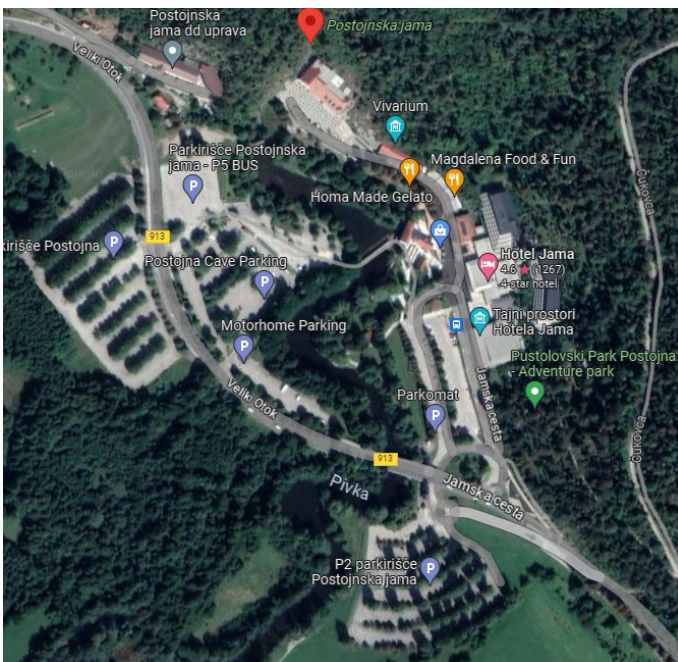
The two attractions are approximately ten kilometres apart and are managed by the same Slovenian statutory entity. Tickets for both are available to be purchased online through a common booking point and combined tickets are available (<https://www.postojnska-jama.eu/en/>).

The first indication of the nature of the Postonja Cave experience comes at the time of booking when tour scheduling reveals departure frequencies being at one-hour intervals between 9.00 am and 6.00 pm (our visit being at the time of the year when the busier visitation season begins). The advice is given that strict adherence to a requested arrival some 10 minutes before the designated tour departure is essential and, if missed, transfer to a later tour is not available.

The reason for this warning is immediately apparent when one arrives to park at the complex. As a rough estimate, the tourist bus-parking area would appear to accommodate up to 15 or 16 such vehicles with seating for 50-plus people. On the other side of the main road is located the main car-park - one of large dimensions - which would appear to provide space for multiple hundreds of individual vehicles.

The last stage of the walk from where we parked our rental car is through the associated tourist services complex - facilities including a very large, four-star hotel and multiple restaurants, food outlets and tourist knick-knack shops. An air photo from Google maps shows the size of this complex.

Figure 1: Google map image of the Postonja complex (below)



It is at this point, closer to the impressive entrance building (one dating from 1928) that the first hint of the scale of the activities becomes available.

The queueing system for visits is well-organized - dividing the participants in each time group into English-speaking and non-English speaking (the non-English speaking group being given audio guides enabling selection of a tour commentary in one of the more than 12 languages available).

Figure 2: Queuing system outside Postonja-jama (below)





Our English-speaking tour group comprised about 60 people, whilst those with the audio guides were of similar number. A visit to Postonja Cave is not one of an intimate guided experience. The opportunity of asking questions is virtually non-existent as there is but a single guide provided to each 50-plus cohort.

The tour commences with a journey by electric train into the cave. About half this distance is through open elements of the cave proper with roof heights of ten or more metres. However, the first portion is through a tunnel which has been excavated to provide this rail access. The total dimensions on either side of the train track are safe but the overhead clearance is, in my assessment, limited. I am 196 cm tall and there were portions of the tunnel where it was necessary for me to slump in my seat to avoid my perceived risk of being scalped. No safety warnings were given, and no overhead protection is provided.

**Figure 3: Electric trains ready for departure, each containing a subgroup of tour participants (left)**

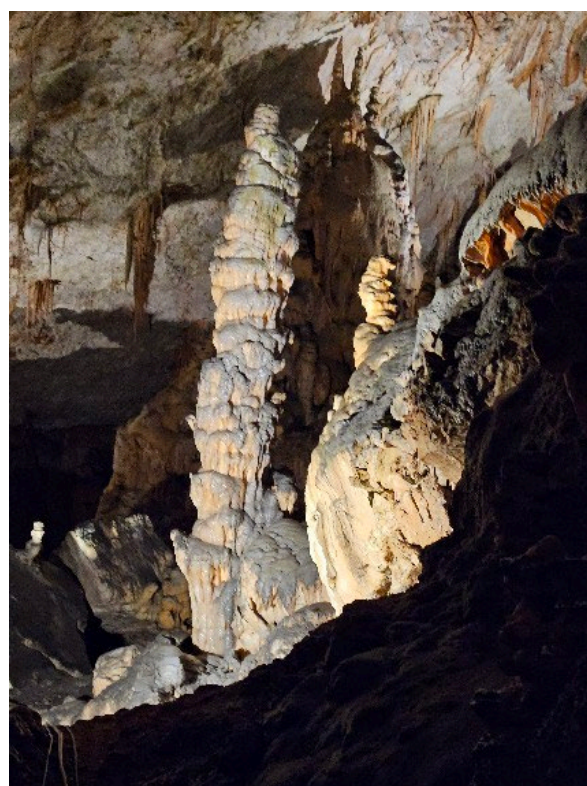
The two subgroups in our departure travelled on separate trains – each train with sufficient capacity for nearly double the size of the group to which we had been allocated.

Much of the early portion of the cave proper we traversed was completely dry, with many of the formations appearing to have significant dry-dust deposition on them.

**Figure 4: Dry section of the cave, showing speleothems with apparent dust accumulation (right)**



**Figure 5: Active section of Postonja-jama, beginning at the end of the train journey (left)**

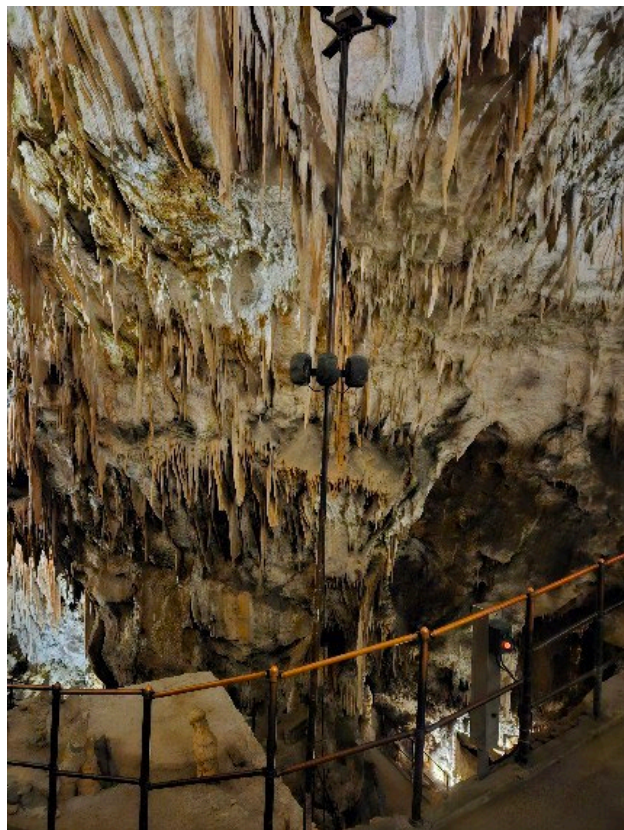


After disembarking from the train, some two kilometres or so from the cave entrance (the route weaving in and out of tunnels and, in open areas, avoiding damaging large formations), our group was assembled by the single guide assigned to run our tour. It is to be observed that the end of the railway line appears to coincide, largely, with the commencement of the section of the cave which remains active.

From our disembarkation point, we followed the guide along a series of well laid out and reasonably wide walking paths (mostly at modest inclines and with few steps). Although I looked carefully for signs of lampenflora, none were visibly apparent, with the lighting appearing to be a comparatively modern LED system.

At the limited number of locations where we stopped, comparatively low volume audio systems were provided for the guide to impart information to our group. At all but one of the locations where this occurred, the information provided in English was technical (although presented in comparatively simplistic form), and comprehensive with respect to what was able to be observed in the lighting from that assembly point. There was only one occasion when the guide employed the now decried anthropocentric formation description – an instance which was jarring and out of context with the remainder of the commentary delivered.

**Figure 6: Infrastructure for low-volume audio communication at designated viewpoints (right)**



Finally, as one completes the circuit within the cave to a location to re-join the train to be taken back to the entrance, an opportunity is provided to view, in a very large case, an Olm (*Proteus anguinus*) – a cave salamander whose habitat includes this cave. Although information was delivered concerning the life cycle and physiology of this animal, it was difficult to see, hear and take in as a consequence of the size of the tour group to which we had been assigned. It is to be noted that, with respect to this fascinating creature, there is a separate breeding and research facility (with separate entrance fee) that provides a more comprehensive opportunity to view and absorb information about these creatures. Because of the timing of the tour to which we had been assigned, and the necessity to travel to our next overnight destination in Trieste (Italy), we did not have time to visit this facility.

Black and Pivka Caves are smaller caves which can be visited as part of a larger Postojna experience described below.

In the period between World Wars I and II, when the territory of Postojna was part of Italy, three caves of the Postojna Cave system, namely Postojna, Black and Pivka Caves, were connected by means of man-made passages. The construction of man-made passages was a military project and, according to a plan that eventually fell through, the tunnel leading from the Pivka Cave was supposed to continue to the Planina Cave, whose exit was located on the Italian-Yugoslav border. The man-made passages make it easy to move from one cave to another, which gives an excellent opportunity to learn about the vast size and grandeur of the Postojna Cave system. A three-cave extended tour is offered as part of the visitation experience – it being, as it was explained, a very gentle form of adventure caving experience.

Unfortunately for us, that activity (which was limited to a much smaller group) was only offered once a day during peak visitor season, it taking more than three hours to traverse. These tours are booked out almost immediately slots became available on the website for the Postojna Natural Cave Park site.

Wishing to conclude on a positive note, although Postojna Cave obviously handles thousands of visitors per day during its busy season (we were there, coincidentally, on 1 May - Slovenia's National Day), the whole facility appears to be very well-maintained, with staff employed to pick up litter, with the grounds and the restaurant/snack esplanade being regularly patrolled for this purpose.

