

# Slovenia, the Cradle of Karst Geotourism

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Slovenia is regarded as the cradle of karstology and speleology, but it can also be regarded as the cradle of karst geotourism. Slovenia is a source country of the international scientific term “karst”, which was taken from a German name for the Karst Plateau in south-western Slovenia. The geographical and geological schools of Vienna exercised a decisive influence on the word as an international scientific term, its technical use being established by the mid 19th Century. The term karst and the related science were finally put forward by J. Cvijić with his work ‘Das Karstphänomen’ (1893).

The beginnings of karstology and geotourism stretch back at least to the polymath J.V. Valvasor (1641–1693), who interpreted karst phenomena inaccurately from today’s perspective but professionally enough for his times that his renowned study of intermittent Cerknica Lake earned him membership in the eminent British Royal Society. He was the first to professionally describe and present the “functioning” of an intermittent karst lake.

Numerous Slovene and foreign researchers continued his work. Among others, in 1778 B. Hacquet postulated the so-called “corrosion theory” about the origin of karst that still applies today for karst regions. In his works, this natural scientist of French origin who lived in Slovenia for twenty years described numerous karst phenomena and forms.

Over the past centuries, karst phenomena and karst geomorphosites in Slovenia have been the goal of so many travellers that we can speak of Slovenia’s karst as the earliest geotourist destination in the world. In historical documents, we can trace the first visitors back at least to the 13th century, although organized visits to karst geomorphosites only began at the beginning of the 19th century. In the following two centuries, Postojna Cave alone, the most visited geomorphosite destination in Slovenia, has hosted more than thirty million visitors, in recent years at a rate of over 500,000 visitors annually.

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