

OHIO SLICES IT UP FOR GEM OF AN ATTRACTION

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West Liberty, Ohio – June 11, 2009 – Many families are sifting through brochures to find a gem of a trip without breaking the bank this summer. What they are discovering is that three diamonds in the rough are found at once place – Ohio Caverns.

Besides the guided tours of the cave passages, Ohio Caverns offers a giant wooden sluice, outside, for visitors to pan for real gem stones and minerals. There are about a dozen different types ornamental stones commonly found, including emeralds and (fools) gold. The sluice consists of a 13-foot wooden tower and 80-foot wooden flume. The water is piped out of the tower, descending through staggered planks of narrow chutes. Along its course, wooden plates slide into grooves at the sides of the channel just like those used to recover minerals in mining operations.

Ohio Caverns' gift shop invites mining guests to purchase three to five pound bags of rough, which have been seeded with not only gemstones and minerals, but fossils and arrowheads too. Miners are provided all the mining equipment they need to sift through their rough all along the sluice hoping to strike "gold."

"This is a very popular activity for groups as miners, both young and young-at-heart, learn how to pan for these specimens, identify what they find and take home a nice collection," said Eric Evans, manager of Ohio Caverns. "Entertaining and educational, panning for treasure is fun for all ages and is a great way to pass the time for family members who are unable or unwilling to go on the cavern tours."

Another Ohio Caverns gem lends itself to an all but forgotten staple in day tripping. It features a 35-acre park with a large pavilion overlooking a top-notch playground and the wooden mining sluice, among other amenities. It allows families or groups to spread out and enjoy a picnic, toss a Frisbee and unwind for a day.

The third gem of course is that Ohio has a natural wonder that continues to mystify visitors 112 years after its accidental discovery. From "soda straws" that defy gravity to the "palace of the gods," Ohio Caverns is a thrilling spectacle that has been dubbed one of the six best caves overall in the US, as well as America's most colorful caverns.

"Our entertainment value is much more robust today than ever before," said Eric Evans, "Many folks have never panned for minerals in a true gem mining sluice or taken advantage of our 35-acre park, which is designed to host family reunions,

scout troops, and other outings large and small. In fact, many of today's visitors have never explored the original caverns, which were closed for 72 years."

Over the past decade, visitors once again have the ability to visit the original portion of the Ohio Caverns known as the "historic tour." It includes a colorful natural rotunda named "The Palace of Natural Art" and "The Giant's Coffin," among other fascinating sites.

Major highlights inside Ohio Caverns feature the Crystal King – the largest and most perfectly formed pure white crystal stalactite found in any cave. It is nearly five feet long after 200,000 years of growth. Other unique stalactites are called helactites. These resemble straws hanging from the ceiling but somehow defied gravity, bending and twisting in weird directions. One of the more intriguing formations is the "Old Town Pump," which looks just like it sounds, right down to the dripping water.

These are the only known caverns in the country where dual or double formations are found. These unique formations consist of iron oxide tipped off with milky white calcium carbonate. It is a mystery as to why the two minerals remain distinctly separate, refusing to blend colors. One of the beauties of these caverns is its wide-array of color. In addition to black and white – stalactites, stalagmites, columns and other formations come in a variety of color that include hues of yellow, orange, red, blue and purple. The climax of the guided tour is the "Palace of The Gods" and its colorful display of translucent crystals.

The regular tour of the underworld spans 45 minutes and one mile, reaching a depth of 103 feet and temperature of 54 degrees. Many primitive forms of sea life are fossilized into the ceiling from the Devonian period and Paleozoic Era.

Once the tour returns to the world above, there is a gift shop that offers a plethora of subterranean treasures to commemorate a casual trip. It is also a destination for seasoned geologists to add to their valuable collections. Many make the trip just to shop the store as its items are not available for sale anywhere else.

Ohio Caverns is a travel gem anyone may uncover throughout the year. From April 1–October 31, it is open daily from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. It closes at 4:00 p.m. from November 1 – March 31. The 45-minute regular tour is available daily but the 1 ½ hour historic tour requires a group of 10 or more people to register in advance. The normal tour costs \$12.50/adult and \$7 per child 5-12 years-old. The historic tour costs \$18.50/adult and \$12.50 per child 5-12 years-old. Value passes and special group and school rates are available. Ohio Caverns is located at 2210 East State Route 245 in West Liberty, Ohio. You may begin your plunge into Ohio Caverns at www.ohiocaverns.com or by calling 937-465-4017.

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