

UNESCO Global Geoparks

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In News: The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) is making efforts to get recognition of a geopark for Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) consisting of Erra Matti Dibbalu (red sand dunes), natural rock formations, Borra Caves and volcanic ash deposits.

- While there are 161 UNESCO Global geoparks spread across 44 countries, India is yet to have one of its own.

UNESCO Global Geopark

- UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development.
- UNESCO Global Geoparks empower local communities and give them the opportunity to develop cohesive partnerships with the common goal of promoting the area's significant geological processes, features, periods of time, historical themes linked to geology, or outstanding geological beauty.
- A UNESCO Global Geopark enhances awareness and understanding of key issues facing society, such as using our earth's resources sustainably, mitigating the effects of climate change and reducing natural disasters-related risks.
- The creation of innovative local enterprises, new jobs and high quality training courses is stimulated as new sources of revenue are generated through geotourism, while the geological resources of the area are protected.
- A set of criteria as established by UNESCO must first be met for a geopark, as nominated by the corresponding

government, to be included in the GGN:

- the existence of a management plan designed to foster socio-economic development that is sustainable (most likely to be based on agritourism and geotourism);
- demonstrate methods for conserving and enhancing geological heritage and provide means for teaching geoscientific disciplines and broader environmental issues;
- joint-proposals submitted by public authorities, local communities and private interests acting together, which demonstrate the best practices with respect to Earth heritage conservation and its integration into sustainable development strategies.

Global Geoparks Network (GGN):

- The Global Geoparks Network (GGN), of which membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks, is a legally constituted not-for-profit organisation.
- The GGN was founded in 2004 and is a dynamic network where members exchange ideas of best practise to raise the quality standards of a UNESCO Global Geopark.
- While the GGN as a whole comes together every two years, it functions through the operation of regional networks, such as the European Geoparks Network that meets twice a year to develop and promote joint activities. It is managed under the UNESCO's Ecological and Earth Sciences Division.

Difference between UNESCO Global Geoparks, Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites:

- Biosphere Reserves focus on the harmonised management of biological and cultural diversity.
World Heritage Sites promote the conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value

- UNESCO Global Geoparks give international recognition for sites that promote the importance and significance of protecting the Earth's geodiversity through actively engaging with the local communities.
- A World Heritage Site or Biosphere Reserve can apply for the UNESCO Global Geopark status. However, a clear evidence has to be provided on how UNESCO Global Geopark status will add value by being both independently branded and in synergy with the other designations.