

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.

In 2020, these Global Geoparks, have been in news due to the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage's (INTACH) approach to get Visakhapatnam's Erra Matti Dibbalu into this list.

Both, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its list of Global Geoparks is an important topic for candidates preparing for the upcoming [IAS Exam](#). Questions based on the same may be asked in GS I, II and III papers, under conservations, geographical features and important Institutions.

What are UNESCO Global Geoparks?

- These are single, unified geographical areas of international geological significance, and are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development
- UNESCO's work with geoparks began in 2001. It was in 2004 geoparks countries came together at UNESCO with an appeal to form the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) where national geological heritage initiatives will form a global network of exchange and cooperation
- The UNESCO Global Geopark was ratified by 195 member states in 2015 and gives recognition to geological sites and landscapes which are well maintained and in a holistic manner
- At present there are 161 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 44 countries across the world
- The authorities under this body manage and explore the various global heritage sites and its natural and cultural heritage
- UNESCO also does not imply any restriction on the countries regarding the economic activities being held within the Geoparks
- International Conference on Geoparks is conducted on regular intervals where the criteria, and evaluation of the existing and new geoparks is done

Functions and Significance of UNESCO Global Geopark

Preserving the cultural heritage of a place is the way forward to enrich the traditional and natural sites across the globe. Thus, the formation of a committee under the UNESCO Global Geopark is also extremely important.

There are certain important features of the UNESCO Global geoparks which have been discussed below in brief:

- These geoparks can be used for economic activities and there is no restriction by UNESCO with this regard

- Maintenance of these geoparks is done through the geo tourism activities, like excursions, tours, and academic visits
- Their bottom-up approach, i.e., involving local communities for combining conservation with sustainable development gaining popularity
- The designation of UNESCO Global Geopark is given for a period of four years. Once this tenure is complete, scrutiny and analysis is done by the authority for the revalidation process

About Global Geoparks Network (GNN)

It was in 2004 that the Global Geoparks Network (GNN) was formed for countries to maintain and preserve their geographical heritage sites. Some salient facts about the development and formation of GNN have been discussed below:

- 17 European and 8 Chinese geoparks came together at UNESCO headquarters in 2004, to form the Global Geoparks Network (GGN)
- Their main aim was to conserve the geographical heritage sites of their country and ensure proper maintenance and management of these sites
- This network is managed under the body's Ecological and Earth Sciences Division
- From 2015, all the members of this network were known as UNESCO Global Geoparks
- There are three main criteria based on which the designation of geopark is authorised:
 - Socio-economic plans for maintenance and sustainable development of the site
 - Demonstration of methods to preserve geological heritage
 - The proposal must be made in consideration with public and private authorities, along with local communities

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UNESCO Global Geopark - India's Case

India is one of those countries which do not have a single geopark registered and acknowledged under UNESCO Global Geopark list.

Indian authorities and organisations have approached UNESCO with three such heritage sites till date. These include:

1. **Lonar Lake, Maharashtra** - India's candidate in 2019 for UNESCO Global Geopark is an ancient lake created by a meteorite strike

2. **St. Mary's Island and Malpe beach, Karnatak** - The second bid for India in 2018 for Global Geopark was St. Mary's island. It is a set of four small islands that are formed of columnar rhyolitic lava, which gives it a distinctive geological stature
3. **Erra Matti Dibbalu, Visakhapatnam** - For 2020, Erra Matti Dibbalu or the coastal red sediment mounds, which are sand dunes located between Visakhapatnam and Bheemunipatnam, have been chosen as India's representation for UNESCO geopark. This geological heritage site is also notified in the National Geological Heritage Monument Sites of India

In India, all sites which are prominent for the geological aspects are surveyed by the Geological Survey of India. It is the basic source of information for earth science.

About UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) is an important programme under the United Nations and is headquartered in Paris, France.

UNESCO is a specialised agency that works for world peace through global cooperation in the fields of education, culture and the sciences. Through its programmes, it strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

India is one of the founding members of UNESCO. The Indian organisation working under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization is called the Indian National Commission for Cooperation.

India has constantly been re-elected to the Executive Board of UNESCO since 1946 and the organisation's biggest contribution has been in preserving the cultural heritage of the country.

Difference between UNESCO Global Geopark, Biosphere Reserves & World Heritage Sites

There are three sites which are vividly categorised by UNESCO as heritage sources. Discussed below are all three in brief to simplify the difference between them:

1. **Biosphere Reserves** - The main focus is on the harmonised management of biological diversity. To get a [List of Biosphere Reserves in India](#), candidates can visit the linked article
2. **World Heritage Sites** - The sites which have a high cultural value not just within the country, but universally, fall under this category. To learn more about the various other [UNESCO Heritage Sites in India](#), candidates can visit the linked article.
3. **UNESCO Global Geopark** - These are the sites which are given a global recognition for promoting and preserving Earth's geological entities

UPSC aspirants can also refer to [UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages in India](#).

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