

GLOBAL GEOPARK : ART & CULTURE

NEWS: UNESCO adds 16 new Global Geoparks, North Korea and Saudi Arabia record historic firsts

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

UNESCO has added 16 new Global Geoparks across 11 countries in 2024, including first-time entries by North Korea and Saudi Arabia. With this, the total number of geoparks has reached 229 globally, though India still has none listed.

Recent Update: 2024 UNESCO Global Geopark Additions

- In 2024, **UNESCO added 16 new Global Geoparks** across **11 countries**, marking the **10th anniversary** of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN).
- The inclusion of **North Korea and Saudi Arabia** marks their **first-ever entries** into the Global Geopark system.
- With this update, the **total number of UNESCO Global Geoparks** stands at **229 across 50 countries**.

Highlights of New Entries (2024)

1. North Korea – Mt. Paektu Global Geopark

- Features the **Millennium Eruption**, one of the largest volcanic eruptions of the last 2,000 years.
- Holds **cultural significance** for Koreans and is a major site for geological and historical study.

2. Saudi Arabia – Obatharan Valley/Wadi

- Located at the base of the **Tuwaiq Mountain range**, a lush ecosystem in an arid environment.
- Features **ancient coral reef formations**, **unique biodiversity**, and plays a critical role in the region's **water conservation**.

3. China – Kanbula Geopark

- Situated on the **Qinghai-Tibet Plateau**.
- Includes features like **Maixiu volcanoes**, and is intersected by the **Yellow River**, which enhances its ecological and geological significance.

4. Other Countries Included

- **Ecuador, Indonesia, Italy, Norway, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Vietnam** were also part of this expansion.
- These additions reflect the growing **global commitment** to **geological heritage, sustainability, and geotourism**.

UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGP): Key Features and Functions

Feature	Description
Established	Introduced in 2015 under the International Geosciences and Geoparks Programme (IGGP)
Purpose	To recognize and preserve geological heritage of international significance
Key Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Promote geological and environmental education• Facilitate sustainable development• Empower local communities• Encourage eco-tourism and cultural conservation Governance Overseen by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Networking Membership in the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) is mandatory for UGGP recognition Reassessment Geopark status is not permanent; sites are reassessed every 4 years for compliance Distinction Not to be confused with UNESCO World Heritage Sites, which have a broader cultural or natural significance

Geographical Footprint

- After the latest additions, the **total area covered by Global Geoparks is around 855,000 sq. km.**
- This is comparable in size to the country of **Namibia** in Africa, reflecting the expansive reach of the network.

India's Current Status

- As of **July 2024**, **India has no officially recognized UNESCO Global Geopark.**

- However, efforts have been ongoing to propose sites such as the **St. Mary's Islands (Karnataka)**, **Bhedaghat Marble Rocks (Madhya Pradesh)**, and the **Lonar Crater (Maharashtra)**.
- These sites are under consideration or are being developed to meet UNESCO's Geopark criteria.

Conclusion and Significance

- The expansion of the Global Geoparks Network shows UNESCO's ongoing commitment to integrating **science, conservation, culture, and community development**.
- It encourages **interdisciplinary research, climate adaptation awareness, and local economic empowerment** through geotourism.
- India, with its diverse geological heritage, has significant potential to contribute to and benefit from this global initiative.

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