



# UNESCO Global Geoparks

## Why 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.**

## Key Points

- **Meaning:**
  - These 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.
- **Features:**
  - **Management:**
    - These are **managed by a body having legal existence** recognized under national legislation.
    - It needs to be noted that **UNESCO Global Geopark status does not imply restrictions on any economic activity inside a UNESCO Global Geopark** where that activity complies with indigenous, local, regional and/or national legislation.
  - **Visibility:**
    - Geoparks are sustained through **geo tourism activities** like excursions, nature trails, guided tours, hiking and academic meets.
  - **Networking:**
    - **Cooperating with the local people** (bottom-up approach) living in the geopark area and with **other UNESCO Global Geoparks** through the **Global Geoparks Network (GGN).**
      - GGN, of which **membership is obligatory for UNESCO Global Geoparks,** is a **legally constituted not-for-profit organisation** with an annual membership fee. It was **founded in 2004.**
- **Designation Period:**
  - A UNESCO Global Geopark is **given this designation for a period of four years** after which the functioning and quality of each UNESCO Global Geopark is thoroughly re-examined during a revalidation process.
- **Global Geoparks vs Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites:**
  - Besides UNESCO Global Geoparks, there are **other two UNESCO site designations,**

## **Biosphere Reserves and World Heritage Sites.**

- **Biosphere Reserves** focus on the harmonised management of biological and cultural diversity.
  - Out of **18 notified biosphere reserves, India has 12** biosphere reserves under the **World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR)**, the latest one included is [Panna Biosphere Reserve](#).
- **World Heritage Sites** promote the conservation of natural and cultural sites of outstanding universal value.
  - India has 38 world heritage sites, including 30 cultural properties, 7 natural properties and 1 mixed site. The latest one included is [Jaipur city, Rajasthan](#).
- **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.
  - **India does not have any UNESCO Global geopark.**

## **UNESCO**

- UNESCO is the **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture.
- UNESCO's programmes contribute to the achievement of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) defined in Agenda 2030, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.
- **UNESCO-IOC (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission)** is leading a global effort to establish ocean-based tsunami warning systems as part of an overall multi-hazard disaster reduction strategy.
  - Recently, UNESCO-IOC approved the [recognition of two communities of Odisha](#) viz., **Venkatraipur** and **Noliasahi** as **Tsunami Ready Communities**.
- It has **193 Members and 11 Associate Members**. India joined UNESCO in **1946**.
  - In 2019, [the USA and Israel formally quit UNESCO](#).
- It is **headquartered in Paris, France**.

## **Visakhapatnam's Case**

- **Important Sites:** [//](#)



- **Erra Matti Dibbalu:**

- It is **coastal red sediment mounds** located between Visakhapatnam and Bheemunipatnam.
- The width of sandy red dunes vary from 200 metres to two kilometres, spread across five kilometres along the coast.
  - Such **sand deposits** have only been reported from two other low latitude tropical regions in **South Asia** — the **Teri Sands of Tamil Nadu** and **Red Coastal Sands of Sri Lanka**.
- It is among the 34 notified **National Geological Heritage Monument Sites** of India by the **Geological Survey of India (GSI)**.
  - The **term geological heritage** is used for natural geological or geomorphological features that have aesthetic, intrinsic or scientific and educational value, that provide unique insight into geological processes affecting the formation or evolution of Earth.

- **Natural Rock Formations (Eastern Ghats) at Mangamaripeta:**

- One example is the **natural arch** at Mangamaripeta beach opposite the Thotlakonda Buddhist Site.
- It is likely to **date back to the period after the last Ice Age** around 10,000 years ago and is similar to the natural rock arch of Silathoranam in the Tirumala Hills.

- **Borra Caves:**

- **Discovered by William King George** of the GSI, these **one million year old caves** attract a huge number of tourists every day. These are located **at an elevation of 1400 m above sea level**.
- These caves are known for **stalactite and stalagmite formations** such as Shiva-Parvathi, Rishi's Beard, Mother-Child, Crocodile, Human Brain, Tiger and Cows udder.

- **Volcanic Ash Deposits:**

- These are said to have originated from the **volcanic eruption of Toba in Indonesia 73,000 years ago** near Araku (Andhra Pradesh).

- **Concerns:**

- **Red sands** are being **exploited for construction activity**. Further, **degradation due to human interference** such as digging, climbing, littering are affecting their stability and exacerbating erosion.
  - The recent incident of **overcrowding and reckless acts of visitors** endangering the natural arch has raised concerns among geologists and heritage activists on the need to safeguard the sites of the region and establish a geo park.
- **Conservation Efforts:**
- In July 2019, INTACH organised a campaign to create **public awareness on geologically and culturally important spots** in the region.
    - **INTACH** was founded **in 1984 in New Delhi** with the vision to spearhead heritage awareness and conservation in India.

[Source: TH](#)

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