



Hong Kong Geopark gains global status

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Hong Kong National Geopark has joined the Global Geoparks Network, which the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation supports. The announcement was made at the 10th European Geoparks Conference in Langesund, Norway.

Before joining the network, Hong Kong National Geopark was officially renamed as Hong Kong Global Geopark of China. With the inclusion of Hong Kong Global Geopark of China, the network now has 87 members in 27 countries throughout Europe, Asia, South America, Australia, the Middle East and North America.

"The designation of Hong Kong Global Geopark of China is a worldwide recognition of the significant geological heritage of the region, as well as its great potential for sustainable development," Secretary for the Environment Edward Yau said, at the conference.

"The range of significant geological sites and features within Hong Kong Geopark and its proximity to the urban area are internationally unique. Our acceptance into the Global Geopark Network makes Hong Kong Geopark an international icon that will attract both tourists and citizens, and will also serve as a strong catalyst for the continuous preservation of the environment."

According to UNESCO requirements, a geopark should not only possess special geological features and landforms, but also provide social and economic benefits to the surrounding communities by promoting sustainable geo-tourism. Geoparks are established to protect geological heritage, popularise geo-scientific knowledge and promote local economic development through sustainable, nature-based tourism.

Hong Kong Geopark is located in Sai Kung and the northeastern part of Hong Kong, and became a national geopark in November 2009. Since its opening, it has drawn more than 1.5 million visitors.

Geopark added to the global list

Joyce Ng

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Hong Kong's eastern countryside has been added to the Unesco-sponsored global geopark list.

The designation was made by the Bureau of the Global Geopark Network after a three-day conference in Norway. A total of 10 sites were chosen out of 16 applications from around the world this year.

"The new status will encourage us to further promote the work on environmental protection," said Secretary for the Environment Edward Yau Tang-wah, who attended the conference.

He said the government would protect the newly designated area from damage, including an offshore wind farm in Sai Kung proposed by CLP Power that would be outside the park but could spoil the landscape.

"We will require the project to go through an environmental impact assessment," Yau said.

The global geopark network now has 87 sites from 27 countries.

The local geopark straddles Sai Kung and the northeastern New Territories. It is known for its hexagonal rock columns, which are rare not just in Hong Kong but globally.

It covers about 50 square kilometres of sea and land and is largely within country parks and marine parks. Equipped with four education centres and 10 geo-trails, it was recognised as China's national geopark in 2009.

Dr Yeung Ka-ming, senior geopark officer from the Agriculture, Fisheries

and Conservation Department, said exhibitions to introduce rocks in the parks would open at a museum in the Bank of China building in Central in October, and in the science and history museums in December.

The Travel Industry Council will launch an accreditation scheme for specialist tour guides to the geopark at the end of the year. Council chairman Michael Wu Siu-ieng said the new recognition would hopefully attract tourists from America and Europe, who tend to be interested in natural scenery, and encourage tour guides to receive training.

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