The final decision on whether Qeshm Geopark reenters the coveted Global Geoparks Network will be made in April, according to the geopark's director.

Speaking to Mana, Hamidreza Mohsenpour added that the network's member states will vote on the issue during the Workshop for the Middle East Region slated for April 24-26, 2017, on Qeshm Island, after the geopark's dossier was reviewed last year during the Seventh International Conference on UNESCO's Global Geoparks Network in Torquay, England (Sept. 27-30, 2016).

“We've had numerous meetings in the past couple of years to get the geopark back on the network,” he added.

Initially added to the coveted network in 2006, Qeshm Geopark was dropped from the GGN in 2012 due to the authorities' failure to address the site's problems, such as underdeveloped infrastructure and unenforced environmental regulations.

The geopark is the only one of its kind in the Middle East to be included in the network.

In November 2015, Iranian officials submitted the geopark dossier to the UN body after redefining environmental regulations, restoring a number of sites in the park and improving infrastructure.

Deeming it incomplete, UNESCO sent the dossier back and suggested changes to be made before the organization could review it again. The dossier was resubmitted to UNESCO in February and it has now been approved.

To promote the geopark on Qeshm Island, officials have renamed an important square on the island to “Geopark” and installed boards around the square that publicize information about the geopark, which is home to over 3,000 animal species.

A pavilion has been set up at Qeshm International Airport that introduces the geopark to boost tourism.

Setting Up Museums

Among key measures to bring the geopark up to global standards is the renovation and expansion of the site's museum. The museum exhibits samples of the area's geological and ecological (both marine and terrestrial) diversity, among other things.

“We expect the renovation to be completed in the next Iranian year (starts March 21),” Mohsenpour said.

One of Iran's seven free zones, Qeshm Island is a top holiday destination and a treasure trove of natural and ecological attractions in the Persian Gulf. Aside from the geopark, sun and sandy beaches, the island's famed mangrove forests in the Hara Protected Area attract large numbers of domestic and foreign tourists.

Hara Protected Area is one of five forests in Hormozgan Province and arguably the most important feature of Qeshm Geopark. With an area of 85,686 hectares, Hara is a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

According to the official, the ecological importance of the forests has compelled local officials to build a new museum dedicated to showcasing the woodland's key ecological features.

“The museum will help boost efforts to protect the Hara forests and give a glimpse of what forests have to offer to tourists who are unable to visit the protected area due to weather conditions,” Mohsenpour added.

Geoparks have significant scientific and geological value, apart from being a natural and cultural heritage. GGN has been established by UNESCO to register such parks, protect geoparks, provide education and set standards for green tourism.
To comply with UNESCO’s standards, a geopark must have the infrastructure to accommodate tourists in line with environmental standards, while protecting the natural landscape.