

Toru YONEDA

Founding and Former President of the Japanese Geoparks Network

Founding and Former Chairperson of Itoigawa Geopark Council

Former Mayor of Itoigawa City, Japan

Leader in Geopark Development and Promotion

Professional Profile

A pioneering leader in the Geopark activities in Japan, Toru Yoneda played a central role in initiating, promoting, and institutionalizing Geopark activities nationwide. As Mayor of Itoigawa City and Chairperson of the Itoigawa Geopark Council, he successfully led the city to become Japan's first member of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN). As the founding President of the Japanese Geoparks Network (JGN), he greatly contributed to the growth of the Geopark activities across Japan, fostering collaboration among local governments, scientists, educators, and communities, and strengthening networking and collaboration in the Global Geoparks Network.

Professional Experience

Mayor, Itoigawa City, Niigata Prefecture, Japan

2005 – 2025

Chairperson, Itoigawa Geopark Council

2009 – 2025

- Directed management and promotion of Itoigawa Geopark, a UNESCO Global Geopark and GGN institutional member.
- Led the initiative for Itoigawa to join the Global Geoparks Network, achieving membership in 2009 as Japan's first Geopark recognized by GGN.
- Promoted the integration of geological heritage into education, tourism, and community development.
- Represented Itoigawa Geopark at international conferences, fostering global exchange and cooperation.

Founding President, Japanese Geoparks Network (JGN)

2009 – 2022

- Led the establishment of JGN, creating a national platform to promote and support Geopark activities throughout Japan.

- Advocated for the integration of Geopark principles into education, community planning, and tourism policy.
- Instrumental in launching and expanding the Geopark movement in Japan from its inception.
- Fostered nationwide collaboration among Geopark communities, academic institutions, and local governments.
- Encouraged international exchange and mutual learning between Japanese and overseas Geoparks.

Academic background

B.E., Civil Engineering, Kanazawa Institute of Technology, 1971

Awards & Recognition

Special Distinguished Service Award for Municipal Governance, awarded by the National Association of Mayors of Japan (June 2024).

Commendation by the Minister of Justice of Japan for distinguished service (October 2024).

- Honored nationally and internationally for leadership in sustainable regional development through Geoparks.
- Recognized by academic and governmental organizations for advancing Earth science education and public outreach.