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New green attraction

Bamboo-themed souvenir shop and symphony in the works

Dateline: Penang

CHRISTINA CHIN

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Photos by **CHAN BOON KAI**

NATURE lovers will get a chance to enjoy a new green attraction at the Penang Botanic Gardens when a bamboo appreciation centre is constructed this year.

State Botanic Gardens department assistant director Salasiah Yusop said the environmental-friendly structure in the bambusetum would be built entirely out of bamboo.

"An officer from the National Landscape Department will visit the bambusetum on March 9 and subsequently prepare a Bill of Quantity (BQ) for the project.

"The BQ will outline the work scope and once that is done, we can engage a contractor," she said, adding that a souvenir shop selling items made of bamboo would be part of the structure.

The cost of the bamboo appreciation centre would be borne by the state government.

On when the bambusetum would be officially launched and opened to the public, Salasiah said the procurement and planting of the bamboo plants began in November last year and was completed on Feb 15.

"Now, the plants are being nurtured so that they can grow and flourish — a lot of what's going on is maintenance work.

"A proper opening ceremony will only be held at the end of the year as we want to make sure that the centre is ready and everything is perfect.

"However, the public is free to visit the bambusetum anytime, as we've never fenced it up," she said when met at the gardens recently.

Close to 40 different bamboo species from all over the country have been planted at the bambusetum.

Salasiah said the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) had provided invaluable guidance to the department in selecting and caring for the plants.

The bambusetum is part of the Tourism Ministry's RM7mil Botanic Gardens expansion project which also comprised a new visitors' pavilion, facade and eco-stream walkway.

The project was completed in early 2011.

The Tourism Ministry had allocated an additional RM450,000 to enhance and maintain the bambusetum collection after criticisms by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that the attraction was devoid of bamboo plants.

The ministry's Penang office director Jamie Yeoh said the bambusetum was progressing well.

"We have been monitoring the project closely and are excited to showcase it to the public.

"We are planning an event called the 'Bamboo Symphony' to highlight research on the plants as well as its traditional usage in everyday life and music.

"It will be interesting," she said, adding that the event was slated for the fourth quarter of the year.

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Green space: A jogger running through the beautifully landscaped bambusetum.



Looking good: A gardener carrying out maintenance work at the bambusetum.

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With care: A gardener pruning one of the bamboo plants.

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Growing with flourish: A gardener tending to the plants at the bambusetum.