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Spa-cial surprises from the forest

Natural wonders in new range of products

By YIP YOKE TENG

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Photos by SIA HONG KIAU

THE lush greenery of Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) in Kepong has always been a huge attraction for Kuala Lumpur folk.

If you are a regular visitor, would it ever cross your mind that the pleasant environment would be a great backdrop for an indulging spa session?

Or at least, have you ever wondered if there was a way you could take home a piece of nature's bounty?

You may have even wondered why this has not happened, considering the institute's active involvement in research.

Well, it has happened!

A range of spa products has been developed under the FRIM-Malaysian Technology

Development Corporation (MTDC) Symbiosis Programme, which was launched in 2008.

The former acts as the technology provider while MTDC is the sponsor-cum-business development trainer.

Building a spa in the forest is also in the pipeline and it may be set up next year, with an estimated cost of RM1mil.

MTDC, wholly-owned by Khazanah Nasional Malaysia, was established in 1992 to promote the adoption of technology by local companies, which would help with the commercialisation of local inventions.

Bio-Nature Formula Sdn Bhd's proposal of a forest-based home spa range made it one of the 10 spin-off companies tasked with commercialising FRIM's technology.

Among the products developed by the other companies are tissue culture seedlings, food for diabetics, bio-diesel and disinfectants. They are all housed at the FRIM-MTDC Technology Centre located in FRIM.

Bio-Nature Formula manag-

ing director Jurina Anwar said the products were launched in September last year after two years of research, thanks to a grant for RM1.16mil.

It is currently being marketed through direct selling, as well as to spa outlets, hotels and travel agencies.

"We are still in the midst of creating strong bonds with our customers to get the necessary feedback from them.

"After that, we will market the products at leading pharmacies," she said.

There are four products under the brand Forestra, including body scrub, body wash, lotion and herbal feminine wash.

Each product is priced between RM25 and RM45. The products are also available in a travel pack as well as *hantaran* (wedding gift) package.

The market is never short of spa products and the demand remains high. According to a report from Global Industry Analysts (GIA), the spa industry will generate revenue of US\$77.2bil (RM240bil) globally by 2015.

Forestra is banking on local herbal treasures to counter the fierce competition from foreign products.

Jurina is confident that Forestra will remain attractive because it is one of the few local

brands supported by continuous scientific research.

"Samples of raw materials were sourced from different parts of the country to find out which one worked best. Then came the

extraction and distillation processes using FRIM facilities, and the last step was to develop the formulation," she said.

Traditionally favoured herbs and plants such as *Pokok Kapal Terbang* (*Chromolaena odorata*), which is commonly used to stop minor bleeding; kaffir lime which is used for *Mandi Bunga* (floral shower); and *Centella asiatica*, known for its anti-oxidant properties, are among the active ingredients.

"The products are suitable for the local climate and meet the needs of our customers. The lotion, for instance, is infused with essential oils that repel mosquitoes," she said.

She added that there were many repeat customers and, if the demand increased, the company would grow the required plants on a large scale.

"We hope the products will appeal to a larger market as they showcase the uniqueness of Malaysia, her rich heritage and natural resources," she added.

The home spa range has brought satisfaction to the scientists at FRIM as well.

More commercialisation activities are in the works, including developing products for postnatal care as well as hair and face-care.



Convenient: Forestra products are available in a travel pack.

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Attractive choice: Jurina showing the Forestra home spa set.