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The Kilim Geoforest Park in Langkawi is showcased as an important element in mangrove conservation. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON/The Star



A replica of the famous Mulu Pinnacles is on display at the 'Hutan Kita: Journey Through Our Rainforest' exhibition at KL Tower.

Journey through Malaysia's forests

Unique ecosystems and conservation efforts on show

By AIDA AHMAD
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ONE way to escape the sweltering heat in the city and at the same time, take in Mother Nature's beauty, is by sitting in a dark, air-conditioned room surrounded by fireflies.

You do not have to drive far or get into a riverboat as this augmented reality experience is available free of charge in the heart of the city.

This simulation replete with fireflies and mangrove swamps forms part of the "Hutan Kita: Journey Through Our Rainforest" exhibition at KL Tower organised by the Water, Land and Natural Resources Ministry.

The exhibition starts with a display of high-resolution photographs of forests in Malaysia at the entrance, which is a constructed tunnel flanked on both sides by artificial grass and that leads to a bamboo tree canopy.

From there, visitors will be led to what is touted as the only exhibition that showcases all of Malaysia's forests as well as efforts in conserving and preserving our national treasure — the rainforest.

Visitors get to learn about 850 forest tree species and the highlights of the uniqueness of each state while staff from Tourism Malaysia, Malaysian Timber Certification Council, Sarawak

Forestry and Forest Research Institute Malaysia are available at their booths to share about efforts in managing our forests' sustainably.

The exhibits are divided according to states and regions.

Within the Heart of Borneo area, visitors will be entertained by the gentle musical styling of *sapeh* maker Peter Omar from Sarawak, who will also show how the instrument is made by hand.

There is a replica of the famous Mulu Pinnacles at the Mulu National Park on display.

While the flora — including a replica of the Rafflesia flower — is located outdoors, replicas of various life-sized fauna, some of which are endangered, such as the pangolin, serow (goat-like mammal), leopard cat, palm civet and Malayan tiger are displayed in glass enclosures in an air-conditioned room with piped-in narration explaining about the animals.

Meanwhile, the twinkling lights and nature sounds from the projection of fireflies and mangrove in another room result in an immersive and relaxing experience.

The exhibition has been given the accolade of the Largest Tropical Rainforest Tree Species Exhibition by the *Malaysia Book of Records*.

There is also information on national forest areas and oil palm estates around Malaysia.

The "Hutan Kita: Journey



Visitors to the rainforest exhibition can see a replica of the Rafflesia.



At the exhibition, sapeh maker Peter Omar will show how the traditional stringed instrument is made by hand.



Annisa says the exhibition is a good way to learn about Malaysia's flora and fauna.

Through Our Rainforest" exhibition is also aimed at enhancing Malaysia's image and reputation in preserving forests, especially in the national ecological corridor — the Central Forest Spine.

KL Tower was chosen as the venue for the exhibition as it is located next to KL Forest Eco-Park (formerly known as the Bukit Nenas Forest Reserve), the oldest permanent forest in peninsular Malaysia.

Among the tourists who found the exhibition interesting and informative was Angela Millan, 21, from Spain, who was holidaying in Kuala Lumpur with her family.

"The exhibition is educational as it informs people about Malaysia's forests and the rare species of animals you have here," she said.

Student Annisa Wan Mazlan, 21, said the exhibition provided good exposure to conservation efforts being taken to protect our forests.

"It is a good way to learn more about the many species of plants we have as well as the endangered



Mangrove saplings form part of the flora display.

animals in the country," she said.

Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC) has a booth at the exhibition to show the efforts the palm oil industry has taken to conserve Malaysia's biodiversity.

"We are not going around cutting down forests and planting oil palms," said MPOC science and environment executive Shahdan Kassim.

"People can come here and learn about our projects to conserve the

environment, with a recent one being the one million forest tree planting initiative in Sabah," he said.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced that the merbau — a hardwood tree indigenous to Malaysia — was Malaysia's national tree because of its hardy nature.

Admission to the exhibition, which ends on Sept 22, is free.