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Husband and wife tourist guides, Razelan Mohd Shah and Salamah Ahmad, discovered the 'Rafflesia tiomanensis' in Kampung Juara on Tioman Island. PIX BY ZULKIFLY AB LATIF

## New Rafflesia species found on Tioman

**MERSING:** *Rafflesia tiomanensis*, the scientific name of the Rafflesia found on Tioman Island, off the coast of Pahang, is the world's latest species of the plant.

The new species makes it the world's 29th known species, which can be found in Southeast Asia, mainly in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, and the eighth for Malaysia.

It is the only one that can be found on an island in Malaysia as the others are found in the tropical rainforests in Kelantan, Pahang, Perak, Terengganu, Sabah and Sarawak.

Found in Kampung Juara, the *Rafflesia tiomanensis* has small discrete warts on the perigone lobes, but without any warts on the diaphragm upper surface, no disk rims and irregular shape of the opening of its lobes. All other Rafflesia species have warts on the diaphragm upper surface, processes and disk rims.

The parasitic plant was first discovered by local husband and wife tourist guides, Razelan Mohd Shah and Salamah Ahmad, during a routine nature trip in the area. Razelan reported the findings to Siti Mu-

nirah Mat Yunoh, a botanist from the Forest Research Institute Malaysia.

In the *Malayan Nature Journal* March edition, Siti Munirah described the *tiomanensis* as "outstanding and unique".

"This new Rafflesia discovery shows that Tioman is not only one of the most beautiful tropical islands in Malaysia, but also one of the richest in terms of natural wonders," said Razelan, who, together with his wife, has been taking visitors on nature walks in Tioman's interior for almost 10 years.

"I hope that more emphasis is placed on this flower's economic and touristy values, and not just for its medicinal purposes."

Razelan and Salamah also want to see more effort put into the conservation of the priceless natural heritage of Tioman.

"The discovery of *Rafflesia tiomanensis* is an important milestone that highlights the importance in preserving the natural heritage of the island.

"Although it is a protected marine park, development and environmental concerns such as over-exploitation remain," he added.