

Walk on the wild side



Assoc Prof Ahmad (right) explaining the growth of tualang trees to the envoys during the rainforest walk. - LOW LAY PHON / The Star



Enjoying the cool air and beautiful greenery during the boat ride to Lata Berkoh cascades are (from the front) Michelle, Anthony and Lijin.

Jungle trekking, bird-watching, spelunking and cruising along Sungai Tahan — the 10 Bayer Young Environmental Envoys certainly had a great time.

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IMAGINE being tasked with writing a 1,000-word essay on your contributions to environmental protection in Malaysia.

Despite the increasing awareness of environmental issues in the country many Malaysians would be hard pressed to come up with 100 words, much less 1,000.

But for the 10 university students selected to become Bayer Young Environmental Envoys (BYEEs), writing such an essay was a breeze.

"It wasn't difficult — I just described what I had been doing with my friends and family.

"I think I was chosen because I wrote about things that I practise daily, which have become a habit," said Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) marine biology graduate Yap Lee Chuen, 23.

For Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) environmental studies student Anthony Leong, 21, the problem was not the content, but rather keeping on track.

"Writing the essay really killed my brain cells," he joked.

"The topic was general, so I had to continuously check to ensure that I didn't veer off the topic."

Coming from public and private universities around Malaysia, the final 10 not only had to impress the judges with their essays, but also with their personalities and presentation skills through an interview session.

The reward?

An opportunity to become part of an international network of BYEEs from 17 countries around the world, a chance to attend a five-day eco-camp aimed at training participants in various aspects of environmental care, and a shot at a week-long study trip to look at best environmental practices in Germany.

Back to nature

Organised for the second time in Malaysia by Bayer in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the eco-camp this year was held in Taman Negara, Kuala Tahan.

While the trip started out with a relaxing bus and boat ride from Kuala Lumpur to Taman Negara, the rest of the stay was

packed full with activities and talks for the 10 participants.

Among the activities organised were bird-watching, a guided walk through the rainforest, going on the canopy walkway, a visit to the Kelah Fish Sanctuary and Lata Berkoh cascades, and a spelunking expedition to Gua Telinga.

Said Monash University environmental management student Chin Lijin, 19: "I loved the jungle trekking and bird-watching most as we learnt a lot about plants and birds along the way.

"It was amazing to see the amount of knowledge our guides had while they explained the things we saw."

For many of the envoys, the favourite activity was climbing and crawling through the narrow and tricky passages of Gua Telinga to observe the bats that inhabit the cave.

"I enjoyed the cave exploration because it was my first time experiencing that challenging activity. It was really exciting.

"The flora and fauna in the cave are quite different from those found in other places," shared UMT biodiversity conservation and management graduate Aqilah Mohammad, 22.

For Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) architecture student 'Ulya Mohamed, 24, the spelunking trip stood out most as it was her first caving expedition and she truly enjoyed the teamwork and feeling of *esprit de corps* among the envoys.

"Every experience was memorable, but the one that is closest to my heart is the caving trip.

"That was where I saw how closely our group bonded.

"We really helped one another - those with torchlights stayed close to those without, and whenever someone experi-



Aqilah (left) and Lee Chuen checking out the butterfly that landed on UPM photographer Yusri's shirt.

enced a slippery or dangerous spot, they would warn the others," she said.

Meanwhile, the serenity while cruising along Sungai Tahan made the boat rides a highlight of the eco-camp for UMT marine biology graduate Teh Lay Hoon, 23.

"Breathing in the fresh air and feeling the cool breeze on my skin is a luxury for someone who comes from a place where the air is heavy with automobile emissions and the hot air often leaves a sticky feeling.

"Cruising along the river lined with huge, green trees makes more sense than driving along a congested road dotted with concrete skyscrapers," she shared.


Caring for the environment

Aside from taking part in nature-based activities, the envoys also had the opportunity to pick the brains of environmental management lecturers from UPM's Faculty of Environmental Studies.

The talks and practical sessions facilitated by the lecturers covered topics like environmental issues and management, water management, composting, environmental law and eco-tourism.

The session on composting by Dr Latifah Abdul Manaf and Assoc Prof Dr Azizi Muda proved to be very useful for UTM chemical (bioprocess) engineer student Andy Seer.

"I learnt a lot; I especially enjoyed the

A young woman wearing a pink hijab is shown in profile, looking towards the right. She is holding a white net that is illuminated from behind, creating a bright glow. The net is held up by a wooden frame, and some green leaves are visible on the branches above it. The background is dark, suggesting an outdoor setting at night. The woman's right hand is visible, holding the net, and she is wearing a red and black beaded bracelet. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the light behind the net.

Aqilah catching an insect during the insect study session.



Rubbish is useful too! Anthony, Nurhidayati Abdul Aziz and Lay Hoon sorting through the resort's waste to form compost.



Hey, this isn't so bad. 'Ulya leading the way on the canopy walkway strung 40m above the forest floor.

chance to do the composting hands-on," he said, adding that composting will be part of a "Plant-A-Tree" programme he is helping to organise in his university.

Fellow UTM student and chemical engineering major Lee Hui Choo, 23, agreed.

"The talk on composting had the most impact on me as I learnt how we can turn waste into something useful.

"It sent a very strong message to me not to waste food."

Other facilitators present included Tengku Hanidza Tengku Ismail and Assoc Prof Dr Ahmad Ismail, who spoke about wildlife, ornithology and environmental issues.

Said Universiti Malaya environmental engineering student Michelle Lim, 21: "I really enjoyed the session with Dr Mat

(Ahmad) because he is very knowledgeable and convincing.

"I found myself paying 100% attention to him whenever he talks."

Aqilah shared: "I think each and every facilitator provided us with useful information on different aspects of the environment.

"Dr Azizi, for instance, taught us a lot about eco-tourism in Malaysia."