

Rainforest herb advocate: VNI Scientific eyes huge cosmetic potential in the rainforests of Malaysia

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A firm is exploring the use of local rainforest herbs as cosmetic ingredients. [Getty Images]

A Malaysian cosmetics manufacturer believes there is huge potential in exploring the use of local rainforest herbs as cosmetic ingredients.

VNI Scientific is a Malaysian halal cosmetics manufacturer that was founded in 2017 by CEO Savina Kaharudin.

The company has also spun off with VIN BioC, which it founded in collaboration with NanoMalaysia, a company limited by guarantee (CLBG) under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI).

VIN BioC specialises in the development of crystalline nano cellulose as a key ingredient in cosmetic products, such as biocellulose masks and nano-emulsion serums.

The firm also uses this technology as a platform to promote local rainforest herbs, which it has been studying with local universities and agencies such as Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM).

"In March 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, most manufacturers like us had problems purchasing raw materials from overseas. Furthermore, prices increased like three times the normal price," recalled Savina.

Out of necessity, the company has been focusing on local herbs from the Malaysian rainforests with the aim to provide unique ingredients from trusted and certified local suppliers.

“Many Korean beauty products use Mugwort and they are very proud of that cosmetic ingredient. We have ulam raja, which is similar. You can find it in abundance in Malaysia so why can’t we use ulam raja as an ingredient in cosmetics,” said Savina.

Ulam raja, also known as king’s salad, is widely used as a traditional medicine in South East Asia that has been reported to have a rich source of bioactive compounds such as ascorbic acid and quercetin.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the herb has high antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-microbial properties among others.

Support local

Today, the company offers a handful of local ingredients, including kesum, moringa, neem, mangosteen and pineapple extract.

Savina told us she was expecting demand for local Malaysian herbs to increase. Not only do these ingredients tell an appealing story, but they can reduce cost and long lead times for imports.

Additionally, she believes that local consumers were more willing to support local businesses, especially as the market was able to give them quality products at a lower price.

She cited the company’s own bio-cellulose masks as an example, which costs one-third of international offerings.

When it comes to raw materials, Savina said the cosmetics industry has yet to scratch the surface of what Malaysia has to offer in terms of raw materials.

Malaysia is home to dense tropical rainforests, including the Borneo rainforest, one of the oldest and more biodiverse rainforests in the world.

“The Borneo rainforests is 130 million years old – that’s older than the Amazon. There’s an absurd amount of ingredients that we can explore,” said Savina.

At the moment, the company is in the midst of exploring a range of materials that can potentially be used in cosmetics, including one mushroom with skin brightening properties.

While she was not able to reveal the mushroom variety in question, Savina hinted that it has the same qualities as the hero ingredient used by a global skin care brand that specialise in reducing the appearance of dark spots and uneven skin tone.

In addition to this, the company is working on a project with FRIM to commercialise extracts from the rainforest collected by indigenous tribes, namely the Orang Asli.