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## Botanical wonderland

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STROLLING beneath the vine-draped pergola, and trying our best to duck busy carpenter bees, one can't help but marvel at the treasure grove that is Taman Botani in Putrajaya.

More than 25 hectares of flowers blooming, birds nesting and palms reaching for the skies, the garden is a well-mapped, education-based collection of ornamental plants from the major tropical regions of the world.

Focused on giving visitors an insight into botany, information is a key factor in engaging the crowds.

Tour guides are part of the deal when you stroll through the grounds and almost all the plants are named so that you know what you are looking at.

A visit to Taman Botani begins at the Visitors Centre (after some oohs and aahs at the orchids in full bloom growing from the ground just outside the building.)

At the centre, visitors are encouraged to discover more about plants in the Interactive Exhibit using their five senses. Among the attractions are the fun Helicopter Seed, a mammoth praying mantis, a quiz and a hunt.

Once all, children especially, have had their fill of the Petrosains-like exhibits, there is the Canopy Bridge to cross. Be forewarned that the botanical gardens are hardly two years old, so there isn't a tree canopy yet; but look down from the bridge and observe how the plants are making great progress.

The bridge leads one to a trek up the Heliconia trail, to be dazzled by the gravity-defying flowering banana, the Lobster Claw and other related plants.

The bees and the vines appear as you go further up the path.

Palm Hill, built over a sprawling lawn, features more than 50 palm species and fringes the Sun Garden which comprises plants like the Morning Glory that just love the warm rays of Phoebus.

An obelisk with sundials stands erect at the edge of this circular garden patch to signify the relationship between the plants and the time of day in which they bloom.

Through the Sun Garden and down the floral steps past the Orchid Path are plants that were introduced to Malaysia way before colonial times.

Did you know that the Flame-of-the-Forest was an African plant? Well, it's there, with the rest of the African Collection.

Past the Tropical American Collection is the romantic Bougainvillea Tunnel with garden swings to sit on to catch your breath. Then comes the Asia Pacific Collection with beautiful Hibiscus and Canna in bloom.

Finally, a walk through the Fern Garden takes you back to the Visitors Centre.

Taman Botani has been open to the public for just over a year now and has since drawn some 105,141 visitors. Adults are the highest number of visitors with schoolchildren arriving by the busloads.

Taman Botani will be officially launched tomorrow by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

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