

# Daily Express



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## Undersea Giant Clam garden

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**Kota Kinabalu:** The new owners of Gayana Resort on Pulau Gaya, Gayana Eco Resort Sdn Bhd, has undertaken an environmental mission to restore the flora and fauna found within its waters.

Education will be a major thrust of the resort's new conservation wing - the Marine Ecology Research Centre (MERC) - a non-profit marine centre that will provide a platform for marine ecology studies, research and education, said aquatic biologist Alvin Wong, head of MERC.



"Our focus will be on Giant Clam propagation," said Wong. "This threatened mollusc would be intensively propagated at MERC and restocked into waters around Gayana Eco Resort to eventually create an underwater Giant Clam garden," Wong said.

The company is in the process of engaging a veteran Giant Clam specialist from Penang to put it in place, Wong said.

The paradise-like island - which unfortunately has also been allowed to be settled by illegal squatters on one section - is home to three sensitive marine ecosystem. These are the mangrove forests, sea grass meadows and coral reefs.

Only 15 minutes by boat from Kota Kinabalu, the island which is part national park (Tuanku Abdul Rahman Marine Park) and also a handful of people owning Native Title lands, is a perfect setting to educate the public about the ecological importance and crisis facing the marine ecosystem.

Principal of Kinabalu International School, Martin Spice, who led 25 students on a tour of the resort, Thursday, felt Sabah could definitely do something to restore its marine heritage.

"The depletion of marine resources is evidently clear but even clearer is the message that we can do something about it," he said.

The students aged 6-11 and five teachers did just that by replanting corals at Malohom Bay on the island. They did this by planting a coral fragment each in a newly-mixed concrete substrate that would eventually be anchored at the reef bottom of Malohom Bay which had been extensively fished by some among those residing on the island by using even explosives.

"Whilst book learning is valuable, it will never replace the impact of children seeing and participating actively in a "hands-on" way, Spice noted.

Operations manager, Terence Lim, noted that Kota Kinabalu International School was the first school in Sabah to respond to an invitation sent out by the resort. Apart from coral replanting, MERC's current programmes include putting in place an "Artificial reef" around the resort to promote the growth of coral as a sanctuary for marine fish.

Meanwhile, Datuk Sue Jayasuria, President of Sabah Environmental Protection Association, congratulated the Resort's management for the programmes they are doing in Malohom Bay.

"These programmes will certainly create awareness among the young on the importance of marine conservation," she said, citing the "challenges" the Fisheries Department is facing in combating "destructive fishing and overfishing in Sabah waters."

"Sepa hopes more private corporate sectors would emulate Gayana Eco Resort and initiate environmental conservation

and awareness programmes in Sabah," Sue said.

One point to be noted is that the rubbish scourge continues to degrade Sabah's pretty environments, including a strategic island like Pulau Gaya, despite a host of persuasive and awareness efforts from the authorities including the Mayor's personally having dialogues with the people living in water villages.

Though the sources of rubbish are believed to be diverse, Sue blamed "the kind of people living at water villages - most of them are transients who do not respect the law of the country," she said.

"There have been relocation programs of these people but their numbers continue to grow.

"Sepa believes the co-operation of genuine local people living at Pulau Gaya is needed to address this problem, beautify the island and benefit from tourism activities," she said.

"But political will and sustainable actions by the Government is the only solution," Sue asserted.

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