



**NATURE'S CALL** Indulge in some Shinrin Yoku (forest bathing) at Ayus Wellness Experience, situated at the Mulu Marriott Resort & Spa; Gerry Bodeker

# In Absolute Awe

Seek refuge in the arms of Mother Nature to restore your body, mind and spirit at Ayus Wellness Experience, writes **Lily Ong**



**S**COTTISH-AMERICAN naturalist John Muir once said, “And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul.” This quote accurately depicts the transformative power of Mother Nature, a fact now backed by science and research.

Fortunately for us Malaysians, we are blessed with an abundance of nature around us to retreat into for ‘therapy.’ We can even proudly say that we are home to million-year-old rainforests, such as those found at a Unesco Heritage site—Gunung Mulu National Park.

Here, amid the lush and protected sanctuary, owner of Mulu Marriott Resort, Dato’ Robert Geneid is partnering with Harvard-trained public health academic Professor Gerry Bodeker to launch Ayus Wellness, a luxurious experience centre where wilderness and wellness come together. Also playing an integral role in this partnership is Dr Qing Li, a leading world expert in the art of ‘forest bathing,’ also known as *Shinrin Yoku*.

In an exclusive interview, Bodeker sheds some light on what we can expect from the Ayus Wellness Experience (AWE).

**What was the inspiration behind AWE?**

In 2009, I produced a book together with Malaysian colleagues, titled Health and Beauty from the Rainforest: Malaysian Traditions of Ramuan. I was especially fascinated about the use of food for healing and the importance of the Malay herbal salad known as ulam. Therefore, when Dato’ Robert Geneid reached out to a mutual colleague seeking to add a wellness aspect to his property, we met and found great synergy in a vision for a forest-based wellness programme built around Bornean indigenous food and wellness traditions. Thus, the idea of Ayus Wellness was born.

**Why was Mulu Marriott the perfect location for Ayus Wellness?**

Well Mulu is a Unesco World Heritage site, with 52,000 hectares of primeval rainforest plus a sixty-million-year-old cave system. It is also home to indigenous communities who understand nature and are custodians of the forest, the mysterious riverways as well as the wildlife.

**Tell us more about AWE’s concept of wilderness meets wellness.**

Researchers in Japan have proven that immersing in nature can boost immune system functioning, reduce stress and blood pressure, increase the ability to focus in children with ADHD, accelerate recovery from surgery or illness, increase energy levels and improve sleep. *Shinrin Yoku*, the Japanese term for this immersive forest experience—forest bathing—is led by our colleague Dr Qing Li of Nippon Medical University in Tokyo, Japan. Also, at Mulu, there is the opportunity for not just metaphorical bathing in the forest atmosphere, but actual bathing in Clearwater Pool, a pristine forest pool fed by highly mineralised water from the sixty-million-year-old Clearwater Cave System. After bathing in these waters, one would feel deeply refreshed and enlivened from within.

**How do you work with the locals in developing AWE’s rituals?**

We consulted with scientists who have expertise in Bornean herbal traditions plus worked with Penan medicinal experts to craft a medicinal forest walk guided by traditional herbalists. Our AWE staff comprise the indigenous communities and they play a key role in leading guests on journeys and sharing the deep natural traditions of their society. Finally, we give priority to sourcing our produce from indigenous communities and suppliers, thus supporting and building local enterprises that can thrive in the local ecosystem.

**What are your tips for achieving balance?**

For me, it’s my daily habit of meditation, yoga practise, wellness cuisine and regular exercise. It definitely feels better when these foundations are firmly in place. 🧘

PHOTOS: AYUS WELLNESS EXPERIENCE



**SCIENCE OF WELLNESS**  
*Shinrin Yoku* pioneer Dr Qing Li pictured with Mulu Marriott Resort’s Dato’ Robert Geneid

**Here are the five pillars that form the wellness rituals of the Ayus Wellness Experience at Mulu Marriott Resort & Spa**



**A WELL MIND**

AWE’s guided rainforest immersion connects participants with nature and the tranquility of the ancient rainforest—restoring balance and peace of mind. Yoga sessions are held here for meditative attunement with the forest.

**REJUVENATION AND SKIN HEALTH**

Bornean herbal beverages, skin treatments and immersive forest experiences rejuvenates one from the innermost cellular levels to give outer radiance. Plus, a traditional deep-tissue massage by a master practitioner renowned for his healing abilities in the Penan community.



**WELLNESS NUTRITION**

AWE’s unique Bornean-themed vegetarian menu is derived from indigenous herbal and food traditions plus science to nourish at the deepest level. They also offer guests a daily ‘shot’ from the ulam plant pegaga (centella asiatica).

**PHYSICAL WELLBEING AND VITALITY**

AWE will take fitness-oriented guests through the Mulu rainforest and cave systems, to enhance vitality, strength and awareness of self in the environment.

**PEACEFUL SLEEP**

AWE also incorporates sleep enhancement treatments that draw on science and Eastern traditions of restorative rest to ensure more restful sleep.