

Age-old Indonesian beauty secrets revealed

By Catherine Nash
Daily News Style Writer

CLOSE TO 18,000 tropical islands make up the Indonesian archipelago, a botanical wonderland that is home to 30,000 species of flora from rare orchids to giant rhododendrons to countless varieties of ginger. Many of the plants are used in Indonesian folk medicine and beauty treatments, and an American company called Juara has blended these centuries-old traditions into a modern skincare line.

"We're the archaeologists digging up Atlantis," said Metta Murdaya, Juara's president and a native Indonesian. Murdaya is referring to jamu, Indonesia's herbal medicine. For hundreds of years, jamu "recipes" were closely guarded secrets. In 1975, the government began requiring commercial practitioners to record their ingredients with the Ministry of Health, which oversees the multimillion dollar industry today.

The World Health Organization estimates that up to 70 percent of Indonesians use jamu for medicinal or cosmetic purposes. Pills and tonics are taken for upset stomachs, colds and even cancer, while ointments are used to soothe rashes or encourage hair growth. "A lot of it is close to what we would call skincare," Murdaya said.

Healing properties of turmeric

Two of jamu's star ingredients are turmeric and ginger. Recently, turmeric has gained the attention of Western medicine. Separate studies at Johns Hopkins, UCLA and the University of Texas are investigating turmeric's role in the fight against cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer's disease and some cancers.

Turmeric also has well-documented antioxidant and anti-inflammatory proper-



MASQUERADE — Juara's milk and red sandalwood facial mask, a pink powder that is mixed with water, calms stressed-out skin (\$35).

ties, which translate into big benefits for the skin. Like many of the botanicals Juara uses in their products, turmeric required serious legwork to bring it to market.

Though Murdaya and her three partners found plenty of turmeric in Indonesia, none met their quality standards. Their primary concern was finding commercial grade turmeric that didn't stain the skin yellow. They finally found what they needed in India, another country with a long tradition of ayurvedic health care, and now the turmeric antioxidant facial mask is a best seller.

"People really see a difference right away,"

said Al Briscoe, director of buying at Elephant Pharmacy, an upscale alternative drugstore in Berkeley and San Rafael that stocks Juara. Briscoe attributes the mask's strong sales to the calming effect it has on skin, adding that Juara has been a big hit with women ages 18 to 39. "What they really like is [that] the products are very light and easily absorbed."

Soften up

Sweet black tea is another Indonesian staple that appears in Juara's skin-softening series. Made by combining black tea with sugar and mushrooms, the resulting fermented liquid is full of B vitamins and acids that rehydrate the skin, preserve the life span of collagen and minimize the appearance of wrinkles. Juara has incorporated it into an eye cream and lip treatment, as well as a moisturizer that is made with rice bran oil to help maintain the skin's elasticity. "Everything should soften your skin, make it healthy and make it balanced. That's the philosophy of Indonesian skincare," Murdaya said.

Heather Sasaki, a 37-year-old self-proclaimed "cosmetics connoisseur," is hooked on Juara because it keeps her combination

skin balanced. Sasaki, who spends an estimated \$3,500 a year on skincare products and services, loves the best-selling candlenut body cream. Candlenuts, which resemble macadamia nuts and are widely used in cooking, produce oil with a very tight molecular structure. As a result, the lotion penetrates the skin easily and leaves behind a semipermeable finish that lets skin breathe. "I absolutely love the scent," Sasaki said in an e-mail.

Indigenous fragrance

Briscoe also likes Juara's "unique scent profile." Juara's use of botanicals indigenous to Indonesia sets them apart from many of the natural products Elephant Pharmacy carries, which rely on more familiar herbs like lavender and rosemary.

Three new products are in development for fall including a candlenut hand balm and an exfoliating rice facial scrub. "Women in Indonesia wash the rice, then wash their faces with the rice water," said Yoshiko Roth, Juara's vice president of sales and marketing. Data suggests that dissolving rice starch in water helps prevent moisture loss and calms irritated skin. "It makes skin brighter," added Roth.

Juara is also introducing a brand-new ingredient to the line. Tamarind, a fruit whose pulp is used in Asian and Latin American cuisine, is a natural antioxidant. Juara's tamarind tea hydrating toner combines tamarind with green tea and rice bran for extra hydration. "It adds a nice cushion so you feel even more supple," said Murdaya. The new products will be available this September.



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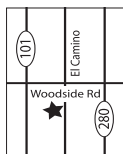
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