Durian wine, anyone?

By DAVID EE

WITH its buttery and savoury notes, it is a wine that could be served at any dinner party or restaurant. Yet guests might get a surprise when they find out its special ingredient – durian.

The white wine – created by two students from the National University of Singapore – contains no grapes. Instead, it is made entirely from the pungent “King of Fruits”, in what its makers claim is a world first.

But the squeamish need not worry. The wine “tastes nothing like durian”, said final-year PhD student Christine Lee.

The 29-year-old, who created the concoction along with undergraduate Fransisca Taniasuri, hopes it will appeal to curious wine drinkers – whether or not they love the spiky fruit.

It is not likely to hit the shelves any time soon, however. The duo, from the university’s Food Science and Technology programme, are still seeking investors keen to take the plunge into the growing market for tropical fruit wines.

Ms Lee and 22-year-old Ms Taniasuri used the traditional wine-making process, starting with durian puree before fermenting it for four weeks.

Their final product has an alcohol content of just 6 per cent, lower than that of standard wines.

In 2009, Japanese scientists found that combining durian and alcohol could prove fatal. This is because the fruit’s high sulphur content inhibits the body’s ability to process the drink.

But the students discovered that the fermentation process sharply reduces sulphur levels within the durian – meaning that drinking the wine will not kill you. Ms Lee and Ms Taniasuri, who are graduating this year, hope to eventually market their beverage in the region.

“Asians might be receptive to wines from tropical fruits,” said Assistant Professor Liu Shao Quan.

“But it will always be a niche market. It will probably never replace traditional grape wine which has been around for many, many years.”

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