

Publication: Yahoo! News Singapore

Date: 3 August 2014

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PUBLISHED ON AUGUST 3, 2014

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A passionate motorcycle rider, a rugby player and a dog trainer are among the 12 gorgeous finalists for this year's Miss Universe Singapore beauty pageant.

Pharmacy technician Rathi Menon, 23, rides a 400 cc super four, residential concierge Jannah Kamaludin, 21, loves to play "rough sports" like rugby while Singapore Management University graduate Danielle Lin 23, is currently excited about training a dog on obstacle courses.

Organisers also consider this year's contestants to be a more "exotic" mix compared to last year's list of finalists, which was dominantly Chinese.

Also among the finalists unveiled at Shangri-La Hotel on Saturday: a Nigerian-Malay, an Arabian-English and a French-Indian-Chinese.

Miss Universe Singapore national director, Errol Pang, said, "We open doors to every race, not just Chinese girls...it just so happened that last year, we were short of Malays and Indians."

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Nigerian-Malay Ijechi Nwaozuzu, 21, a law student, said, "Part of why I join this competition is to show the world that we're cosmopolitan. We always talk about Singapore being multi-racial, but I don't think we show enough of that on the international stage."

When Yahoo Singapore asked finalist Liana Azman, 20, on her thoughts about representing the Malay community, she said, "I'm proud to represent Singapore. I know that it is not a good thing for a Muslim to wear a bikini in public, but it is part and parcel of the competition. I can't behave like a diva and refuse to wear it...it's all about being a good sport."

Organiser Derrol Stepenny Promotions also announced some changes to the pageant, which now incorporates elements of a modeling competition.

"Not only are we looking for a beauty queen who is beautiful and intelligent, we're also looking for someone who can conquer the international catwalk [industry] as well," said spokeswoman Penelope Pang.

She said the finals will adopt a fashion runway concept, and the winner will win a fashion spread with Aesthetics and Beauty magazine, as well as a modeling portfolio with Singapore fashion photographer Micky Wong.

The finals will take place on 22 August at the same venue, and the winner will win lavish prizes including 4.0 carats princess cut diamond earrings worth over \$35,000 by sponsor Dymenz, as well as represent Singapore at the Miss Universe pageant.

The date and venue for the international Miss Universe final have yet to be confirmed.