

Travel Tales

Meet the New Miss Vanuatu! Part 2

by

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This month we will learn more about Valerie Martinez, the new Miss Vanuatu, and how she won her crown.

Q: Who were your sponsors in the Miss Vanuatu contest?

A: My main sponsor was Barrett and Partners, a local chartered accounting firm. I would like to thank them and my employer QBE Insurance (Vanuatu) Limited. QBE let me attend all the meetings and rehearsals even during working hours.

Q: How were the contestants reduced in number to 10, and were there any disqualifications?

A: More than ten showed up at first, but then some just dropped out.

Q: Tell me about your talent presentation.

A: My talent was playing the ukulele. My boyfriend is a musician and he taught me how to play, beginning about a year ago. I had to practice a lot. My only other talents are judo and weaving Tahitian grass skirts, and neither of those would have worked on stage.

Q: What was your native costume?

A: I wore the costume of the Nambrukwen tribe, one of the two main tribes on Tanna island. I wore manasei leaves and told the interviewer that the strong perfume of the leaves is "meant to attract men, and get them aroused." The audience liked that!

Q: Yes, that was the best line of the whole night. How did you get out of that heavy makeup from your Tanna outfit?

A: I used baby oil and a cloth, and my aunties helped me backstage. There was no-one to help me put on my regular makeup for the swimsuit contest, so we had to call in someone from the audience!



Valerie won the swimsuit competition for Miss Vanuatu

Q: Tell me about the swimwear competition.

A: The organizers told us not to listen to the advice of other contestants. But just before the swimwear contest I was shy about taking off my sarong. So I asked Jennifer Watson if she was going to take off her sarong. "Oh, no," she said, "I am going to keep it on my hips." So I decided to do that, too. I was first out, and I walked the entire catwalk, faced the judges, and went back to stand facing the audience – all with my sarong on. Then Jennifer came out, and when she reached the judges she whipped off her sarong and proudly showed off her body! I had to stop myself from laughing out loud, she had tricked me so well. So when we walked out two by two, I pulled off my sarong right in front of the judges. I had the last laugh, because I won the swimsuit competition!

Q: How did you keep smiling for five hours straight?

A: I suffered.

Q: Yes, I noticed you were the only one who smiled all the time. How did you win Miss Congeniality? In most contests that is given as a consolation prize.

A: Well, I am just naturally friendly. I thought of the other girls as friends. But I think some of the other girls were just pretending, and maybe that showed.

Q: During the evening gown contest, you were asked how you would promote Vanuatu more, if you won. How did you answer?

A: I said a little, then had a long pause. If I was going to answer now, I would say that we should promote our unique culture in more countries, and display our terrific food and culture, including our dance, sports and music. Public speaking is my greatest fear, and I had to work very hard to overcome my shyness. I actually use contests to force myself to be a better person and learn new skills. In New Caledonia, if I was asked a question in public, I wouldn't just forget the answer. I would actually forget all my French, all my English, and all my native Bislama!

Q: One contestant was asked how the government could improve tourism in Vanuatu. How would you answer that?

A: I think we need to clean up all the trash along the roads and in town. I would like to lead a national effort on that. We need to repair the potholes in the roads. We should publicize our natural attractions more, and ensure that all our tourist venues are accessible to cruise ship passengers.

Q: How did you feel just before the results were announced at midnight?

A: I almost fainted, mainly because I had had nothing to eat all day except a piece of chocolate and a glass of water at 4 pm.

Q: How did you feel when you won?

A: I was so happy! Who would think that I could become Miss Vanuatu – ooh la la! But God has a plan for everyone.

Q: What was the reaction of the people?

A: Many people supported me, especially from Tanna, where my mother was born. But there were some negative comments on radio and Facebook, saying that I was not a “real” Ni-Van [native Vanuatuan]. That hurts me, because I feel more Ni-Van than French, and my Bislama is better than my French. I did think that Jennifer Watson would win instead of me, because I had heard that there was a lot of feeling that a “pure” Ni-Van should win, not a “half-caste” like me.



Valerie Martinez and her main rival, Jennifer Watson



Valerie won the title of Miss Vanuatu in 2013 and is still reigning as of 2016

Q: What passport do you carry?

A: I used to have a French passport at school in New Caledonia. But I let it lapse and only have a Vanuatu passport now. I had to show it to the Miss Vanuatu pageant officials to prove that I am a real Vanuatu citizen and fully eligible for the contest. I feel that Vanuatu has the best of Ni-Van, French and English culture, so as a proud person of mixed heritage, I think I am a good person to represent our country.

Q: What messages would you like to give to the youth of Vanuatu, especially the girls?

A: Most important is: focus on your studies at school. Keep yourselves clean and pure. Remember your local language and culture, and be proud of it. I lost a lot of my mother's local language of Tannese, but now I am working to re-learn it. Don't get tattoos -- God gave you a beautiful body, and you should leave it the way you got it. I almost got tattooed, but thank goodness my boyfriend saved me from that. Finally, be brave. Recently a wonderful young girl of 14 in Pango Point saved three children from a fire, while some adults just watched. Be like her – see what's right. Then do it!

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Lew Toulmin of Silver Spring is working in the Prime Minister's Office in Vanuatu, a country of 250,000 on 53 islands, in the SW Pacific.

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