

NUS scholar who is Miss Earth S'pore says:

Beauty pageants can serve a cause

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SHE is a scholar who had thought that beauty pageants were for airheads. So it took her a month to decide whether she should put her studies on hold for a shot at fame.

And when she did go for it, Maricelle Rani Wong, 20, a first-year student who is under the University Scholars Programme, went all the way.

She was into the first semester of her four-year mechanical engineering course at the National University of Singapore when she deferred part of it to try for the Miss Earth 2010 crown in Nha Trang City, Vietnam, earlier this month.

Though the Miss Earth Singapore winner did not make it to the top 40, she has no regrets taking part even though it means she will now have to take more modules in each of the seven remaining semesters to graduate on time, in 2013.

No regrets

Said Maricelle: "I thought I'd never get another chance to experience something like this again, so I made the decision."

The competition is her first beauty pageant.

The former National Junior College student, who was in the Integrated Programme that allowed her to take the A levels without having to do the O levels, had initially thought beauty pageant contestants were bitchy and unfriendly.

But she found out this was not so.

She said: "The girls I met were friendlier and more helpful than I thought. We exchanged make-up tips and practised walking and posing together."

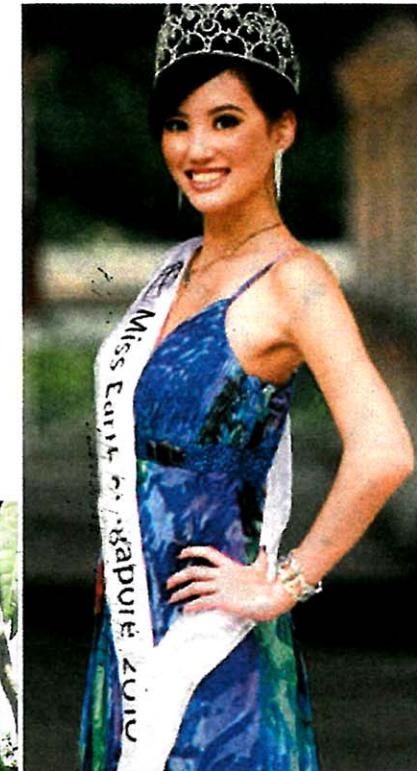
"I realised that pageants are a lot more than looking pretty. There are so many ways to hold up your dress and yourself."

All the practice in front of the mirror paid off when she was crowned Miss Earth Singapore 2010



HARD WORK: During the pageant, Maricelle spent a month in Vietnam cleaning up beaches and planting trees.

PICTURES COURTESY OF MARICELLE RANI WONG



"The pageant wasn't all about looks. The ecological cause, too, was what motivated me to join."

— Maricelle Rani Wong (left)

at a local nightspot last month. For her effort, she won \$2,000 cash and the chance to represent Singapore in the international competition.

"The pageant wasn't all about looks," she said. "The ecological cause, too, was what motivated me to join. I've always been interested in environmental issues, and I thought the pageant would be a good opportunity for me to start taking some serious action."

Her mother, homemaker Agatha Wong, 58, was initially worried that Maricelle would neglect her studies for the pageant.

"But I know my daughter has good time management (skills)," she said. "I want her to experience things outside of her studies, too. So I supported her in joining the pageant."

Said one of the judges, Ms Cheryl Hansen, 40, who is also the managing director of C.T. Hansen International, which organised the pageant: "Maricelle won because she is very passionate about helping the environment."

"Her warm and friendly personality also made her suitable for the title."

Maricelle spent a month in Vietnam as part of the pageant's programme, cleaning up beaches, planting trees and attending gala dinners to help raise funds for flood victims in the country.

Since returning home, Maricelle has started raising funds to introduce clean technology to developing countries such as India, Vietnam and China.

"I have a lot of ideas and I've been talking to some organisations to gather support. But nothing's finalised yet. After all, I got back from Vietnam just two weeks ago."