

Buffs strut their stuff at Mr Gay World

GABI MBELE | 03 May, 2015 06:00



Mr Gay South Africa Craig Maggs; Mr Zambia, Siyathokoza Thabani Khumalo; Mr Iceland Troy Michael Jonsson; Mr Spain Jesus Martin Marquez; and Mr Dominican Republic Alejandro Torres-Solanot.

Image by: ESAALEXANDER

With Miley Cyrus's *We Can't Stop* booming in the background, men dressed in shorts and little else fill the grounds of the Blackwaters River Lodge in Knysna, dancing to the beat.

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These are the buff contestants of Mr Gay World, participating in a sports challenge on a sunny Friday morning.

The men from 21 countries - including Cuba, Ireland, Australia, Zambia and South Africa - took part in the seventh annual Mr Gay World pageant in the Garden Route town last night.

Contestants were judged on their appearance, grooming, "intellect" and social skills, and had to write a test on issues affecting the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual and intersexual community.

This competition is unlike regular beauty pageants. There is no age limit - the oldest contestant is 42-year-old Nomer Yuzon from the Philippines, and the two youngest are Jody de Smedt from Belgium and Daniel Fröhlich from the Czech Republic, both 20.

They work in various professions. Many are in the entertainment industry and others are students, waiters, gym trainers or computer security experts. One is a teacher.

"This is more than just about a title, it's about creating awareness internationally for the gay community," said Mr Gay South Africa, Craig Maggs.

"Whether I win or not, I'm still proud to have represented the country and connected with fellow gay community members from around the world," he said.

For 27-year-old Australian Scott Fletcher, an IT security manager from Melbourne, the event is about more than just competing against 20 other men.

"I don't think of it as just social change for the gay community," he said.

"I also want to launch an internet programme that helps gay communities across the globe get help in terms of coming out; raising awareness in different countries with hopes to merge the global gay community on one platform."

The winner was chosen by a panel of seven judges. One of them, Ricardo Amunjera from Namibia who was third runner-up in the pageant two years ago, said the competition was not "just about beauty but also looks at the intellect of the delegates".

"From the moment they arrive they are judged by their interaction with fellow contestants," he said.

"Beauty, physique and appearance is less than 50% of the competition. It's also about their [knowledge] of the hosting country, their knowledge of LGBTI history and current affairs," said Amunjera.

Another judge, Frank Malaba, said he was glad to see two African countries taking part in the competition. South Africa being the only country on the continent that allows gay marriage.

But it was the grand finale at the Knysna Mall Exhibition Area, where guests paid up to R330 per ticket, that determined the winner last night.

He walked away with the title but no big prizes other than a goodie-bag of clothing vouchers and bragging rights.

Controversy

The competition has not been without controversy. In 2012 Mr Zimbabwe, Taurai Zhanje, pulled out due to family pressure.

Soon afterwards, Mr Namibia, Wendelinus Hamutenya, withdrew after he was injured in an alleged homophobic attack in Windhoek.

In the same year Mr Ethiopia, Robel Hailu, was disowned by his father, who told him he brought shame to his family and should kill himself.

This year Mr India, model Thahir Mohammed Sayyed, pulled out of the competition after receiving threats to himself and his family.

The founder and president of the pageant, Eric Butter, said: "We created this event to combat homophobia, but for a delegate and his family to go through such harassment is unacceptable and we have to be sympathetic with him."

Knysna Tourism CEO Greg Vogt said the town was proud to be one of the few that had "opened their doors to pink money".

The competition is aligned with the Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival, which has been held in Knysna for the past 14 years.

This is the second time the competition has been held in South Africa. South Africans have won twice.

And the winner is...

Mr Gay World 2015 Winner: Mr Gay Germany

Sport Winner: Mr Gay Sweden

Mr Photogenic: Mr Gay Spain

Art Challenge: Mr Gay Zambia

People's Choice award: Mr Gay Malta

Social Media Winner: Mr Gay Belgium

Best Written Test: Mr Gay Germany

National Costume winner: Mr Gay Mexico

Swimwear: Mr Gay Australia

Mr Congeniality: Mr Gay Colombia

Fashion: Mr Gay Spain

Formal Wear Award: Mr Gay Spain