



More Than Meets the Eye

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Photography courtesy: Gary Jordan, Sarah Jane Waddell and The Miss World Organisation

I first met Sarah Jane Waddell over the phone, where I quickly got the idea that she is anything but a conventional beauty queen.

This impression was easily supported by bit of scouting on her Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest pages, where images depicting her love for riding horses (which has captivated her since she was a child) are interspersed with captions declaring her love for 'buss-up-shut' (roti), curry and pumpkin (of which she can put away an impressive amount) and revealing her experience with curried egg (which she has only recently tried for the first time). Then there are the glimpses into her often glamorous life, which are side-by-side with photos of the works of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and a variety of funny and inspirational quotes.

By the time we sat down for an interview a rainy Wednesday afternoon, I was eager to see whether Miss Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) World could really be as down-to-earth and funny as she seemed. Despite all of my research, it was only over a glass of Sprite at the beautifully-restored Boissiere House (also known as "The Gingerbread House") that I fully realised how much more there is to Waddell than meets the eye.

First things first: she really is as beautiful as she appears on TV and her various social media profiles, even coming straight from the gym in workout gear. However, her openness, self-deprecating sense of humour and free and incredibly contagious laugh certainly don't seem to fit the stereotypical beauty queen mould. Her speech and cadence also give glimpses into Waddell's down-to-earth-ness where she switches from "proper English" to our local dialect (accent) that has been named one of the world's sexiest accents in the blink of an eye.

While her travels, educational achievements and mastery of three languages (English, Spanish and Mandarin) are no secret, fans might be surprised to know that Waddell loves to spend her free time hiking some of T&T's best nature spots. Her favourite happens to be a lookout in Paramin; which she loves for the crisp, clean air, calming atmosphere and amazing 360-degree view.





On the other hand, Waddell loves all things fashion, which she describes as “history, art and culture in one” (and hopes to find time in her busy schedule to indulge her interest in styling and retail). She’s currently considering the idea of a blog chronicling her Miss World journey. However, she warns me, it would mainly include finds from the stylish, but affordable racks of H&M and an assortment of “junk jewellery” statement pieces.

It’s all indicative of a sense of humour and adventure that has served her well, prompting her to give the local Miss Universe pageant a try back in 2012 on the advice of a friend who called and convinced her upon seeing that the casting was that weekend. Though she wasn’t selected, Waddell took home the Fan Favourite award and having that experience helped propel her to the Miss World victory this past July.

Key to the win was Waddell’s drive, determination and shrewd decision-making. Her strategy was simple: use whatever spare time and resources she had to train and prepare on her own. The week of the pageant she practised in a nearby dance studio where she walked three hours every day before joining her fellow delegates for the mandatory three-hour rehearsal. “In high heels! My feet were killing me!” Waddell laughed.

Even with all of these attributes, it’s a long road to victory in London on December 14th. Luckily, she’s being trained by an incredibly knowledgeable woman with whom she admits she is “obsessed” with: the legendary Giselle Laronde-West, who picked up T&T’s first and only Miss World crown in London 28 years ago.

Describing Laronde-West as “graceful, humble and straightforward”, Waddell praises the former beauty queen and current businesswoman’s savvy and scientific eye, which helps her to improve in every one of their weekly sessions.