

## **The Beauty Industry in Venezuela**

Latin America has long been hailed as a region of extraordinarily beautiful men and women. This is particularly the case of Venezuela, a country that has been dominating international beauty pageants for the past few decades and has taken home more international titles than any other nation in the world. Although many are quick to attribute this exceptional performance and reputation to a national obsession with physical appearances and a booming local plastic surgery industry, Venezuela's beauty industry reaches far beyond such limited explanations and offers a very interesting alternative for developing a nation's human resources, while making an impressive impact on local and world economies.

Today's culture of beauty promotes a much deeper and holistic understanding of good looks. It emphasizes the harmonious integration of a balanced diet, exercise, poise, intelligence, good manners, a positive attitude, self-confidence, self-respect and discipline. Such desirable traits are by no means restricted to beauty queen contestants or models and therefore prove to be a commendable standard that should be inculcated in each and every citizen, regardless of social status.

To mould such an exemplary citizen - the ultimate objective of the entire process undertaken before one can deservingly claim the title of a beauty pageant such as Miss Universe, Miss World or Miss Earth - several channels of the local economy need to pool together, whereas several niche markets may spontaneously surface as well.

Throughout the past decade, the beauty industry has solidly consolidated itself within Venezuela's economy, incorporating not just a beautiful body and promoters, but also grooming institutions, the cosmetic industry, fashion houses, the media and entertainment industry, the medical sector, the tourism sector and multi-million dollar companies in the form of local investment and corporate sponsorship.

The individual's journey can begin as early as seven years old at one of Venezuela's famous "beauty factories". These are grooming institutions, not just beauty schools, where one learns, apart from the art of applying make-up and choosing the right colours, to speak well and intelligently, carry one's self with grace and style, practice proper social etiquette, take care of one's health and body, and just simply be at one's best, unique and unforgettable. It is not uncommon to find many middle and upper class parents who consider this to be an important aspect of their child's social formation, and indeed it is.

Not surprisingly, one of the industries which profits significantly from this social norm is that of cosmetics and personal care products. Although women may automatically be identified as the major contributors to this sector's economic success, it should be well-noted that men too, Venezuelan and worldwide, harbour similar desires to be pleasing and attractive to themselves and others. In fact, studies show that Venezuela is the largest consumer of cosmetics and personal care products per capita in the world, taking a 9.3%

share of the world cosmetic market according to the *Review of In-Cosmetics Industry Trends Presentations, 2004*.

The fashion industry is another area of the local economy that greatly benefits from a well-structured, national culture of beauty. At the exceedingly popular Miss Venezuela beauty pageant, contestants' attire are custom-made by local fashion designers and fashion houses. It is an opportunity for local stylists and artists to showcase their creations. First, on a national scale and then internationally should the candidate be chosen to represent the country at any of the numerous international pageants.

Furthermore, in the Venezuelan paradigm, it has virtually become the norm that the Miss Venezuela national contest, under the prestige guidance of the Miss Venezuela Organization (by far the most superior grooming school, perhaps in the world), be the primary recruiting agency for Venezuela's next batch of super models, television personalities and soap-opera starlets. A subsidiary of the Cisneros Group of Companies, this is a classic example of killing two birds with one stone, as Cisneros' television stations are also the leading producers of soap-operas in Latin America.

In search of an even more refined beauty and in the pursuit of a more universally acclaimed standard of perfection (and to much notoriety within the beauty pageant circles), Venezuela's plastic surgery industry has also experienced significant growth and expansion as a result of the nation's keen appreciation of beauty. It is a thriving industry which has been consistently increasing over the past few years, being particularly sought after for liposculpture, breast enlargement, buttocks augmentation, face lifts and nose jobs. As a matter of fact, regions such as the island of Margarita have consequently become popular destinations for North Americans and Europeans seeking inexpensive cosmetic surgery. A vacation package now being promoted by travel agents and local clinics, giving rise to a new niche in the tourism industry.

Moreover, due to their immense popularity in the South American continent, beauty pageants have attracted a great deal of corporate investment and sponsorship which only serve to sustain and strengthen the aesthetic tradition in countries like Venezuela. Corporate sponsors of the Miss Venezuela contest include Pepsi Cola, Palmolive, Colgate and Lux. Additionally, it is a widely popular, televised program that reaches a significant proportion of the Cisneros Group of Companies' total audience in Latin America, an audience which surpasses 550 million people.

The beauty industry in Venezuela is truly a vibrant one with many economic and social advantages. A number of diverse avenues of the local economy are drawn together and interwoven to accomplish the final goal, the transformation of a rock into an exquisite diamond. What is more, citizens are actively encouraged to pursue personal growth and take responsibility for their well-being. The country's international image is further enhanced as a result, its representatives being recognized for their beauty, elegance and personality. It is important however to acknowledge the risks ever present in this industry, the unhealthy obsession and abuses that can and do arise to the detriment of society rather than its improvement. Hence one emphasizes again that beauty is not just skin deep, it resonates from within and is manifested in one's attitude, behaviour and

personality. Consider the profile of titles such as Miss Universe, Miss World or Miss Earth that praise so much more than physical beauty and calls on the individual to also be intelligent, compassionate, confident and creative. These are characteristics that we should all seek to develop as human beings, whether or not we wear a crown.

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