

SWE ZIN HTET

b. November 16, 1999

MISS UNIVERSE CONTESTANT

“If I say that I’m a lesbian, it will have a big impact on the LGBTQ community back in Burma.”

Swe Zin Htet is a Burmese model and beauty pageant winner. In 2019, as the reigning Miss Myanmar, she became the first out lesbian to compete in the 67-year-old Miss Universe contest. In Myanmar (also known as Burma), homosexual conduct is criminalized.

Swe Zin Htet was born to a Buddhist family in rural Burma. She spent much of her time meditating and maintaining the family’s shrine to the Buddha.

Around the age of 15 or 16, Swe Zin Htet discovered her attraction to women. She came out to her parents, who were initially shocked and unsupportive. She told People magazine, “The difficult thing is that in Burma, LGBTQ people are not accepted.”

She was the first out lesbian to compete for the Miss Universe title.

At age 16, Swe Zin Htet began competing in beauty pageants. In 2016 she was crowned Miss Golden Land Myanmar and won Miss Supranational Myanmar the same year, earning her a spot at Miss Supranational 2016. She took home the Miss Personality title from that pageant and set her sights on the Miss Universe competition. She won Miss Universe Myanmar in 2019, qualifying her for the international contest in Atlanta, Georgia, later that year.

A week before the global Miss Universe competition, Swe Zin Htet came out publicly on the beauty blog “Missology” to capitalize on the publicity surrounding the pageant. She also took to Instagram, posting a photo collage of herself and her girlfriend of three years, Gae Gae — a popular Burmese singer— with the word “proud” and a rainbow flag emoji.

“I have that platform that, if I say that I’m a lesbian, it will have a big impact on the LGBTQ community back in Burma.” Swe Zin Htet said. Although she did not take home the crown, she made an undeniable impact on the Miss Universe contest, which aired in more than 190 countries. “We are honored to give a platform to strong, inspirational women like Miss Universe Myanmar,” pageant organizers said. “[We] will always champion women to be proud of who they are.”

Beyond its global impact, Swe Zin Htet’s coming out was particularly brave, as consensual homosexual conduct remains illegal in Burma, carrying a potential prison sentence of 10 years or more. She hopes her confident self-acceptance will inspire legislative and social change.

Though Swe Zin Htet largely avoids publicity, she stays active on social media. She spends most of her time modeling.



© GETTY IMAGES

lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2021 – A Project of Equality Forum