

Bikini babes in Singapore

The Republic is featured in latest Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue

BY HUANG LIJIE

SINGAPORE is getting exposure in the pages of the latest swimsuit edition of popular American magazine Sports Illustrated.

The swimsuit issue, read by about 79 million people worldwide, is one of the publication's annual highlights. It features photos of top female models and athletes in swimsuits against stunning landscapes. Singapore is among nine locations chosen for this year's issue, along with others such as the Philippines' Boracay Island and the Canadian town of Banff.

Here, the shoot by American photographer Steve Erle was done over two weeks last August in places such as Sentosa, Chinatown and the Marina Bay area.

The magazine had accepted an invitation from the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) to shoot here.

The magazine feature comes amid growing international attention on Singapore being a cool city with good food, exciting nightlife and a breathtaking skyline. Last year, it was featured in popular TV shows such as *The Amazing Race* and *Top Chef*.

The swimsuit spread in Singapore featured four international models – Shan-nan Click, Kenza Fourati, Izabel Goulart, and Damaris Lewis – who have graced the covers of fashion magazines and advertisement campaigns overseas.

While they were posing here, they turned heads and drew curious onlookers.

Ms Jenny Lim, 50, manager of Chinese restaurant Tak Po in Smith Street, said: "We had more customers that day; a lot of them were uncles who came to gawk at the models in bikinis."

The STB, with government agencies like IE Singapore and the Economic Devel-

opment Board, had been wooing the magazine since last year.

Mr Chang Chee Pey, executive director of brand management, destination marketing and strategic marketing at STB, said: "The global reach and brand association with Sports Illustrated would help profile Singapore as a fun, vibrant and exciting city."

After the magazine accepted the invitation, STB worked with it to shortlist locations that would give a flavour of Singapore, as well as new developments here.

The board declined to say how much it spent to invite the magazine here.

Fashion photographer Wee Khim said Singapore is an unusual pick for a swimsuit feature as the beaches here are "not pristine" and there are "no wide open spaces or beautiful horizons".

But he added: "What Singapore offers is the whole package... white sand beaches in Sentosa, modernity around Marina Bay and a touch of tradition in Chinatown."

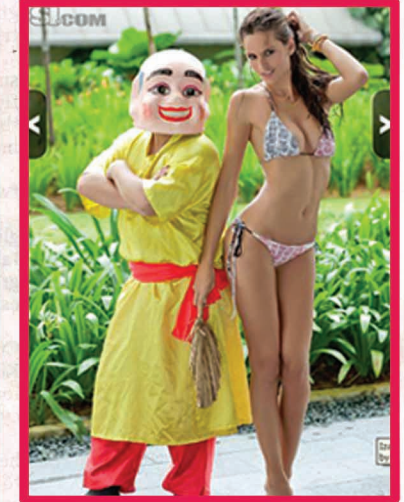
Dr Srinivas Reddy, associate dean of the Lee Kong Chian School of Business at the Singapore Management University, said the impact of the feature will likely be sustained. "The swimsuit issue is usually kept rather than thrown away, so people will likely recall Singapore, and the image of Singapore will be reinforced."

Dr Lynda Wee, an adjunct associate professor in retailing at Nanyang Technological University, said: "Growing attention to Singapore on the international radar will help change the perception of it as a place with nothing to look at, to a must-see destination."

The issue hit United States outlets yesterday and will go on sale here soon.

lijie@sph.com.sg

Additional reporting by Lianne Koh and Yuen Sin



On location in the Lion City

OTHER recent occasions when Singapore was featured in the popular media overseas:

- *Top Chef*, a television culinary competition and Emmy Award winner, filmed its season finale here last year.
- *The Martha Stewart Show*, a lifestyle television series shown in more than 20 countries and which reaches more than 100 million households worldwide, filmed an episode here last year.
- *The Amazing Race*, an Emmy Award-winning reality television show that has teams racing around the world, filmed here in 2009; the episode was aired last year.
- *De Dana Dan*, a popular Bollywood movie featuring stars such as Akshay Kumar, Sunil Shetty and Katrina Kaif, shot most of its scenes here in 2009.

The latest Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue features photos of model Izabel Goulart posing on a trishaw (above) and with a big-head doll (above, right) in Singapore. PHOTOS: SPORTS ILLUSTRATED