

BILLIONAIRE



THE POWER OF WOMEN ISSUE CELEBRATING THOSE ELEVATING OTHERS

PHILANTHROPY • Empowering a new generation of beekeepers
VERTICAL GIRL • Kathy Sullivan, NASA spacewalker and deep ocean diver

HAUTE CULTURE • The women scientists shaping the future of biodesign
GAME, SET, MATCH • Tennis veteran Katrina Adams weighs in on glass ceilings

MATRIARCHS OF MUSTANG • A luxury Nepalese hotel investing in female artisans
THE ENTREPRENEURS • Female founders writing sustainability into business

Five Minutes With... Melita Koulmandas

Eleven years ago, Australian entrepreneur Melita Koulmandas co-founded Song Saa Private Island in conjunction with the Song Saa Foundation, a luxury travel experience in Cambodia that paved the way for sustainable tourism. Here, she sits down for five minutes for a quick-fire Q&A.

What is your morning routine?

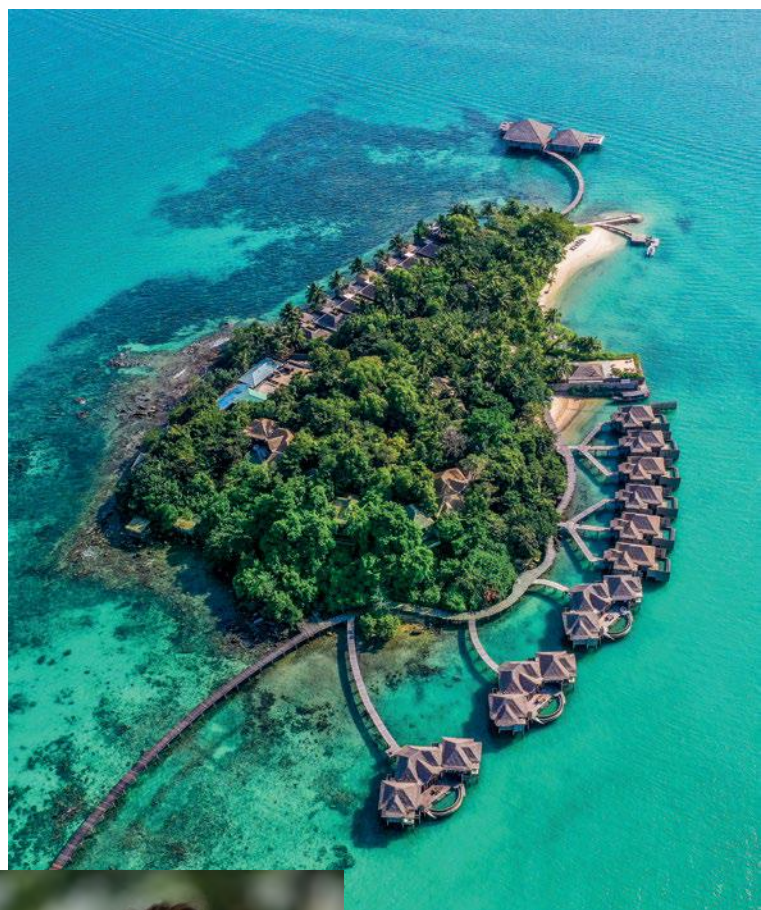
I'm awake before 5am to enjoy the silence of the house. I must have a cup of tea outside, listening to the birds as Phnom Penh wakes up. It's my time to get ahead on work and focus on creative projects. After that, it's breakfast with the kids before the school bus arrives. I fit a workout in, and then the day starts to take off.

What would we always find in your fridge?

There's a constant supply of local coffee beans from Modulkiri and the very addictive, fresh hummus from Backyard Café. We do a bit ourselves too — homemade yoghurt, and some herbs, chillies, and leafy greens from the backyard. And you'll always find some dark Temple Chocolate in there; the chilli flavour is incredible.

What has been your best trip?

This is tough, but my solo adventure mountaineering in the Chamonix Valley really stands out. I think I'm a bit hooked — the feeling of reaching the summit of Mont Blanc has inspired me to train for tougher climbs. I'm also excited to take the kids on a surfing holiday in Brazil this year, which I can't wait for them to experience.



Clockwise from top: Song Saa, a sustainable resort in Cambodia. Melita and her Yai Yai. An artwork by her favourite artist Sopheap Pich. Melita Koulmandas.



What is your most precious possession?

My three boys' favourite stuffed toys that they sleep with. They're irreplaceable.

What are your style signifiers?

The top-knot hairstyle is a staple for me. In general, quite low maintenance, a kaftan-style top over leggings and some lipstick is a classic go-to look for me. I like mixing in items I've picked up locally and from my travels, like at the markets in Morocco or a handmade piece from a Cambodian designer.

If you weren't running Song Saa, what would you be doing?

I've always felt a very strong pull towards design, regeneration, and philanthropy. So, most likely, in a field where I can blend those together in some way.

Who is your greatest inspiration?

My Yai Yai, my Greek grandmother, established a milk bar in Sydney when she emigrated. Despite the challenges of multiculturalism, she succeeded in creating a welcoming space for her community to come together. Seventy years later, the area is now known as "Little Athens", a place that holds very fond childhood memories in my heart.

What do you love about Phnom Penh?

Phnom Penh is so vibrant, there's an abundance of creativity. Young Cambodians are so energising to be around. They're completely open to life and their entrepreneurial spirit is infectious.

What is your guilty pleasure?

Cheese, without question. I bought so much Brazilian cheese when I was there recently, and the Cambodian artisans are phenomenal. Their goat cheese or buffalo mozzarella on a salad is perfection. In the evenings, I love nothing more than unwinding with a brie, some olives, and a glass of wine.

What is the key to happiness for you?

For me, happiness is about connection. Spending time outdoors, with family, travelling and experiencing different cultures, these are the things that fill my cup.

What is your favourite luxury?

Time for myself; it's very rare with kids and a business, so I'm very grateful when it happens.

Which artist is your favourite?

Sopheap Pich is a Cambodian artist who makes incredible works of art. I was fortunate enough to tour his studio recently



where he's preparing a new collection for an exhibition in a Hong Kong gallery. There was one piece that I fell in love with that is a mix of reclaimed metals. Those who know me, know my love for the texture and colour of these types of materials.

What gift do you most value?

Since Covid, my family, friends, and I have shifted towards valuing the gift of quality time together more than ever. Sometimes, this means travelling to see each other, or it could be as simple as organising a beautiful picnic outdoors with a group of close friends. I also cherish the little gifts from my kids — breakfast in bed and their arts and crafts creations are favourites. ◇



Clockwise from top: Melita mountaineering in Chamonix Valley. You will always find Temple Chocolate in her fridge. Coffee beans from Modulhiri.