

A PASSION FOR HOSPITALITY

MAY 2015

HOTELS

www.hotelsmag.com

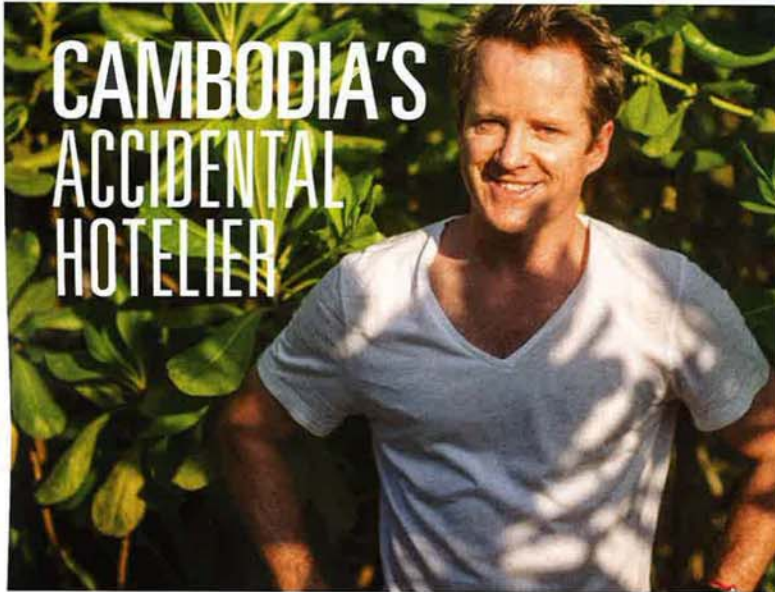
WEARABLES AND MOBILE MARKETING

WIDE WORLD OF WELLNESS

CHINA: 10 YEARS LATER

ITC CELEBRATES
the GRANDEUR
of INDIA





When Rory Hunter and his wife, Melita, explored the Koh Rong Archipelago in Cambodia nine years ago, they weren't looking to build Song Saa, the country's first luxury private island resort with 27 over-water bungalows. It was only through a chance lunch with the family who owned the island and wanted to sell that the story unfolded. "We agreed on the spot and came back a week later to sign the paperwork," recalls Hunter, an Australian who has a background in advertising with Saatchi and Saatchi.

The couple originally spent four years pulling the development together (they already had a property company in Phnom Penh), speaking to management companies, architects and consultants, and had the project ready when Lehman Brothers crashed in September 2008 and Melita was diagnosed with cancer. The dream was put on hold.

Melita recovered quickly, however, and six months later the pair went back to the island — this time deciding Melita would design the resort and the couple would run it.



BREAK THE RULES.

All industries are seeing
an unprecedented level of
disruption, and the hotel industry
is no exception.

EMBRACE THIS CHANGE.

— RORY HUNTER

Now in its third full year of operation, the resort is EBITDA-positive, and the duo is growing its Song Saa Foundation, an independent NGO for improving local communities and the region's natural environment. The pair also has plans to grow Song Saa Hotels and Resorts, and HOTELS interviewed Rory to learn more.

HOTELS: How is the art of hotelkeeping different at Song Saa?

Rory Hunter: While our lack of experience likely meant we made many mistakes in the early days, it also allowed us to build a brand and a company without any preconceived notion for how it's meant to be done. We've strived to create a sense of family amongst our team so that our guests feel like they are staying at our home.

H: Can you describe your vision for "tourism's new frontier"?

RH: Hotels — and resorts, in particular — need to reframe their role within the ecosystem where they operate and redefine who their stakeholders truly are and act responsibly. This is good news for the bottom line, especially as consumers become more aware and are supporting companies who share their ethics and ideals.

H: What advice can you offer global hoteliers?

RH: Break the rules. All industries are seeing an unprecedented level of disruption, and the hotel industry is no exception. Embrace this change and see the opportunities for what they are — a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make the world a better place.

H: What are your plans for future hotel developments?

RH: We recently moved to Hong Kong and set up our head office where sales and marketing are now based. We're starting to look for other sites and opportunities and will focus on emerging Southeast Asia in only the most spectacular locations where our guests would want to visit and where we can contribute positively to the surrounding ecosystem.

H: Do you have any hotel mentors?

RH: We've had a number of mentors who were very generous with their time and support. John O'Sullivan from Four Seasons was one of these angels, as was Homi Vazifdar from Canyon Equity (California). They probably thought we were mad, but were far too polite to say so.