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Inspired by a mountaineering mishap and frustrated by the soaring cost of technical gear, two Singaporeans are building an outdoor label that performs well without luxury markups.

Chin Chih Lin

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When Singaporean mountaineer Kenneth Wong was preparing to climb a Himalayan peak a few years ago, he needed a technical shell jacket that could withstand freezing temperatures and brutal weather. The options from established outdoor brands cost upwards of S\$500, an amount the then-consultant, barely a year into his career, struggled to justify.

"So I bought a second-hand jacket for S\$50, which I thought was a good idea at the time," recalled Wong, 29. It wasn't. The jacket failed mid-climb. "If not for the Sherpa I was climbing with, I would've had hypothermia," he said.

That close call eventually led Wong and his friend Maribelle Su, 26, to launch Goliath, a Singapore-based online outdoor apparel brand built around high-performance gear at more accessible prices. Its products currently range from S\$99 merino wool tees to S\$269 shell jackets.

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Founded in March 2025 and officially launched in August, the young brand has moved quickly, raising around S\$80,000 through crowdfunding within a month and shipping orders to customers across 20 countries.

But in a market already crowded with outdoor heavyweights – from value-driven players like Decathlon to highly technical labels like Arc'teryx and Patagonia – why start another outdoor brand?

For Wong and Su, the answer lies somewhere between performance, accessibility and a desire to build products they themselves wanted to wear.

FROM UNIVERSITY FRIENDS TO CO-FOUNDERS

The pair first met as freshmen at Singapore Management University, later reconnecting during an exchange programme in Rome – where they also travelled to Iceland together.

“I knew immediately Maribelle would be a good business partner – seeing how good she was at planning the trip and taking photos. A lot of the skills I lack are things she naturally excels at,” said Wong.

After graduating in 2023, Wong went into consulting while Su started her own social media agency. The idea for Goliath surfaced later, after Wong’s experience in the Himalayas.

“I also realised I preferred eating cup noodles in the mountains over expensive business dinners,” he said with a laugh. “That was probably when I knew I needed a change.”

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Goliath, a Singapore-based online outdoor apparel brand built around high-performance gear at more accessible prices.

In February 2025, Wong approached Su with the idea. “When Kenneth brought up hiking apparel, it clicked – I was already getting into hiking myself and had my own frustrations with existing brands.”

The brand’s name carries personal weight. During his first year of university, Wong found out his mother had stage four cancer. “She battled it for three years before she passed away during my final year,” he said.

Throughout that period, the biblical story of David and Goliath – about faith in the face of insurmountable odds – resonated deeply with him. “Doctors initially thought my mum only had a few months, but she fought for three years,” he said. “No matter how big the giant is in your life – whether it’s cancer or something else – if you have courage, you can push through.”

BUILDING AN OUTDOOR BRAND FROM SINGAPORE



Goliath is run entirely by its two founders. Wong oversees operations and technical product development, while Su focuses on branding and storytelling – though both are involved in design.

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“We don’t have a dedicated designer for our clothes,” said Su. “Kenneth is more technical, while I approach products more from a lifestyle perspective.”



For instance, the brand’s hiking pants, which at first glance resemble regular cargo pants, can also be converted into shorts. “A lot of women’s outdoor gear still looks overly technical,” she said. “I wanted ours to feel flattering and versatile enough that you’d actually want to wear it outside hiking too.”

The founders are aware that launching an outdoor apparel brand from urban Singapore may initially seem counterintuitive. “We honestly wondered who would buy from a Singapore outdoor brand,” Su mused.

To their surprise, Goliath’s crowdfunding campaign drew customers not just locally, but also from countries like the United States, Australia, Poland, and Taiwan. “That was validating because it showed us that the pain point wasn’t just local,” says Wong.

Some of our products are made in the same factories as established outdoor brands. To build the brand, the pair spent months sourcing manufacturing partners themselves, including visits to suppliers in China and trade fairs such as the Canton Fair in Guangzhou.

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Currently, Goliath's products are manufactured in China, with materials sourced globally – including Australian merino wool and zips from Japanese brand YKK. "Some of our products are made in the same factories as established outdoor brands," added Wong.

Operating without physical retail or a large team helps keep costs down. "We're fully online and it's just the two of us, so we can reinvest more into materials and construction rather than overheads or expensive campaigns," he said.

TESTING GEAR IN THE REAL WORLD



While Goliath's branding leans lifestyle-oriented, Wong insists the products are designed with real technical performance in mind. The brand's shell jackets are rated at 20,000mm waterproofing and 20,000g/m²/24h breathability, placing them within a performance tier typically occupied by significantly more expensive jackets. That said, ratings alone don't tell the full story – seam construction, membrane technology and long-term durability are often what separate premium brands from newer entrants.

For its base layers, Wong says Goliath uses 100 per cent Australian merino wool rather than blends. Many established brands mix merino with synthetics to improve durability and drying speed – a trade-off some consumers may prefer – but Wong argues that pure, fine-micron merino is generally softer and considered more premium.

We always prioritise function first. I don't want Goliath to become a status symbol.

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As a newcomer, Wong believes one of Goliath's biggest advantages is speed. "Larger brands often have very long feedback cycles," he said. "When we posted our shell jacket samples online, people pointed out that our embroidered logo could let water seep through, so we quickly added waterproof backing. Someone else suggested a fleece-lined chin guard for comfort, and we implemented that too."

The founders have also tested the products personally. Su brought an early Stormshield Shell sample to Japan's Kamikochi, along with a backup jacket from another brand in case it failed.

During a six-hour downpour on the descent, her partner – who was wearing a jacket from a well-known outdoor brand – ended up soaked through. Because the Goliath sample was slightly oversized for her, Su passed it to him and switched to her backup jacket instead. "When we got back, he was still dry," she said. "That was when we realised the jacket genuinely worked."

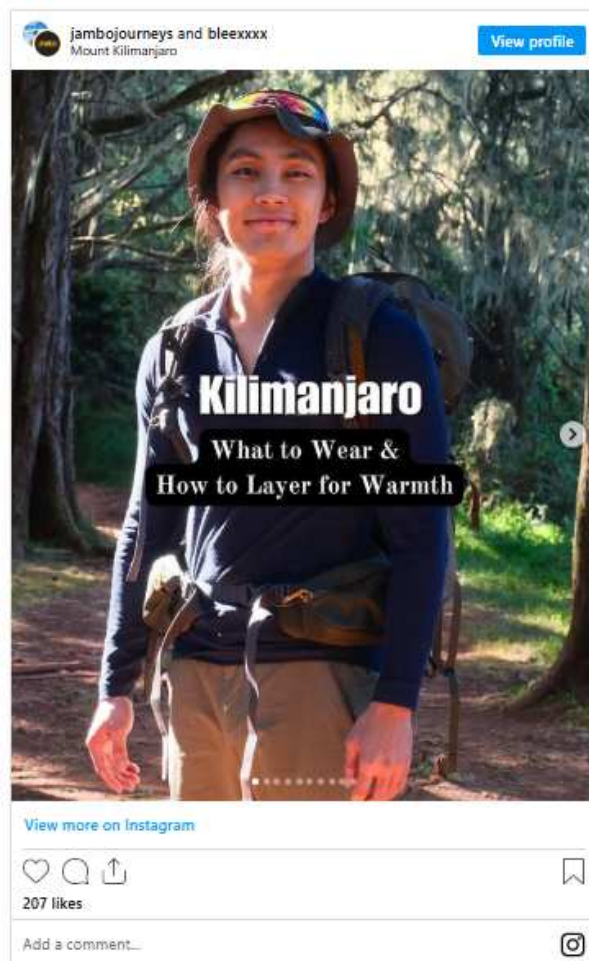


Wong wore the brand's shell, pants and merino layers while climbing Chulu Far East, a 6,059m Himalayan mountain, during monsoon season and was pleased with their performance. Goliath's products have since been tested further by their contacts in the mountaineering community – including on expeditions to Kang Yatse II in the Indian Himalayas and Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

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Bryan Lee, co-founder of Singapore travel company Jambo Journeys, wore Goliath's Stormshield shell during a Kilimanjaro climb. In an Instagram post after the expedition, he wrote that while he "wasn't able to test the waterproofness" of the jacket, it "protected me well against brutal winds."

FUNCTION FIRST, FASHION SECOND

Like many outdoor labels today, Goliath sits within a broader shift where technical apparel increasingly crosses over into daily wear. Brands like Arc'teryx, once associated mainly with alpine sports, have become fashion signifiers embraced by the gorpcore crowd.

Su says versatility is something Goliath consciously considers when designing products. "We wanted people to be able to wear our products outside of hiking too." Encouragingly, some of Goliath's products have found audiences beyond traditional hiking circles. Its water-resistant pants, for instance, are now worn by Outward Bound Singapore instructors, boulderers and even dancers.

Still, Wong is cautious about letting fashion dominate the brand's direction. "We get requests all the time for different colours, even very neon ones," he said. "But we always prioritise

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function first. I don't want Goliath to become a status symbol. I'd rather people wearing it be associated with genuine adventure."



For now, the founders are intentionally keeping the product range focused. Beyond its shells, fleece jackets, hiking pants and merino layers, Goliath recently launched a lighter Stormshield Ultralight jacket aimed at trail runners and hikers in hot, humid climates like Southeast Asia. They are also exploring colder-weather gear and lifestyle accessories such as bags.

"We've already researched products like hiking poles and beanies," said Wong. "But if we don't think demand is fully there yet, or the product still isn't good enough, we'd rather not launch it."

Su added: "We want to be intentional about what we put out. As an outdoor brand, it's important to think responsibly about production and demand."

That discipline is partly practical too. Minimum order quantities remain expensive, production lead times can stretch up to 80 days, and the brand's bestselling hiking pants were sold out when CNA Lifestyle spoke to the founders.

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For Wong, the response so far speaks for itself. “If people are sceptical, I’d point them to our reviews – you can tell they’re real,” he said. “We’re still learning, but we genuinely believe there’s room for outdoor gear that performs well without being out of reach.”

Wong says both founders are fully reinvesting into the business rather than drawing salaries. He hopes that, eventually, Goliath can grow into something larger than just an outdoor label.

During the pandemic, Wong founded Food for the Homeless Singapore, a ground-up initiative, which provided daily dinner deliveries and other essentials to homeless shelters at a time when they were overcrowded and struggling with limited resources. While running his own initiative, he also supported Bless Community Services and St Vincent Home.

“My goal eventually is for Goliath to reach a stage where we’re stable enough to give back more meaningfully to underserved communities and causes,” he said.

Source: CNA/yy