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When it comes to road trips, this platform claims to overtake Google Maps

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“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do.” – Mark Twain

Deepak Ananth (39) and Vineet Rajan (32) will definitely agree with this sentiment. Avid travellers who have collectively explored over 500,000 km by road, they gave up their corporate careers to start up in the domain close to their hearts.



(From L-R) Deepak Ananth and Vineet Rajan

A year ago, the two friends were on a trip to explore the forts of Maharashtra. Being passionate about travelling, they weren’t satisfied with visiting well-known spots everyone knew about, instead choosing to talk to local people and unearth

new places of interest. The fact that these forts were lost in oblivion because they hadn't been listed on travel websites — and that there had to be more such treasures hidden away in different parts of the country — planted the seed of an idea in their minds.



Laying the groundwork

Discussions on the concept began early last January, and they spent some time deliberating upon the various difficulties road travel throws up, among which the lack of information on clean and accessible toilets, eateries, and other places of interest along highways were a few.

Also Read: These startups are redefining travel experience with cutting-edge technology (<https://yourstory.com/2016/11/travel-startups-2/>)

After 11 months, in November 2016, the duo finally launched ScoutMyTrip, a community-driven road trip planning platform which lets users generate itineraries for their travels. These indicate the locations of petrol stations, hotels, toilets, eateries, and places to visit during the journey as per one's interest. It is also a platform where like-minded travellers can meet and talk about their past journeys and help others plan on the basis of their experiences.

Deepak has over 15 years of experience in the payments industry. He has been the product head at Tata Communications and last worked as the director of petroleum business at VeriFone India Pvt. Ltd.

Vineet,
the other
co-
founder,
was



previously with HP and has also co-founded IndiBlogger, a network for Indian bloggers.

Deepak adds that the product is built from the standpoint of the average traveller. The workflow is designed in such a way that even if you don't usually take road trips, you are taken through all the necessary steps.

So why should people use this platform when Google Maps has already simplified travel to such an extent? Deepak's answer is that while Google Maps, available on most phones, is the go-to platform for routing, road trips are about a lot more than just directions, something their audience understands. "We offer an entire ecosystem around road trips — from hotels to dhabas to other information which is not available on Google Maps. We focused heavily on creating a community that is not easily replicable and which helps other fellow road trippers."

The platform is also working on customer acquisition on multiple levels. It uses traditional digital marketing as well as partnerships with various travel-related partners.

Managing business

The initial investment of around Rs 25 lakh from the two co-founders was concentrated on product development and enhancement.

However, they are now in talks with investors and are looking forward to raising around \$350,000–400,000. "We need funds to invest in technology and also need resources to work for mobile and web platforms. Besides, a lot of money is also required for marketing purposes," says Deepak.

According to the co-founders, the revenue models are multifold. Since it's a community-driven platform, it plans to leverage targeted marketing campaigns for relevant brands. It is also a platform-as-a-service to B2B clients. In future, highway listings will be another revenue source. Affiliate income on hotel bookings, roadside assistance, e-commerce, and vehicle bookings will also generate revenue for the company.

It has finalised revenue and growth-driven partnerships with brands like Oyo Rooms, MylesCars, and ONN Bikes. Deepak believes that mutual co-promotion catering to each other's strengths is going to help all the stakeholders.

“In the last month, we have added 2,000 users on our site and there have been over 600 trips planned on ScoutMyTrip in this time. What is very heartening to note is that we have had an approximate 63 percent rate of return visitors in this short span. We’ve also brought in our first revenues by tying up with brands and building unique experiences for them,” says Deepak.

Product roadmap

According to Deepak, going mobile is next on the priority list. With the growing user base and road trips being planned, ScoutMyTrip will start working towards big data and analytics, which will tie back to the ad network being built in the initial phases.

“In the next 12 months, we plan to roll out our platform as a service model, and hit the American, European, and Australian markets within 24 months,” says Deepak.

Market overview

According to IBEF, the Indian travel market has managed to continue its growth run over the past 10 years. It is predicted that the total addressable travel market in India will be \$40 billion by 2020.

Early last year, HolidayIQ, an online travel website, shared a study and stated that 60 percent of holidayers prefer road travel over trains and flights.


Some of the other platforms focused on road travel in India are EzRoadTrips, Highway Delite, GoRoadTrip, and Easy Roads (<https://yourstory.com/2016/08/easy-roads/>).

Last year, Easy Roads raised an angel round amounting to about \$200,000 from a consortium of investors.

Experts believe that with the growing road connectivity, road travellers will also increase. The travellers will require substantial information about the routes they choose. They believe such platforms will help to increase the efficiency in the travel sector.

Website (<https://scoutmytrip.com/>)

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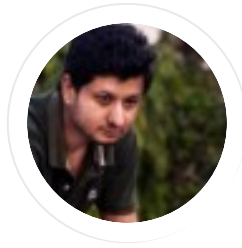
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