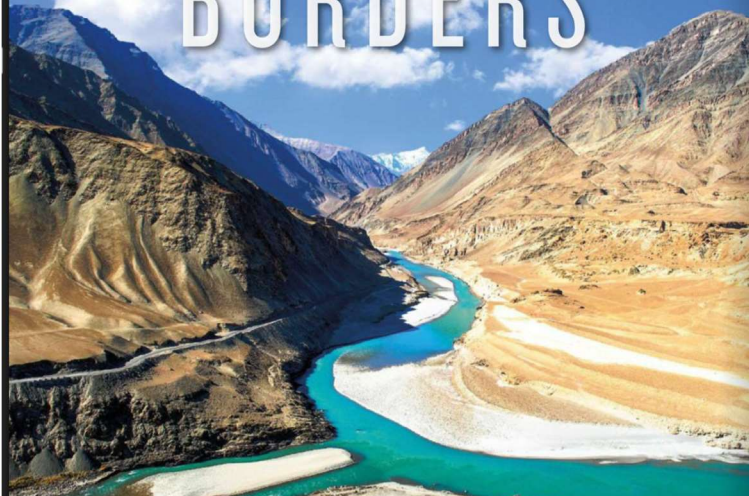


URBANE IDEAS

Entrepreneur and founder of ScoutMyTrip, Deepak Ananth has a plan for road travel... and it doesn't just stop at India's boundaries

WORDS NIDHI TAPARIA

BEYOND BORDERS



Deepak and his partner-in-crime Vineet, are both avid travellers

DEepak ANANTH HAS his father to thank, for his off-the-beaten-track career choice. He helms a start-up that facilitates road travel. "My dad was a travelling sales manager for Hindustan Petroleum. In those days, his car was his office, quite literally. My earliest memory as a child is of being wrapped up in the old Ambassador and waking up in a new city almost every day. So new city/village experiences and the joys of road travel are deeply etched childhood memories."

A beginning
It is this childhood joy that Deepak is hoping to renew among Indians as he along with his co-founder Vineet Rajan set up ScoutMyTrip. A website that helps you navigate road travel on Indian highways – it hopes to enhance the experience that Google provides and offers reviews that even TripAdvisor doesn't! ScoutMyTrip helps with planning a road trip across the country, mapping points of interest, amenities like petrol pumps, restaurants, public loos and even interesting places enroute. It makes suggestions depending on the type of traveller you are and the journey you are attempting.

Start-up guy
Deepak's career so far seems like prep for this start-up role. Be it being the head of business development at payment solutions provider TechProcess Solutions, to heading product management at Tata Communications, to being the director for Verifone's prepaid and petroleum business. All these roles be it sales, tech or product have equipped him well enough to run a start-up. "Post a hard day at work I still found time to explore the country and keep that travel bug alive."

Buddy act
In 2007, buying a Bullet, a cast iron 500cc bike, gave new miles to his passion. It also laid ground for him as he met co-founder Vineet during his travels. The duo set up their own club for like-minded travellers and have become well-known figures in the travel community. "A lot of this meant talking, sharing and giving back to enrich this travel community which didn't have too many online tools then." It is this travel with Vineet that set them off on the idea of ScoutMyTrip. "We wanted to create a free reservoir of information that nobody can map on India's highways which is set up seamlessly with architecturally sound APIs. Online travel is fragmented. Today, even

Google or TripAdvisor don't offer what you can do in little corners and off the highway. I wanted travellers to share their stories of routes, information and advice for free. And I wanted to fund this profitably through marketing tie-ups with consumer brands, crowd funding, and as a next step look at e-commerce – things like where you can rent camping gear for Ladakh, swimming gear for your daughter or even camera rentals for a holiday."

His way or the highway
Deepak has plans beyond just the highways. "Did you know on the highway to Chikmagalur, there are beautiful waterfalls just off Hampi? I want others to discover these beautiful places with ease." ScoutMyTrip.com has already mapped 12,000 such places of interest and facilitated over 1000 trips for many. His targets are steep as he wants to look at 1 lakh trips in the next 6 months and 1 million in 18 months. But Deepak is confident. "In India, road travel is changing courtesy multiple factors: the beautiful highways that the government is building, new age cars and the strong cellular networks that now allow you to be in touch at any point of time. Also, now Indians are keen to make use of long weekends and take short breaks with their own

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Photo: @travelincubator @freesia in Asam as well as Rajasthan

wheels – be it a car or a bike. What's more, the character of each highway is different – the roads of Tamil Nadu are brilliant which you can trust blindly while those of Gujarat can be endless and lonely. It is these quirks that make travel so exciting and yet challenging."

That Eureka moment

The proof that his idea works came when they raised an undisclosed amount in seed funding from co-working space and accelerator Z Nation Lab last year in a year of tough VC love! For Deepak, more than the money, the capital only reaffirmed that they were on the right track. "This signpost of funding late last year helped us push our plans into the fifth gear!" The journey started with a small 'proof of concept' drive when Deepak accompanied avid biker and late Shammii Kapoor's son, Aditya Raj Kapoor on a six-day ride to raise funds for women entrepreneurs

in a tie up with not-for-profit organisation Rang De. "The 1200-kilometre, six-day-long bike ride was from Mumbai to Pusad in Yavatmal district and we raised our target of one lakh via crowd funding." Since then, the partnerships with Kotak Bank, Oyo Rooms and many more have kept the ScoutMyTrip team busy.

Winds of change

The change has been exciting and he found encouragement from family and friends in equal measure. "They were surprised but also supportive having seen how this fuelled passion for travel. They have seen how people call all the time asking for help, advice and even in emergencies given I am an expert on the roads of South India." Even now, while Deepak is taking bloggers and brands on roads less taken, he is still managing to find time for himself. "Passion dies easily, I am

told, when it becomes work. So I ensure that I find time to discover and explore a place by myself, or with friends and family in tow. What people don't see behind the travel and the website is the amount of work that happens behind the scenes – be it tech or managing the nitty gritty."

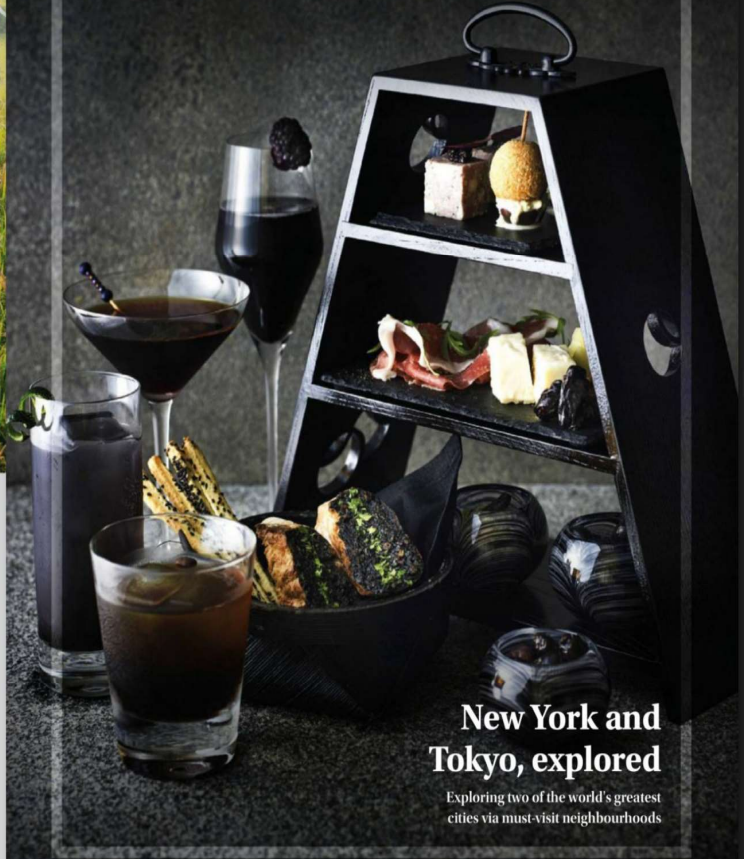
Two's company

Which is why he's happy to have found an able partnership of almost a decade to share the load and the drive with. "When you travel as much as Vineet and I have done, with someone, you know everything about their strengths and weaknesses. We have each other's back no matter where and when." It's this trust that Deepak is hoping the world will place on him as he hopes to charter highways outside the country on his app too.

And like the team at ScoutMyTrip says, it is #AgeSeRight! 🍷

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