

# TakeMeTour's Tour to the Top

By Renée van den Elsen

**H**aving won People's Choice Award at the Echelon Asia Summit in 2015, Digital Winners Asia in 2016, Startup Thailand 2016 and many other prizes, TakeMeTour is no longer a start-up to ignore. The co-founders Taro Amornched, who used to work at Google, and Nope Anukunwithaya, who studied Industrial Engineering, are both still in their twenties. After we encountered Taro at the first NTCCxTech event, we decided we want to learn more about this company. Commerce magazine met with them for an interview at their office within a renovated restaurant near Phaya Thai station. The office holds the middle between a student room and a community center, with the main difference that this community center is filled with guys vigorously coding away on their computer. After we took place on the beanbags on the floor, we started to chat.

## FROM IDEA TO START-UP

TakeMeTour's co-founders Taro and Nope are high school friends. They started this company four years ago with a slightly different concept. Based on their experience of studying abroad and showing friends or family around when they would visit, they noticed the value of a friend giving you a tour. So they set up a large scale matching system that connected Thais travelling abroad with friends studying in that specific country. Less than two years ago, they shifted the concept from outbound to inbound travelers and TakeMeTour in its current form was born. The online platform basically connects international travelers coming to Thailand with 'local experts' who will show them around for a day excursion. It is now the largest online marketplace for local tours in Thailand.

"We didn't want to lose the idea of a friend showing around his area, but we also realized the limitations of the outbound concept" Nope states. "Back then Thais were not as comfortable with making online purchases yet, so we decided to focus on international travelers," he adds. The model responds to the global trend in travelling: "People are looking for authentic, local and original experiences. The days of big tour busses and pre-set programs are over" as Nope words it. Like most online platforms, TakeMeTour works with a commission-based model: of every tour booked they earn a small booking fee, borne by the traveler.

## FINDING INVESTORS

The road to finding investors hasn't been an easy one for them. They got turned down multiple times, but they emphasize the value of rejection: "the feedback you get from those unfruitful meetings is very important and enabled us to improve a lot on our business model", Nope says. "However, rejection doesn't necessarily mean that your idea is bad. Stay true to your idea, but be open to adjustments", Taro adds as a free advice to those still struggling to find investors. "Our investors (500 TukTuks, Dtac Accelerate and Ittipat Peeradechapan (CEO of TaoKaeNoi ed.) understood the evolution the travel industry is subjected to, they saw potential in our 'sharing economy' based platform." "Also, the fact that tourism is one of the biggest industries in Thailand kind of helped", Taro jokingly adds. The advantage of the Thai market is obvious, but still a lot of other companies don't receive any funding. What makes them stand out? "We managed to find investors not just because we had a good idea. Loads of people have good ideas, but it's the execution that counts. I think the quality of our team, already having a finished and functioning product to present, and to some extent, our ability to deliver an evincive pitch is what convinced the investors to take the leap."





As starting a business can be really tough, Nope and Taro also commented on the intangible support they receive from their investors, which they describe as being mentors to them. “Sometimes we just need a push, some encouraging words or verification that we’re still on the right track. Luckily our investors understand that need.”

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#### TAKEMETOUR’S TEAM

Not counting the thousands of local experts, TakeMeTour’s team consists of seven people with an average age of 26. Twenty-six. Just let that sink in for a minute. You’re back? OK, we continue.

Taro mentions that they are eagerly looking to expand their team: “I know Thailand sits on a big pool of talent, it’s just hard to find”, “and we are very picky” Nope adds. Taro obtained a master degree in Robotics and previously worked for Google, Nope studied Industrial Engineering and worked for a Japanese company. It took time to convince their parents that quitting their jobs to start

TakeMeTour was the right step to make. Nope clarifies: “My father is a traditional man, it is hard to explain to him that we actually make money. We just never touch it, because everything happens online.” As does their marketing: “Facebook and Google helps us find our customers directly”, says the former Google employee.

#### FUTURE

Currently, priority is to improve the insurance policy on both the traveler’s and tour guides’ sides. Besides this, TakeMeTour is partnering up with a company in Japan, bringing the outbound concept back by sending Thai travelers to Japan. In the not-so-near-future, TakeMeTour wants to explore other revenue streams next to the commission-based model, expand to different markets in the region and see if they can add a third language, like Chinese, to their product. “We don’t want to sound smart, but there is a need to educate the market first before we can really expand. The opportunities are plentiful, but we might be a bit too early”, Nope claims.

“Unlike me” Taro says, who then hastily takes off to catch his flight to meet up with a partner in Singapore.