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Why start up in Singapore? French CEO of travel website explains

In the fifth part of a special series looking at Singapore's burgeoning start-up scene, Frenchman Guillaume Picard explains why he chose Singapore as the base for his start-up.

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SINGAPORE: Travel website eOasia is run by an international team hailing from countries like France, Poland and Indonesia. But when its CEO, Frenchman Guillaume Picard, wanted to find a base for the start-up, which targets the South-east Asian market, he decided Singapore was the best bet.

“My business partners were already based in Singapore, so the idea was that it’s easier to set up here,” said Mr Picard. “It’s a great location, because it’s really the centre of South-east Asia, and since we travel a lot, location is important for us.”



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“It’s quite easy to set up a company in Singapore,” he added.

The website, which offers local activity tours directly from activity operators, was officially set up in 2013. It has its core team based in Singapore.

Initially, Mr Picard said he had considered Hong Kong or Bangkok as a base for his company. But Singapore’s strategic location, good infrastructure and the ease of getting administrative tasks done tipped the balance in its favour.

“There are also a lot of events in Singapore for the travel industry, and overall the government is really helpful for start-ups in Singapore,” he added. “They really push businesses to invest in startups, so it’s easier to raise money in Singapore compared to other Southeast Asian cities.”

He added that being part of a start-up incubator like Mediapreneur also gave his company a leg-up. Mediapreneur, which is Mediacorp’s incubator programme, provides start-ups like eOasia with seed funding, a working space, mentoring, networking opportunities and attractive media packages to speed up their growth and development.

Since he joined the programme last July, he said it has been an “amazing experience”. “Since we travel and meet all our partners on site, we have a lot of travel stories to share. And Mediacorp is always looking to get good content. So there’s good synergy between Mediacorp and eOasia. In exchange for good travel content, we get good exposure.”

ASIA AN EMERGING MARKET

To Mr Picard, Asia is an emerging market for the tour and activities industry. He explained that his team chose to focus on Southeast Asia because he saw a gap for websites like his in the market.

“It has been done in Europe, it has been done in the US, but while there are a few websites in Asia doing this, what they had on offer wasn’t as strong or as curated,” he said. “Nowadays travelers are looking more and more at unique experiences. That’s where eOasia comes in.”

He explained that eOasia works directly with the activity providers in the 12 countries they are in, and aggregates all the activities into one website. He added that because they cut out the middleman, they can offer their customers a best price guarantee without compromising on the quality of the services provided.

“A lot of travelers book their activities when they arrive, but they have no guarantee that the activities they book are the best operators,” he said. “For example, there are 15 or 20 different



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operators offering white-water rafting in Bali, so how would the traveler choose? So we come to Bali, we meet all the operators and we select the operator we want to work with.”

He added that eOasia has tried to make the booking process for these activities as simple as possible – much like booking a hotel room through a website. Currently, the company offers more than 2,500 activities on its website.

Mr Picard and his team has also found that their extensive experience living in and travelling around Southeast Asia stood them in good stead when it came to running their business. He said eOasia’s team knows the region very well, and as for himself, he has spent two full years travelling around Southeast Asia, and has lived in Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Singapore.

His top travel activity for those heading to Singapore? “Try the indoor skydiving at Sentosa. There aren’t many places you can do that in the world, and even the kids can do it!”

eOasia is being supported by Mediacorp's incubator programme, the Mediapreneur (<http://www16.mediacorp.sg/themediapreneur/>).

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/business/why-start-up-in-singapore/2713778.html>