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OWNRIDES is an online driver booking platform for tourists where with a few simple steps, tourists can find and book a good private driver who drives safely, speaks the same language, and charges a fair price.

Founded in May 2017 by a team of experienced entrepreneurs Steve Sng and Benson Lu, the travel startup has since been growing rapidly with over 3500 bookings made to date.

We find out more from CEO and Co-founder Steve Sng on how OWNRIDES started and the challenges they have faced.

What inspired you to start OWNRIDES?

After my previous startup LoveByte was acquired by migme, I travelled around Asia and used Airbnb often.

I was inspired by how it created a whole new economy by enabling locals to share their houses with travellers and I thought we could do the same for tours too.

After relocating to Taiwan I discovered there are many places that are not easily accessible by public transportation, so we decided to start something that helps tourists like myself travel around Taiwan with local drivers.

Ultimately, OWNRIDES will become an online marketplace for tours provided by locals.

What were some of the biggest challenges that you faced?

Starting up in Taiwan as a foreigner is a big challenge.

I get threats from competitors because they know I am a foreigner.

I had no personal network to help me and had to start all over again to connect with investors, partners and startup community here.

It also doesn't help that most were not optimistic about their own country's tourism industry. Hence, growth was very slow in the beginning.

What was the most memorable/unforgettable experience?

Meeting a customer who turned out to be the founding member of H.I.S. Travel.

I was very surprised that he chose our service instead of his own company's or the other travel agencies' in Taiwan.

At the same time, I became more convinced that we are headed in the right direction that increasingly more people are preferring DIY travel over packaged tour.

Being a serial entrepreneur who have successfully exited a startup, could you share some of the biggest lessons you've learnt throughout your journey?

I learnt a lot throughout my entrepreneurial journey, from LoveByte to migme to Ownrides currently.

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With LoveByte, I learnt that having a good mentor helps a young entrepreneur like myself avoid many pitfalls.

With migme, I learnt that caring deeply about the problem you are solving for your users or customers beats worrying about what your competitors are doing.

With Ownrides, I learnt that helping each other become better in whatever we are doing or want to do is as important as building and growing the company.

Who is a role model that you look up to and really admire?

I always admire Bill Gates. He is a very competitive and sometimes ruthless person but he shows us that geeks can become titans in the business world too.

His leadership brought victory to Microsoft during the Operating System war and later the browser war, and maintained market dominance until antitrust cases forced him to step down.

If you could give your younger self some advice, or to any other aspiring entrepreneurs, what would it be?

Get out of Singapore, even for a few months, and this will open up a whole new world of opportunities to you.

You will discover a lot of opportunities and new ideas that you will never have in Singapore.

I regret not doing an overseas exchange while studying in Singapore Management University despite the many overseas exchange opportunities provided.

At that time, I was worried about the fee, but now I would just take the loan and go for it.

What are your future plans?

I'm 100% focused on OWNRIDES now.

I want to expand it to more countries in Asia and grow it into a bigger marketplace for tours provided by locals.

Most tours are still not bookable online while those provided by Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) are "one-size-fits-all" packages that are not personalized and not what today's tourists want.

We believe local drivers can provide better, and Ownrides will enable them to create and list their own unique tours for tourists to book.

Even better, tourists can customize each of the listed tours and have a price quoted to them instantly.

In doing so, we will create a whole new economy that provides an income to thousands of locals.