

Publication: Phnom Penh Post Online

Date: 19 March 2025

Headline: “Tinder of aeroplanes” makes inroads in Asia, hopes to get travellers to fill idle time on flights

“Tinder of aeroplanes” makes inroads in Asia, hopes to get travellers to fill idle time on flights



SINGAPORE – A new mobile app that recently made inroads into Asia, including Singapore, hopes to get flight passengers to chat with one another during their idle time in the air.

Wingle, a third-party in-flight messaging app, allows users to talk to one another without an internet connection. Users need only turn on Wi-Fi and Bluetooth on their phones to start messaging fellow passengers aboard a flight.

On the app, users can also book airport lounges, among other features.

Wingle, a portmanteau of “wing” and “mingle”, is available in English and Spanish, with more languages to follow.

Wingle’s co-founder Inigo Merino said: “Everyone has a Hollywood dream of meeting someone on a plane and getting a date.”

But forging romantic connections is not the only objective of the app, which has been billed by some as the “Tinder of aeroplanes”.

“The purpose of the chat is up to the user. It can have a social perspective, a romantic perspective or even a networking perspective,” Mr Merino told The Straits Times in February, when he was in Singapore for the Aviation Festival Asia, an aviation technology conference.

Publication: Phnom Penh Post Online

Date: 19 March 2025

Headline: “Tinder of aeroplanes” makes inroads in Asia, hopes to get travellers to fill idle time on flights

Wingle’s Spaniard creators, Mr Merino and Mr Pol Quintana, both 30, first discussed the idea of an in-flight messaging app in 2020 when they met in Dubai, where they were based for work.

Mr Merino was in the travel and hospitality industry, while Mr Quintana was in the technology field.

Both frequent travellers for work, the pair saw an opportunity for passengers to make meaningful connections during their spare time on flights.

Mr Merino said: “I looked around and saw that there were so many people like me, travelling for work alone, and I didn’t know any of them.

“Wingle would give me the chance to talk to the person sitting five rows behind me, so I’m not just limited to those who sit next to me.”

He likened flights to “one of the few moments in our lives that are like parentheses”, without interruptions or notifications, allowing passengers to engage in conversation with others.

It was only in March 2023 that the pair got down to exploring the potential of such an app. They completed a prototype of it at the end of 2023.

They left their jobs early in 2024 and dedicated their time to developing Wingle, which was launched in Europe in July 2024.

The app was made available globally, including in Singapore, in January and has more than 20,000 active users, Mr Merino said.

Eighty per cent of its users are European. At present, Asian users form less than 10 per cent of its user base.

The app’s income streams come from commissions from its various booking services, including for luggage storage and lounges.

There are more than 800 airport lounges available for booking on the app, said Mr Merino, whose start-up is based in Spain. These include the Plaza Premium and Sats Premier lounges at Changi Airport, based on ST’s checks on the app.

To use Wingle, users must set up a profile with their name, age, gender, profile picture and home airport information, and fill in a personality diagram. This diagram comprises six characteristics, including one’s creativity and sociability.

After their account is created, users have to select their flight from a list of flights departing from an airport.

Users can access the chat function only once the plane takes off.

To safeguard the privacy of users, they can see only each other’s name, age and personality diagram. The profile picture of a user is hidden and will be revealed only if the user allows it.

Initials of names are accepted by the app, based on ST’s checks.

Publication: Phnom Penh Post Online

Date: 19 March 2025

Headline: “Tinder of aeroplanes” makes inroads in Asia, hopes to get travellers to fill idle time on flights

Users of the app must be at least 18 years old. The founders are looking into rolling out more verification steps for users to confirm their age, said Mr Merino.

Conversations between users are deleted at the end of a flight. “You have your flight to decide whether or not you want to continue chatting with that person,” Mr Merino said, noting that this adds a layer of gamification and excitement for users.

However, the element of anonymity that the app provides could give rise to concerns.

Ms Joyce Lee, a senior associate for intellectual property at law firm Withers KhattarWong, said platforms that grant an element of anonymity may embolden harmful behaviour such as trolling, harassment, or the spread of misinformation or harmful content.

“Providers of such platforms should educate users on potential risks and encourage responsible behaviour while using the service,” she said, adding that users should be able to easily report abuse or block harmful interactions.

On the reception such an app may receive in Asia, Singapore Management University associate professor of marketing Hannah Chang said that in many Asian contexts, people tend to be more reserved when meeting strangers face-to-face, but they may feel more comfortable interacting online.

“In such context, this app might help promote social interaction, especially if there’s an element of privacy or anonymity.”

Mr Maximilian Tay, 27, who travels by air about four times a year, said the idea of using an app that connects him with strangers nearby feels a bit invasive.

“The fact that (users) are in close proximity might make interactions feel more obligatory or awkward. Unlike a dating app, where users exist in a digital space, this app makes interactions feel very immediate,” the Singaporean lawyer added.

“That said, I can see how this app would appeal to travellers who enjoy meeting new people, especially in enclosed spaces like an aircraft or a lounge.”

Hungarian user Fanni Fulop, 26, a coordinator in a real estate company, used the app once in December 2024 on a Ryanair flight from Rome in Italy to Budapest in Hungary. She learnt about the app from an advertisement on a shuttle bus in Italy.

She chatted with a fellow passenger on that flight about their reasons for travelling and the places they intended to visit.

As she was unaware that their conversation would be deleted once the flight landed, she did not manage to keep in touch with the other passenger. “It’s definitely entertaining to text a stranger and get to know them,” she said.

Mr Alvin Chan, manager of implementation services at aviation consulting firm Alton Aviation Consultancy, said whether the app takes off depends on how well it can be integrated with the rest of the passenger journey and combine key travel needs onto one platform.

“Applications such as Wingle will need to demonstrate an enhanced user experience as well as better value proposition, in order to increase adoption.”

Publication: Phnom Penh Post Online

Date: 19 March 2025

Headline: “Tinder of aeroplanes” makes inroads in Asia, hopes to get travellers to fill idle time on flights

Mr Merino told ST that Wingle’s long-term goal is to be a one-stop shop for all things related to air travel.

Wingle is not the first in-flight messaging initiative. Airlines, including Air New Zealand and American Airlines, have allowed passengers to message fellow travellers in other seats via their in-flight entertainment systems.

In 2012, KLM, the national carrier of the Netherlands, launched Meet and Seat, a social networking function allowing passengers to get to know other travellers on a flight after linking their Facebook or LinkedIn profile to their flight.

The aim was to allow travellers to meet others with the same background or interests.