

Foodsites that combine experience of travel and food are attracting investors, customers

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If you're travelling and yearning for some home-cooked food, you might want to check out MealTango.com. It's a website that introduces travelers to unique dining experiences with locals in farms, villages and homes in various parts of the globe. If you're on a train, you could log on to RailYatri.in or TravelKhana.com to get your favourite dish delivered at your next stop.

In Hyderabad, Detours India offers tourists personalised culinary experiences, apart from organising food tours. Companies that combine the experience of travel and food are attracting investors and customers and creating niches for themselves in a growing market. Consulting firm Technopak Advisors estimates the unorganised food services market will grow to \$58 billion by 2020 from \$34 billion in 2013.

Pune-based MealTango, launched in August 2013 by Saket Khanna and his wife Neeta Valecha, started off as an in-home dining platform for food lovers seeking authentic home-cooked meals. It has now built up a network of 150 hosts on its site in 35 cities across 13 countries. This month, it will launch MealTango Light, which offers takeaway home cooked meals.

The takeaway product is one way to scale up the network of hosts that Meal-Tango has created and is an option for those who many not always have the time or inclination to provide in-home dining, said Vaibhav Domkundwar, an angel investor in MealTango and founder of Better Capital, his personal investment firm that funds early stage technology-enabled companies across sectors.

MealTango raised \$110,000, or Rs 66 lakh, in angel money from a clutch of investors including Shraavan Shroff of Venture Nursery, Kaushal Aggarwal of Avendus Partners, Sanjay Jindal formerly at Priceline. com, and Domkundwar. Detours India, which offers theme based, personalised culinary and cultural experiences to tourists in Hyderabad, will extend its offerings across India starting February. It is doing this by taking a group of 10 international tourists on an 11-day food tour across Ahmedabad, Amritsar, Delhi, Kolkata and Hyderabad.

"Adventurous travelers are passionate about food. Getting an understanding of the country, its culture, daily habits through food is exciting," said Jayanti Rajagopalan, 42, founder of Detours India. Portals that cater to the requirements of railway travelers in the country have also attracted investors.

Food services constitute a large chunk of the business for RailYatri.in, which received Rs 3 crore from Blume Ventures. The share of food services is "almost 70% of its overall topline," said Manish Rathi, co-founder and CEO of RailYatri, unwilling to disclose further financial details. It also gets revenue from partnering with taxi services.

Currently 500-600 customers order food through RailYatri daily, he said. The company has tied up with 300-400 restaurants across 220 stations and allows rail travelers to order even two-three hours before their delivery destinations. "Food is an integral part of travel. We have created a platform where we allow individual food joints to provide food to rail travelers by listing their services," Rathi said.

The company was seeded by Silicon Valley-based angel investment firm Ujama Ventures. RailYatri also offers comprehensive information on trains, time-tables and amenities via mobile applications

and the web. "Food and travel are daily consumer needs. Everything else is more sporadic. So, with even half the population trending to a smartphone in 8-10 years, this becomes the second-largest market in the world — even if purchasing power is a fraction of some of the western markets," said Karthik Reddy, managing partner of Blume Ventures.