

## FRANCE'S BLABLACAR DRIVES INTO INDIA

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NEW DELHI: French start-up BlaBlaCar, which has become the world's largest long-distance ride-sharing community on the back of deteriorating public transport systems across the world, is launching in India on Wednesday. Backed by European and US venture capital firms, including Index Ventures and Accel Partners, BlaBlaCar will connect car owners and co-travellers to travel together on city-to-city journeys and share the cost of the journey. For starters, BlaBlaCar (a play on in-car babble between driver and passengers) plans to cash in on the 3.5 lakh people visiting the Jaipur Literature Fest slated to be held between January 21 and 25.



### TRAVELLING TOGETHER

➤ Backed by European & US VCs, BlaBlaCar connects car owners & co-travellers for inter-city trips with costs shared

➤ It has already become the world's largest long-distance ride-sharing community on back of inadequate public transport systems

➤ India is the 14th country & only Asian nation to be part of the BlaBlaCar network, with Brazil next on the co's radar

For instance, a person driving from Delhi to Jaipur with empty seats can post that fact on BlaBlaCar's website after checking in through his Facebook profile. Others travelling to Jaipur can hook up with him and travel together. "A trip like that would cost around Rs 700 per person," says Raghav Gupta, country manager India with BlaBlaCar. "The company controls the rates in such a way that the car owner/driver cannot earn a profit. The earnings may just cover the fuel costs. This will keep commercial players including taxi operators at bay."

Last year, Index Ventures and Accel Partners pumped \$100 million into BlaBlaCar, making it one of the largest venture investments in a French start-up. India is the 14th country and the only Asian nation to become a member of the International BlaBlaCar community. Next on the company's radar is Brazil and Mexico. "India could become a bigger market than Europe since car-ownership is rising quickly and the country does not have a well-developed public transport system connecting cities," says Nicolas Brusson co-founder and COO of BlaBlaCar.

As a student at Insead Business School in France, Brusson had teamed up with fellow student Frederic Mazzella and pooled in around \$12,000 each to start the company. "In the beginning, we offered intra-city as well inter-city rides. But later we realized that people were using the inter-city option more. If you have Rs 3,000 at stake from an inter-city ride as compared to Rs 500 from an intra-city ride, it's more likely that you will wait for your passengers even if they are late by 20 minutes," says Brusson.

BlaBlaCar will not charge a fee from drivers in India until the model reaches a critical mass. In markets such as France and Spain, it has already monetized the business. "We want to target the middle class, upper-middle class and students. Cities that don't have great connectivity such as Ambala and Meerut might see good traction to start with," says Gupta.

However, BlaBlaCar is not the first ride-sharing start-up here. In November last year, German start-up incubator Rocket Internet-backed Tripda, a ride-sharing marketplace, entered India.