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## A Founder's Story: Adding Value

There are so many beautiful things in this world. And I truly believe that there is only one way to get the most out of it: by sharing them.

**Coming from a small farming village in the south of the Netherlands and studying in a slightly bigger city close by, I didn't exactly have the feeling that I've seen it all. While I was always very interested in Sociology and the differences between cultures (mainly driven by many conversations with my best friend Annes, who is from Bosnia), it was only in my student years that I actually started wanting to experience this myself. My main inspiration was without any doubt Jared Diamond's Guns, Germs & Steel. Explaining his theory about why welfare is so unequally spread across the globe. I wanted to find out more about it, experiencing life in different parts of the world. And what better place to start than a country where life is known to be beautifully different from any other: India. Together with my wife Inge we started off in New Delhi for a journey of 6 months through Asia.**

Completely unprepared, we assumed that it would be warm in February! So only with summer clothes in the backpacks, we arrived in a freezing Delhi in the middle of the night. Without heating, hot water or decent blankets in our hostel we immediately knew this wasn't going to be easy. Though Delhi is a beautiful city that really captured our hearts, it has been a love-hate relationship and it definitely started with hate. In a harsh environment, our naivety was punished by being ripped off by rickshaw drivers, pressured to book tours we didn't want and barely avoiding a robbery by turning away at the right moment. After fake policemen tried to let us book train tickets at a fake counter, we were fed up with it. **That's when life showed us there's sun after the rain. By accident we stumbled upon a guy offering to take us out of Delhi and into Rajasthan. Saying yes was one of the best decisions in my life.** Why? Because this is how we met RP. A small and friendly man from Punjab with an impressive black beard and always wearing his turban (being a Sikh). Officially a private driver, he definitely became our first true local guide! He showed us the real beauty of New Delhi, teaching us how to behave and helping us to understand that people, who we felt were invading our (huge) personal space, just wanted to be friendly. In the two weeks he guided us around Rajasthan, RP let us experience India like a local. We met with his friends and spent great evenings together, eating delicious food and chatting about life in India. He also invited us to a Sikh [langar](#), showing us the beauty of it: a place where everybody, regardless of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity, is offered a free meal.

However, there is also a sad part of the story. We soon found out that RP had a lot of trouble making a living. He had to leave his family for months in a row to earn some money. While we met RP via one of his friends and let him guide us, he normally had to do standard tours for local agencies where he was paid almost nothing. When I told him I was working as an online marketer, he immediately replied with the question: "Can you set up a website in Europe to send guests to me directly?" He loved to offer tours the way he offered one to us: completely personalized for his guests and cutting out intermediaries to allow him a fair income . **The idea of Withlocals was born!**

What happened during that journey changed my life forever. I finally started to understand the beauty of other cultures, how much I can learn from them and how different visions can enrich someone's life. Something that — I'm sure about it — that adds value to everybody's life and paves the way for a more accepting society. On the other hand with all the bad things we saw, I also started realising how lucky I had been growing up in an environment with so many opportunities. For some time I even felt guilty because of this. Fair or not, **since that travel my goal has been set: to contribute to a more fair world, using the opportunities that I get in order to enable people around the world to have equal chances for building the lives they want. As I truly believe that only by sharing opportunities you can create a better world for others, but definitely also for yourself.**

### **Add value. Share opportunities. Multiply happiness.**

With this in mind, a few years later my brother Marijn and I were both contemplating our careers and looking for ways to add more meaning to them. We wanted to build a company that would actually add true value and founded according to a core principle, of making the world a better place. How? The answer was simple. With the rise of the P2P marketplaces and the Sharing Economy we decided to poke up the fire again. After Marijn had his own local experience during his honeymoon in Sri Lanka, he took the idea to the next level and together we set up a new company named Withlocals.

Back to the present, now. Something really beautiful is happening with an increasingly growing community of enthusiastic people spreading the Withlocals concept around the world. Why? To enable more people to earn an income with something they are passionate about. And, maybe even more importantly, adding value by connecting people and cultures!

Willem

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#### ABOUT WITHLOCALS

Withlocals is a Dutch scale-up marketplace that connects tens of thousands of travelers each month. Our verified and well-trained local hosts offer personalized private tours and activities in more than 50 cities across Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Our vision is to end mass tourism and replace it with personalized traveling at scale. We break down the barriers that separate locals and travelers. We let locals earn their fair share with their passions and the love for their

cities. While at the same time creating authentic travel experiences for travelers. This is our way to improve the quality of living in cities and brighten up the world.

[www.withlocals.com](http://www.withlocals.com)

### **How it all started**

The idea of the company originated when founder Willem Maas was traveling in India. After some disappointing experiences, Willem met an amazing guide who showed him the true colours and wonders of India. When he found out Willem was working in online marketing, he asked if he could set up a website which would send guests directly to him, so he and his family would be the one profiting. That's exactly what Willem did in 2013 when he founded Withlocals.

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Withlocals