

2 Indian start-ups win grants at Booking.com accelerator programme

Tourism start-up GHE wins €4 lakh, Sakha Consulting €3.25 lakh

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A mission to electrify Himalayan villages using solar energy and empowering them through tourism is what led to Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE), an Indian tourism start-up, win a €4-lakh grant. This was the highest grant awarded at Booking Booster 2018, online travel aggregator Booking.com's accelerator programme.

Another Indian start-up — Sakha Consulting Wings: Women on Wheels — came in second by winning a grant of €3.25 lakh, with its motto to provide “non-traditional livelihood with dignity to women. In all, 10 start-ups from six different countries were awarded grants on Thursday.

“In 2014, we used solar micro grid to electrify Sumda Chenmo, a 1,000-year-old village in Markha Valley of Ladakh, in just two days. We electrified 15 houses, with about 150 people, and then we knew we were doing meaningful work,” Jaideep Bansal, energy access leader at GHE, said.

The company would use the grant to acquire customers, expand operations to Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh among other cities, and across foreign locales such as Nepal and Indonesia. GHE organises expeditions to provide clean energy and digital education access to remote mountain communities of Himalayas, and helping to put them on the map for future travelers to

explore. “This grant will empower us to conduct 160 impact expeditions with 2,500 tourists, bringing electricity to one lakh villagers and in the process offsetting 9,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions,” Bansal added.

GHE conducts expeditions under which volunteers help in providing solar power to electrify off-the-grid mountain side villages.

Taxi aggregator

Sakha Consulting, a New Delhi-based taxi aggregator whose cabs are driven only by woman for women passengers, would use the grant to scale up capacity and improve operational efficiencies.

“Over the next two years, this funding will enable us to provide livelihoods in transport to more than 1,000 resource-poor women, who will be able to earn collectively over €2 million and provide 1.1 million safe rides to women across India,” Meenu Vadera, founder at Sakha Consulting said, adding that the firm had helped more than 1,500 women become employable, of them about 650 are currently working as chauffeurs.

“We really believe that travel can change the world. We see that travel has the opportunity to connect people and basically change perspectives of people, and have an enormous impact on community,” Gillian Tans, President and CEO of Booking.com.

This year, Booking.com has committed to invest €4 million in sustainable tourism, she added.

The writer is in Amsterdam at the invitation of Booking.com



Jaideep Bansal (right), energy access leader at Global Himalayan Expedition, receiving the grant at the Booking.com event in Amsterdam