

Spotlight on...Travel Entrepreneur

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In-depth interviews with travel industry insiders

As we sit sipping chilled white wine in the Connaught Bar, Mayfair, I can't help feeling a little out of place; this is a five star hotel, whereas my outfit is distinctly budget. The kind-faced man in front of me, however, is looking remarkably comfortable and alert, despite the fact he's been on a whistle-stop business trip to London and is due to fly back to India in the morning. I suppose businessmen don't have time for frivolous things like jetlag.

Parik Laxminaryaran is the co-founder and MD of Enchanting-Travels, a multinational travel company providing tailor-made tours based on truly unique experiences and – a My Destination favourite – local knowledge. I'm keen to learn more about Parik's passion for travel, and motivations for embarking upon such an ambitious project.

India is Parik's home; he knows the best local haunts and off-the-beaten track destinations, yet it was seeing his country through the eyes of a friend from business school that inspired him to launch Enchanting-Travels. 'On our trip, I noticed a key difference between our travel experience and his pre-conceived ideas of what India would be like. It was then I decided that Enchanting-Travels would reveal India to the world by providing an authentic insight.'



Parik in Masai Mara, Kenya

[Enchanting-India](#) launched in 2004, and the company has since expanded to cover Africa, South America and Asia, each with a designated team on the ground. Parik frequently visits the global offices and destinations, which can't be easy with a wife and two children to take care of.

'Entrepreneurship is a double-edged knife. I can never switch off from thinking about my business, but I also have the freedom to make choices independently, without having to answer to anyone else. My family time is precious to me and we spend two months a year exploring a remote part of the world, which is hugely enjoyable, as long as I have internet access to keep my eye on things!' He pauses, smiling. 'My wife Vineeta is a travel nut too and so are the kids; we've all got the travel bug and the kids' passport pages are filling up rather rapidly.'

It's clear from the way his face lights up when he describes his lifestyle that his is a business with firm foundations on a real passion: travelling. His 'travel junkie' parents ensured that he grew up with his eyes open to the world. 'My first real memory is of a family holiday to Kanha National Park when I was seven. We were on an elephant safari, yet were lucky enough to spot two wild tigers from the safety of the elephant's back. My younger brother's cap fell to the ground next to an angry tigress, and we witnessed the elephants and tigers trying to assert their supremacy on the path. That was a surreal experience, etched in my mind forever.'



Wine in Masai Mara, Kenya

Today, Parik focuses on creating these unique (but perhaps not quite so dangerous) experiences for his customers. Recently one of his teams in India went out of their way to help trace the roots of a guest's great grandfather, who served in the British Army in a remote part of India. He recalls, 'We contacted a local government office and a village church to trace the details of his burial place, and the team took genuine pride in making this discovery for our guest.'

It sounds like Enchanting-Travels make some customers' dreams come true. I ask Parik what would be his dream destination for the perfect holiday. He ponders for a moment.

'Africa. I love the wildlife, the sense of freedom you get in the vast, remote areas. For me, an ideal holiday includes a sense of being cut off from civilisation; you don't have to go very far in Africa for that feeling!'

Back to reality, and I'm wondering, is there such thing as a typical day in the life of Parik?

'If I'm not hopping on a long-haul flight to Argentina, I usually start my day by dropping my incredibly curious 5-year-old off at school, then I'm on my phone to check how much interest and how many bookings we've had overnight. Then, my day is filled with meetings, mainly focused on the company's growth, and figuring out ways to connect our diverse team of 180 people from 18 nationalities spread across seven countries.'



Parik off-duty

It's clear that Parik is a hands on managing director, although he claims that in ten years' time, he'd like to see himself in a more advisory role, allowing him more time for his hobbies, which include tennis and exploring nature. What would he say to someone with aspirations to follow in his footsteps and start a successful travel company?

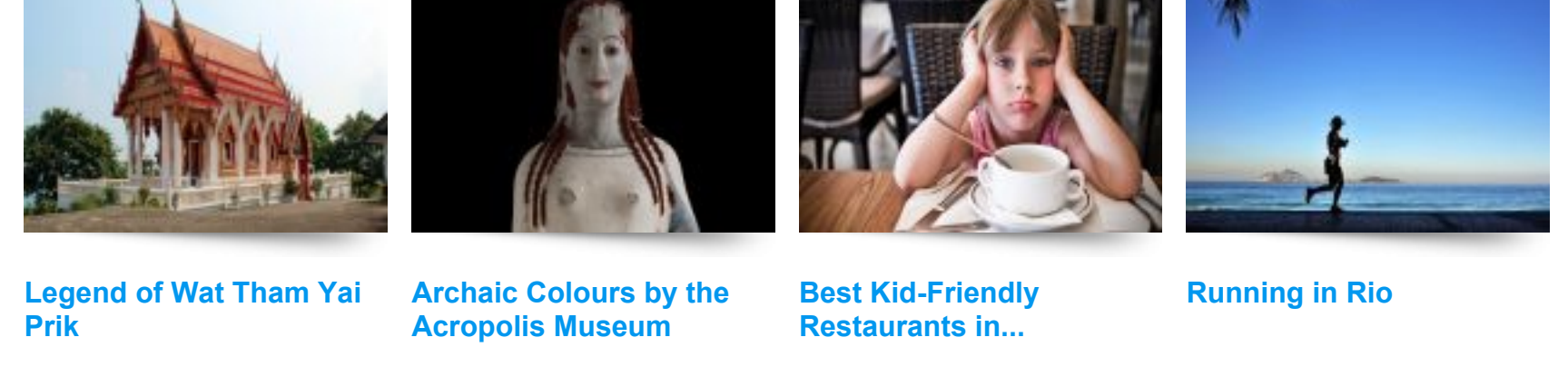
'I believe it boils down to the execution of the basics and being able to answer three simple questions; how are you going to get your customer, how are you going to ensure they have a great trip, and do you feel you have the perseverance and mental make-up to deal with uncertainty and the gruelling challenges of entrepreneurship? Answer those, and then you're ready.'

I've forgotten my embarrassment; I've forgotten to finish my drink; talking travel with an entrepreneur like Parik is captivating, and far less formal than I'd expected. Maybe, because deep-down he's just a wanderlust like the rest of us.

For more information and inspiration, check out [Enchanting-Travels.com](#).

Next week we interview a hotel owner, our third industry insider!

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