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## THE “AIRBNB FOR FOOD” GIVING MILLENNIALS NON-TOURIST EXPERIENCES

STARTUP VIZEAT IS BRINGING THE AIRBNB MODEL TO DINING FOR MILLENNIAL TRAVELERS, CONNECTING LOCAL HOSTS WITH TRAVELERS FOR DINNERS, COOKING CLASSES, AND MORE—CATERING TO MILLENNIALS’ LOVE OF AUTHENTIC, OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH EXPERIENCES...

Millennials are demanding more from their travel experiences as they trigger [new trends in the industry](#): more authenticity, more [Instagrammability](#), and more diverse locations. Ypulse’s research on the [Wanderlust Generation](#) found that 70% of Millennials travel to experience new cultures and explore, and 60% travel to try different foods and cuisines. These motivators are surely some of the reasons that Airbnb has found so much success with young travelers, who are more likely to want to immerse themselves in local culture than previous generations. And now a new startup is bringing that mentality, and model, to dining experiences.

VizEat is using its digital platform to facilitate in-person interactions focused on Millennial travelers’ top interests: food and local culture—and it doesn’t get more authentic than getting a front row seat at a local’s dining table and a sneak peek into their daily life. Dubbed the “Airbnb for food” by [The Guardian](#) and “the Airbnb of local dining” by [Forbes](#), the platform operates in a similar fashion but for a different purpose. Users can seek out a host, view their profile, and choose from experiences including dinners, cooking classes, and food tours. While some worry interactions with perfect strangers could be perfectly awkward, others see the experience as a way to meet new people and go beyond typical tourism.

We caught up with VizEat CEO Jean-Michel Petit to get the inside story on how travelers are interacting with the platform, why Millennials are seeking out offline experiences, what VizEat is focusing on in the future, and more.

### **Ypulse: Can you give us some background on VizEat?**

**Jean-Michel Petit:** VizEat started in 2014 and we’ve come a long way since then—we’re now the world’s largest social dining platform and leading community for authentic food experiences with locals.

Through intimate dinner parties, group cooking classes, and food tours, we connect hand-selected local hosts with travelers seeking non-touristic, immersive experiences. We’re providing people with a unique way to engage with locals all over the world and to discover new cultures through food.

In the past three years, our platform has grown from 50 hosts to more than 25,000 hosts across 130 countries. Our website and apps are now available in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Chinese.

Some milestones for us include this past September when we acquired the largest social dining platform in the U.S., EatWith. Furthermore, last year, Apple selected VizEat as one of the top 3 Apps of 2016, resulting in CEO Tim Cook enjoying a VizEat lunch in Paris during early February.

**Ypulse: Ypulse research shows Millennials love unique experiences. Can you expand on why you think, in an increasingly digital world, young people are seeking out in-person experiences? What do you think customers are looking for in a VizEat experience?**

**JP:** VizEat gives a new generation of travelers a way to make meaningful connections with locals. We're providing people with an exciting way to explore the world authentically and off-the-beaten-path. In a world filled with online connections, I think people are realizing that in-person, human connections are more important than ever. VizEat is bringing back the human element that many people are missing.

As we like to say, the dinner table is the original social network. We believe that some of the strongest connections and conversations take place when sharing a meal. We're using technology to facilitate these offline connections, and we're creating a space for as many people as possible to break bread together.

**Ypulse: Can you describe some reactions customers have had to their experience using VizEat?**

**JP:** We always love to hear from our guests their reactions to their VizEat experiences. Of course, every experience is different, but a lot of common feedback we hear is that their event was "the best way to experience local life," an "unforgettable experience," and very often "the highlight of my trip."

**Ypulse: VizEat has been described as the "Airbnb for food." Can you discuss why that name fits (or doesn't fit) what the company is trying to do?**

**JP:** We're very different from Airbnb. Of course, like Airbnb, VizEat is part of the sharing economy and offers guests experiences in someone else's home. But in our case, the stars are the host's personality and culinary skills, and not primarily the apartment.

VizEat is much more about authentic cultural interactions. In every VizEat experience, the host is a major part of the memory that a guest has when they leave. The social aspect, and the joining of locals and travelers, is really what leads to the magical and serendipitous moments that happen around the table.

**Ypulse: Does VizEat have any advice for brands that want to break into the crowded travel space?**

**JP:** People have been travelling without you. If you launch a new brand, you'll need to differentiate by proposing new, innovative concepts, profoundly appealing to the new generation of travelers. This is one of the reasons why we're partnering with so many travel companies!

**Ypulse: What's next for VizEat? What are the company's goals for the future?**

**JP:** In the upcoming year, we're focusing on expanding VizEat's presence around the world. As a result of our recent acquisition of EatWith, we now have a strong presence in North America. We're now specifically looking to increase our offerings in Southeast Asia and Latin America. We want to change the way people travel on a global scale, one meal at a time. Experience is the new luxury and food is all about the journey!

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

JEAN-MICHEL PETIT

CEO, VIZEAT

For Jean-Michel, travelling, gastronomy, and new encounters are his passions. It was during a trip to Peru while sharing a traditional meal in the island of Amantani (Lake Titicaca) that the idea of VizEat was born. He says it was the best travel experience he's ever had—because it was real.

Until 2012, Jean-Michel was a Board member and Director of Investments of London-based venture capital firm Eurovestech. He previously occupied the position of CRM and E-commerce Director at Compaq France and was a member of the Alta Vista Europe management team.

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