



movoya's Journey

■ By Lei Na

Even though it's been two years, Josef Gong (CEIBS EMBA 2006) still clearly remembers the first email he got from Johannes Muffler. It was in Chinese, though the writer was German. Johannes introduced himself as a CEIBS MBA 2008 alumnus who wanted to start a business that focused on outbound tourism for Chinese travellers. He hoped Gong, who had already been in the tourist industry for 20 years, had advice to offer. Gong was happy to help as he could draw on the expertise he had accumulated while working as General Manager with Shanghai China Travel International Ltd and then launching his own start-up, Utour.

"Utour had long been committed to providing 'maximum service' to the more than 40,000 foreign travellers it receives every year. What does 'maximum service' mean? If budget permits, we take our guests to the best bar by the Huangpu River, where they can watch the lights on both river banks light up one by one. If budget

does not permit, tour guides will take wine to the Great Wall, and our guests have wine while watching the sunset," says Gong. "I've always thought it's a pity Chinese people rarely get that kind of service when they travel overseas. I've always dreamed that one day Chinese tourists could enjoy this same level of service in Europe."

In China, he says, the outbound tourism industry still has a long way to go. Meanwhile in Europe, agencies targeting Chinese tourists are mostly run by Chinese immigrants or overseas students, who are often lacking when it comes to customer service skills. Agency-organised tours often fail to provide Chinese tourists with an understanding of authentic local customs, but merely offer sightseeing, Gong adds. "In the past 3 to 5 years, more and more travellers have begun to give up on tour groups. Some high-end tourists even join well-known American groups. This does bring about a very distinct experience, but the prerequisite is that they can speak English very well."

But what motivated Johannes? There's an interesting story about what led him to the field of tourism. In 2008, then 24-year-old, he enrolled as one of the youngest members in his CEIBS MBA class. After graduation he stayed in China, working in Nanjing and Beijing, for the German pharmaceuticals corporation Bayer. After a few years, he returned to Germany to be closer to family and friends. Just for fun, to thank one of his former CEIBS classmates that had become a close friend, he designed a very detailed itinerary for his classmate's family to travel in Europe. He got great feedback. Realising that he had a knack for and genuine interest in tourism, Johannes decided to start movoya, an agency exclusively focused on Chinese tourists looking for an authentic travel experience in Europe. movoya is a buzzword that comes from the French "mon voyage" which means "my journey". The itinerary designed for his classmate later became a classic movoya travel route.



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SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

At their first meeting, Johannes was surprised by Gong's fluent German; just as Gong had been surprised to receive an email in Chinese from a German. Gong had graduated from Tongji University's German Department. With no language barrier, the common bond of being CEIBS alumni and a solid understanding of each other's cultures, their collaboration has been very smooth. They decided to include some of these elements in their business plan. movoya tour guides are all local Europeans who speak fluent Chinese. They have years of experience in China, and they understand China's culture and customs. Some are experts in Chinese tea ceremonies and calligraphy, some have pilot licenses, and some are Kungfu masters. On movoya's website, there's an impressive video starring Felix, one of their tour guides. Under the clear sky, in the midst of a carpet of green grass, all the beauty and romance of Europe's ancient towns unfolds like a gorgeous painting. “For me, dreaming means to have sunshine, fresh air, a blue sky and holidays,” says Felix. He, like many movoya tour guides, often becomes great friends with their

guests as they explore Europe together. On a recent business trip to Shanghai, one of his former guests spent days knitting him a hat to keep him warm.

Johannes explains that a lot of thought goes into making sure their Chinese guests are slowly eased into the experience of being served by European guides. For many, they've never had this experience before. Their movoya journey usually begins right after they land; it's usually a morning flight. They enjoy a leisurely breakfast in a restaurant that has a bird's eye view of castles and fabulous scenery, followed by a stroll. “Some guests are nervous right at the beginning, because they're not familiar with the environment. They calm down after we drive them to the attractions,” Johannes says. Unlike some tour groups, movoya gives their guests plenty of time to take photos and linger as they enjoy the scenery. They also help bridge the gap between locals and their guests. “For example, when dining in a countryside eatery in Germany, our tour guides will help our guests chat with the locals. This helps them shake off any feelings of formality and have real conversations with the local people, like friends,” he adds.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

movoya intentionally keeps groups small, that's one of its advantages. Unless there's a company-specific activity, each group only includes four to ten people. Travel arrangements are very novel, so they can avoid other big groups; and the boutique hotels selected have a certain distinctive ambiance that provides a peaceful and comfortable atmosphere. "Our goal is to let our guests understand the local culture and lifestyle with help from European guides," says Johannes.

This is why they have designed many uniquely original itineraries. While doing product R&D, they act like German craftsmen concentrating on artistry. During their travels, movoya guests can take a walk along the Berlin Wall Memorial to feel the passage of time, appreciate modern architecture while wandering through Potsdam Square, visit quaint cuckoo clock handicraft workshops in the Black Forest, or take their children to visit the birthplace of Grimm's Fairy Tales that gave us stories like *Little Red Hat*. They can also speed along the Silvretta High Alpine Road, with the valley's rise and fall, watching the breathtakingly beautiful landscape that's either covered with ice and snow or vast areas of lush greenery.

"On a journey, two elements matter most. One is where you're going, and the other is whom you're going with," says Gong. "This is why we design various themes, bringing together people with similar interests and requirements. For

example, this winter we launched a product called "Travel with Your Family". We realised that many successful people want to travel with their families, but their only problem is time..." These tours are designed to meet the needs of various types of family groups: nuclear, extended, those that include the elderly and kids. Whatever the group, movoya finds ways to provide them with a truly unique journey. "For example, we will arrange for our guests to dine with European locals, and experience the atmosphere generated by European families of three generations," says Gong.

CEIBS PAVES THE WAY

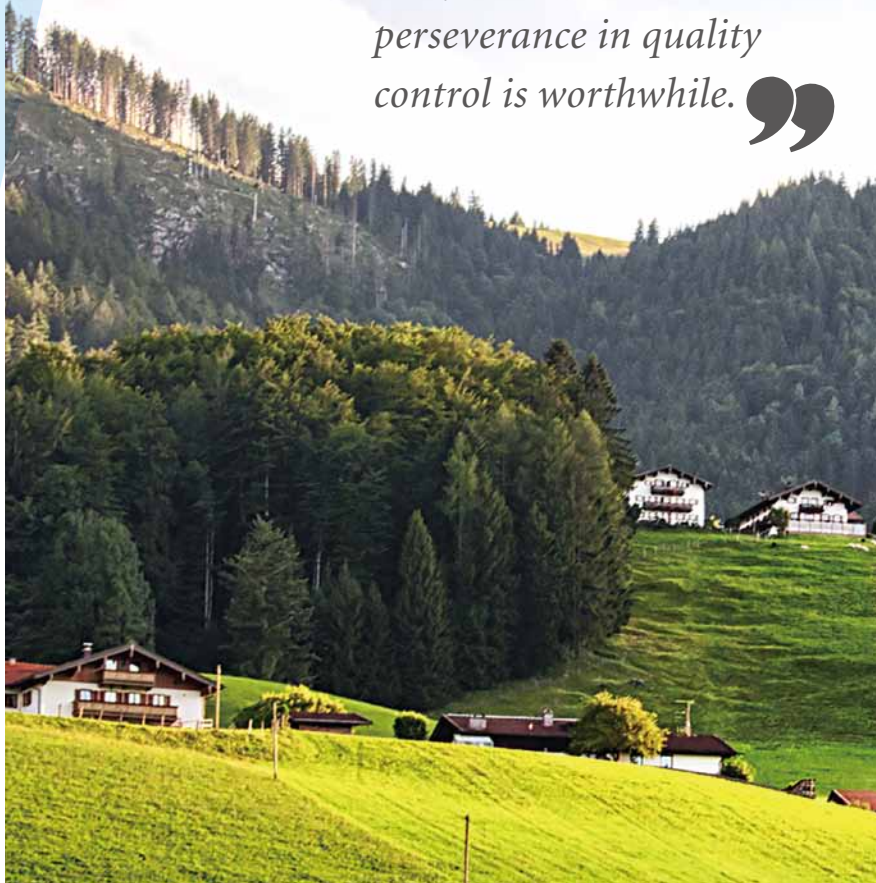
Today, movoya is headquartered in Berlin, with offices in Shanghai and Barcelona. The goal is to run their company with German efficiency while providing the best service possible for all their guests. They take inspiration from world famous German brands such as Audi and Benz, as well as the country's many small businesses that have earned a great deal of respect and could be regarded as role models.

Both men know they could not have come this far without their alma mater. "Without CEIBS, we would not have met each other, let alone build up mutual trust in such a short time," Johannes says. Their adherence to strict quality standards, and unique business model that's a combination of East and West, is a reflection of the CEIBS spirit.

Today Johannes is the CEO of movoya, and Gong plays the supporting role as his partner. In Johannes' eyes, Gong is a wise man with rich life experience. He turns to him whenever there's a problem to be solved. Gong is always a calm source of valuable advice. Meanwhile, Gong sees Johannes as a typical German. "He's extremely cautious and earnest, and he's very resolute when it comes to his principles," says Gong. He recalls Johannes' insistence on double-checking a product catalogue that he thought was already very good, looking for areas of improvement. In fact Johannes has always kept a careful eye on quality control. "In the early days when our company size only allowed us



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to receive three batches of guests each time, he turned down every fourth batch to ensure our service quality. For many Chinese companies, this is unacceptable and would be seen as inefficient,” says Gong. “But every time I see our guests leaving, utterly satisfied, I see that his perseverance in quality control is worthwhile. Of course, I also help him to reach a balance between efficiency and quality.”

Last year, Johannes joined CEIBS’ European alumni’s first reunion in

Barcelona, where he met the school’s President Pedro Nueno and Dean Hellmut Schütte. He also discovered many business opportunities during conversations with other alumni. He could feel the power of CEIBS’ alumni network, which has already played such a huge role in movoya’s launch. He’s hoping CEIBS will host more events like the Barcelona reunion, which can create opportunities for alumni to set up partnerships via their network, expand their businesses globally, and reap even greater rewards.

ADVICE FOR ENTREPRENEURS



“Entrepreneurship requires a calm mind. Today’s society is very fickle, and there’s no avoiding the impact of this fickleness. To overcome this, one has to focus on just one thing; but that’s very hard to do. One needs to stick to his original goals, and adjust as needed by taking advantage of circumstances. The most important thing is to remain calm and be patient.”

– Josef Gong



“Though there’s a huge difference between Chinese and European cultures, we can understand each other. I fell in love with China as soon as I arrived. As I travelled around with my classmates I was deeply impressed by the Chinese people’s hospitality. I have deep feelings for China, and this kind of affection is the biggest motivation for my entrepreneurship efforts. For me, to help Chinese travel across Europe is a way to pay them back for the hospitality they showed me.”

– Johannes Muffler

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