





SWEET MEMORIES

David Soong's Sweet Escape is making high-quality photography accessible.

BY **ARDIAN WIBISONO**

David Soong has an eye for what makes a good business. A serial entrepreneur, David has co-founded several successful ventures such as the Boga group, a lifestyle company behind prominent brands in the country like Sushi Tei and Bakerzin, wedding photography service Axioo, online wedding vendor directory Bridestory and printing service Printerous. What's next for David? A new online service called Sweet Escape, which provides professional photography services to travelers.

Sweet Escape's idea came from David's experience when traveling on holiday with his family. Despite being a photographer, he found that he rarely had good family pictures. "I figured that it's not just me, that others want to have good memories to remember. However, it should be easy and affordable," David says.

With Sweet Escape, one can book a professional photographer in more than 300 cities around the world, who will meet you, take your photos and return results within three days. It's something like AirBnB or Uber, but for photography services. So far, the startup has a network of over 500 selected photographers, with more being added all the time.

The pricing is also simple, from \$300 to \$500 for a two-hour session depending on the city—Jakarta costs \$300, while Tokyo \$400. European cities such as Barcelona cost \$500. The prices can be checked beforehand on the site or its app, with Sweet Escape taking a standard 20% commission.

While not cheap, David says the service is targeted at high-end tourists. David wants his clients to have a good experience with the local photographers, so each one is tested for interpersonal skills and knowledge of their city. David says the photographer should have lived in the city for at least five years, so he know good places

for pictures and the best time to do it. Many of his photographers are semi-professional freelancers with a full time job in a different field, but have a passion for photography and meeting new people. David says some have interesting backgrounds such as a firefighter and a civil engineer.

"In other words, they are also a good tour guide as well, knowing where to find a good coffee shop or place to eat, for example. Our photographer in Quebec brought a heat pack for his client, an Indonesian family not used

to the minus 24-Celsius degree cold. This good experience is priceless, but they also get good pictures," David says.

To ensure the quality of the photos, Sweet Escape's team in Jakarta does all the editing. Clients get to select from over

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150 photos and can download their favorite 40 as high-resolution pictures. Additional photos are charged at a fee of \$10 each. David says orders coming in last year were up five-fold from the year before, even though he does no marketing of the site—it is all word-of-mouth referrals. During the yearend holiday season, David says Sweet Escape received thousands of orders from around the world. Most are Indonesians who want photos taken in cities such as Paris, Tokyo and New York, but he says about 30% are overseas customers, with special interest coming from the U.S. He is confident that Sweet Escape has a good chance in the global market.