

# Looking for experiences with a group of like-minded solo travellers? Meet Flash Pack

*As part of our quick fire questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Radha Vyas, cofounder of Flash Pack about surviving the pandemic, creating a company culture built on radical candour and the thrill of adventures and immersive local experiences.*

Temps de lecture : minute

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Back in 2012, I was in my 30s and thriving in my career. But as a single person, it was difficult to find like-minded people to travel with since all my friends were getting married, having kids or busy with their own respective careers.

After travelling solo for many years, a friend suggested I look at joining a group tour and this was the first time I'd heard of this concept of group travel. Back then, organised group trips catered exclusively to either party-loving 20-year-olds, who are looking for late night seniors in search of coach trips. There was nothing out there for people in their 30s and 40s. They are the group of people who crave adventure, are free-spirited and independent minded, who don't want to always backpack or stay in hostels but want to see the world on their own terms. They are the ones who want to do adventure right.

When I first met my now husband Lee, who was a photojournalist and spent a lot of time travelling the world in search of adventure, we spent the entire evening exchanging travel stories. Together, we identified a gap in the market for solo travellers in their 30s and 40s and that's how

*Flash Pack* was born.

Tell me about the business - what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work with, how you reach customers and so on?

Flash Pack specialises in small group adventures and experiences for like-minded solo travellers in their 30s and 40s. Each itinerary is tailor-made and meticulously researched to help shape bucket-list brag-worthy adventure trips. The trips cut out the oversubscribed tourist trails by offering authentic activities and spontaneous experiences with locals. We have connections to unique and independent accommodation that show off the best of the destination, whether it's at the foot of snow-capped mountains, a luxury safari lodge or a private wine tasting in the desert.

Flash Pack is more than just a vacation. People come to the trips as solo travellers - 95% of the customers arrive alone - but leave having made deep-rooted and meaningful connections. This sense of community is what makes Flash Pack different from other group tours. We aim to take people on an adventure - not just geographically, but also personally. We're obsessed with getting the group dynamic right and designing difficult-to-organise itineraries - from experiencing *ice bath therapy* in Finland to staying in a Land Rover retreat in *Serengeti National Park*.

We're on a mission to create one million friendships across the globe through group travelling as we believe shared adventures, cut-above experiences and one-of-a-kind accommodation have the power to bring people together, creating meaningful connections.

How has the business evolved since its

## launch? When was this?

When we first launched in 2014, we started off with exciting, cutting-edge destinations like Uganda and Sierra Leone. However, we soon realised that the destinations that we were offering weren't what the general public wanted.

Since then, we have pivoted to better known destinations. Our dedicated team are working tirelessly to scour the globe in search of unique, authentic activities, whether it's a week-long sojourn to *Northern Italy*, a trip to *Greece* to immerse yourself in the land of ancient myths and mesmerising cityscapes or sharing a meal with the sumo wrestlers in *Japan*.

## Tell us about the working culture at Flash Pack

At Flash Pack, transparency is king. We have introduced the compensation calculator in the company to make our team feel heard and valued in a post-pandemic working environment. This also helps create the company culture of FlashPack to be completely based on trust, honesty and openness.

We also apply radical candour among the members of the company because we care deeply for our colleagues and we'd like every team member of Flash Pack to provide and receive feedback in real time. At Flash Pack, there's no room for blame culture. When a mistake happens, we dissect it together as a team to understand how it happens and everyone is welcomed to share their own mistakes and failures. This stems from Lee and I being very candid about the administration of Flash Pack 1.0 and the mistakes we made back then. It has been a part of our onboarding process since day one.

## How are you funded?

Prior to the challenges in the pandemic when we were forced into administration, we bootstrapped the business with £15,000 of savings and ran it as a side hustle to begin with, not quitting our jobs until 2016, when we raised a seed round of £250,000 from angel investors. In 2021, we relaunched Flash Pack following a multimillion series A investment round from PPF Group.

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Our biggest challenge was the pandemic and dealing with the rising COVID-19 cases, which was when Lee and I were forced to repatriate customers from around the world, cancel thousands of departures and issue millions of pounds worth of refunds. The hardest part of all was saying goodbye to the team as we had to reduce the number of members from 55 to 15 immediately. By September 2020, we had to put our company into administration. Even though the future of travel looked grim, we held our heads high and remained optimistic.

When our brand assets were put up for auction, we decided to grasp the chance and rebuild what we created. We remortgaged our house and with a small loan from our family, put a bid and and luckily won our business back. The rest, as they say, is history and Flash Pack was reborn.

## How does Flash Pack answer an unmet need?

There's a gap in the market for travelling with a group of like-minded solo travellers, who are in their 30s and 40s and crave the thrill of adventures and immersive local experiences. Group tours are set up predominantly for either young travellers in their 20s and students who are doing their

gap year or a more mature, luxurious group of travellers aged 60 to 70. The travel industry is indifferent when it comes to catering for the needs of solo travellers who are in their 30s and 40s, busy professionals and aren't specifically looking for singles holidays.

Also, there are many people who want to totally immerse themselves in amazing holidays but are missing out because they are worried about the security issues when travelling alone or because they want a dynamic adventure with people their own age and stay in a boutique hotel but cannot find any.

Flash Pack was launched to answer all those needs. Flash Pack caters to people in their 30s and 40s, craving the thrill of adventure, still echoing the unique, off the beaten track element of a backpacking trip but combining it with a boutique feel for the added touch of luxury.

## What's in store for the future?

Flash Pack is already known for the standout, experiential aspect of our global adventure and we're lucky to have a brilliant community of independent-minded, free-spirited people in their 30s and 40s, many of whom join our trips as seasoned solo travellers and leave off with life-long friendship that they made along the way.

As for the evolution of Flash Pack, global expansion is what we're aiming for as we believe that we've defined the category and Flash Pack is one of the market leaders for solo travellers. We want to make it THE brand for 30s and 40s and not just simply a travel company.

## What one piece of advice would you give

## other founders or future founders?

Your business will become your obsession. You need to be prepared to make a lot of sacrifices. Lee and I consider Flash Pack to be another baby of ours so we ended up talking about it the entire time we're off. We don't think that's a bad thing at all because we consider Flash Pack to be our joy and happiness.

## And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I live in accordance with my circadian rhythms, which means I don't eat within an hour of waking up to let my hormones balance out, so sleep hormones can subside and insulin can be produced. After that, I eat all my meals within a 10 hour window from 9am to 7pm roughly. I get out and walk everyday to expose myself to as much sunlight as possible. I'm also actively managing glucose spikes by eating a savoury breakfast each morning and eating vegetables with every meal. I think it's important to reflect on the day and take some time to wind down after a busy day, so I make sure to build in time to meditate before bedtime.

Radha Vyas is cofounder of *Flash Pack*.