

INTERVIEW · TRAVEL & ENTERPRISE

Hostelbird: *India's First Community-Driven Online Travel Agency*

India has long been a dream destination for backpackers, yet finding a safe, affordable place to stay has not always been easy. Hostelbird, a young platform founded by Srinagar-born entrepreneur Aabid Bhat, is trying to change that. It lists more than 1,000 hostels across the country, from the Himalayan towns of Manali and Kasol to the beaches of Goa and the lakeside city of Udaipur. Beyond bookings, it aims to build a community: travellers can join group tours, volunteer in exchange for a stay, and meet like-minded people on the road. The platform pays particular attention to women travelling alone, with female-only dormitories, safety-focused listings and a reward scheme that encourages solo travel. We spoke to the founder about his own journey and the future of budget travel in India.

1,000+
hostels listed across India

45 million
budget & backpacking trips a year*

Female-only
dorms & safety-focused listings



Interview by **Vijay Laxmi**, 1st Year MBA, Chandigarh University

*Founder's estimate



IN CONVERSATION

Aabid Bhat, *Founder, Hostelbird*

Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir · Hostelbird, India's First Hostel Booking Platform

Q1 Hostelbird is a platform for hostel stays across India. What inspired you to start it?

I grew up in Srinagar, Kashmir, and for a long time I felt like an outsider even in my own hometown. That changed when I started travelling solo and staying in hostels. For the first time I found a real sense of community, a "tribe" of like-minded people. I wanted to make that experience easier for others to find, so I founded Hostelbird.

Q2 What gap in the market were you trying to fill?

There was no dedicated platform built around hostel bookings in India. Most travel platforms focus on hotels, while hostels and the budget-conscious, backpacking traveller get very little attention. We estimate around 45 million such trips are taken in India every year, and that audience keeps growing. They deserve a platform designed for them.

Q3 What does Hostelbird offer travellers?

We work in four areas. First, we help travellers discover safe, verified hostels. Second, we offer volunteering opportunities, where travellers can exchange their skills for a place to stay and meals. Third, we organise verified group tours. And fourth, we have a social feature that lets travellers connect with each other, because meeting people is a big part of what makes hostel travel special.



> *"Travel is an essential, empowering experience for personal growth.*

Q4 You place special emphasis on female solo travellers. Why is that?

Solo travel by women is a fairly recent trend in India, but it is growing, and safety is the most important factor for them. We connect women with hostels that offer female-only dormitories and strict safety policies. We are also developing AI-driven summaries of guest reviews, so travellers can quickly judge how safe a property is. On top of that, our reward system, called "birdcoin," gives women higher incentives to encourage them to travel solo.

Q5 Traditional family and societal expectations can discourage women from travelling alone. Do you see that changing?

I believe in evolution and growth, and I see change happening. The internet and social media play a big role. Women see others travelling solo and feel inspired to do the same, even where family or social restrictions exist. It won't change overnight, but the direction is encouraging.

Q6 What would you say to someone who has never travelled alone?

Travel is an essential, empowering experience for personal growth. It shows you who you are and connects you with people you would never otherwise meet. That is the heart of Hostelbird's mission: making that first step feel safe, affordable and welcoming.