

Swiss Entrepreneurship Program | Startup Stories

Peru | Alana and Mesa 24/7 | Seed capital at the right time helps to boost a promising entrepreneur

Alana Visconti is the co-founder of the Peruvian startup [Mesa 24/7](#), an online restaurant reservation platform. During the growth progress, Alana was struggling to raise funds needed to complete her vision to grow her business to a stage where it became profitable.

As part of Swiss EP's program to support female entrepreneurship, Alana was invited to Swiss EP's [NextGen Women Entrepreneurs Week](#) in June 2017, which brought together entrepreneurs, investors and mentors from six countries. She actively took part in workshops to enhance her product, trained her pitching skills for raising investments and took part in networking with entrepreneurs from around the world. During one of the workshops she met Patty Yong, a Peruvian angel investor.



Alana & Patty bonding over business at NextGen Women Entrepreneurs Week 2017

Patty was inspired by Alana's drive and vision and loved her business model. After the event, Swiss EP facilitated further conversations between Alana and Patty, and Patty ended up investing USD 40K in Alana's company in the last quarter of 2017. Other investors joined from PAD Piura, the angel network co-led by Patty, and Mesa 24/7 successfully raised a total of USD 265K by the end of the year. This round helped Alana to hire more staff and increase her outreach. Mesa 24/7 is now among the fastest growing startups in Peru and currently employs 15 people.

Albania | Enea Mema and Elite International | Going abroad is not always the best option

In late 2015, young and talented Enea Mema was planning to leave Albania to study at Lund University in Sweden. As he would later state, this was just another way to leave Albania and find opportunities abroad. Migration of youth and brain-drain are key challenges for modern Albania.

About the same time, Enea met with the Swiss EP team in Tirana at an event organized by Swiss EP partner, Albanian Innovation Accelerator. The team introduced Enea to the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Albania and available learning opportunities and networking events. Swiss EP team advised Enea to join a program to harness and structure his entrepreneurial spirit.



Enea presenting at Startup Pirates Award Ceremony, Tirana, 2016

Soon thereafter Enea signed up for the Startup Pirate pre-acceleration program organized by Swiss EP partner Yunus Social Business in April 2016. The program was supported by Swiss EP experts. At the event, Enea learned how to be part of a team and at same time manage a business. He took the mentors' advise to heart. His team won the competition. This was the turning point for Enea and he decided not to leave Albania but to become an entrepreneur in Tirana.

Enea then founded **Elite International**, a company that now does business in the fields of tele-marketing, program design, restaurants and real estate. Since April 2016, Enea and his team members have participated in numerous events hosted by Swiss EP Partners, especially those involving mentoring, like the Master Mentoring Bootcamp. During the last six months ELIT International has experienced phenomenal sales growth, and now employs 122 full time persons.

Vietnam | Tuan Minh and Thai Ha from Nem Zone | Long term mentoring as a way to success

The founders of Nem Zone, Hai Ha and Thai Ha are financial professionals. They love cooking, especially the Vietnamese traditional spring rolls – or “nem” in Vietnamese. They decided to open their first Nem Zone Restaurant in 2013 in Hanoi, using an innovative way of cooking *nem* that tastes better and fresher for a longer period after cooking. Customers loved the new *nem* and they opened up a total of 10 restaurants in Hanoi over next few years.

Consequently, an opportunity arose to franchise. They planned for expansion, but unfortunately, business performance of the chain turned out way different than the founders’ plan until it came to the worst-case scenario: Quality of services and food was out of control, the balance sheet was disaster and the two had to close the business.

The woman entrepreneurs re-started their careers as professionals in a financial institution. However, their entrepreneurial spirit kept them attending startup events, including mentorship orientation and matching by KisStartup, a mentoring program supported by Swiss EP that received training in mentoring from Mike Ducker. In one of the KisStartup sessions she met her mentor, Ms. Do Thu Giang, who used to be a financier before starting a green business with her husband. She is a committed mentor in KisStartup mentoring 1-on-1 program and also received training through Swiss EP.

In the following months, Thu Giang and her husband Tuan Anh helped the women founders through strategic advise and mentoring to revamp the business model, and more importantly, revive the business. With an undisclosed amount of investment from Thu Giang and Tuan Anh, the women quit their jobs and relaunched of Nem Zone restaurant in the downtown district of Hanoi in October 2016. They are growing again, and in a more manageable and controlled manner. In the 18 months from the restart, Nem Zone has achieved break even, they have monthly revenue of USD 4000 with 9 employees (8 women and 2 deaf employees), and Thai Ha has also added a 6-month old baby!



Tuan Minh (right) - founder of KisStartup - and Thai Ha at opening of Nem Zone