

FIKA

Team Roles

David Lin – Looking Sleepy
Emma Fritzberg – Looking Left
Nathaniel Li – Looking for Love
Steven Horng – Looking Lost

Problem and Solution Overview

People love to travel. Exploring new cultures offers some of the best opportunities for people to develop a diverse perspective and find personal enrichment. But over time, trips have become less about connecting with the place and more about checking off some boxes, going through the motions, and capturing that same shot everyone else has. With Fika, we aim to bring meaning back into travel. *Fika* is a Swedish word that loosely translates to “coffee break,” but really means so much more. True *fika* makes you feel suspended in time, as you relish the joyous things in life with friends, family, coworkers, or in our case, someone you just met. Our Fika connects travelers with locals who love sharing the intimate knowledge of their culture. Locals know cultural practices and how to get around. By connecting travelers with locals who are not only familiar with the area, culture, and language but also share similar interests, travelers can experience something richer and more meaningful on their trips than ever before.

Design Research Goals, Stakeholders, and Participants

Our main stakeholders for our design problem are travelers and locals. Individual stakeholders could fall into one or the other of these categories at different times: when they are currently in an unfamiliar environment, or on the other hand, when they are in a place they are from or know very well. We also identified several groups of secondary stakeholders, including local business owners, but in the interest of time we did not focus our research on our secondary stakeholders. Our goal in conducting user research was to develop a nuanced understanding of what travelers are looking for, how they utilize existing resources, and where they feel the resources currently available fall short. We also aimed to gather information on how locals feel about interacting with visitors to their own city.

We started out our design research by conducting interviews with three main participants: an exchange student originally from Beijing who studies computer science in Hong Kong, a Korean-American nursing student who spent three months in Jordan during a gap year, and an in-state UW student currently studying abroad in Prague, Czech Republic. We conducted our interviews in person, by phone, or over FaceTime. We prepared a script, which included questions on travel planning, daily life while traveling, best moments, and frustrations while abroad, but we also asked additional questions beyond our script as the conversations went along.

All first-round participants have some connection to UW and are a friend or acquaintance of a member of our project group, which made it easy for us to get in touch with them quickly. This pre-existing common ground between us, as student researchers, and our subjects, made it very easy to establish a rapport, so we continued interviewing, adding three more UW students to our participant base. A significant limitation of our participant base was that it was not very diverse in age. We remedied this by conducting another round of interviews specifically with older travelers (beyond college age), who were family members or family friends. Adding this second round provided our research with another perspective, allowing us to design more effectively for travelers and locals of varying ages.

Design Research Themes

Choices, Choices Everywhere!

One of the more challenging findings was in the relative success our participants are currently using. Many participants had a service they used for food, another for getting around, and one more for places to visit and things to do. Three of our college-aged participants stated that they simply Googled "What's near me?" for food or things to do instead of using specific apps. When asked about these existing services, most of the impressions were relatively positive. The apps got the job done, more or less; cravings were satisfied, destinations were reached, and empty time slots were filled with things to do. However, most of our participants had not heard of the more niche services that exist, such as Atlas Obscura, Couchsurfing, and Time Out. On an interesting note, after we described these services to our participants and giving them a few minutes to play around, there was a slight distinction between the older and younger demographics of our interviewees. Most of our college-aged participants stated that for future travels, they were likely to stick with the services they have already been using, whereas on the other hand, our older participants indicated a deeper interest in trying out new services, such as the ones we named, in addition to using familiar ones.

A Whole New World

One of the major, shared pain points that our interviews revealed involved understanding the local laws, people, and cultural etiquettes. Participants listed off things they were unaware of when visiting other countries, ranging from laws that required helmets when biking to conventions for tipping after a meal. One participant mentioned how she avoided uncomfortable encounters that her friends experienced because she made sure to research attitudes towards foreigners and women in the country they were traveling to and adapted accordingly. Lastly, many participants who traveled to countries that speak a foreign language mentioned the language barrier reinforced the lack of understanding even more, citing the difficulty of finding instantly accessible information.

Bridging the Gap

Pain points and frustrations aside, we also want to highlight and expand on the positives from the interviews. Many interviewees expressed how interacting with locals often enhanced their experiences abroad. They were able to get a deeper look at the culture they were visiting, sometimes even experiencing something so unique they would never have been able to experience from simply following a blog post or tour. Moreover, we found that knowing someone familiar with the area significantly helped our interviewees settle in and adjust. Since connecting with locals might also provide solutions for some of the other issues with traveling—such as navigating the area culturally and geographically—we really want to explore how we can facilitate experiences by connecting a traveler with someone from the area. We see a lot of potential value in being able to provide a visitor with someone who is a friend, an expert on the area, and a guide to the culture there, and strive to include this goal in our designs.

Task Analysis

1. Who is going to use the design?

Our current design is aimed at travelers to foreign countries that are seeking a more engaging, meaningful trip that allows them to interact directly with the local culture and seek out experiences off the beaten path that align with their interests.

2. What tasks do they now perform?

Our users plan a trip by looking up things to do, places to stay, and areas to visit. Some users will look up how to get around and even some safety tips. Once there, our users navigate a foreign area by walking, taking public transportation, or calling a taxi/Uber driver. Our users determine places for food, sightseeing, groceries, events, and other activities. Our users interact with locals for events, getting around, and simply for information. Some users need to interact with locals who spoke a language different from their native language. Our users must learn the cultural norms of their travel destinations.

3. What tasks are desired?

When our users are planning a trip, they will input their destination and duration of the trip, as well as some types of things to see/do/visit that they are interested in experiencing. Our users will look at descriptions of locals that are interested in being local guides and choose one or more guides that interest them. Users will then communicate with the locals and schedule opportunities to meet up, and even explore the place with them. Users will learn about local culture and customs. Users will be able to visit and experience points of interest off the beaten path.

4. How are the tasks learned?

By putting travelers in contact with locals that intimately understand the area as well as share the same interests as the traveler, travelers will be able to find out compelling experiences in the local area less easily accessible online. The guides will be able to tell them about their favorite places to visit, must-dos, and must-sees. Moreover, guides may be more up-to-date on local events that tourists would be interested in. Guides that show the user around will allow the user to interact directly with the local people as well as help users gain cultural awareness.

5. Where are the tasks performed?

Our participants perform the tasks almost everywhere around the new environment, from the airport, at their accommodations, or just in a completely new area. Therefore, our service needs to be adaptable to different environments and needs. For services requiring online processing or accessing data in the cloud (not in the phone cache), such as searching for new places, the user would require an environment with internet access.

6. What is the relationship between the person and data?

Any user location data is sensitive for safety reasons and will not be accessible, even by employees. User accounts, passwords, and personal information will be encrypted and stored securely with differential privacy. Since people may also want to keep data such as their favorite locations for later use and that they may also like to access them on the go without internet, we will store a copy of some of this information on the user's phone cache.

7. What other tools does the person have?

Our targeted users most likely have a smartphone with internet access and locations services. Some may have familiarity/fluency of a foreign language, or an app to help them converse in a foreign language. In addition, existing apps serving various isolated purposes, like Uber, Airbnb, may also be installed in the user's smartphone.

8. How do people communicate with each other?

People communicate when traveling via internet/apps, and in person when they are physically in the same location. One participant stated that he would have entire conversations with locals through Google Translate. For a task like ordering food, a traveler might point and nod to communicate an order. One possible way of aiding this task is including a translation service for users that is optimized for common traveling and day-to-day vocabulary. We also plan to have a built-in chat for travelers and locals on service.

9. How often are the tasks performed?

Some tasks, such as actually meeting with a local, may only be performed a few times on a trip, whereas others, like finding a place to eat, might be performed multiple times a day. Whatever the case, we aim to provide service to users whenever needed during their travel period.

10. What are the time constraints on the tasks?

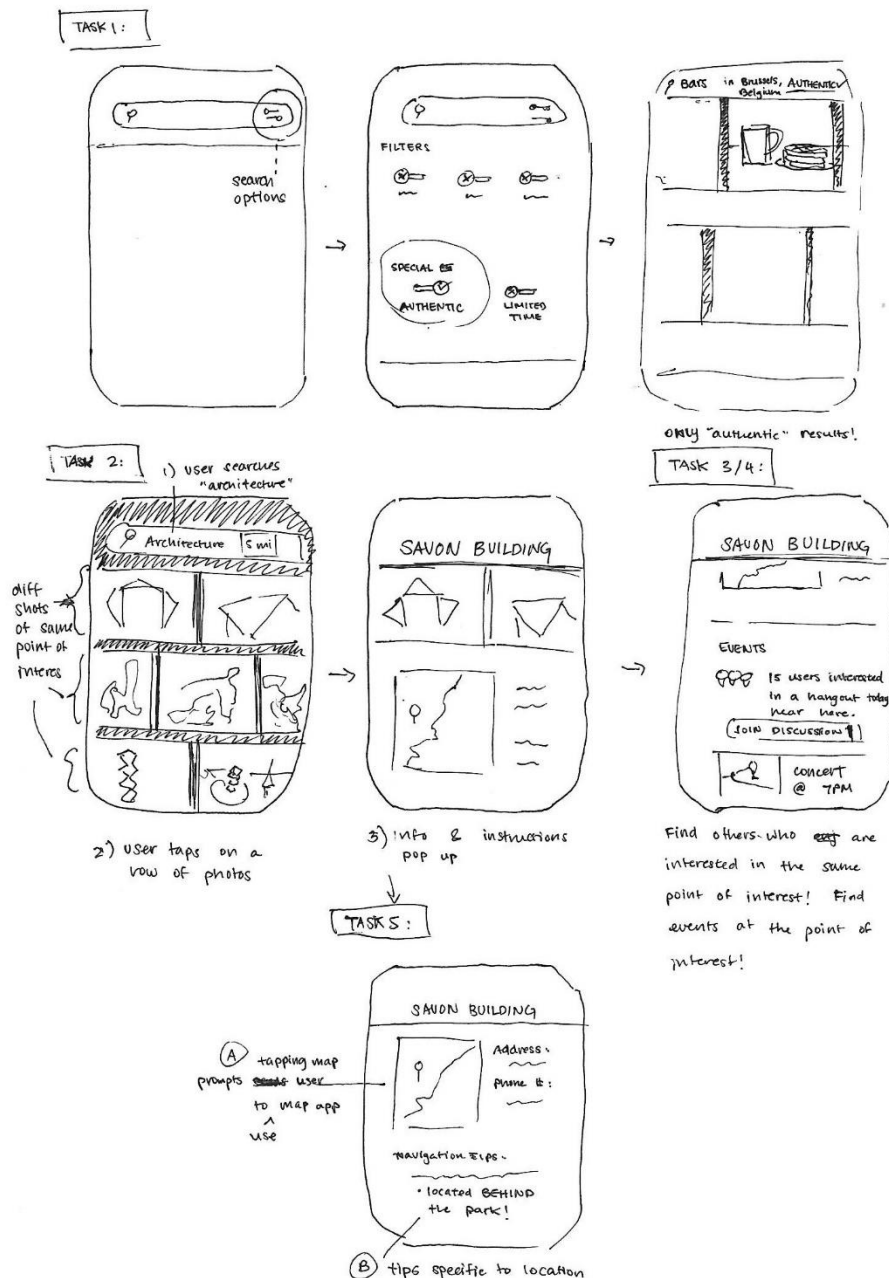
The time constraints for the tasks will necessarily vary with the length of the trip, especially in regard to sightseeing; if there is an interesting but out-of-the-way point of interest in a city, the traveler must discover it in the time they are there, or the opportunity is missed. In other situations, the window of time is shorter. For example, group of travelers might be hungry and looking for a place to eat. Even if an amazing authentic restaurant is only steps away, if they don't find out about it quickly, they may settle for the closest American fast food place – another missed opportunity. Moreover, a traveling user's personal factors may impact the time constraints, such as their travel schedule, and whether it aligns with a local user's schedule.

11. What happens when things go wrong?

Safety, while not an explicit goal of the service, must be designed into the concept. Though we want to encourage travelers to explore off the beaten tourist path, we don't want to lead them into potentially dangerous situations. Therefore, all recommended locations will be closely reviewed by a dedicated staff team periodically as well as the installment of a peer-to-peer review system. To handle situations when things go wrong, we have cooperation with emergency response teams and local authorities in cities we operate in so that users can have quick access to the necessary services under the occurrence of unforeseen events. Users may also report incidents directly to the support team.

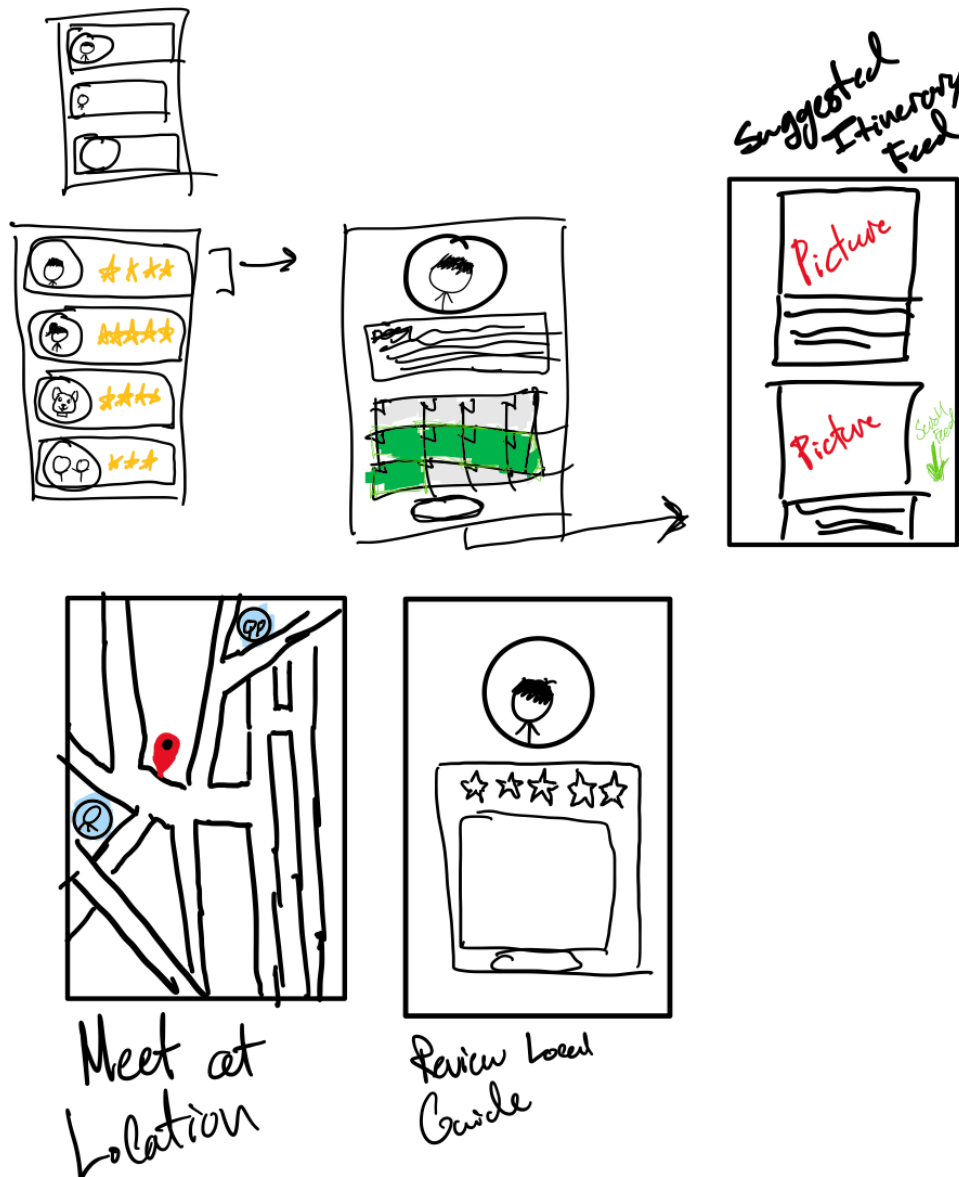
Proposed Design Sketches | DESIGN #1 – Exploring through Photos

For a traveler who doesn't know the place he's traveling to well, but wants to find "hidden gems," names of sights, attractions, and businesses oftentimes don't mean much. Rather, photos can reveal a lot more about than a name or short description. This platform would allow users to search for photos posted by other users of points of interest through search tags, filters, and location. In order to have variety while still maintaining high quality, there could be curators or editors for certain tags for each location, labeling them as "authentic." Tapping on a photo could lead the user to more information and options regarding the point of interest captured by the chosen photo. This design would also be a huge bonus for travelers who also enjoy photography, as it allows them to see the city from a lens outside of just landmarks or popular sights, inspiring them with different angles to capture the likeness of a particular city.



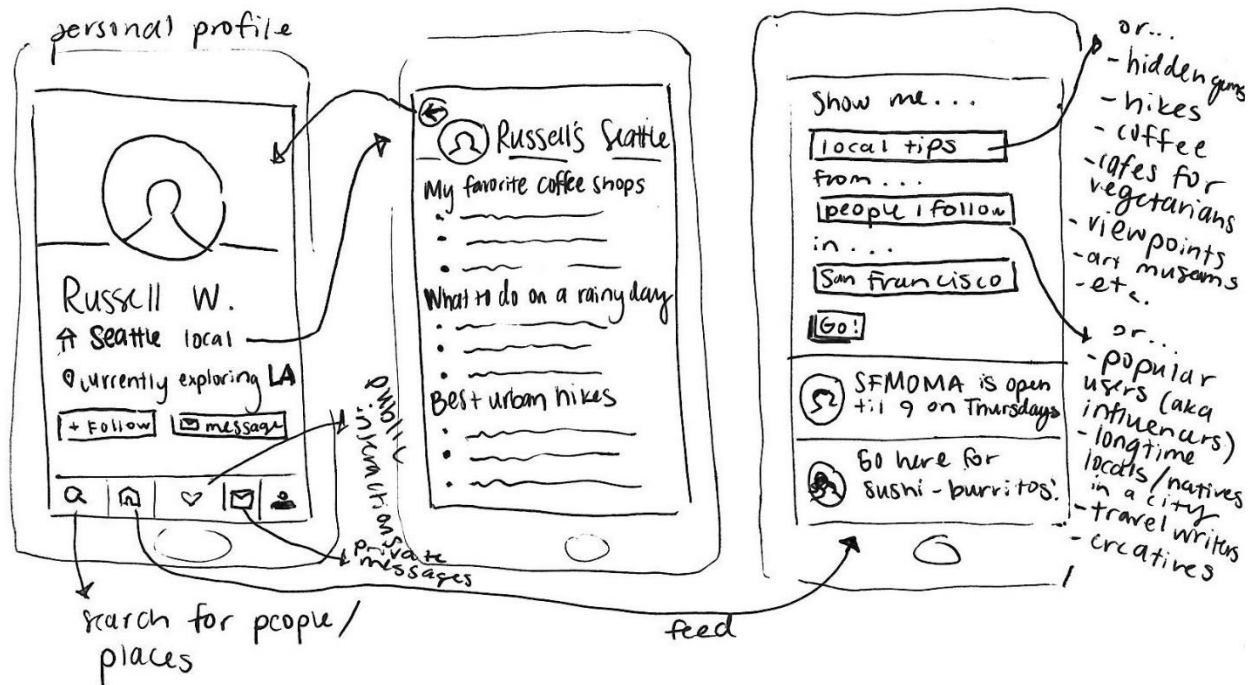
Proposed Design Sketches | DESIGN #2 – Local Tour Guide

From our list of challenges and opportunities, we've decided to focus on a solution that aims to simply address both the challenges and opportunities at once. A lot of challenges stem from unfamiliarity with the region: lack of information about things to do, how to get around, and the local etiquette. Moreover, interviewers expressed excitement over their experiences interacting with locals. This design attempts to approach the goals by bringing people directly together. Inviting a local to become a sort of tour guide / travel buddy would allow tourists an avenue right to the heart of the local culture. Their guide would have insider knowledge on the things-to-do outside of the usual tourist spots. They would be able to speak the language and possibly take people to less accessible places, as well as already know how to get to and from places—maybe even provide the transportation.



Proposed Design Sketches | DESIGN #3 – Local Tour Guide

Instead of focusing on one-to-one connections between travelers and locals, this design facilitates one-to-many connection while still maintaining a personal feel. Users can curate a personal profile of their city and look through the personalized guides of others they find compelling. People can share their favorite spots in the city they know best and discover new places to explore when visiting new cities by following their friends and/or public profiles of travel writers or influencers.



Written Scenarios

Scenario 1 – Meeting a Local (Figure A):

George is an American tourist currently in Paris for the first time. He has already been there for a week now, filling up his time with the most popular tourist sights. Just now, he exited from the last tourist attraction on his Paris checklist – the Notre-Dame Cathedral. With two days left in Paris, he wonders how he should spend his time. As he wanders the streets around Notre-Dame, he realizes although he's checked off all the sights he wanted to see, he doesn't feel like he knows much about local Parisian culture at all. George decides to check out Fika, which he had previously heard of from a friend. After starting it up and allowing access to his current location, he sees a list of locals each with a rating, some interests and hobbies, and their available schedule for the day. As he browses this list, he notices Charlotte, a local with high ratings, an interest in fashion and art (both of which George loves!), and a schedule that's free for the rest of the day after 5:00 p.m. He taps on Charlotte's profile and reads in her bio that she's a lead designer for a fashion magazine who loves meeting new people. Other travelers had left some promising reviews, with one reviewer suggesting that "One must absolutely not pass Charlotte up if they are looking for knowledge about local fashion!" George decides Charlotte sounds like the perfect local to meet! He messages her, and they agree to meet up at an café near the both of them at 5:00 p.m.

Scenario 2 – Finding an Authentic Business (Figure B):

Haley and Sophie are two Australian friends traveling to Japan for the first time. Their first destination is Osaka. They've heard Osaka in particular is famous for its Japanese food, especially okonomiyaki, a popular regional dish. They are just a little bit apprehensive, because they know that most Japanese food contains meat or fish and they are both vegetarian. They take the train from Kansai Airport into the city. Neither Haley nor Sophie speak any Japanese, so navigating Osaka is somewhat overwhelming. They are hungry after their long flight from Melbourne, but don't want to fall into a tourist trap. They use Fika to connect with Yoko, an Osaka native. They see from Yoko's profile that she has lived in Los Angeles, speaks fluent English, and is a vegetarian foodie. She sounds like the perfect guide! Haley uses in-app messaging to make plans to meet up. Yoko suggests one of her favorite traditional okonomiyaki spots in Osaka. She tells them how to get there using Osaka's amazing subway system. They meet at the tiny restaurant and chat while they wait for three seats together at the counter to open up. Around them, everyone is drinking sake and speaking Japanese. Yoko orders vegetarian okonomiyaki for everyone in Japanese. While they watch the chef make their food, Haley and Sophie run through their itinerary and Yoko gives them travel advice on what to see and what to skip while they're in Japan. The okonomiyaki is amazing and unlike any food they've tried before! Haley and Sophie pay for the meal to say thanks. Yoko says goodbye in Japanese and teaches Haley and Sophie how to say it too. Yoko is thinking of planning her first trip to Australia soon, and Haley and Sophie tell her to make sure and reach out through Fika when she does so they can show her around Melbourne.

Storyboards

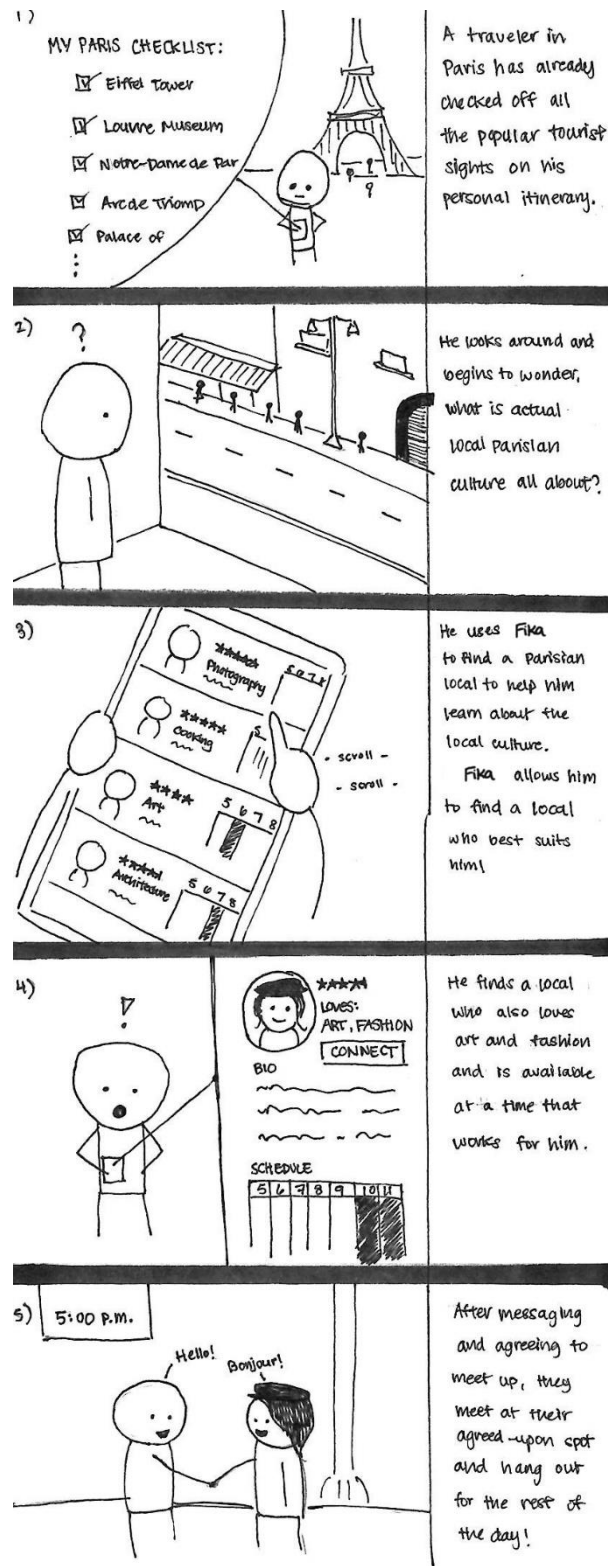
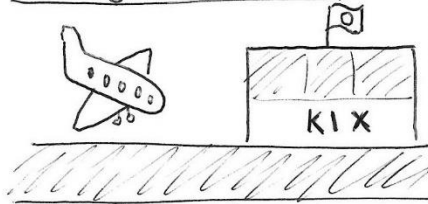
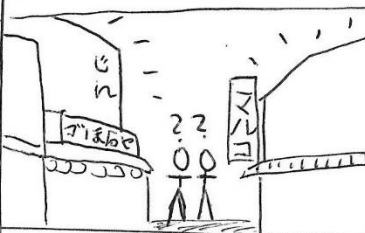


Figure A: Meeting a Local

Haley & Sophie touch down in Osaka, Japan for the first time. They've heard the city is famous for its food, but are apprehensive because they are vegetarian. They head out to explore.



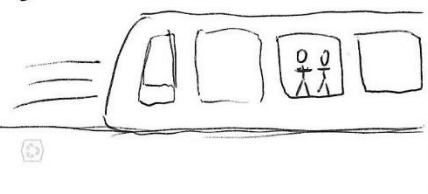
H&S are Australian and don't know any Japanese. Some restaurants have English menus, but they seem like tourist traps.



They connect with Yoko, an Osaka native who has lived in LA and speaks English. They also see from her profile she's a vegetarian foodie.

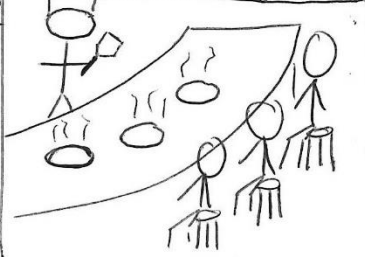


Mizuno has the best veg food! Meet there?
Haley: Sounds good!
Cool! Take the pink sign way there!



They meet Yoko at a spot she suggests, via messaging in-app.

Yoko orders for everyone in Japanese. They chat about H&S's itinerary in Japan while watching the chef make their okonomiyaki.



H&S pay for the meal to say thanks. Yoko says goodbye in Japanese and teaches them how to say it too.



Figure B: Finding an Authentic Business