

Five on a MISSION

Satarupa Basu

The heat of reality shows has just been transmitted to the web. For what is the first online reality show of its kind, In.com, the online portal of one of the frontline web service portals, Web 18 Software Services Ltd, in association with the South Africa Tourism Board, has launched a reality show portal <http://f5southafrica.in.com>.

Fantastic Five is an interactive online series that chronicles the journey of five young travellers — Chhavi Sachdev, Harish Thota, Rohit Barooah, Swapnali Das, and Zishaan Hayath — sent out on an adventure to South Africa. What sets these five apart is their thirst for adventure, passion for photography and blogging skills.

The project, initially conceptualised as a promotional event for the launch of Blish, a micro-blogging platform from Web 18, caught on with Netizens to such an extent that turning it into a full-fledged reality show was almost a formality.

"Unlike reality shows on television, which have anyway reached saturation levels and are drastically edited before being aired, things cannot get more real than in *Fantastic Five*, where we have combined real time with blogging. Viewers will get to watch everything live," says Surya Mantha, CEO, Web 18 Software Services.

The selection process is novel too. Of the several thousand contestants in an online audition, 15 were chosen through a process that included uploading a one-minute travel video or a travel photo (of a place visited) and a 100-word write-up on travel. "These 15 contestants were invited to Mumbai and grilled by the judges on their aptitude for travel, photography and blogging. Finally, we zeroed in on five of them," explains Mantha.

The *Fantastic Five*, as they are called, will leave for South Africa on July 6 for a journey that will bring out the adventurous spirit in them. Equipped with their video cameras and laptops, they will be sharing with the world their experiences through their five unique perspectives.

Each of the contestants will explore five different cities in South Africa — Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, Sun City and Port Elizabeth — for five days and five nights. Consequently, they will upload videos sharing their experiences along with five live blogs. Viewers will interact with the *Fantastic Five*, pose questions and also rate contestants' photo-blogs and videos on a daily basis.

At the end of the journey, the winner, or the 'most popular traveller' as rated by the viewers, will win a contract with *Better Photography* magazine, as also a wild card entry into Season 2 of *Fantastic Five*, coupled with some cool gadgets.

"Going by the response, we want to convert it into an ongoing series. It depends on which countries express an interest in tying up with us," says Manthan.



CHHAVI SACHDEV



HARISH THOTA



ROHIT BAROOAH



SWAPNALI DAS



ZISHAAN HAYATH