Working on OTA (Optimized Travel Assistant) has been one of the best experience project development experiences I have ever had.

It was a Friday night -- the night of HackGT2018 -- when we started on this project. A team of three Computer Science freshmen and one Computer Science senior set on to a journey that we did know when it might conclude. We teamed up about two weeks before the day of HackGT and met several times throughout the week to discuss what we wanted to work on for the hackathon and how we wanted to work on it. After many hours of brainstorming, we decided to go ahead with Optimized Travel Assistant - we call it 'OTA'.

Since half of us did not have any application development experience coming in, we laid down our schedules and self-assigned dynamic targets to achieve every day. Soon, it was the day of HackGT, and our knowledge base had grown from knowing just a few lines of codes to being proficient in dealing with Python, Java, Javascript, API's, Google Cloud Platform, Google App Engine, and Google Compute Engine.

It was 09:00 PM on October 19, 2018 when the hacking officially started. We carefully laid down our strategies and started developing on our idea. I took charge of developing an API and deployed it on Google App Engine to ensure better uptime, while also developing the backend of the web application and the Android application. One of our team members worked on the frontend of the web application and the Android application. Another person worked on getting the backend and the frontend to communicate with each other. The fourth person took the responsibility of UI and UX of the application.

It was pretty exciting to see everyone in the team working with each other to tackle the common challenges and also coming up with new ideas on how we could make our application better. From getting the application to displaying results based on a few numbers, we got it to suggest a list of five places to the user based on their travel history, their immediate preferences, the weather conditions in the nearby tourist attractions, and the traffic conditions within a certain radius of the user.

Speaking generally about the project, it was fun to see how all of us pushed our limits to the maximum to work towards the common goal. A couple of sleepless nights and 36 hours of continuous brainstorming session later, we came out as the finalist of the HackGT2018 and the winner of the Best Transportation Related Hack award by Lyft.