The Straits Times

Travel app that identifies landmarks wins local technology competition

By Lester Hio

SINGAPORE - An app which functions as a personal travel guide has clinched the top prize in a local app competition.

Developed by two students from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) - engineering PhD student Liu Kai, 24, and undergraduate Li Jing, 22 - the UGuide app allows users to take a photograph of a building or landmark. Image recognition software will then pull up information of it from a database and provide an audio commentary about it.

The WeMage Challenge was organised by NTU and China-based Internet firm Tencent, which owns the messaging app WeChat.

Participants had to develop an app using WeChat's smart platform - software developed by TenCent and the Rapid-Rich Object Search (ROSE) Lab - that deals with image recognition and search software.

Held at NTU on Friday morning, it was the first WeChat app competition to take place in South-east Asia.

The two winning students walked away with a $10,000 cash prize and the chance to commercialise their product.

Other app ideas presented included a food picture-sharing app which allows users to snap a photo of a food item and find out which restaurant serves it, as well as a fashion app that dispenses advice on matching a tie to a shirt based on a photo taken of either item.

The challenge attracted 136 participants in 48 teams. Each team had to include at least one NTU student.

Professor Alex Kot, director of NTU's ROSE Lab and associate dean (Graduate Studies) for NTU's College of Engineering, said: "The creative mobile apps designed by the participants are a clear indication of the strength and versatility of the rapid image search technology developed by NTU.

"We see a number of promising apps developed in this inaugural competition which have the potential to add new capabilities to the already ubiquitous smartphone."

lesterh@sph.com.sg