

'Arm yourself with curiosity and knowledge' - Sabine Lehmann, founder and CEO of AAVEA

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

5 Aug 2021

Sabine Lehmann has worked in the tourism and attractions industry for the past 25 years. Founder and CEO of African Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions (AAVEA) and founder of consultancy agency, Curiositas, Lehmann has established herself as both a futurist and maven in the art and science of visitor attractions management.

With an interest in trends and foresight of tourism in Africa, Lehmann has led and supported a wide range of tourism projects, been a keynote speaker, and served as a thought-leader on several boards within the industry.

This Women's Month, we chat with Lehmann to find out more about her journey, industry challenges her organisation and others have faced and what Women's Month should otherwise represent within its power and strength.

■ Tell us a bit about yourself - your background?

Although I am a Capetonian born and bred, I have had the privilege of living and working in Germany, the UK, Holland and New Zealand – somehow, however, I always find my way back home.

I have been in the visitor attractions industry for more than 25 years now. Although I started out as a speech therapist, I have since got an MBA and Masters in Futures Studies. I was the CEO of Table Mountain Cableway for nine years, the opening COO for the Zeitz MOCAA for two years and started my own attractions and futures consultancy business, Curiositas, three years ago. I am also the founder and chair of the African Association of Visitor Attractions and Experiences (AAVEA).

I am curious about the future of leisure and how we will spend our leisure time – especially out of the home. How will megatrends influence how we spend our leisure time? How will attraction and experiences providers meet these needs? And how do we ensure more people have safe access to healthy leisure spaces and activities that are good for the mind, body and soul?



Sabine Lehmann

■ Describe your role at AAVEA - what does a typical workday look like for you?

My role at AAVEA is to immerse myself in all things attractions, to connect colleagues with information and each other, to source and track leisure trends and to play an advocacy role for the attractions industry in South Africa.

The role of visitor experiences and attractions has been underrated in South Africa. The pandemic has changed this as we see how important healthy social spaces are and as we finally understand the power of the domestic tourism economy.

There is no such thing as a typical work day – which is just how I like it.

■ Do you have any role models? If so, who?

I don't have role models as such, but I do have thought leaders that I have been following for some time. Faith Popcorn is a futurist that I have been following for almost 20 years. Joe Pine, who wrote the seminal book *The Experience Economy* is also someone that I have been following for 20 years.

And of course, my colleagues; strong, curious and creative women in and outside of the industry is where I draw ideas and inspiration from.

■ ***What are your thoughts on the impact of Covid on the industry? How has AAVEA dealt with this challenge?***

In the field of futures; almost every major future scenario thinker had highlighted the outbreak of a pandemic as a global risk. I had read Hans Rosling's (another thought leader that I follow closely) book *Factfulness* in 2017 and he clearly stated that one of the five global risks is the outbreak of a global pandemic.

The impact has been profound. The impact of climate change and accelerated poverty will also be profound. If only we can all see this too.

I looked back at some futures work I had done pre-pandemic for Curiositas clients and was pleased to see that the mega-social trends I spoke about in 2017 were all still relevant and had in fact become accelerated during this period. The concern is – how do we not just gloss over these curious signals; but engage with them and try to understand what this means for our business. Future scenarios are intended to help us think of a range of possible futures and help us plan for them by being less surprised and more prepared.

AAVEA has led the way in advocating for staggered school holidays as a post-lockdown recovery tool that can boost domestic tourism and give attraction operators an extended high season. This has now been proposed by the Department of Basic Education. AAVEA has also just completed its first-ever attractions benchmark study which will be released at our virtual conference on Thursday, 19 August 2021.

For the first time, we will have some hard data to share with tourism stakeholders, highlighting the role attractions and experiences play in tourism and job creation.

I don't refer to a "post-Covid era", but rather to a "post-lockdown era". We know that what we have missed the most is connections with strangers and friends. Attractions and experiences will have an important role to play in encouraging people out of their homes to connect with themselves and others in a safe and healthy way.

■ ***Do you think it's important to have a month dedicated to women? And why.***

I really don't like the way Women's Month has been made into a version of Valentine's Day to women. It's not about flowers and chocolates for women. It's not about cute gifts. Women's Month is about the enormous power and strength that can be found in diversity of thought and experience and viewpoints. Across genders, races and generations.

We need to remember that Woman's Day honours the incredible courage that the women of 1956 showed when they marched to the Union Buildings to protest against the carrying of pass books.

If Women's Month can draw the spotlight towards voices that are not usually amplified then it has a role to play. If it's a way of selling more roses and chocolates... then scrap it.

■ ***What advice would you give to women wanting to enter your industry?***

Arm yourself with curiosity and knowledge. Surround yourself with voices that will tell you the truth – about yourself and your industry,

■ ***What is the best advice anyone has given you?***

Stay true to yourself. No one can be you but you.

▣ ***As a woman, have there been any significant challenges in the workplace that stand out for you?***

Many. Funnily enough, I came across an old notebook that I kept from 2006. I had forgotten this incident but in it, I noted that my boss at the time had said, during a performance review, that he could see I was a hard worker and that I should channel my extra energy into some hobbies or raising kids. Seems quite unbelievable now that that can be said.

Fifteen years later, I don't have kids nor hobbies...

▣ ***Do you have any pearls of wisdom to share this Women's Month or words of encouragement?***

"The future belongs to the curious" – Anonymous

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

Editor at Bizcommunity.

- ▣ #AfricaMonth: Jane Nshuti, transforming African foodways with plant-based cuisine - 31 May 2024
- ▣ #AfricaMonth: Emirates - transforming travel and fostering connections in southern Africa - 3 May 2024
- ▣ #WTMA24: Celebrating 10 years of industry growth and collaboration - 16 Apr 2024
- ▣ Pullman Cape Town: Where business meets leisure - 9 Apr 2024
- ▣ Sho't Left Travel Week: A chance to boost South Africa's domestic tourism - 6 Jun 2023

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>