

INTERNATIONAL

# BOWLING INDUSTRY

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Beekse Bergen  
in the  
Netherlands



# BOWLING WILD

AT THE UNIQUE SAFARI-STYLE RESORT BEEKSE BERGEN IN THE NETHERLANDS, BOWLING IS PART OF A MUCH LARGER FAMILY EXPERIENCE.



■ By Paul Lane

**B**owling while on safari? This may sound like a dream, but at Safaripark Resort Beekse Bergen, Hilvarenbeek, the Netherlands, bowling has gone wild. Bowling is just one of multiple attractions included in this larger-than-life family experience. From actual safaris in Safaripark, to Speelland — the children’s attraction so vast it is called a country —, to Holiday Park where accommodations run from tents to deluxe cabins, to the Event Center which is large enough to hold 20,000 souls, Beekse Bergen is a real game-changer in the family entertainment space.

The land where the Holiday Park and Speelland are located today started off as Natural Park for Peaceful Recreation in 1964. The Safaripark, where visitors were able to drive through a gated community where 50 lions walked freely among the cars, was added and opened in 1968. Today, there are over 150 species roaming the Safaripark that is home to more than 1,000 animals. Visitors can experience the wildlife from their car, just like an African safari, or take a bus tour where a ranger will guide and explain about the animals encountered. Visitors can also download an app that identifies the various species as they are spotted.

The Speelland Children’s Play Country is exactly that: a playground for children of all ages. At Speelland, children experience a wonderful day full of fun playing on slides, swings, seesaws, trampolines, water slides, paddle boats, and much more. And while the children are having fun playing in the various attractions, parents can relax on the sandy beach until sunset.

The Holiday Park is a great place to spend a night or two, surrounded by forests and water. Guests can choose what they prefer to do: a day of swimming in the covered Jungle Pool; climbing and scrambling on the playground equipment; fishing in Lake Victoria; enjoying lunch and dinner; or do nothing at all. As with the Safari Resort, the Holiday Park offers a variety of accommodation options ranging from log cabins, chalets, themed ‘jungalows’ and safari tents, either close to or alongside the water, or in deeply wooded areas.



The Event Center evolved and grew gradually over the years, and, in 2018, the €100 million (\$111.6 million) Safari Resort Beekse Bergen opened.

The Safari Resort Beekse Bergen is an area where you can become at one with nature by spending the night sleeping with wild animals close by in a variety of accommodation options, including one of 206 luxury lodges (including a kids and group lodge), two tree-houses, and 17 luxury safari tents. Each type of accommodation comes fully equipped with kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms, and can accommodate between six and 14 people. Food and beverage service



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The Restaurant Moto

is also available on request.

Guests at the Safari Resort will experience waking up among zebras, giraffes, rhinos, and a myriad of other animal species — an experience that seems like something out of a travel brochure, magazine, or a travel documentary. At the heart of the resort is Karibu Town, a bustling center where guests will find everything needed for the ultimate vacation. Nearby, the Maji Springs, with a lap pool and a children’s water playground, rev up the fun.

After a day full of activities, guests can enjoy delicious dishes in Restaurant Moto. The word moto is Afrikaans for *fire*, and at Restaurant Moto, fire is an important ingredient. The sounds and aroma of meats sizzling on the grill is an experience to savor. It’s also an opportunity to get to know a variety of new and different types of exotic dishes that the whole family will enjoy.

The Guest Services and Market is the place for visitors to stop by when they first arrive before driving directly to their reserved accommodation. Before guests arrive, they are given a unique code which gives direct access to the resort and room without having to wait in line to check in — there’s no delay to starting their unique safari experience.

The Market supplies provisions for an overnight stay. Among other things, guests can find pre-packaged, fresh sandwiches and meals, small-service groceries, and souvenirs.

The Pamoja Lounge in Karibu Town is the place to head where guests can enjoy a cocktail, a glass of wine or beer, and enjoy atmospheric African music while enjoying a snack and drink at the bar with friends.

The Pamoja Lounge is home to a six lane bowling center which is available exclusively for overnight guests within the resort. With the average length of stay being three nights, the Pamoja Lounge and bowling center has proven to be a popular place for guests of all ages to get together.

The safari-themed ambiance of the bowling center fits seamlessly with the rest of the resort and park. It is equipped with QubicaAMF’s SPL Boutique English walnut lanes, TMS string pinspotters, BES X Bowler Entertainment System, and, to



Niels de Wildt, director of Libéma Holiday Parks



Folkert Nievelstein, manager of Bowltech’s sales and service for Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg)

ensure the lanes are in tip-top condition, a new QubicaAMF EZ Touch lane machine. All the QubicaAMF equipment was supplied by the Netherlands-based Bowltech Group.

Niels de Wildt, the director of Libéma Holiday Parks division, the parent company of Beekse Bergen, always planned for bowling and safari park. Niels said, "In the early stages of development, when the facilities in Karibu Town were being considered, a bowling center was always part of that discussion. Beekse Bergen strives to provide a year-round family fun experience." Niels explained that bowling at the Dierenbos location was a hit with customers. "Bowling provides a fun and interactive activity for the whole family," he continued, "so it was a logical choice to add bowling to our central building at Beekse Bergen."

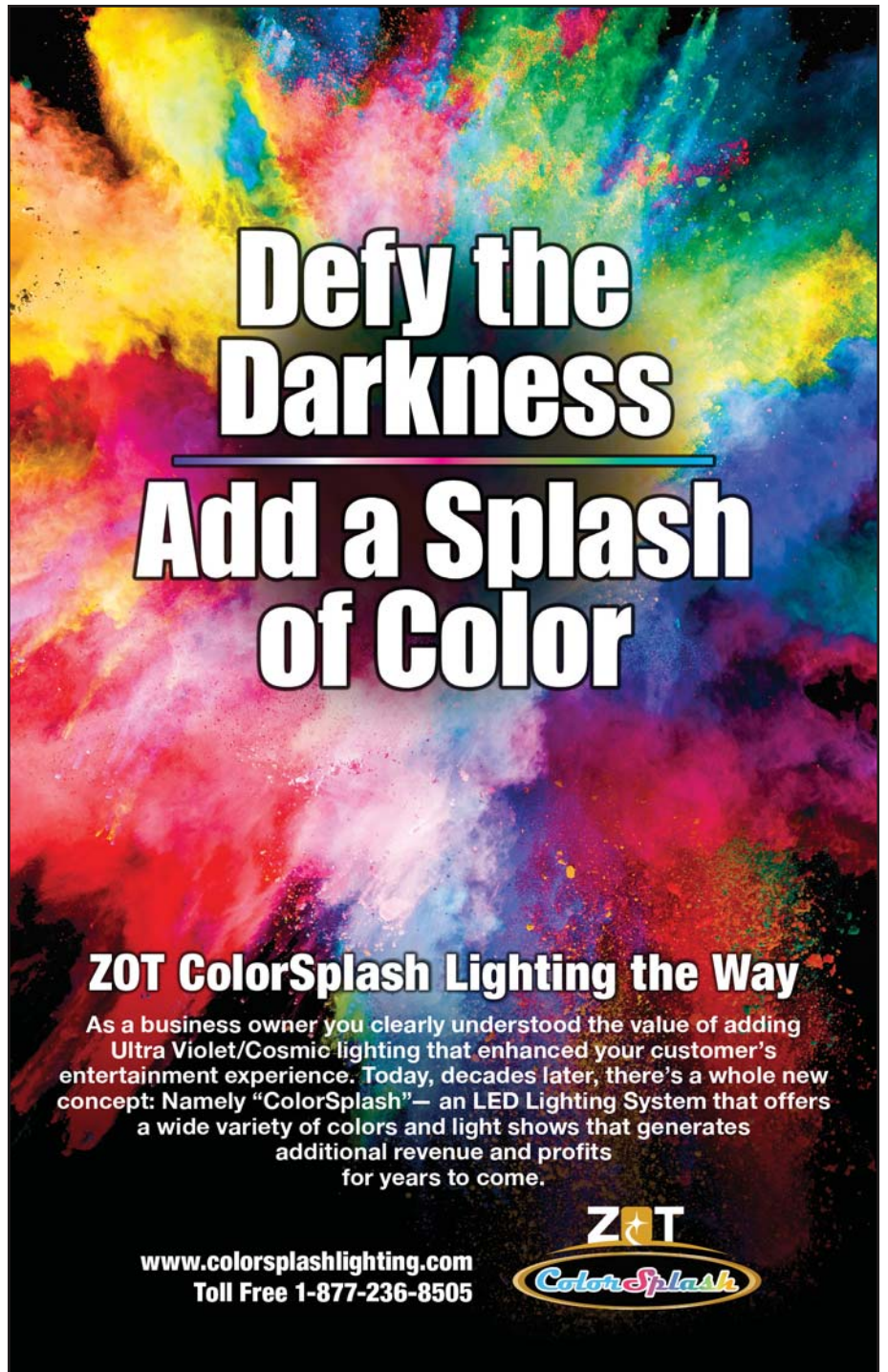
Folkert Nievelstein, manager of Bowltech's sales and service for Benelux (Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg), adds, "As part of a major €100 million investment, Libéma has extended the activities with a resort where people can stay overnight, [with] the wild life. Obviously, those guests need to be entertained, so we helped them create a unique bowling facility that seamlessly fits into the African-themed environment"

The construction of the new bowling center was planned with military-style precision. "As an example, transportation and unloading of equipment had to be precisely planned, scheduled and executed as there was little room to maneuver in the natural environment of the park. Any contractor who damaged even *one* of the trees would be fined immediately [in order] to protect the natural surroundings to the maximum. This and many other stories are what made this project pretty unique," added Folkert.

Guests who stay in a rental or tent at the Safari Resort or Holiday Park receive a complimentary Attraction Pass. The Attraction Pass includes free Wi-fi and

unlimited access to six different day attractions: the Safari Park; the Speelland play country; the Animal Kingdom park; the Zoo Park; an aviation theme park; and an aqua zoo.

Another major and popular attraction at Beekse Bergen is the Event Center. The Event Center consists of six attractive halls and an outdoor area occupying about 100 acres. There are two more structures located in the outdoor terrain: The Cabin and The Lodge. The other locations in the Event Center differ in size, atmosphere, and layout, and can be used for all types of events, ranging from children's parties, to anniversaries, to weddings, to family celebrations, to school trips, and theme parties. It's also a popular venue for corporate team-building events and employee gatherings. "We can



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# COVER STORY

accommodate corporate [and party] groups in from a 20 person minimum up to 1,000 guests in our Adventure rooms," Niels de Wildt adds. "We average around 15 plus such events a month. To promote our corporate and party events, we develop marketing campaigns through online channels like Google AdWords, and we also make online presentations on showcase websites like www.locaties.nl. Furthermore, we have an active and highly effective sales team."

The outdoor spaces at The Event Center consist of extensive sandy plains, woodland areas, large lawns, and 28 acres of water. The outdoor area is ideal for tough motorized activities and exciting survival trips. The Cabin and The Lodge are designed to host special events.

The size and diversity of the terrain makes it suitable and popular for music festivals. Niels says, "The site offers space for tens of thousands of visitors. Festival organizers such as Decibel

**“Bowling provides a fun and interactive activity for the whole family, so it was a logical choice to add bowling to our central building at Beekse Bergen.”**

**- Niels de Wildt**

Outdoor, Best Kept Secret and WOO HAH Festivals have been on the site at Beekse Bergen for years, each of which have attracted 20,000 visitors for up to three days and nights."

Given the sheer size and complexity of the overall Beekse Bergen Safari Resort, the complex is obviously important to the local community and economy, including in terms of employment.

Niels de Wildt says, "Beekse Bergen guarantees a unique, high-quality one-day and overnight safari recreation in the Netherlands. The opening of the resort reinforces the (multi-day)

The on-site market in Karibu Town



The Pamoja Lounge is a casual bar next to the bowling lanes

residential tourism and employment in Brabant province Presently, there are about 600 full- and part-time employees at Beekse Bergen, a number which will increase as there are plans for a Phase II Expansion to the Safari Resort in terms of accommodation and activities."

With more than 20 locations, Libéma, the parent company of Beekse Bergen, is one of the largest leisure concerns in the Netherlands. The company consists of three divisions: amusement parks; holiday parks; and trade shows and events, each of which operates a variety of venues. The diversity of these locations offers entertainment opportunities to families and the business market with over 8,000,000 visitors a year.

With bowling being such a small yet highly successful part of Libéma's overall business at Safari Resort Beekse Bergen and Holiday Park at Dierenbos, one cannot help but wonder how many of the seemingly huge number of guests that pass through the door discover bowling for the first time in this unique setting. And, of those who enjoyed the experience, how many would be motivated to visit their local bowling center in their home town, not only throughout Benelux, but the rest of Europe, as visitors are attracted to the park from across the entire region. Maybe the bowling industry in Europe owes Libéma a vote of thanks?

A Special thank you to Marlies van Steenoven: Team Lead Travel, Libéma Fun Factory BV, for all her help in gathering information for this story. ❖



Paul Lane is former Director of Marketing and Marketing Services for AMF Bowling, Inc. He has been the director of 18 AMF World Cups, an officer in national and international trade associations, and a pro bowler during a career that spans more than 60 countries and 50 years.