

Matt Bowles: Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles. Welcome to The Maverick Show. My guest today is Johannes Voelkner. He is the founder of the Nomad Cruise where location independent entrepreneurs and digital nomads come together for a business conference on a cruise boat twice a year.

After becoming a digital nomad in 2010, it was two years into that journey when Johannes realized he definitely missed having like-minded people around him, so he took action, and he started to build the community that ultimately led to one of the largest digital nomad Face-book groups and then, accidentally, to the creation of the Nomad Cruise, which now attracts nearly 500 participants on each voyage and is one of the largest work-cation events in the world. He is also the founder of Homebase Global, a travel community for remote workers. Johannes, welcome to the show.

Johannes Voelkner: Thank you. It's great to be here.

Matt: Good to have you here, man. We've been trying to organize this interview for a while, so I'm super excited that we're doing it. And just to set the scene, we are in Jericoacoara, Brazil right on the beach. And I understand that you have been here at least once before because this is one of the top kite surfing destinations in the world, and you are a pretty serious kite surfer, as I understand it.

Johannes: Yeah. I mean, Jericoacoara's an amazing place, and it has got some kiting as well. There are better places for kiting in Brazil, but I love the overall package that you get here of the kiting, the people, the restaurants, and overall, it's just a really incredibly amazing place, no matter whether you like kiting or not. Do you agree? I guess –

Matt: I do agree because I've never kite surfed, and this town has absolutely blown me away. For people that have never been, it's literally like a town that's built on the sand. The whole thing is one the beach. There are no paved roads. Everywhere you go, it's all sand. If you go into restaurants, you're going shopping, you're going to the nightclub – whatever you're going to, it's all sand.

And they have this Caipirinha Street down by the ocean which has literally probably 50 consecutive Caipirinha carts. The first time I saw that, I was like, "How in the world are 50 consecutive, identical-looking Caipirinha carts all going to do business?" But

sure enough, you go down there at night, and they all have lines for people to buy Caipirinhas from them.

Johannes: Exactly. And they have fiber internet here, so that's also really good to work and run your business, and work in the morning, and go kiting in the evening, and then go for an early Caipirinha or party with the sunset, and then go to sleep. And then you're awake at 7:00 in the morning again.

Matt: Which is also an amazing feature here in terms of the sunset parties. So, they have a rooftop nightclub called Café Jeri, and it is literally only open from 5:00 p.m. until 8:30. And so, you go up there, and it is one of the wildest clubs. You would think you are in I don't know what city at 2:00 in the morning at the hottest club.

I mean, we're talking a dozen fire twirlers standing on the bar or the rooftop doing these acrobatics with fire torches, acro-yoga people. They literally have a tank with a mermaid swimming in it. All the bartenders, the flare bartenders that are juggling the bottles. And obviously DJs. They also have a live band supplementing the DJ. It is absolutely wild. It's a rooftop party, and it literally ends at 8:30 p.m.

Johannes: Exactly. So, it's perfect to just go for dinner afterwards and then go sleep or go to the Caipirinhas.

Matt: Or go to the Caipirinhas, exactly. It's an amazing concept. So, can you talk a little bit about kite surfing? And just for people that don't know exactly what that is, maybe just explain what it is, and then how you got into it, and what is it like? What does it feel like when you're kite surfing? Why do you love it so much?

Johannes: Well, basically, it's a kite that is attached to some lines, and you're in a boat kind of like waterskiing. But most people think that it's a very exhausting sport because you have to hold the kite, which is not true because the kite pulls your body, so you can do it just with two fingers. It's an amazing sport because you get to see amazing places around the world, which is also one reason why I ended up in Jericoacoara when it was not less busy six years ago and then three years ago again.

There are amazing places around the world that you can see the wind usually for kiting only picks up in the afternoon, so in the

morning, you have a lot of time to work, to focus. It's a great sport that has got endless progression. It's fairly easy to learn once you get the hang of it, which takes about 10 days. Then you can see amazing places around the world, have fun, have a sport that actually doesn't really hurt you so much. You can jump 12 meters, but still, you don't really get hurt unless you do stupid things, which sometimes can happen.

But in general, it's a pretty safe sport. It's amazing, and you get to see the world. The only thing that sucks is traveling with kite gear, but that's just one bad thing about it, and I got used to it thus far, so no problem.

Matt: It's always a tradeoff. So, that's awesome. So, traveling the world and kite surfing, and I know a lot of people that have different types of passion hobbies will travel the world to go scuba diving or travel the world to go skiing, and kite surfing, obviously, is one of those types of sports where there are preeminent destinations and people travel the world to go and experience it in those locations. So, that's awesome. Let's go back a little bit now and jump back and talk a little bit about your digital nomad journey, and your choice, and what inspired you initially to start that journey. So, you're originally from Germany?

Johannes: Exactly. I'm from Germany, but in 2005, I went to study in Cape Town. Basically, there, I met my ex. We had been living together and kept on for five years. I even got engaged. The whole thing didn't really work out, but what worked out in that time was that it's very hard to make money in South Africa, so basically, I started to work online and do virtual assistance actually for European clients in Switzerland or in Germany where they would pay me much more than in South Africa, and that was kind of the start for me.

So, I was working online, the relationship ended, and then after the relationship ended, I was like, "Okay, I'm here in South Africa. I'm not even close to where I am." I always wanted to go to South America, or the Philippines, or many other places. I didn't want to stay after the relationship ended much longer in Cape Town. I kind of went traveling because I thought my clients don't really care where I am, and I didn't really consider time zones and things like this, so I learned a bit more afterwards, but that's how I started. I was forced to learn an online job because the wages are so bad in

South Africa.

Matt: And then from there, were you able to establish that as a completely location independent form of income that was able to replace the previous job that you had? And how did your entrepreneurial trajectory evolve from there?

Johannes: So, basically, what I did is first of all, I was actually working for a tour company, inbound tour operator. They organize all the things for the travel agencies in Europe for people to go to Africa. So actually, because I always wanted to do tourism – not online marketing, which explains what I’m doing today – I actually became a virtual assistant, so I had a job only in my life for four months, and after four months, I already quit the job because the virtual assistant job was paying more than my salary in South Africa, so I just went to them and I just said, “Okay, I want to work freelance, and I want to have double the hourly rate whenever I want to come.”

And I did some good things for them, so they actually allowed me to do this. So, I had a very easy transition after four months which made it easy because if you’re living in a country that’s a little bit cheaper, it’s much easier to actually get to that level where you can work location independently.

Matt: So, you established a fully location-independent lifestyle at that point, and you were able to generate your income without being in one particular place, so you had achieved the location independence. And then from there –

Johannes: No, actually not location independence because location independence kind of means that you can live almost anywhere in the world. I was able to live like that in South Africa, but if I were to move to Miami, then I would be in big trouble, right?

Matt: I see. You mean because of the amount of money that you were making?

Johannes: Yeah, yeah.

Matt: I see what you’re saying. But you didn’t have to go into an office, so you at least got a taste of that sort of lifestyle freedom. And then from there, what was your entrepreneurial trajectory from there?

Johannes: So, I helped my family with a project in the therapy niche. I just did the right things without knowing it. Doing Face-book ads in 2008 was a lot cheaper than it is today, so at that time, I was able to build a nice business based on that, selling products for therapists. And that helped me to basically become really location independent. And actually, it even helped me to start a four-hour work week and get a full salary. And so, I took that book that I read and that time really serious, and I was just traveling around the world and just really working not so much. But afterwards, I realized that that's not really what I want to do, and then I started more projects.

Matt: So, you were able to read *The 4-Hour Workweek* and create an automated business that was giving you enough of a stream of income to cover your basic lifestyle expenses?

Johannes: Exactly, yeah. I was doing that. And that allowed you to travel, but then eventually you wanted to do more, so then where did that lead you? What was your next move after that?

Matt: So, I was doing the four-hour workweek, the therapy project, but I was also being a web designer and doing some additional income sources because I never really know. You know when you build some kind of passive income, you never really know how long this lasts. I'm fortunate that actually lasted until today, this project, but on the side, I was doing web design for dentists, or signage people, or different people, so I had basically two jobs.

But these were both not really what I wanted to do, and so basically, when I left Cape Town and I started to travel, after 10 months, I realized that I really wanted to connect to more people who are also location independent, and I was like, "Wow, this is amazing. I'm here actually in Jericoacoara and in all these places." Actually, when I was here, that was one of my first trips in South America, and I was traveling with another web designer when we were here six years ago, but the internet was really crappy, so we couldn't stay too long.

But basically, that's when I realized I wanted to connect to more people, so I had the idea to create an e-book that inspires people to travel to all these amazing places that I've found in my travels, which actually, in that e-book, I think Jericoacoara is already

mentioned.

Matt: Nice. And so, you created the e-book, and then you put it out there as an income generator, or as an attempt to identify other people and start building community, or both?

Johannes: I thought that this e-book might make me really rich, so I launched it, and I had five sales on the first day, and then it didn't really work at all. I made a lot of mistakes when I launched this, but that was the foundation of everything that I'm doing today in the nomad scene, this e-book, so it wasn't really such a failure in the end.

Matt: So, it was something that initially appeared to be a failure, but then what were the effects of it, the long-term effects that actually ended up coming out of it?

Johannes: So, eventually, I invited people who bought my e-book were the best travel destinations for digital nomads where they can live for under \$1,000.00 – that is the topic of the e-book – per month. I invited all these people into the first Face-book group for digital nomads, and then I was like, “Okay, I want this group exclusively for people who bought my book.” But then I had 300 people in the group, and I had 1,000 people who wanted to be part of the group. And so, I was like, “Okay, well, it's a bit risky, but let me just open up this group for everyone because surely there are more people who are interested in this.”

So, I saw that there was this big demand, and then I grew this group very, very quickly to 5,000 people. And when there were 5,000 people in that group – that was actually three years ago – I posted the Nomad Cruise in that Face-book group, and I said, “Here. There's a great cruise that we can go on,” so it wasn't called Nomad Cruise. It was just a cheap cruise across the Atlantic. And 100 people booked it because we were all super keen to meet each other because at that time, even three years ago, there were not so many nomad events or anything, so something like this sounded like a great way to meet 100 other nomads because at that time, I didn't even know myself more than 100.

And then we had a lot of bookings, and then I decided to turn it into a more serious business after the first trip.

Matt: So, you just put that out there as an attempt to socialize with other nomads and basically create a Meetup. And then when you saw the response to that, at what point did it trigger in your mind that this was a really viable, 1.) Business opportunity that you could potentially monetize and build in a meaningful way, but 2.) Really a way that you could grow the event itself and add value to the nomad space?

Johannes: So, I realized that when there was really a lot of demand that maybe I should do something more about it, and at that time, I was also looking for business ideas. So, actually, also three-and-a-half years ago, I had started a coworking space in Tarifa, and then I had started the cruise, and eventually, I decided to drop the coworking and just focus on the cruise. But I realized there was a lot of demand, so what we did was we had all the people, and then I met the designer, who was actually going to help me with something else, with another project, and he helped me with the cruise, and we just made a website called Nomad Cruise one week before the cruise started.

So, we gave it a go. We printed a flag. That's all we did. And some T-shirts that people could buy. So, basically, we made sure that this was not just a meet-up. This was the Nomad Cruise. But basically, it was just a meet-up that we then transferred into a cruise.

Matt: But that was smart that you branded it because then you controlled the brand.

Johannes: Yeah, that helped us to create the brand, and then there were some people on the boat who wrote for big German media, and I also had one person who was interviewing me for media and stuff. This is how we got some leverage and grew it from there. And so, like this, we already had the name Nomad Cruise, so it was featured really on big newspapers.

Matt: That's awesome. So, let's talk about the evolution of the Nomad Cruise experience from that first cruise until now. You've just finished the seventh cruise. You have the eighth one already advertised and available, so we're talking about just over a three-year timespan that's gone by. What was it like on that first cruise, and then what is it like now? Maybe you can just describe today, currently, what is the Nomad Cruise, who is it for, and what

is the experience like?

Johannes: So, basically, what happened was on the first cruise, it was really just a meet-up, and my main idea about the cruise was not the cruise itself. It was that we arrive in South America with a hundred people and that we don't feel so alone traveling in South America. It was not about the cruise. One week before the cruise, I thought, "Okay, maybe let's just do some workshops so we're not so bored." So, some people just filled out a thing. It was very informal meet-ups, which we also still have on the cruise every evening. That is one of the best things probably about the cruise.

But there were informal meet-ups happening on the cruise that we put together three days before the cruise, and we had two evenings for the little conference and some more planned talks so that we could take some nice pictures of us doing talks, and that was it. That was the cruise. And then afterwards, we actually went to Jericoacoara where we are here now, and we're with 30 people, and we celebrated Christmas together, and then we went for New Years, so that already happened on the first cruise.

But basically, over the time of the cruise, everything became a lot more professional, and now with volunteers, and staff, and everyone involved, there's about 50 people involved running the cruise, even if someone is just doing something for three hours at one point. But they have 50 different people who are involved and helping to make this happen. So, we have an amazing talent show, we have a failure night, we have an opening ceremony, closing ceremony. We have over 80 talks and workshops, a lot of specials where you can really connect much better to other people. And basically, every cruise, we add something that wasn't there before. If there's something that we didn't like, then we take it away.

So, there are always small improvements, and now on the last cruise, so now that we were 500 people, something like communication became a lot harder, so we are working on making communication on the cruise ship also much better for the future cruises. I mean, we just optimize all the time. We look at the feedback, and then we go for it.

Matt: Well, I have been on the last two cruises. I was on Nomad Cruise 6, and then I came back immediately for Nomad Cruise 7, and I have been very impressed with a number of things about the cruise.

The first thing that stood out to me on Nomad Cruise 6 was the amount of international diversity that you have on the cruise. So, back in the last cruise, there was maybe 250 people or so, but they were from 42 different countries, including countries like Uganda, and Nigeria, and Kenya. I mean, places all over the world, and so it wasn't just European countries or it wasn't just from the U.S. or things like that. And so, that to me was very interesting.

And then the other thing was the level of professionalism in terms of the event organization and the execution of the entire event. And then the third thing was the caliber of people that I met on the Nomad Cruise. And a lot of listeners of The Maverick Show will actually know many of them because I have interviewed them for this podcast. So, Interview No. 1, for example, of this podcast, which listeners will know, is with May Ling Lai who I met on Nomad Cruise 6 and also interviewed her. That interview was recorded on the boat on Nomad Cruise 6, and that was literally the premiere launch episode of The Maverick Show.

And then subsequently, people will know Kristin Wilson in Episode 3, who I also met on the Nomad Cruise. They'll know Julia Shem from Episode 8, who I also met on the Nomad Cruise. And a number of other people that I've interviewed are people that I initially meet on the Nomad Cruise because it attracts and brings together those caliber of location-independent entrepreneurs and those types of people, so it has really evolved to quite the networking event in this space.

Johannes:

So, we have a lot of programs, but what it's really about is the networking, and it's about meeting people and then that you can meet them in other places around the world and stuff. And what we just want to facilitate is to really create friendships. So, it's not that we want to have you make the best business. These are things that take time, right?

We are always trying so that everyone meets a lot of people and can really connect with them, and that's why we are now traveling, me and Jerry, and have a lot of things because this is what I feel is the biggest problem about the digital nomad life that people are very isolated or you have 600 different friends but no one who's real. And so, we want to give a good foundation for these things.

Matt:

And I think the other thing that's really interesting about the

dynamic of the community on the Nomad cruise is that everyone is voluntarily contributing their knowledge or their expertise, so you don't pay any speakers or even subsidize expenses. And yet, all of the paid participants on the cruise volunteer to give talks or workshops, or share expertise, or host meet-ups, or do that kind of thing. And then you can just meet other people that are doing interesting things. So, on Nomad Cruise 6, I did a workshop that I hosted on minimalist packing, on how to travel the world for a year-plus with carry-on luggage only and look good while you're doing it.

And so, that was kind of a cool niche, one of the things that I do, but then as I met different people, including May Ling, she and I then on this most recent cruise decided that we would come together and host an entrepreneur hotseat workshop where entrepreneurs at all different stages in their journey could come up and pose their biggest question, or obstacle, or challenge, and we would strategize with them in front of the group for five or 10 minutes through that and really just try to deliver as much value as we could.

We thought that customizing the workshop experience and really trying to deliver specific tactical value for those people and then also for the audience to see that kind of strategy process would be the best value that we could deliver on the cruise. But that mentality is embodied by everybody else on the cruise also, and they're trying to think about what do they know, or what do they do, or what's their expertise, and then how can they deliver that and how can they talk to people and answer their questions and help people, not just while they're doing their talk but also throughout the cruise and at night at the bar, and there's people talking about business and organizing.

I mean, I just organized a couple ad hoc one-on-one mastermind sessions where I approached some of the individuals on the cruise that I most respect as entrepreneur business owners, and I said why don't the two of us sit down for an hour and basically give each other feedback on the other person's business. And so, we just set up these things, and so I came away with all this business advice from my own business, and then they did as well for me and stuff. And so, those kind of networking opportunities I think are incredibly valuable. Obviously, the friendships and the social come out of it as well, but the business networking too has been really

incredible. It's a really impressive space.

Johannes: I mean, basically, the idea is that this is something that I was always dreaming of. I thought it would be really cool because when I started out as a nomad, I didn't know anyone. I wanted to know all these super successful people, and I wanted to have it in a way that you can share your knowledge because sometimes people who are not successful, they also know other things and stuff, so I really always liked the idea of just having a skill share where everyone just gives and contributes with each other, so we tried to have this culture on the cruise to really help each other.

Matt: That's amazing. So, that's the experience on the cruise, and there's a whole mix of business and social and everything else that's there as well as a talent show. I mean, there's a theater on the boat, and some of the people that are performing music, or they're performing stand-up comedy, or they're performing acts of various different kinds. I mean, there's a talent show that the participants just voluntarily participate. I mean, it's really incredible where it has evolved to.

And I want to ask you, you alluded to the 50 people that are now involved in building, delivering, and executing the operational side of the event, and I want to talk to you a little bit about the business side of things and some of the behind the scenes stuff. I mean, the first thing that's apparent to people that go on the cruise, and you can see at the end of the cruise because your entire staff and your volunteers, they all get a standing ovation. And it's really a heartfelt one. It's not just like, "Oh, thanks." It's like, "Wow, we were all legitimately impressed with the performance of all of these people."

And so, I want to ask you, first of all, about hiring. How do you find staff of that caliber? How do you identify them and how do you hire them and bring them on? What is your process for curating and attracting the team that you have?

Johannes: So, basically, everyone who's been helping with things was a part of the cruise in the past. So, I think especially for the cruise, it's really important that people understand what this is about so we don't look anywhere outside usually for these types of things. We only take people who were participants of the cruise, so everyone who's been helping, except there was one exception with the

media thing where sometimes you need to have something more specific, but everyone has been part of the cruise. And then I always look for people who are really good in connecting people.

So, with every cruise, there are some people who are really standing out in the way of how they were first-time participants, but they are just really good and they're bringing people together, so that's something I look for. I observe a lot on the cruise. Or when people really do something very proactively, that's how they usually get involved, that I just look out for these qualities. But I mean, these days, we have some volunteers and then we also have CEOs, so that is also a friend's thing if someone who's coordinating. Like, the CEOs are people who were coordinating tribes.

Matt: Can you explain what that acronym means and what the tribes mean and stuff like that just for people that have never been on a Nomad Cruise?

Johannes: CEO was the chief experience officer, so people who were looking out for a small group of people on the cruise because the bigger the group gets, the more you really need to make sure that people don't get lost in the whole environment. So, we started something where we created smaller tribes within this big group, so we have some leaders who are doing this, and they're doing this completely voluntarily. And then we have volunteers who are really actually working on the cruise, and we have a core team of 5-6 people, and media.

Matt: And so, can you talk a little bit about the way that the operations run? How do you manage your team? How do you execute the event? How do you plan in between cruises? And obviously, everybody's a digital nomad and they're all over the place. How do you manage a distributed team on different time zones and basically get everything to run like clockwork on the ship from the perspective of the participants? How do you do that?

Johannes: So, I wish it would run like clockwork, but it's always good when most people have that impression. So, basically, we are 5-6 people, social media, a little more operational looking for excursions, and someone who takes care of the program, and someone who takes care of the bookings. So, we are actually a super small team. I think most companies or whoever, they would run the cruise with

15 people, and we're doing it with five. But we have optimized the processes. I think a lot of processes, we have them quite well, and we put just a lot of information before it gets asked. That's what we try to do, so that keeps a lot of our work from us.

And we have a Meetup meeting once a week from about 2-3 months before the cruise, and we talk about the program and what we need to do, what are the next big steps, and then we just do it. We use Asana quite a lot. It's great for instead of using email, on Asana, you can see what everyone else is doing. Zoom for collaboration. We don't even have a Slack channel yet. We are thinking about it, but we might not use it. So, it's quite simple in that sense, but complicated at the same time.

Matt: It's definitely not, I think, an easy thing to execute where you can mark it and sell to 500 people, coordinate a program for 80 talks and presentations, and then be able to have the entire thing coordinated on the ship with everything from talent shows in the theater to professional photography and social media going on everywhere to 80 talks starting at the right time, and going, and being coordinated. I mean, I think you're being pretty humble when you're describing it, but it is quite a professional caliber event.

Johannes: So, what I did actually, even the first cruise where you went, I did that one almost by myself, the preparation. So, I coordinated the talks. Pretty much the talks, I didn't host the program, but it was just two people who did this for 250 people, which afterwards, I decided I'm not going to continue like this because it was just way too much. But actually, until one year ago, I did it like this. I mean, there are really key things, like key aspects of the program, and if you just really break them down – we do a lot with surveys, for example.

The program, it's like 2-3 emails, and you actually already have 100 people who want to do a talk. And then you work on that and you prepare it based on the feedback that you got from people. We are going to improve a lot on the program and on the structure of how we do it, but basically, you learn from every cruise. So, I have the whole organization of the cruise in my head after doing it so many times, but not all the staff has it in their heads, and so that's why now we are becoming really good at documenting things and making them actually really perfect.

So, I'm learning a lot, but from basically being a freelancer to leading a small team and setting up the processes, organizational chart, like how you manage top-down and all this, I had no clue about this stuff about one year ago, but I interviewed a lot of friends who know how these things work.

Matt: I was going to ask you about how you learned about that because my entrepreneurial journey, I have no business background at all, and all of my academic work and my entire professional work experience up until the age of 30 when I unexpectedly got fired from my job had absolutely nothing to do with business or what I'm doing today. I just got fired from my job, I ended up reading The 4-Hour Workweek when it came out, and I said, "You know what? I'm going to go this totally different route and figure out how to build a business," with no background at all.

And so, I just started learning as well, so I'm super curious about that. When you say that you really didn't know how to do this, and build these systems and processes, and do all of these different aspects, what was your process for seeking that information out, and learning it, and teaching yourself?

Johannes: So, it was always fixing problems I would say. You're kind of like, "Oh, shit." So, now, we wrote a blog post, and it never got published. That's what happens when you have a team, right? There's one person who writes the blog post, there's one person who's going to put it on the website, and then there's another one who promotes it on social media. And somewhere along the lines, it gets lost. So, when you have situations like this where you can't really blame anyone, then you have to ask yourself, "Why is this happening?" and then you look for a solution, and you'll find, oh, we need to have – always for everything – someone who's responsible to do this.

And then you run into another problem where you're just micromanaging but also being at the top, and you go crazy because if you try to tell someone, "Yeah, but you need to tie your shoes before you leave the house," and at the same time...it's just way too many things. So, basically, I always learned when I was just about to really stress out, and then I realized I'll just let everyone do whatever they want to do – not what they want to do, but I'll just trust them.

And the one thing that is really, really good about the cruise and in general is that people are very loyal, and they really take care that things are working, but you still need to define who's actually responsible for what.

Matt: I wanted to ask you a little bit about your concept of leadership and how you actually run the organization because it does seem like you have really empowered a number of your staff to run with their areas of expertise. You just mentioned loyalty. I mean, I have noticed both in terms of your staff and obviously certainly in terms of the volunteers that continue to come back to help with it, but also even in terms of just the customers and the participants of the Nomad Cruise, you have really, it seems, developed a core group of – you might call them raving fans, like hardcore brand loyalists who literally are just committed now to go on the next however many Nomad Cruises there are.

They're just going to keep going on them because they're totally loyal to the brand, and I think that you've been able to build a brand that has been able to get the customer loyalty, you've been able to get volunteer loyalty, and you've been able to get staff loyalty as you've just described. Can you talk a little bit about your concept of leadership and being at the helm of this whole thing? Any thoughts, or reflections, or tips on how you did that?

Johannes: So, in general, one thing that I've been trying to do all the time is I'm really avoiding friction. So, I don't really want to piss off people too much who are part of the community, and I always want to first think about the community and then about making money. And this is very, very hard. It's very, very hard to grow a cruise when you just raised the prices a little bit and stuff. But then also, at the same time, I always need to raise prices, do things, but it was always so that people could actually see where the things that they are doing, where they are going to, and just basically giving 10 times more value than what you're asking for in terms of financial things.

So, because of this, I think I've been able to avoid a lot of friction, avoid people getting upset about things, but they see, "Okay, he's building something, and I like this, I appreciate this, and I stick with this," and so we have really tried to keep people together and building a community, and that is, I think, the key to actually avoid

friction in that sense and so basically trying to understand what your customers want but not becoming greedy or things like this. Which it's not about greediness, but sometimes you need to make good money, and for me, right now, the community comes always first before making a lot of money or anything.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit too about the way that you are expanding? Because I think you started with this concept of community and you started with two cruises per year, and then what has begun happening is that people are wanting to meet up before the cruise in the embarkation city and then wanting to meet up after the cruise lands when you get off the cruise in the new destination.

Like, we're in Brazil right now, we've been here for a couple weeks after the cruise landed here, and there's still dozens and dozens and dozens of people here, and we're all living together here on the beach and hanging out because we wanted to be able to extend that beyond just the cruise and have a real community dynamic.

And then before the cruise embarked from Barcelona, I was part of the Homebase Global program there where there must've been 80 or so of us who came in three weeks early and lived in Barcelona together for those three weeks, and you facilitated workshops and different sessions and all that kind of stuff, and there's workspace access so people could do their jobs and they could work, and there was also these different social things going on, and everything else. And so, can you talk a little bit about what is next for you on the horizon? What are you building and how are you expanding this concept that you're building?

Johannes: So, right now, we are working on a new concept. Basically, what I realized is we started the cruise, we ended up with a community because cruise ships – hate them or love them – they are the best places to build communities because we're all on the same boat and we can't really hide, and for that reason, we ended up with a really cool community. And so, what I notice is that apart from the cruise, people still want to meet up and they want to do more things and stuff, but there was not really a good structure for it.

And being the organizer of that community, before I thought that we could do more things outside of the cruise to really keep people together, and actually, on the cruise, we are really suffering from

very bad internet, and most people actually take the cruise as a detox, which is great, so that they can really focus on networking and meeting people. But at the same time, we're all working online, and we all have different skills, so it's very important for us to actually sometimes meet when we have internet and when we can show each other things, what we're doing. So, I had the idea to create something of an event where we are doing similar things like on the cruise and work online as well.

This is what we did in Barcelona before the cruise. We met with 80 people, and we were working together, and there were a lot of events and stuff. And that was the foundation for something that now we're going to call Homebase Global, and basically, the idea is to make it really easy for people to have a global homebase and not feel just lonely, like in the month after the cruise when they're with a lot of people, but really say, "Okay, I'm going to Cape Town. There are weekly meet-ups happening there. There's someone that I can talk to, like some ambassadors, and a lot of really, really good stuff that we're going to be organizing around the world with the help of this community that we have built over the years.

And in the beginning, it will only be for people who are part of the cruise, but we're going to open it up a little bit more once we have the system in place.

Matt: I'm super excited to see that, and we'll link in the Show Notes to people can go both to the Nomad Cruise as well as to Homebase Global so that people can plug in and then just follow as it evolves and rolls out and stuff like that, and they can be a part of it.

Johannes: So, just to add one more thing, so the main problem that I see and that I saw from the community was that people, they know so many people, but it's still hard that when you go to a place like Cape Town, for example, you go there, and then you know one person there, and it's really exhausting to build up your network and get into a really cool social vibe. And even if you know maybe 10 people there, it might be hard because they are not really already your best friends or something.

So, what I believe is that it would really help if there's one person who's taking care of everyone and who's organizing a meet-up and just keeping the group together so that they can meet and that they

can have a pretty awesome time from the first day that they arrive because that is basically the thing that I've been always missing about the nomad life. I go to Rio de Janeiro, I know no one, I hang out in a hostel, I would travel, and explore the city, and do all these things, and then after five days, all my friends in the hostel leave, but I want to stay there for two months. So, then I end up going to language school to meet people who are there a bit longer or hang out in co-living places.

Anyways, after four weeks, I started to really like Rio de Janeiro because I have my cool crowd, and then after two months, four weeks later, I'm already leaving because I need to go somewhere else or my visa runs out and stuff. And I believe that what we can do with this Homebase Global is that we can give you that feeling that you only achieve after four weeks from the first day, so there will never be a time when you can't connect and plug into certain places around the world basically immediately within the first weekend or even before you get there.

Matt: I love that. That's awesome. So, let me ask you this. You've been a nomad for many, many years now, and you're obviously very productive with your work, and you've built this business, and it's growing and expanding as we've been discussing. And at the same time, you are a pretty serious lifestyle designer, as we've also discussed, in terms of your kite surfing and all of the fun activities, and hobbies, and experiences that you like to have in the different places where you live.

Can you talk a little bit about how you structure your time and your days so that you can optimize your work productivity? Do you have morning routines? Do you have a particular day structure that remains consistent? How do you balance work and all the exciting things to do in the places that you're living?

Johannes: So, it's the easiest when I am in places where I can go kiting actually because that makes me really motivated to stop work after 2:00 or 4:00, or whenever it starts there and how long the day actually lasts. So, that really helps. And so, now, I've started to do a morning workout, maybe seven minutes in the morning, or plank, or some things. Actually, before I even go to breakfast, I just really try to force myself to do this every morning now, but we'll see how long I keep up with this. Besides that, I don't really have a routine. The organization of the cruise sometimes is really

stressful, sometimes it's not. It always depends on how many tickets you have sold already, what you need to do.

But basically, what I'm just trying to learn the most is to really keep as much work away from me as possible and delegate it so that I can have really free time and that I can really rather brainstorm than actually trying to write an email or a newsletter or something. So, I'm trying to keep all these things away from me so that I have more time to just think and strategize and stuff like this, which is what I love as well, and I think that that's where I'm best as well.

Matt: How do you keep everything organized and prioritized and all that? So, even if you're saying, "I need to build this system and then delegate it and have this person run it, and then I need to do this," you have an enormous number of moving parts going on with the cruise, right? So, how do you organize, prioritize, and then focus on the high-value work that's going to allow you to deliver what you're delivering and then grow and build from there?

Johannes: So, we have a project plan in Asana. We have a Nomad Cruise manual where we say "launching cruise, closing early bird" to all these things. So, we always just are in the moment, in the present in this part, and then we work our way through, and then the better we work, the better we prepare, the less we have to do just before the thing. Before this cruise, it was hectic because we also launched this Homebase event at the same time, which is kind of crazy to run an event, start a new event before a cruise for 500 people, which is already double of what you had before. So, since the cruise is over, I haven't been pushing anyone so far. We're taking it very easy back to work.

But basically, it's this so that we have kind of a project plan. There are different stages of organizing a cruise or any type of event where you need to go through, and then the focus always changes, but it's not like I'm trying to remember a lot. Another thing that I'm really starting to do now, and I think I could even do a talk about this one day, is working with mind maps because when you have things that are so complicated like the cruise or building this remote community or whatever, you're always thinking. You're lying in bed, and then you're like, "Oh, shit," and this, and this.

And so, now, I've started to put everything into mind maps, and I

think that this is very, very good. I have the feeling. I'm not sure. Maybe in six months, I'm not talking about this anymore, but I think that mind maps, especially when you're working on complicated things, are very good to visualize and move parts in the whole organization of the cruise, for example. Now, if someone would quit their job, then we have all these parts of what this person's doing, so I could just use some trees of the mind map and put them to someone else, and then they know that they need to take care of this. Something like this, just as a strategy.

Matt: Can you talk about one – it doesn't have to necessarily be the biggest. It could be the biggest – but at least one example of a setback, or major challenge, or failure that you had in growing the Nomad Cruise, and what you learned from that, and what came out of that?

Johannes: On the second cruise, I had organized this by myself, and we had 200 people. I had one person who was helping me and another one just a little bit of hosting for the program, but pretty much it was almost run by myself, and this was the biggest wakeup call for me to make a cool program. So, we didn't really have a program like this before, but the second cruise was kind of – if I would say – it was the biggest failure, and people didn't really connect very well. If I look now on cruises, like the returning customers, there's only a small portion who was in a little bit of a VIP area on this ship. They are still all very, very well connected because this was a smaller group.

But besides that, it was just, in my opinion, it wasn't a failure, but it was like the first official cruise, and if you compare what you see now to what we had there, this is worlds apart. But the failure of organizing this cruise and like me, I even got sick, and I was just like, "What the fuck am I doing here? There are 200 people on this ship, and I'm the only one." And on the introduction night, I said, "Guys, if you have any questions, please don't talk to me." So, that was how we started to make a better program.

Matt: One of the things that I appreciate that you guys have done on the last two cruises that I've been on is you've had the night of failures, and I was wondering if you could just talk about that, just explain what it is and explain why you do it because I think that anybody that either is a business owner or an aspiring one is likely very familiar that 100% of entrepreneurs have failures all the time.

So, can you talk about what inspired that night and describe what it is?

Johannes: So, the main reason why we are successful is because we had so many failures before, right? There's 10 times more failure than successes. I had been working for four years where I had no income, where I had just built a Face-book group and sold my e-book for a few dollars, so there was nothing I could live on. Luckily, I had built the other things before, the passive income that could support this. But all these are things of failure.

Actually, one thing I did before, I've never really said this, I once started within five minutes on the German Face-book that was at that time starting, I started some groups for these communities, and there were 40,000 members, and it's only out of five minutes where I started this because I was just the first one to start, like backpacking groups for Thailand and anything. So, these groups, they grew really fast, so that already made me start to think about what you can do with communities and groups. I never made anything out of this.

I couldn't go to tourism school where I wanted to go. I wanted to study tourism. In the end, all your failures put together lead to the success that you have, and it's just always about trying and stuff, and so we wanted to teach this a little bit on the cruise as well.

Matt: And so, participants on the cruise can volunteer to participate if they want to share in front of the group an epic business failure or something like that that occurred to them, and many of them are humorous or whatever it is, but I think it's creating an environment where it's, 1.) Okay to talk about your failures, and 2.) You are going to feel that it's okay to fail. And not just okay to fail because everyone else is also failing, but that's actually how you eventually succeed.

Johannes: You need to fail all the time to succeed because otherwise you don't learn. I mean, it was easy to start the cruise in that sense with a Face-book post, and make a website, and do this stuff, but actually making the cruise from having the concept to where it is today, that was not easy. That was not just a lucky post where you do something. That was learning how to build teams, how to make a program, how to make all these other moving parts work, how to actually sell what you're doing and finding the right pricing things

and whatsoever. And it's still not that it's smooth. So, there are so many things.

Sometimes you can be really lucky in doing the right the thing, but if you look at the real picture, then you just have to really put in the work and you have to have a lot of failures that will ultimately lead to the big success because you can't just be successful by doing one thing for fun or where you're just really lucky because then you didn't learn anything.

Matt: And those failures can oftentimes be very stressful, either because of the financial consequences that they have or as you mentioned with the second cruise, just stuff like this, because of overwhelm or because of all various different reasons. And so, over your entrepreneurial journey, what techniques have you developed for dealing with stress and managing and reducing stress in your life as an entrepreneur?

Johannes: So, I think I have one pretty good skill. That is that I don't really get so stressed. I kind of get stressed, but until I get stressed, it takes quite a lot of – like I can deal with this, I don't know why. I am stressed, like I'm working a lot, but that I'm like, "Oh, shit," when I see sometimes the level when other people start to freak out, then it's very seldom that I get angry and stuff. So, I've kind of learned to control this or whatever. It's not something where I really had to work on a thing that I'm not getting stressed.

Matt: That is a really good skill. Let me ask you this. Now, you've been traveling, you've been a digital nomad since 2010, and you've been traveling the world and living all over the place. And as you reflect back on that experience and the personal growth and the experience you've had through travel, can you talk about what travel itself means to you? Why do you travel? What do you get from travel? Why are you so passionate about it? Why is it important to you?

Johannes: So, I think that changed. It changed a lot. I used to really love to travel, and now I just really like to spend time in certain places, and work there, and live there. Like now, I've been here to Jeri, I didn't do a buggy tour, I didn't go horse-riding, I didn't do a lot of the things, but I still just enjoyed being here, and I really love the kiting. So, I just like to be in places where I can do this after work, and I like to be in nice places, not big cities and stuff, so I really

appreciate that, but I'm not so much into the whole travel mode anymore.

But I still like it. I'm always curious to go to new places and stuff, but in the beginning, I was always super excited to go somewhere else, and now I've found a cool hobby that makes me travel.

Matt: That's awesome. Where do you see the future of the digital nomad movement at large going? Because you've now been a nomad since 2010, and you have seen an incredible evolution. I have been full-time nomading since 2013, and when I started, none of these work-travel programs of any kind existed at all. I was just excited to have Airbnb, and I didn't have to stay in either a hotel or rent a long-term apartment. I was like, "Oh, my gosh. This Airbnb is amazing." And then I had Uber, and I was like, "That's crazy."

And then all of a sudden, this space just proliferates with all these different things in just a matter of a few years of companies trying to come in, and fill voids, and serve the space and stuff like that, and facilitate the ability for more and more people to exercise their location independence and work from amazing places, and see the world, and build community, and that kind of stuff. So, based on everything that you've seen up until now, what do you think is the future of the digital nomad movement and how is this ecosystem going to continue evolving?

Johannes: So, I think that we are just really at the very, very start, so I think that this will go crazy. It will go nuts, and there will be – if I think maybe 10 years ahead, then there will be so many more hotspots where you can meet nomads around the world. So, yeah, it's going to go really crazy. A lot more co-living options, co-living hotels, co-living hotel chains. Any type of thing you want in tourism will have something for nomads because in the end, if you think about it, a normal person who works from 9:00 to 5:00 travels maybe two or three weeks per year, and there's a whole travel industry for these people.

So, now, one nomad travels all year round. We are much more able to spend money on travels, so this will go crazy I think. But also, people will travel more, but they also will basically settle earlier in new places, like southern Spain, or somewhere in Portugal, in Greece, not maybe settling but spending more time there at a time. There's no Bali of Europe yet, so there will be five or six coming

soon, and it's a very exciting time to watch what's happening and be part of it.

Matt: All right, Johannes. You ready to start wrapping this up with some lightening round questions?

Johannes: Yeah, sure.

Announcer 1: The Lightening Round.

Matt: What is one book that has really influenced you over the years that you would most recommend to people?

Johannes: So, I'm just going to say what everyone says, and it's the *The 4-Hour Workweek* because basically, I was lost in Cape Town trying to find my way, and when I read this book in 2008, it was just shortly after it came out, I kind of realized that that was just my eye-opener, that there's a world where you can work online, and that was my start for the entire journey. So, maybe it's not really so applicable anymore for people, but that is the one book that I value.

Matt: What is one app, or productivity tool, or gadget that you're currently using that you would most recommend?

Johannes: I can really recommend Asana, which is amazing. It's kind of like Trello. It's a bit more sophisticated than Trello. It's got more functionality already built in than Trello, and that is great if you want to collab with other people. But what I have to add is that whatever you put in Asana, you also have to still document your processes because things after a while get lost. So, what I would do, apart from any other program, before you start any work, sit down and write down what you want to achieve. You want to do marketing for the cruise, you want to launch the cruise, write down on Google Docs what you want to do, and then put the most important things in Asana.

Matt: Awesome. Of all the places that you have traveled, which have now been – how many countries have you been to probably?

Johannes: I think over 75.

Matt: So, over 75 countries that you've been to and a number of places

within those countries of course, what would be the top three travel destinations that you would most recommend that other people check out?

Johannes: So, I always say Cape Town. I still think it's one of the best, most beautiful cities in the world with a huge variety of things, and it's just an awesome place to spend one to three months when it's really cold in Europe in the winter. So, Cape Town, I really like. Besides that, I love Tarifa, which is a small town in southern Spain, also a kite surfing town, but I really like the vibe there and the vibe that you get in Tarifa. Similar to here, actually, to Jeri. Lots of young people, so it's something that is quite unique in Europe where you have a lot of packaged tourism, so I can recommend to check it out even if you are not a kite surfer. So, there's Tarifa.

And the third place, which one would I pick? I really like Bali actually. It's kind of a stereotype nomad thing, but I really enjoyed my time there when I was there. I was there a long time ago. I didn't enjoy it so much, but I kind of enjoy the vibe. It's pretty awesome. It's pretty laid back, easy. So, I can just recommend to check it out and make your own opinion about it.

Matt: Awesome. So, you've been to 75-plus countries, but you haven't been everywhere in the world, so what would be currently your top three bucket list travel destinations, places that you've never been but you'd most like to go at the top of your list right now?

Johannes: So, these places would be Japan – I have always wanted to go there, and I want to explore Taiwan and all these other countries around there in Asia. Not Southeast Asia, but up there. So, Japan would be on it. I think French Polynesia or this whole area, I haven't really been anywhere around there. And apart from that, these are really my top two places, and then there are a lot of other places I want to see, but this is what is really high on my list.

Matt: Knowing everything you know now and experiencing everything you've experienced so far in life, if you were to go back and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Johannes?

Johannes: So, I would say maybe don't think too much, but take action and learn because when you're taking action and actually working on

things, you learn much faster than just trying to think, “Oh, I want to start this business,” or whatever. And also, that is actually something that I’ve done already all my life, but since I was 18 and the internet started to kick off, but you can basically find out anything on the internet, so make use of that and teach yourself to learn things.

Matt: Awesome. All right, last question, and then we’re going to tell people how they can find you and learn more about everything you’re up to. When you think back on the entire Nomad Cruise experience, and all the different cruises, and all the different experiences you’ve had building the cruises, and wins and losses, and everything else, can you share a behind-the-scenes story or an anecdote that comes to mind? It could be funny, it could be crazy, it could be anything, but sort of a behind-the-scenes Nomad Cruise anecdote that maybe some people might not know that kind of stands out or was particularly memorable to you?

Johannes: What I can just say, and I said this actually this time on the welcoming night – it’s not really an anecdote, but it’s just something where I realized what we are doing. When you work on the cruise or when you work on some kind of event, and you just have a big X list of all the people who are going to be there on the cruise, so you have this long list of 500 names, and then when you have the welcome night, and you have this actually coming together, and there’s actually 500 people walking into this room on this ship going on that journey with you, that is always where I wake up and where I’m like, “Oh, wow. Actually, we’re building something really, really cool here.”

So, it’s something that I really enjoy, the whole preparation when you see these lists and all this thinking and stuff coming together in this moment of the welcome ceremony, and you’re like, “Oh, wow, this is crazy.”

Matt: All right. So, how can people find you if they want to connect with you or follow you on social media? How can they find out more about the Nomad Cruise and get involved if they’re interested in coming on one of the cruises and where do they find out about Homebase Global and what you’ve got coming up next?

Johannes: So, actually, I’m not so super active on social media. I’m trying to stay a little bit under the radar so I can focus on making the cruise.

And just sometimes, I share some things so there is an Instagram account. I think it's Johannes Voelkner. I think I renamed it the other day. And then the Nomad Cruise, you can find everything on NomadCruise.com, and Homebase, the domain name is HomebaseGlobal.com. And there, we have all information and newsletters and everything where you can just sign up and then find out where we're going next.

The next cruise is actually in April, going to go from Las Palmas to Lisbon with a lot of stops, and it will be pretty amazing with a lot of cool events like what we're doing here now in Jeri, we're going to do this in Portugal and just cover some cool surf towns with the people who are going to be there with us. That's what I'm most excited about actually.

Matt: Awesome. Well, we're going to link up to all of those things in the Show Notes, so everybody's going to be able to find them in one place at TheMaverickShow.com, and then you just go to the Show Notes for this episode. We'll have all of those links right there. Johannes, thank you so much for being here, man. This was awesome.

Johannes: Thank you so much for the great questions. It was fun. Thank you.

Matt: Good night, everybody.

Johannes: Good night. Ciao.

Announcer 1: Be sure to visit the Show Notes page at TheMaverickShow.com for direct links to all the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all that and much more at TheMaverickShow.com.

Announcer 2: Would you like to get Maverick Investor Group's White Paper on real estate investing for digital nomads, how to buy U.S. rental properties from anywhere in the world, and finance an epic international lifestyle? Just go to TheMaverickShow.com/nomad. The report is totally free and available for you now at TheMaverickShow.com/nomad.

Announcer 3: Do you want to learn how to travel the world for a year-plus with carry-on luggage only and look good while you're doing it? Go to TheMaverickShow.com/packing to see a free recorded webinar

and learn exactly how Matt does it. He shows you the luggage he uses, the specific items he packs, and the travel brands he likes most. Even if you're just looking to go on shorter trips but pack more efficiently and eliminate your checked luggage, you won't want to miss this. You can watch the free recorded webinar at TheMaverickShow.com/packing.

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