

**Travel Tales**  
by  
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**Questions About the Scandal Aboard  
One of the World's Super-Yachts  
Part 3**

The “Phocea” scandal in Vanuatu made headlines around the world. We are interviewing one of the only eye-witnesses present on the yacht, which was released after ten months in police custody after being seized in the capital of Port Vila. The country is famous for being the setting for the World War II book, play and movie “South Pacific.” Super-model Faviola Dadis was aboard and for the first time in print is answering questions in this multi-part series.



*The luxurious lounge aboard the super-yacht Phocea*

*Why did “Phocea” not anchor in the usual quarantine location?*

The computers on the yacht were not functioning properly and the captain could not download current maps of Port Vila. “Phocea” is so large that many harbors can’t accommodate her and it was unclear if there was enough depth of water to anchor in the main harbor. That was the only reason for stopping in Paradise Cove, instead of the usual place.

*Press accounts have speculated that the “Phocea” was smuggling drugs, diamonds, weapons or passports. True?*

No, absolutely not.

*Describe your own drug and drink use, if any.*

I don’t do any drugs, and I rarely drink even at parties. When social events are a part of your job profile, it’s important not to get caught up in that scene.

*Describe what happened when anchoring that first time.*

Nothing special. We were all exhausted after the trip from Tonga and were happy to see land.

*Press accounts state that various ministers were seen boarding the yacht before it cleared Customs. What did you see?*

To my knowledge, the only people who boarded the yacht before it cleared Customs were agents to take our passports to Immigration.

*Press accounts state that two Ministers came aboard the “Phocea” before the vessel cleared Customs. Did you see them either then, or at any later time?*

I saw various Ministers on board “Phocea” during my time on the yacht, however, to my knowledge no one ever boarded before the vessel before it cleared Customs.

*What was the time line?*

The “Phocea” arrived in Port Vila in the early afternoon. We handed over our passports for Customs clearance, and did not disembark until several hours later when we were told we had been cleared by Immigration. All of us (about 18 people) went for dinner at Paradise Cove and returned to the yacht. A few days later, police and Customs officers boarded the “Phocea.”

*Press accounts state that the police boarded the yacht because it had not cleared Customs, and that you resisted arrest. What happened.*

It was very early in the morning—about 6 am. I was called up to the deck by one of my crew members to talk to Customs. When I came upstairs I saw the other members of the crew lined up, and that about 30 police and Customs officers had boarded the yacht with machine guns and sniper rifles pointed at us. The officers claimed that the yacht had not been cleared by the appropriate authorities and began making demands and accusations. They ordered everyone on the yacht to surrender their passports and cell phones. I refused and asked to see a search warrant. The officers did not have one, yet continued to search the vessel and bullied us by pointing guns in our faces and threatening to shoot if we disobeyed them. I was excessive in standing up for my rights to retain my passport and other possessions. About two hours later a search warrant arrived, and I was arrested for obstructing the officers.

*What happened next?*

I was taken to jail and held for about 30 hours. I was refused the right to call the US Embassy, or speak to my lawyer directly. I was finally granted permission to speak to my lawyer, and was taken to the Magistrate where I paid my bail. I was charged



*Faviola in front of the Vanuatu court during the Phocea scandal*

with obstruction of justice and illegally disembarking the yacht, with a maximum possible fine of 2,000,000 Vatu (about \$22,000 US) and two years in prison.

*What were your thoughts while awaiting trial?*

I was incredibly frustrated, as was the rest of the crew. We were the subjects of front-page news every day, and none of us had done anything wrong. I was an employee on a yacht that had become the center of a huge investigation, and I was eager to finish the trial and move on with my life.

*What happened in court?*

Eventually I pleaded guilty on both counts. The fines and charges were minimal. Considering the fact that if I pleaded not guilty, I would have to wait several months for my trial to be heard, I decided to accept charges I still feel were ludicrous. The condition of my bail during the trial was to check in with the police every day. When the decision was finally delivered in court, I was fined 70,000 Vatu (about \$750 US). The prosecution made several contradictory statements, and the judge agreed that I was simply an employee of the yacht, who had stood up for my rights.

*What were your impressions of the Vanuatu justice system?*

I saw so much corruption during my time in Vanuatu. With no disrespect to the people of Vanuatu, their justice system is a joke. Police officers, Customs officers, and government officials did not even adhere to their own laws. For instance, I found out that it was illegal to have been prevented from contacting the US Embassy or speaking to my lawyer. Also, the Senior Magistrate said there was no reason for any of the crew's passports to have been confiscated, and ordered them returned immediately. The police had apparently "lost" several of our passports, and they were not returned for three more days. And because they had no prison cell for the skipper when they arrested him, he was allowed to drive around on patrol with the police officers all night, getting drunk.

*What was your lawyer like?*

My lawyer was a handsome man from New Zealand who had practiced law in Vanuatu for many years. I learned that a lot of the legal proceedings in Vanuatu rely upon friendly relations and cooperation with the authorities. My lawyer was well liked and had a good relationship with the prosecutor, the Magistrates, and the Police, which was very helpful. But every time I appeared in court, the prosecutor would either say his case was not ready, or would spring new charges. This resulted in my having to appear in court four times over two months before my trial was held.

Silver Spring resident Lew Toulmin worked in Vanuatu for 33 months, and has sailed on every ocean.

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