

Travel Tales
by
Llewellyn Toulmin

Scandal Engulfs One of the World's Greatest Yachts
Part 4

Super-model Faviola Dadis sailed aboard the 246-foot-long “Phocea,” the second-largest private sailboat in the world, and was caught up in the biggest recent scandal in yachting. For the first time in print, she is answering questions in this multi-part series.



How long did you have to stay in Vanuatu, while awaiting trial?

I stayed there about two months on the “Phocea.”



Were you able to enjoy some aspects of the country?

Yes, towards the end of my stay. I went hiking at some beautiful waterfalls, jet skiing, kayaking, and snorkeling at the world’s only underwater post office.

But did you get dengue fever?

Yes, I got dengue hemorrhagic fever, a very serious disease. It was terrible. I had a very high fever, a rash, migraines, spontaneous bruising and intestinal problems for six weeks. I received IV antibiotics for my

The glamorous interior of the super-yacht Phocea was home to Faviola for more time than she expected

weakened immune system and had my blood tested over 10 times. My blood platelet count had dropped significantly and there was concern that if I cut myself, I could bleed to death. It was very scary because in Vanuatu there were not adequate supplies or medicines, so all of my tests had to be sent to Australia, and if anything serious happened, I would need to be airlifted there. My doctor pleaded with authorities to have me returned to the US, but was refused.

Were you held in the Port Vila jail for a day after your arrest?

Yes. The cell was disgusting—it was covered in feces, urine and blood, and there were rats crawling around the floor.

Was the fine or legal fees paid for you?

Yes, by the yacht owner.

How did you leave the country?

By airplane. I stopped in Los Angeles to visit friends, then flew on to Vegas to see my family.

Some press accounts seem to indicate that you “snuck out of the country” by buying an air ticket with cash at the last minute, in violation of a court order. How do you respond?

I did not sneak out of the country. My flight was scheduled for the upcoming Sunday. I heard on Radio New Zealand Friday night that the prosecutor had submitted an appeal to keep me in the country. I had paid all my fines, and had adhered to all the conditions set forth in my bail. There was no reason to keep me in the country and my lawyer suggested I change my flight to the next day. I was hassled by immigration, but they agreed that I had been cooperative and after discussion with various authorities, they permitted me to board the flight.

The captain of the “Phocea” was reportedly charged with failing to report the arrival of a vessel and entering at an unauthorized port, with a possible fine of \$33,000 US. Eventually he was fined only \$5600, due to being “prevented from exercising his powers as Captain.” Comment?

I’m not really qualified to comment on his charges.

How did other crew-members and the owner leave the country?

Everyone left by flights to various destinations. Some of the crew members remained.

Were you helped financially in this?

Yes.



Faviola was fined 70,000 Vatu – about \$750 USD – but could have faced a much bigger fine and jail time

Some persons speculate that the “Phocea” was smuggling small quantities of weapons to local officials, to arm their private security forces or local expats. What do you think?

I think it’s very far-fetched. There was absolutely no illegal activity aboard.

The “Phocea” was front page news in Vanuatu almost every day for six months, and you were the subject of front page articles. What errors would you like to correct?

I couldn’t even begin to correct the several months of false accusations. There were so many things printed to make the crew appear as though we were criminals involved in some crazy political conspiracy or smuggling of illegal goods. Every day we would get the paper and joke about it together—the crew knew the yacht and its contents inside out. We were all very certain of our innocence. The accusations made about us smuggling drugs came from the police confiscating a dried flower arrangement in their search, and claiming it was opium. The accusations of weapons smuggling came from a confiscated water pistol that resembled a real gun. Also, I am not and have never been the girlfriend of the yacht’s owner. It’s amazing how the press can spin things to make them sound much more exciting than they really are.

The yacht “Phocea” was still under arrest, after ten months, in Port Vila harbor. Was that reasonable?

Yes, I believe there was still some clarification needed about where it was registered.

Some members of the crew were detained on board the yacht, right?

Some of the crew members remained on board, but were not detained. They were all completely cleared. The yacht legally requires a number of crew members to remain on board for maintenance.

Some security staffers on board the yacht have been described as “scary and tough-looking big guys from Serbia” who are “clearly up to something.”

I’d say that a yacht the size of the “Phocea” requires security and that it is the security staff’s job to look scary, tough and intimidating. They were all very nice guys.

The police inspector who was reportedly vigorously investigating the “Phocea” case was suspended from duty. Comments?

I was aware he was suspended, but I have no knowledge of why. I feel there was a lot of corruption involved in the case. It’s purely speculation, but I think the entire case was fabricated in order to extort money from the crew and try to confiscate the yacht. I read in one article that the Vanuatu government hoped to get over \$6,000,000 US for its sale.

Silver Spring resident Lew Toulmin worked in Vanuatu and is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

* * *

#end#