

SPORT

'Cesspool of crime': Bali club where drunk Aussies go crazy

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Last week, Broncos superstar David Fifita made headlines when he was arrested and detained in Bali after a physical altercation with a bouncer at La Favela Bar Y Restaurant, a nightclub in the Seminyak tourist district that attracts more than 15,000 people every weekend.

Fifita was lucky. He wasn't charged and [was released after he apologised to his victim](#). But it wasn't the first time La Favela made global headlines for the wrong reasons.

Earlier this month, footage went viral of a brawl outside La Favela where a young female tourist slapped a large bearded man and was consequently punched in the face. Other tourists jumped in and fists flew in all directions until bouncers stepped in and ended the fight.

And a fortnight before that, Melbourne Storm winger Suliasi Vunivalu [was attacked at La Favela after being blamed for spilling a drink](#). He was taken to hospital and received seven stitches to close a gash under his eye.



Bali is cracking down on troublemaking Aussies whose antics range from outrageous drunken escapades to criminal behaviour.



MOST VIEWED



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The club welcomes 15,000 people every weekend night. Picture: Supplied

These high-profile incidents were all instigated by what Fifita’s victim described as “arrogant tourists”. But they follow an unusually large number of reports and allegations of violence and criminal activity at La Favela: assault by bouncers, overcharging and drink spiking by bar staff and an almost endemic spate of pickpocketing. But according to La Favela’s owner, the recent incidents are minority reports, and the venue is statistically safer than most large-format nightclubs in Bali. He also denies claims of theft by staff.



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David Fifita was arrested over an incident at La Favela earlier this month. Picture: AAP Image/Glenn Hunt

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GANG CONNECTIONS

Security at most nightclubs in Bali is contracted to Laskar Bali, one of five large registered “community groups” on the island. Laskar also regularly works alongside Indonesian police and military at corporate and government events in Bali.

Last week, the group assisted private security guards at Further East, a luxury travel trade show attended by “influential regional-specialists buyers and media” at the five-star Alila Resort on Seminyak Beach.

But Laskar, which means “Army of Bali”, has a dark underbelly. In 2015, four members of the rival group Baladika Bali were killed during an armed battle [with Laskar members at Bali’s notorious Kerobokan Prison.](#)

According to Kathryn Bonella, the author of a series of true crime books on Bali including [Schapelle Corby’s recently updated biography](#), Laskar “deal in drugs, weapons, prostitution, pay-offs and revenge killings. They’ll kill for hire – just a couple thousand dollars. When gangsters do get in trouble for

using weapons or for drug trafficking, the group claims no responsibility, saying they should not be blamed for the actions of just a few members. Most people (including the police) are so afraid of possible retribution that even the newspapers will not print the gang's name.”



📷 Laskar Bali members. Picture: Supplied

In January 2017, three former Laskar members and bouncers at La Favela bashed a Ukrainian tourist who refused to pay a \$68 bill, punching him so hard he went blind in one eye. When graphic photos of the victim's bloody eye socket went viral, the assailants were arrested and La Favela paid restitution. Yet other allegations of serious assaults and theft by bouncers at the club have gone unanswered.



📷 A Ukrainian tourist who refused to pay a \$68 bill was left blind in one eye. Picture: Supplied

“While just standing on the dance floor looking for my friend, I suddenly get pulled aside by the bouncer with such force that he rips all the buttons of my shirt,” South African tourist Gustav Lilienfeld posted on Facebook. “He accused me of throwing bottles around, and when I told him I think you might have the wrong guy, he simply said don’t f**k with me and dragged me outside.

“By the time he kicked me out, I noticed my iPhone had been stolen out of my pocket. So I walked up to the staff at the door and explained what had happened and they simply told me to f**k off before they beat me.”

Dylan Goatery of Adelaide, one of 250 patrons who have rated their experience at La Favela as “terrible” on TripAdvisor, shares a similar story. “My phone was stolen and they demanded money for its return,” he wrote. “After trying to get my phone back without payment, I was then violently and physically assaulted (and) knocked unconscious out the front by many of the locals and security.”

Laskar Bali could not be reached for comment. However, a senior Laskar member who works at La Favela was overheard telling a British delegate at the Further East trade show last week to avoid the nightclub because of pickpocketing.

METHANOL POISONING

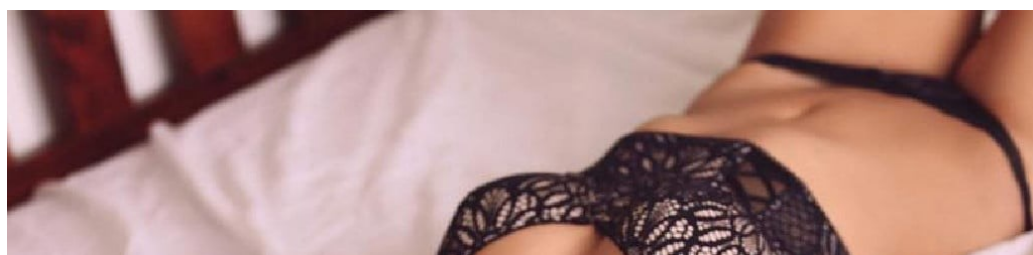
Many nightclubs in Bali run a scam in which they serve customers who order spirits “arrack” – cheap bootleg liquor that can contain highly dangerous concentrations of methanol. According to the Centre for Indonesian Policy Studies, homemade arrack kills more than 120 people in the country every year.

The list of victims includes [Liam Davies, a teenager from Perth](#), who died on the satellite island of Gili Trawangan after drinking what he thought was a vodka-lime mix in 2013.

Ashleigh Russell, a financial adviser from Port Douglas, is one of more than a dozen TripAdvisor users who have complained about experiencing symptoms consistent with methanol poisoning after drinking spirits at La Favela. The club has stridently denied selling methanol-laced drinks.

“I’ve been going there since I was well below 18 years old,” Ms Russell told news.com.au. “For the past eight or nine years, I went there every single night during my holidays in Bali. And I can tell you it’s a cesspool of crime.

“About two years ago, I was with a friend from Australia and within 15 seconds of walking in the door, her phone got stolen. When we went out the front, the mafia tried to manhandle us to get us on the back of their bikes. Another time I saw a guy taken out the back where he got pistol-whipped because of an unpaid bill.”





📷 Ashleigh Russell has been partying at La Favela for years and says she unwittingly purchased methanol there. Picture: Supplied

Ms Russell's last visit to La Favela was in January. "I was with my partner and best friend," she said. "We went to another bar first and had a drink and then to La Favela where we had three drinks.

"The moment we got home we were violently ill, vomiting everywhere. We had to call in a doctor to get intravenous drips. I should've known because my drink smelled like methanol, but then again, the entire club smells like methanol."

An Indonesian woman who spoke to news.com.au on condition of anonymity over fear of reprisal also claims she was poisoned at La Favela in January.

"I went there for a friend's birthday and drank five tequila shots," she said. "I can handle tequila. I drink it a lot. But that night I vomited several times in the toilet and then went home and kept on vomiting until 4pm the next day.

"It wasn't a normal hangover. The day after I went to the doctor and found out I had typhoid and was in hospital for five days. My doctor told me anything you eat or drink that's dirty can give you typhoid. I think it was the shots."

She adds: "Violence is normal at La Favela but not because of the bouncers; it's tourists hitting each other. They get bumped or someone says something to someone's girlfriend and they go crazy. They get upset easily when they're drunk."





📷 La Favela is one of Bali's most popular clubs. Picture: Supplied

Nevertheless, the Indonesian woman said she still parties at La Favela: “All my friends like going there late at night. The music is really good. But now when I go there I only drink beer (from sealed bottles).”

‘EVERYTHING I COULD FOR THAT BOY’

La Favela’s proprietors also run La Plancha, a Mexican-themed sunset bar and restaurant on Seminyak Beach; and La Brisa, a bohemian beach club at nearby Echo Beach styled like a shipwreck. All three venues are enormously successful and, according to the owners, run to the highest possible standards.

“Our objective is to keep people safe but the problem is everyone wants to come to La Favela. On Saturday nights we have 5000 to 6000 people and it’s very difficult for us to manage,” one of the owners told news.com.au.

“If you make the calculations on how many people walk through the doors every night, you will see the statistics for violence are negligible. Until last month, we hadn’t had a major incident for a year and a half. And the other fights that were in the news recently, they happened outside La Favela on a very busy road with lots of bars and restaurants and people everywhere.”





The club is one of Bali's tourist hot spots, attracting a young and beautiful clientele. Picture: Supplied

The owner said the 2017 incident in which the Ukrainian tourist was beaten over an unpaid bill was extremely regrettable; and that he took immediate action to make sure it never happens again.

“First of all, I did everything I could for that boy,” he said. “I paid for the best surgeons in Singapore and when they couldn’t fix his eye, I made sure he had everything he needed in life. I spent more than \$US250,000 (\$A366,000) on him. There have been plenty of cases where people died in clubs and the owners never paid a cent.

“Laskar doesn’t run our security anymore. We do it in-house with expert help from police, military and private security advisers,” he says. “We also cleaned house and implemented a complete change in the workplace mentality.

“We spent months retraining all our staff: teaching them how to stop fights so that nobody gets hurt and psychological training on how to deal with drunk and aggressive people.

“What happened last week when the footballer from Australia attacked one of our security guards was a perfect example. He could’ve hit back but instead security detained the man and called the police. They acted extremely professionally.”



Brisbane Broncos NRL player David Fifita in police custody in Bali at Kuta Police Station. Picture: Supplied

He rejected all allegations that arrack has ever been served at La Favela and invited news.com.au to go into the venue and test the drinks. But the night before the interview we had already done so by going in unannounced and purchasing three shots of spirits from different bars within the venue. All three drinks tested negative for methanol.

He also rejected allegations that staff at La Favela were pickpocketing patrons. “We advise people to be careful about their wallets but because crowds this big, they attract thieves – not only at La Favela but at all the bars in Bali,” he said.

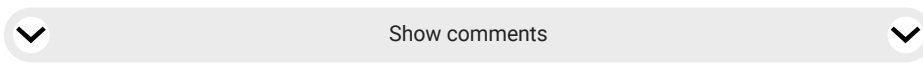
“These pickpockets are mostly professionals from overseas – experts who work in teams when a man takes a telephone and then passes it to a woman. Ninety per cent of the time when we catch them, this is the case.

“We have put security cameras up everywhere and also on the street to assist police with their investigations even though it’s not our responsibility to do. We really try hard to make La Favela as safe as possible.”

Originally published as [Bali club where drunk Aussies go crazy](#)



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