

MARKETING

The cautionary tale of the Fyre Festival fiasco

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Fyre Festival attendees were stuck on the island for hours as they tried to leave

By DANNY PARISI

During what was supposed to be three days of luxury in the Bahamas, the inaugural weekend of Fyre Festival April 27-30 turned into chaos as attendees were left stranded on the island with little food, entertainment or guidance as they desperately tried to leave.

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The event was chronicled in real-time on Twitter as a series of devastating organizational errors turned the festival into something out of "Lord of the Flies." The organizers of the event, including rapper Ja Rule, were forced to apologize and postpone the event.

"Fyre Festival set out to provide a once-in-a-lifetime musical experience on the Islands of the Exumas," said the event's organizers in a statement posted to its [Web site](#). "Due to circumstances out of our control, the physical infrastructure was not in place on time and we are unable to fulfill on that vision safely and enjoyably for our guests."

Expectations vs. reality

Fyre Fest was organized by Ja Rule and tech entrepreneur Billy McFarland, most infamous for his Magnises Black Card project.

The event was marketed as the pinnacle of a luxury weekend. A heavy Instagram and social media advertising campaign featuring models, yachts, beaches and music painted a picture of luxurious relaxation and partying.

Ticket prices reflected this image, ranging well into the hundreds of thousands of dollars for the most exclusive and decadent packages, including private yachts and fine dining.

The accommodations were depicted in marketing materials in line with the "glamping" trend of luxurious outdoor sleeping arrangements.



Matt Halfhill ✓
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In case you're wondering, those "cabanas" are actually disaster relief tents.

#fyrefestival



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Glamour accommodations were little more than lean-tos

Unfortunately, none of this was to be the case.

When customers arrived they were treated to utter chaos. Social media posts from attendees show an event wildly unprepared for the amount of people who came.

Instead of glamorous outdoor glamping, there were small tents resembling something from a disaster relief zone. Instead of fine dining and catering, customers were embarrassingly treated to sliced bread and some cheese in plastic containers, which then quickly ran out as well.

But even if fewer people had shown up to the event, it is unclear if Fyre Festival could ever have produced the promised amenities. The performer line-up remained filled with TBD slots well past the beginning of the festival on its first night Thursday, April 27.

The social media backlash was swift and furious. Much anguish was directed at the event organizers who promised a luxury weekend but seemed unable to offer anything close to the lofty promises they played up in the months leading up to the event.

This presents a cautionary tale for experiential luxury: luxury consumers expect the best and any less than that will turn into a PR nightmare for all involved.

Plan accordingly

Fyre Fest was a disaster not just for the organizers, but also for the influencers and celebrities who attached their names to it.

Influencers such as Kendall Jenner promoted the event heavily before it happened and have distanced themselves since. Similarly, high-profile performers such as Desiigner and Blink-182 publicly pulled out of the event.

Every person associated with this event will now embarrassingly have it on their record for a long time, creating a negative association in the minds of consumers.

This presents a lesson for luxury brands, influencers and event organizers: you have to be able to follow through to avoid destroying your credibility in the luxury world forever.



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@FyreFraud Here's the dinner they fed us tonight. Literally slices of bread, cheese, and salad with no dressing. #fyrefraud #fyrefestival #dumpsterfyre pic.twitter.com/NmNXakSFiq

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The event quickly ran out of food for attendees

The danger of negative brand associations is real, as Dolce & Gabbana learned when the fashion house put what some saw as a degrading message on the side of a shoe.

One half of Dolce & Gabbana, designer Stefano Gabbana, shared an illustration of the shoe on his personal Instagram account. From there, his followers and news outlets voiced concern over the message Dolce & Gabbana's design was sending to its female consumer base ([see story](#)).

Fyre Festival shows the danger of over-promising and under-delivering as thousands of potential future customers will now have negative associations with the brands involved for the foreseeable future. Brands need to be conscious of these dangers as they plan their own experiential luxury events in the future.

"When nobody does their homework – on either end a lot of promises end up being under-delivered or not delivered at all," said branding expert Rob Frankel.

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