

LEVEL B1

Fyre Festival

The Luxury Party That Never Happened

In 2017 guests paid up to twelve thousand dollars for a luxury festival in the Bahamas and found wet tents and cheese sandwiches. Olivia tells Sean what happened to the guests, the local workers and the man behind it.

Key words

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| • advert | • fraud |
| • luxury | • plead guilty |
| • promise | • sentence |
| • loan | • proof |
| • cancel | • stranded |
| • complaint | • savings |
| • faint | • postpone |

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How to use it

1

Listen to the episode on YouTube.

2

Read the transcript and learn the key words.

3

Do the activities, then check the answer key.

Includes the full transcript, key words, activities and answers

Listen to the episode on the Aprendos YouTube channel

Key words

These words appear in the episode.

Key words	Meaning	Example
advert <i>noun</i>	A short film, picture or text that tries to make you buy something.	<i>I saw an advert for a new pizza place on the side of a bus.</i>
luxury <i>noun</i>	Great comfort that costs a lot of money.	<i>For their anniversary, my parents stayed in a luxury hotel with a pool on the roof.</i>
promise <i>verb</i>	To say that you will really do something, or that something will really happen.	<i>The shop promised that my new sofa would arrive on Friday.</i>
loan <i>noun</i>	Money that you borrow and must pay back later.	<i>She got a loan from the bank to buy her first car.</i>
cancel <i>verb</i>	To decide that a planned event will not happen.	<i>The school cancelled the museum trip when the bus broke down.</i>
complaint <i>noun</i>	Something you say or write when you are unhappy with a product or service.	<i>The hotel got a complaint about the noisy air conditioning in room 12.</i>
faint <i>verb</i>	To fall down and stop being awake for a short time, for example because of heat.	<i>A man fainted on the crowded train, so we gave him some water.</i>
fraud <i>noun</i>	The crime of lying to people to get their money.	<i>The bank called me because someone tried to use my card for fraud.</i>
plead guilty <i>phrase</i>	To say in court that you did the crime.	<i>The driver pleaded guilty to driving too fast past the school.</i>
sentence <i>noun</i>	The punishment that a judge gives someone, for example time in prison.	<i>The thief got a sentence of two years for stealing the paintings.</i>
proof <i>noun</i>	Facts or things that show something is true.	<i>Do you have any proof that you paid the electricity bill?</i>
stranded <i>adjective</i>	Stuck in a place with no way to leave.	<i>The snow closed the airport, and hundreds of travellers were stranded for the night.</i>
savings <i>noun</i>	Money that you keep and don't spend, often in a bank.	<i>He used his savings to travel around South America for three months.</i>
postpone <i>verb</i>	To move an event to a later time.	<i>We postponed the barbecue until next weekend because half the family had a cold.</i>

Full transcript

Fyre Festival: The Luxury Party That Never Happened

- SEAN** Twelve thousand dollars. For a tent?
- OLIVIA** A wet tent. It rained that morning.
- SEAN** And dinner?
- OLIVIA** Two slices of bread and two slices of cheese. In a foam box.
- SEAN** Honestly, that's a normal lunch in Britain.
- OLIVIA** Sean, they were **promised** celebrity chefs.
- SEAN** This is Aprendos English, level B1. I'm Sean.
- OLIVIA** And I'm Olivia.
- SEAN** Right, so who was selling twelve thousand dollar tents?
- OLIVIA** Let's start with a picture. It's December 2016, and you open Instagram. Every famous model you follow has posted the same thing.
- SEAN** What thing?
- OLIVIA** An orange square. Nothing else.
- SEAN** Just orange?
- OLIVIA** Just orange, with one word under it. Fyre, with a Y.
- SEAN** Of course it's with a Y.
- OLIVIA** They all went up on the twelfth of December, at the same time. Kendall Jenner and Emily Ratajkowski were two of them.
- SEAN** And they were paid for this, I assume.
- OLIVIA** Kendall Jenner got two hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. For one post.
- SEAN** For an orange square? I'm in the wrong job.
- OLIVIA** We both are. Then came the video. Supermodels on a beach in the Bahamas, with boats and bright blue water.
- SEAN** Selling what, exactly?
- OLIVIA** A music festival on a private island. The Fyre Festival, in April 2017.
- SEAN** And who was behind it?
- OLIVIA** Two men. One was a rapper called Ja Rule...
- SEAN** ...the Ja Rule from the early two thousands?
- OLIVIA** That Ja Rule. The other was a businessman called Billy McFarland. He was twenty-five.
- SEAN** Twenty-five. At twenty-five, I couldn't organise a picnic.
- OLIVIA** Well, Billy couldn't either. But he was very good at making things sound amazing.
- SEAN** What was his business?
- OLIVIA** An app, also called Fyre. You could use it to book famous musicians for your party.
- SEAN** So the festival was an **advert** for the app.
- OLIVIA** Pretty much. A very expensive advert.
- SEAN** And whose island was it?

- OLIVIA The video said it once belonged to Pablo Escobar.
- SEAN Hold on. That wasn't true, actually.
- OLIVIA Go on then.
- SEAN The island was Norman's Cay. In the eighties it belonged to Carlos Lehder. He was a boss in the same drug cartel.
- OLIVIA So a different drug lord.
- SEAN A different one. And after the Escobar story came out, the owners cancelled the deal.
- OLIVIA How do you know all this?
- SEAN I watched both documentaries last winter. Twice.
- OLIVIA Of course you did. Okay, so they lost the island. Where do you think they went?
- SEAN Another private island?
- OLIVIA Nope. An empty piece of land on Great Exuma, the biggest island in the area.
- SEAN How empty?
- OLIVIA Very empty. And by then, people had already bought tickets. Guess the price.
- SEAN Hmm... five hundred dollars?
- OLIVIA That was the cheapest day ticket. The VIP packages were twelve thousand.
- SEAN With flights, I hope.
- OLIVIA With flights and a luxury villa. That was the promise, anyway.
- SEAN How many people bought one?
- OLIVIA About five thousand tickets were sold in total. And there was one more trick.
- SEAN That sounds bad.
- OLIVIA There was going to be no cash at the festival. So guests had to load money onto a wristband before the trip.
- SEAN How much did they put on them?
- OLIVIA About two million dollars, all together.
- SEAN And that money sat there safely, waiting for the party...
- OLIVIA ...reports say some of it went to pay Billy's old loans.
- SEAN Oh dear. And the people on Great Exuma had how long to build all this?
- OLIVIA Not long at all. A whole festival, from nothing.
- SEAN I've been to a festival like that. A small one in Somerset, years ago. It rained for three days, and my tent floated across the field.
- OLIVIA Your tent floated?
- SEAN A little. I slept in my car for two nights.
- OLIVIA Remember that car, because rain is coming...
- SEAN ...in this story too. Of course it is.
- OLIVIA The twenty-seventh of April, 2017. Day one. Early that morning, a big storm hits the island.
- SEAN And the tents?
- OLIVIA Open. And the mattresses were outside, in big piles...
- SEAN ...in the rain.

- OLIVIA In the rain. Then the first planes land, full of excited guests.
- SEAN So they find the villas...
- OLIVIA ...they find tents. White disaster tents, the kind you see after a hurricane.
- SEAN Actually, I read those came from a real hurricane. Hurricane Matthew hit the Bahamas a few months before.
- OLIVIA That's the usual story, yes. People online called them "FEMA tents."
- SEAN After the American emergency agency?
- OLIVIA Yes. Nobody really knows who owned them. They were emergency tents, and now they were wet.
- SEAN So no villas at all.
- OLIVIA None. And then dinner arrived.
- SEAN The famous sandwich.
- OLIVIA The famous sandwich. A guest called Trevor DeHaas took a photo and posted it on Twitter.
- SEAN Describe it. Carefully.
- OLIVIA Two slices of bread and two slices of cheese. Plus a bit of salad, all in a white foam box.
- SEAN See, I still think that's fine.
- OLIVIA Sean!
- SEAN It's a cheese sandwich! Half of Britain eats one at their desk every day.
- OLIVIA Not for twelve thousand dollars!
- SEAN Fair. For twelve thousand dollars, I'd want some pickle at least.
- OLIVIA Pickle. That's your big complaint?
- SEAN It's a serious complaint. So the photo went everywhere?
- OLIVIA Everywhere, and very fast. But the sandwich has a twist. Later, the local caterer said those sandwiches were for the staff.
- SEAN Only for the staff?
- OLIVIA That's what he said. Trevor said people were handing them to guests. So it's still a bit of a mystery.
- SEAN The sandwich mystery. And the music?
- OLIVIA Most of the acts had cancelled before the weekend.
- SEAN So no villas and no music. What did people do?
- OLIVIA What would you do?
- SEAN Go straight back to the airport.
- OLIVIA That's what they did. And that's where it got really bad.
- SEAN Worse than the sandwich?
- OLIVIA Much worse. The first flight to Miami was supposed to leave at half past one in the morning.
- SEAN And it was late.
- OLIVIA Hours late. Then after sunrise, they cancelled it. And the passengers were locked inside the airport building...
- SEAN ...wait, locked in?

- OLIVIA Locked in, with no food or water. And no air conditioning in the Bahamas heat. One passenger wrote online that someone fainted.
- SEAN Okay, I'm going to be a bit mean here. These people paid twelve thousand dollars for a party. It's hard to feel very sorry for them.
- OLIVIA Oh, come on. Nobody should be locked in a hot room.
- SEAN I didn't say they should. I just said it's hard.
- OLIVIA They paid for something that never existed. And I know that feeling, a tiny bit.
- SEAN You bought a Fyre ticket?
- OLIVIA No! When I lived in Spain after college, I paid forty euros for a "beach party." It was a car park with one speaker.
- SEAN One speaker.
- OLIVIA And no sandwiches. So yes, I feel sorry for them.
- SEAN Fine. I'll feel a little sorry for them. A little.
- OLIVIA On the twenty-eighth of April, the festival was cancelled. In the end, everyone got home.
- SEAN And Billy? Did he run away?
- OLIVIA You tell me. Guess.
- SEAN He hid on a different island.
- OLIVIA Wrong. He stayed in New York, and he was arrested on the thirtieth of June, 2017.
- SEAN For what, exactly?
- OLIVIA Wire fraud. He showed investors fake numbers about how much money his company was making.
- SEAN How much did they lose?
- OLIVIA More than twenty-six million dollars. In March 2018, he pleaded guilty.
- SEAN So then he said sorry and waited quietly for the judge.
- OLIVIA That's your second guess, and it's wrong again.
- SEAN What else could he do? He was waiting for his sentence!
- OLIVIA While he was out on bail, he started a new business. Selling VIP tickets.
- SEAN VIP tickets to what?
- OLIVIA Big events like the Met Gala and Coachella. And the tickets were fake.
- SEAN While he was waiting for a fraud sentence?
- OLIVIA While he was waiting for a fraud sentence.
- SEAN That's almost impressive. Almost.
- OLIVIA In October 2018, the judge gave him six years in prison. He also had to give up twenty-six million dollars.
- SEAN And Ja Rule? What happened to him?
- OLIVIA He was never charged with a crime. And in 2019, a judge took him out of a big lawsuit from the guests.
- SEAN Why?
- OLIVIA The judge said there wasn't enough proof...

- SEAN ...that his posts sold the tickets?
- OLIVIA Right. Nobody showed that his posts made those people buy tickets. And Ja Rule says Billy fooled him too.
- SEAN Hmm. I'm not sure I believe that.
- OLIVIA Lots of people don't. But that's the court result.
- SEAN Can I take over for a minute? Because the documentaries are my favourite part.
- OLIVIA Go on then, film fan.
- SEAN So in January 2019, two documentaries came out. One on Netflix and one on Hulu.
- OLIVIA In the same week, right?
- SEAN Four days apart. Netflix planned theirs for the eighteenth of January...
- OLIVIA ...and Hulu jumped in first?
- SEAN On the fourteenth, with no warning at all. And it gets better. One of the companies behind the Netflix film was Jerry Media.
- OLIVIA Why does that name sound familiar?
- SEAN Because Jerry Media did marketing for the festival.
- OLIVIA Wait. The people who sold the festival helped make the film about the festival?
- SEAN They were one of the producers, yes. The Hulu director said that was a problem.
- OLIVIA And what did the Netflix director say back?
- SEAN He said the Hulu team agreed to pay Billy to appear in their film.
- OLIVIA So even the documentaries had drama.
- SEAN Even the documentaries. So which one should people watch?
- OLIVIA The Netflix one, for one person. Maryann Rolle.
- SEAN The restaurant owner.
- OLIVIA Yes. She had a restaurant at Exuma Point. She fed the workers and the **stranded** guests.
- SEAN Don't tell me. She never got paid.
- OLIVIA Never. And it's worse than that. She used about fifty thousand dollars of her own **savings** to pay her staff.
- SEAN Her own savings.
- OLIVIA Her whole savings. After the film came out, she started a GoFundMe page.
- SEAN Did anyone help?
- OLIVIA It raised more than two hundred thousand dollars. And she said she wanted to share it with other local workers.
- SEAN That's the best part of this whole story.
- OLIVIA It is. But many Bahamian workers who built the site were never paid either.
- SEAN So the guests lost a weekend, and the workers lost weeks of pay.
- OLIVIA Exactly. The Bahamas tourism ministry even said sorry for the whole thing.
- SEAN So Billy's in prison. That's the end?
- OLIVIA Oh, Sean. This is Billy.
- SEAN No. He didn't.

- OLIVIA** He got out in 2022. First to a halfway house in March, and then he had to stay at home until September.
- SEAN** So less than four years.
- OLIVIA** Less than four years. And in 2023, he announced Fyre Festival II.
- SEAN** You're joking. Who bought a ticket?
- OLIVIA** The first tickets cost four hundred and ninety-nine dollars. He said they sold out.
- SEAN** Where was it going to be this time?
- OLIVIA** Mexico, on an island called Isla Mujeres. The dates were the thirtieth of May to the second of June, 2025.
- SEAN** And did anyone in Mexico know about it?
- OLIVIA** Guess.
- SEAN** Nobody.
- OLIVIA** You're right this time! The website moved it to Playa del Carmen. Then in April 2025, a city official there said something...
- SEAN** ...that they'd never heard of it?
- OLIVIA** Pretty much. There was no record of any festival.
- SEAN** And the prices this time?
- OLIVIA** From fourteen hundred dollars, up to one point one million for a group package.
- SEAN** One point one million. With a cheese sandwich?
- OLIVIA** With pickle, probably. Just for you.
- SEAN** Thank you. So what happened?
- OLIVIA** In mid-April, the website said the festival was postponed.
- SEAN** Postponed. So it might still happen?
- OLIVIA** That was the idea. Then in July 2025, Billy put the whole Fyre brand on eBay.
- SEAN** eBay? Like an old bike?
- OLIVIA** Like an old bike. Guess the final price.
- SEAN** Ten million dollars.
- OLIVIA** Two hundred and forty-five thousand, three hundred.
- SEAN** Hold on. That's less than Kendall Jenner got for her orange square!
- OLIVIA** Ha, you're right. I didn't even notice that.
- SEAN** And who bought it?
- OLIVIA** LimeWire. The name from the old music download website. Today it's a different company.
- SEAN** LimeWire! My family computer got a virus from LimeWire in about 2004.
- OLIVIA** So you've got a history with them.
- SEAN** A bad history. I'd stay away from that festival.
- OLIVIA** Okay, listeners, here's what I want to know. Imagine Billy announces another festival tomorrow. Would you buy a ticket? Or would you buy one just to see what happens? Drop your answer below.

- SEAN** And if some parts went too fast, the script of the whole episode is free to download. Look for the PDF link under the video.
- OLIVIA** And if you want a new true story every week, subscribe to Aprendos English.
- OLIVIA** Have a good week!
- SEAN** You too. I'm off to make a cheese sandwich.
- OLIVIA** With pickle.
- SEAN** Obviously with pickle.

Did you understand?

Choose the correct answer.

1. What did famous models post on Instagram on the twelfth of December 2016?

- ☐ A video of a private island.
- ☐ An orange square with the word Fyre.
- ☐ A photo of a cheese sandwich.

2. Why did the festival lose the island Norman's Cay?

- ☐ The owners cancelled the deal after the Escobar story came out.
- ☐ A hurricane destroyed the beach a few months before.
- ☐ Ja Rule didn't like it and chose Great Exuma instead.

3. What happened to the first guests who tried to fly back to Miami?

- ☐ Their flight left early, without their bags.
- ☐ They waited on the beach all night, and small boats took them home.
- ☐ Their flight was cancelled, and they were locked in the airport building.

4. What did Billy McFarland do while he was out on bail?

- ☐ He hid on a different island.
- ☐ He sold fake VIP tickets to the Met Gala and Coachella.
- ☐ He paid back all the unpaid workers in the Bahamas.

5. What happened to the Fyre brand in July 2025?

- ☐ Billy sold it on eBay, and LimeWire bought it.
- ☐ Kendall Jenner bought it for her own festival.
- ☐ Maryann Rolle got it with her GoFundMe money.

Exercise 1. Spot the mistake

Is the key word used correctly? Decide, then check. If it's wrong, the fix appears.

1. The festival was postponed, so the guests had to arrive a week earlier.

- ☐ Correct ☐ Wrong
-

2. Sean's big complaint about the cheese sandwich was that it had no pickle.

- ☐ Correct ☐ Wrong
-

3. The guests were stranded at the airport because there were too many flights to choose from.

- ☐ Correct ☐ Wrong
-

4. Billy fainted his investors with fake numbers about his company.

☐ Correct ☐ Wrong

5. Maryann Rolle used about fifty thousand dollars of her savings to pay her staff.

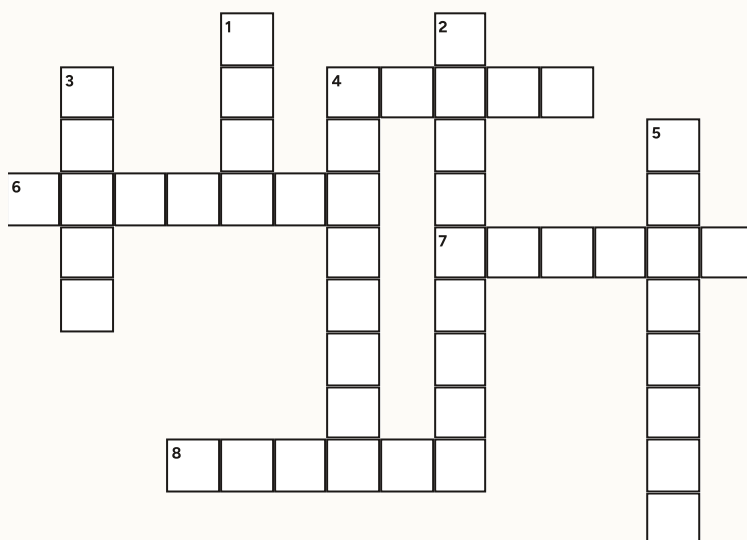
☐ Correct ☐ Wrong

6. The judge had lots of proof that Ja Rule's posts sold the tickets, so he took him out of the lawsuit.

☐ Correct ☐ Wrong

Exercise 2. Crossword

All the answers are key words from the episode.



ACROSS

- 4** The judge said there wasn't enough of this against Ja Rule. (5)
- 6** Maryann Rolle used about \$50,000 of hers to pay her staff. (7)
- 7** VIP guests expected a ___ villa. They got a wet tent. (6)
- 8** The festival was really a very expensive one of these for Billy's app. (6)

DOWN

- 1** You borrow it from a bank and pay it back later. (4)
- 2** Sean's big one about the sandwich: no pickle! (9)
- 3** Billy went to prison for wire ___. (5)
- 4** In April 2025, the website did this to Fyre Festival II. (8)
- 5** No flight, no food and no way home. The guests at the airport were ___. (8)

Exercise 3. Your turn

Imagine you were a guest at Fyre Festival. Write a short email to the organisers in three or four sentences. Use at least two words from the list.

Answer key

Check your answers after you finish the activities.

Did you understand?

1. An orange square with the word Fyre.
2. The owners cancelled the deal after the Escobar story came out.
3. Their flight was cancelled, and they were locked in the airport building.
4. He sold fake VIP tickets to the Met Gala and Coachella.
5. Billy sold it on eBay, and LimeWire bought it.

Exercise 1. Spot the mistake

1. Wrong. Postponed means moved to a later time. Correct: The festival was postponed, so the guests had to wait a few more months.
2. Correct
3. Wrong. Stranded means you can't leave a place. Correct: The guests were stranded at the airport because their flight was cancelled.
4. Wrong. Faint means to fall down and stop being awake for a moment. You can't faint another person. Correct: Billy fooled his investors with fake numbers about his company.
5. Correct
6. Wrong. With lots of proof, the judge would keep him in the lawsuit. Correct: The judge said there wasn't enough proof that Ja Rule's posts sold the tickets, so he took him out of the lawsuit.

Exercise 2. Crossword

- 4 across: proof
- 6 across: savings
- 7 across: luxury
- 8 across: advert
- 1 down: loan
- 2 down: complaint
- 3 down: fraud
- 4 down: postpone
- 5 down: stranded

Exercise 3. Example answer

Dear Fyre team, I paid twelve thousand dollars for a luxury villa, and I got a wet tent. The advert promised celebrity chefs, and dinner was a cheese sandwich in a foam box. Then I was stranded at the airport for hours with no water. I want my money back, and I want some pickle too.