# British backpacker’s death in Laos sparks call for methanol poisoning awareness



# Tragedy in Vang Vieng: The Dangers of Tainted Alcohol

The haunting story of two British friends, Bethany Clarke and Simone White, unfolded tragically during their backpacking adventure in Laos, when a night of revelry turned into a perilous fight for survival. Last November, while in the popular tourist town of Vang Vieng, the duo unwittingly consumed shots of bootleg alcohol believed to be laced with methanol, resulting in catastrophic health consequences for them both. Ms White, a 28-year-old solicitor from London, lost her life to the toxic effects of the methanol, a lethal substance often associated with counterfeit spirits in regions where regulations on alcohol production are lax.

Recalling their fateful night, Clarke noted a sense of unease that crept in after their indulgence. “We had five or six shots each, mixing them with Sprite,” she explained, as the pair began what they thought was a typical hangover. However, the symptoms they experienced the next day were anything but ordinary. Torn between a deceptive sense of inebriation and an overwhelming weakness, the friends continued with their plans, only to find themselves increasingly incapacitated at the Blue Lagoon, a popular swimming spot.

As Clarke struggled to stay afloat, she watched her friend succumb to the effects of the poison. “Neither of us wanted to swim or eat — which, we later learned, are early signs of methanol poisoning,” she recalled. This grievous oversight would soon escalate into an emergency, as Ms White fainted on a bus, leading to a desperate hospital visit where the extent of their condition remained unclear to medical staff.

Despite the critical situation, the medical facilities available in Laos were not prepared to manage such a case. The hospital staff initially entertained the notion of food poisoning; however, Clarke's insistence on their symptoms hinted at something far more dire. Tragically, as Ms White's health continued to deteriorate, her mother travelled to Laos, arriving just in time to bear witness to her daughter's emergency brain surgery, necessitated by swelling caused by methanol’s toxic impact, which ultimately claimed Ms White’s life.

In light of this heart-wrenching ordeal, Clarke has taken the courageous step of launching a petition aimed at educating young people in the UK about the dangers of methanol poisoning. Her initiative seeks to instill awareness of such risks as part of broader travel education in schools. “With methanol poisoning, you don’t think straight… You can’t problem-solve,” Clarke warned, emphasizing the need for vigilance against unregulated alcohol consumption while travelling.

Regrettably, the tragedy did not end with Ms White’s death. The incident sparked a wider investigation into the safety of tourists in Laos, as similar cases surfaced. Reports indicate that six tourists—two Australians, a Dane, an American, and Ms White—lost their lives in what has now been identified as a mass poisoning event linked to illicit alcohol sources. The Lao government has since expressed sorrow and pledged to prosecute those responsible, but the spectre of counterfeit and potentially lethal spirits continues to loom large over the region.

Authorities have issued cautionary advisories to travellers, particularly highlighting the necessity of sourcing alcohol from licensed vendors and thoroughly checking product seals. Methanol is a common adulterant for bootleg spirits, often used to cut costs, and even small amounts can lead to critical illness or death. Understanding these risks is increasingly vital as more adventurous tourists flock to destinations like Vang Vieng, drawn in by its reputed charm and beauty, yet facing hidden perils.

Clarke's petition has so far gathered over 3,000 signatures, moving towards a target of 10,000, and aims to produce impactful visual materials that resonate with the tone of drink-driving public service announcements. “Even if people can’t sign the petition, I want them to know about the risks,” she stated, underlining her greatest hope—a shift in public awareness that could prevent future tragedies.

As the investigations continue and stories of loss mount, the case of Simone White serves as an urgent call for enhanced regulations regarding alcohol production and distribution in Laos, alongside an essential reminder for international travellers to remain vigilant about what they consume abroad.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/25/laos-tainted-alcohol-deaths-send-chill-through-backpacker-paradise)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-citizen-poisoned-by-tainted-alcohol-in-laos-returns-home-2024-11-25/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/45a32250fad99474139d612010146a73)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/22/police-detain-owner-of-laos-hostel-after-tourists-became-ill-and-died-from-suspected-methanol-poisoning-ntwnfb)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ced94znq424o)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/01/laos-suspected-methanol-poisoning-simone-white-mother-warning)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14686443/best-friend-poisoned-methanol-Laos-terrifying-moment-realised.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/new-zealand-citizen-poisoned-by-tainted-alcohol-in-laos-returns-home-2024-11-25/> - A New Zealand citizen who was poisoned after consuming contaminated alcohol in Laos has returned home. The incident, which resulted in the deaths of two Danish nationals, two Australians, a Briton, and an American, occurred in Vang Vieng, a popular tourist destination. The New Zealand Embassy in Bangkok provided assistance to the individual, who has since departed Laos. The Lao government has pledged to prosecute those responsible for the incident and is investigating the origins of the tainted alcohol. Several countries, including Australia, have issued warnings to their citizens about the risks of consuming alcoholic beverages in Laos due to the prevalence of counterfeit and homemade spirits. Methanol, a toxic substance, is often used in these illicit drinks and can be fatal if ingested. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of tourists in Laos and the need for stricter regulations on alcohol production and distribution.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/45a32250fad99474139d612010146a73> - Six tourists—two Australian teenagers, a British woman, an American man, and two Danes—died in Laos after apparently drinking alcohol tainted with methanol. Another New Zealander was also sickened. Methanol, a toxic type of alcohol, is often used as fuel and in products like antifreeze. It can be fatal in small amounts if ingested. Methanol poisoning symptoms include headaches, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, blurred vision, and can lead to coma or death. Methanol is sometimes added to drinks by unscrupulous bars to save costs. To avoid poisoning, travelers are advised to purchase alcohol from licensed stores, check bottle seals, and be cautious of homemade brews and unusually cheap or free drinks.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/22/police-detain-owner-of-laos-hostel-after-tourists-became-ill-and-died-from-suspected-methanol-poisoning-ntwnfb> - Authorities in Laos have detained the owner and staff of a hostel in Vang Vieng after several tourists fell ill and died from suspected methanol poisoning. The victims included two Australian teenagers, a British woman, an American man, and two Danish nationals. The Lao government has expressed profound sadness over the deaths and pledged to bring those responsible to justice. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of tourists in Laos and the prevalence of counterfeit and homemade spirits. Methanol, a toxic substance, is often used in these illicit drinks and can be fatal if ingested. The Lao government is investigating the origins of the tainted alcohol and has urged travelers to exercise caution when consuming alcoholic beverages in the country.
5. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/25/laos-tainted-alcohol-deaths-send-chill-through-backpacker-paradise> - The recent deaths of six tourists in Laos due to methanol poisoning have cast a shadow over the popular backpacker destination of Vang Vieng. The victims included two Australian teenagers, a British woman, an American man, and two Danish nationals. The Lao government has pledged to prosecute those responsible and is investigating the origins of the tainted alcohol. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of tourists in Laos and the prevalence of counterfeit and homemade spirits. Methanol, a toxic substance, is often used in these illicit drinks and can be fatal if ingested. The Lao government is urging travelers to exercise caution when consuming alcoholic beverages in the country.
6. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ced94znq424o> - Holly Bowles, a 19-year-old Australian tourist, became the sixth person to die from suspected methanol poisoning in Laos. She and her friend Bianca Jones, also 19, fell ill after consuming tainted alcohol in Vang Vieng. Both were hospitalized but later died from complications related to methanol poisoning. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of tourists in Laos and the prevalence of counterfeit and homemade spirits. Methanol, a toxic substance, is often used in these illicit drinks and can be fatal if ingested. The Lao government is investigating the origins of the tainted alcohol and has urged travelers to exercise caution when consuming alcoholic beverages in the country.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/01/laos-suspected-methanol-poisoning-simone-white-mother-warning> - The mother of Simone White, a British lawyer who died from suspected methanol poisoning in Laos, has issued a warning to other travelers about the dangers of consuming local alcohol. White, 28, died after drinking tainted vodka shots mixed with Sprite at a hostel in Vang Vieng. Her mother, Sue White, has called for greater awareness of the risks associated with consuming unregulated alcohol abroad and has urged travelers to exercise caution when drinking in foreign countries. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of tourists in Laos and the prevalence of counterfeit and homemade spirits. Methanol, a toxic substance, is often used in these illicit drinks and can be fatal if ingested.