

# Fullers bracing for customer 'frustration' over summer amid crew shortage

Jonathan Killick 19:31, Oct 06 2022

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*Fullers360/Supplied*

Fullers360 will make the annual transition to its peak summer timetable for services to Waiheke Island, Rangitoto Island and Rotoroa Island on October 17. (File photo)

Fullers360 ferries is warning passengers about possible delays ahead of its switch to its summer timetable which will see increased sailings to Hauraki Gulf Islands despite a shortage of crew.

Chief executive Mike Horne said the arrival of summer sailings was “bittersweet” due to critical industry-wide worker shortage.

He said the ferry operator was short of 15 crews, or 60 staff, needed to run its “optimal” peak summer timetable. There would also be no capacity for contingency vessels.

In July, Fullers announced a partnership with Auckland Transport that would contractually require it to ensure sailings were fulfilled on commuter routes to Devonport, Hobsonville Point, Half Moon Bay and Gulf Harbour.

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However, Waiheke Island commuters were left out of the arrangement with routes to the island still exempt from contract regulation, despite agreed new “minimum service levels”.

Horne acknowledged that travellers to and from Waiheke Island relied on Fuller’s service.

“We appreciate the frustrations our customers may feel as we anticipate travel delays over summer,

Particularly during peak times.

“Unfortunately, it’s a matter of people, not vessels - we have the boats, but not the crews to operate more services that we would so love to deliver.”

To encourage recreational passengers to travel outside commuting times, Fullers360 would introduce a 35% off-peak discount, he said.

Waiheke residents would also continue to benefit from a “maximised resident’s lane programme” which allowed them to begin boarding before recreational travellers.



*Supplied*

Waiheke Island is a popular destination among recreational travellers for its sea views and wineries, but it also has a 7600-strong population that relies on ferry services to commute to the mainland.

Horne said the company had been grappling with a skills shortage for over a year and had embarked on a recruitment campaign and increased pay for staff.

“We are actively engaging skilled workers from other markets including, the Philippines, South Africa, Australia and the US, however there is no quick fix.”

In the meantime, he encouraged passengers to arrive at the pier at least an hour early during peak times.

Fullers360 will transition to its summer timetable for Waiheke, Rangitoto and Rotorua Island sailings on Monday, October 17.

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A spokesperson said the number of sailings would match last year’s summer season, but would not return to pre-pandemic levels.