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Long ferry queues worry Waiheke businesses as summer tourist season kicks off

Erin Johnson · 08:28, Oct 20 2022

LAWRENCE SMITH/STUFF

Minister of Energy and Resources Megan Woods, alongside Auckland mayor Phil Goff, announce the purchase and build of two electric commuter ferries for the Waitematā Harbour. (Video published June 2022)

Owner-operator of Island Magic Wine Tours Glenn Fowler said customers who had booked with him last Saturday queued for two hours to catch their ferry from the city.

“I have a wine tour company. People normally get the 10 o’clock ferry and go to their first winery at 11am. If they miss that, it has a knock-on effect for the whole day.”

Fowler said he normally tells customers to catch the 10am ferry but now tells them to get the 9am boat from the city.

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“Then you’ve got the opposite dilemma at 4 o’clock and 5 o’clock when they go back.”

Long queues are mainly a Saturday problem at the moment, Fowler said, but predicted they will be seven days a week once the holiday period kicks in: “Labour Weekend is going to be a real acid test.”

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ERIN JOHNSON/STUFF

Waiheke ferry passengers who didn't fit on the 5pm sailing to Auckland wait for a back up boat to take them to the city on Saturday October 15.

Owner of The Botanical Distillery Helen Elscot said she lets clients know the biggest hurdle in getting to Waiheke is getting on the ferry.

"I've been saying, 'Get there an hour before, see what the queue looks like, pop someone in the queue and get a coffee,'" Elscot said.

But she is now pushing that out and telling her customers, many of whom are celebrating significant events such as birthdays or hen parties, to get to the ferry an hour and a quarter before their expected departure.

Like Fowler, Elscot is also concerned about the end of the day when visitors face long queues to travel back to the city.

"It's frustrating, that reflects badly on all the businesses that hosted them. That blots on the experience they've had."

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JASON DORDAY/STUFF

The Waiheke Ferry Terminal in Matiatia Bay on Waiheke Island, Auckland.

Fullers moved to its summer ferry timetable this week, after [signalling two weeks ago](#) that the transition to more frequent sailings would not be a smooth one.

In previous years, Fullers360 has run a half-hourly service through the summer, but the company said a “critical industry-wide skills shortage” is impacting its workforce and preventing it from running its “optimal peak summer timetable”.

A Fullers spokesperson said the new timetable has been created based on the crews it has available to service it.

“The key challenge for our business over this period will be the availability of back-up crews, rather than the timetable itself. This is what we anticipate could cause disruption,” the spokesperson said.

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scheduled services departed the wharf meaning some customers needed to wait an additional 15 to 60 minutes depending on the availability of back up vessels for the next service”.

When Fullers released its new timetable a fortnight ago, chief executive Mike Horne said the company is encouraging passengers to arrive at least an hour early and travel off-peak where possible.

The one-hour advance arrival is recommended for peak travel times which includes from 10am to 12pm from Auckland to Waiheke on weekends, and return sailings from 3pm, with Thursday and Friday afternoon and evening sailings also expected to be busier than usual.

TODD NIALL/STUFF

Sealink's car ferry on Auckland's Waitematā Harbour. The vehicular service operator reached agreement with employees last week on a pay increase to avoid disruption from strike action over Labour Weekend.

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recruitment campaign, increasing pay for our employees, investing in training and development and partnering with competitors to sustain our summer timetable,” Horne said.

Rising pay rates at Fullers has had a knock-on effect in the industry. Vehicular ferry operator SeaLink last week averted massive disruptions to its Labour Weekend services from threatened strike action. On October 12, members of First Union which represents SeaLink workers accepted an offer of an 8.75% pay increase.

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