

Please Sign In and use this article's on page print button to print this article.

**TRANSPORTATION**

# Scenic tours, ferry companies see rise in customers after pandemic shutdowns



Passengers board the Poseidon Ferry at the Hyatt Regency Miami.

JOCK FISTICK / SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

## IN THIS ARTICLE

**Bill Walker**

Person

**John Silvia**

Person



By Ashley Garrett  
Digital Producer, South Florida Business Journal  
Oct 15, 2021, 12:14pm EDT

With an unprecedented number of Americans turning to water-based recreation amid Covid-19 restrictions, South Florida's water taxi and ferry services are raking in business by offering passengers fresh air, picturesque views and safe travel.

Floating vessels are once again boarding riders after intermittent shutdowns due to the pandemic. As tourism bounces back in the tri-county region, passenger boat services are pulling in both old and new customers.

“Tourism coming to Florida took off in February, and we had a phenomenal summer through August. There was way more tourism this time of the year than there has been in the past,” said Bill Walker, principal and CEO of Fort Lauderdale Water Taxi. “It was amazing how many people came to Florida during Covid-19.”

Headquartered in the city known as the “Venice of America,” the Fort Lauderdale Water Taxi takes patrons on 15-mile scenic rides along the Intracoastal Waterway. The service makes stops at popular attractions such as Las Olas Boulevard, Hugh Taylor Birch State Park and the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Marina.



Fort Lauderdale Water Taxi on New River Sound

JEFF GREENBERG

Fort Lauderdale Water Taxi's 13-boat fleet averages more than 1 million boardings a year. Passengers can choose from

a variety of excursion types, from day trips to private charters to sunset cruises.

Walker, a veteran of the Massachusetts marine industry who relocated to purchase the water taxi in 2007, said Fort Lauderdale's distinctive system of water channels and thriving local business community have played key roles in shaping his company into one of the city's most popular attractions.

"Fort Lauderdale is very unique with 165 miles of waterways, and one of the things that makes the water taxi extremely successful is all the business partners we have in the area," he said. "We work hand in hand with different restaurants, hotels and hospitality groups to drop off 50 to 100 people per day for lunch or dinner. It's a business model that we came up with with our partners that's been awesome."

Water transit isn't only gaining popularity as an attraction for tourists seeking a full day of fun; it's also emerging as a viable alternative for South Floridians looking to avoid the region's notorious traffic.

Developed in partnership with Miami-Dade County's Department of Transportation and Public Works and the cities of Miami and Miami Beach, Poseidon Ferry provides an affordable alternative for residents looking to avoid congestion and construction on Interstate 395. The waterborne commuter service shuttles passengers across Biscayne Bay in about 16 minutes.

On the Miami side, Poseidon Ferry docks outside the river entrance to the Hyatt Regency Miami/James L. Knight Center, where riders can transfer to the Metromover. On the Miami Beach side, the vessel docks at the Bentley Bay Marina, nearby parking and other public transit options.

Poseidon Ferry relaunched service Aug. 16 after a monthslong hiatus due to Covid-19 and permitting issues. The service carried more than 1,000 passengers in the first two weeks and quickly gained loyal daily riders, CEO John Silvia said.



Poseidon Ferry CEO John Silvia

JOCK FISTICK / SOUTH FLORIDA BUSINESS JOURNAL

With commuters and locals accounting for about 60% of Poseidon Ferry’s passengers, Silvia sought out to develop an economical and dependable transit option in the Magic City. One-way tickets for the ferry start at \$3 with a valid Florida ID, and weekly and monthly Trip-Hopper ticket packages are also available.

“We wanted to try to keep it in line with other forms of public transit. Once you start going up too high in ticket prices, it gets less financially viable for daily commuters who need to go back and forth to work,” he said. “We want to make sure that we can keep our promise to the county and the public to keep our service reasonable and appealing to folks.”

Miami’s shallow waterways and bascule bridges have made it a historically challenging location for water transit, but Poseidon Ferry is moving ahead on expanding its services throughout Miami-Dade County. The company is in the process of developing a Coconut Grove route, and plans to run south to Matheson Hammock Park in Coral Gables and

Black Point Park & Marina in Naranja, and north to Bal Harbour’s Haulover Beach and Aventura.

Convincing Miamians to transition away from of their daily commutes by car has proven to be a challenge for Poseidon Ferry. But Silvia is confident the concept will continue to catch on.

“When Miami was founded, it wasn’t created with this much population in mind. Once you can establish the routes and get people to see them as a viable solution to traffic, they’ll use it,” he said. “A couple years from now, as water transit comes alive, the conversation will be much different. I think that Miami can definitely get there.”

**RELATED CONTENT**

**South Florida marinas build more amenities as boating booms**



**T H E L I S T**

More >

BANKING & FINANCIAL SERVICES

**Banks in South Florida** 🔑

Information was obtained from the FDIC. South Flo...

**25 COMPANIES**

BANKING & FINANCIAL SERVICES

**SBA Lenders in South Florida** 🔑

Information was obtained from the U.S. Small Busi...

**25 COMPANIES**

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

**South Florida's Biggest Foreclosures** 🔑

Information was obtained through records from th...

**17 TRANSACTIONS**

**Investment Management Firms in South Florida** 🔑

Information was obtained from the Florida Office ...

**25 COMPANIES**