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Gordon River Cruises to re-open in boost for west coast tourism

Tourism operators on Tasmania's west coast will receive a welcome boost next month, with the first major tourism attraction in the region to re-open following the COVID-19 pandemic, starting up just in time for the school holidays.

The award-winning Gordon River Cruises will recommence operations from Friday 10 July, with the *Spirit of the Wild* sailing each Friday, Saturday and Sunday thereafter until further notice.

Chief Operating Officer RACT Destinations, Andrew Paynter said while COVID-19 had undoubtedly been difficult for business, there were plenty of positives on the horizon as tourism begins to re-open within the state.

"As the first major attraction in the region to re-open, we're really hoping to kick-start the visitor economy on the west coast and attract people from around Tasmania to enjoy all the wonderful things it has to offer.

"Without interstate and international visitors, the last few months have been very challenging for many businesses who can often rely on tourism to make ends meet.

"We're very lucky in Tasmania to have an abundance of world class experiences right in our backyard and Tasmanians have shown a real desire to get out and enjoy them while they can't leave the state.

"We've been very encouraged by the level of local interest so far and we've added two additional cruises on the 15th and 16th of July to cater for demand. It will be wonderful to again see people coming back to the west coast, supporting local businesses while they're here.

Mr Paynter said the re-opening date had been brought forward from 17 July to allow more families to enjoy the magic of the Gordon River during the school holidays.

"With COVID-19 restrictions being lifted earlier than planned we saw a great opportunity to move our re-opening date to align with the winter school holidays.

"As a celebration of being able to re-open, all kids will cruise for free on our Main Deck up until Term 3 starts on July 20.

"After the school holidays, all cruisers will receive a free upgrade to a Main Deck Window seat when booking a Main Deck Central seat until 1 August.

Mr Paynter said a number of operational changes had been implemented to protect the health and safety of cruisers.

“We've dropped our passenger limit to 90, which is normally 192. The buffet is now served by the crew themselves, instead of the guests. Additional crew members will be on deck throughout the cruise to ensure cleaning is more frequent - especially in high foot-traffic areas, and hand sanitiser stations and social distancing markings have been added,” he said.