

NEWS LESSON

The Walking Partner You Can Hire

BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you pay for company at an event you did not want to attend alone?
2. What makes a good companion different from a good friend?
3. Can an enjoyable conversation feel genuine if someone is being paid?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**hire**	☐	A	visiting famous places as a tourist
2	**companions**	☐	B	to pay someone to do a job or to come with you
3	**sightseeing**	☐	C	something that happens to you, or something you do
4	**customers**	☐	D	to look at two things to see how they are the same or different
5	**safety**	☐	E	a plan or agreement between people
6	**arrangement**	☐	F	people who pay for a product or service
7	**compare**	☐	G	people who go somewhere with you
8	**experience**	☐	H	being free from danger

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

In China you can pay someone to join you for a meal, a walk or a trip. Students do the work to earn extra money.

1 You want to visit a mountain, try a new restaurant or spend an afternoon sightseeing. But your friends are busy, and you do not want to go on your own. In China, some people have found an unusual answer: they pay a person to come with them.

2 This is part of a growing business sometimes called the companionship economy. Customers can hire someone to join them for a meal, a walk or a trip. Some companions help people feel more confident in an unfamiliar place, while others know the area well and can make the day easier and more enjoyable.

3 In June 2026, Reuters reported on this business in China. One company offered companions for hikes on Mount Tai, a famous mountain. The customers were not necessarily looking for a lifelong friend. They wanted another person to share one particular experience with them.

4 There are several reasons why the service might be popular. People often move to large cities for work and end up living far from their family. Long working hours make it difficult to keep in touch with old friends, and harder still to make new ones. Some activities are also simply nicer with company.

5 The arrangement can help the person being hired, too. Students and other workers use it to earn extra money, and the hours can fit around their studies. But there are questions about safety, clear rules and what customers should expect. A paid companion is not automatically a close friend, even when the day goes well and the two people get on.

6 Perhaps the idea sounds less strange when we compare it with services we already accept. People pay guides to show them a city and teachers to help them learn, and nobody finds that odd. The unusual part here is paying for company itself, with no other reason attached to it.

7 That is what makes the story interesting. Is paid company simply another service, like a guide or a teacher, or does it say something about how hard it can be for friends to meet in a busy city? People may answer differently.

Sources: Reuters. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The company in the story offered companions for hikes on Mount Tai. T F NG
2. A paid companion is always a close friend. T F NG
3. Students can arrange the hours around their studies. T F NG
4. The service costs less than a tour guide. T F NG
5. Reuters wrote about this business in 2025. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

confident	enjoyable	familiar	lifelong	polite	popular	unusual

1. The weather was perfect, and the hike was much more _____ with a friendly guide.
2. After a few weeks of English classes, he felt _____ about speaking to strangers.
3. Hot springs are _____ with tourists, so the roads are crowded in summer.
4. It is _____ for a shop to open at four in the morning, so people were surprised.
5. They met at school and have been _____ friends ever since.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Last summer, my sister _____ a guide to take her up a mountain. (PAY)
2. She wanted _____ the old town without getting lost. (SEE)
3. Right now, he _____ for a friend outside the station. (WAIT)
4. Last year, the company _____ cheap trips for students. (OFFER)
5. While we _____ lunch, the guide explained the plan. (EAT)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some words need a small word after them. Learn the pair together, for example depend on.

about	at	for	from	of	on	with

1. Thank you _____ the lovely day out.
2. The price depends _____ how many hours you book.
3. My cousin is very good _____ finding quiet restaurants.
4. Some customers are worried _____ their safety when they meet a stranger.
5. A guide you book is different _____ a friend, because you agree a price.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should a paid companion be honest about from the start?
2. Could paying for company make it easier to meet people elsewhere?
3. Which matters most in company: shared interests, attention or reliability?

9 Role-play: hiring a companion for a hike

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the customer

You want to hike up a mountain on Saturday, but your friends are busy. Ask a companion to come with you. Find out the price, the hours and what the companion will do.

Student B · the companion

You are a student and you work as a paid companion. You want clear rules before you agree: the price, how long you will stay, and what you will and won't do. Say yes, or suggest a change.

Useful phrases

I'd like to book you for Saturday.

How much do you charge for a full day?

I'm happy to walk with you, but I'd need to finish by five.

What's included in the price?

That's more than I'd planned to pay.

Let's agree the rules before we start.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree a deal, and was it fair for both people?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 G · 3 A · 4 F · 5 H · 6 E · 7 D · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 T · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 enjoyable · 2 confident · 3 popular · 4 unusual · 5 lifelong

6 Verb forms

1 paid · 2 to see · 3 is waiting · 4 offered · 5 were eating

7 Language focus

1 for · 2 on · 3 at · 4 about · 5 from

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