NEWS LESSON

Paying for Company When Friends Are Busy



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	**accompany**	☐	A	shares part of the same area or purpose
2	**outing**	☐	B	something that makes people interested or draws them in
3	**specialise**	☐	C	an answer to a problem
4	**solution**	☐	D	to focus on one particular kind of work or activity
5	**attraction**	☐	E	a short trip for pleasure
6	**navigate**	☐	F	to go somewhere with someone
7	**convenience**	☐	G	to find the way through a place
8	**overlaps**	☐	H	something that makes life easier

3 Read

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

Hundreds of online contacts do not guarantee company on a shared afternoon. An arrangement that cannot be cancelled on a whim may be the real product.

1 Making plans is easy until you realise that nobody is free to join you. In China, an expanding market for paid companionship is offering an unusual solution. Customers hire somebody to accompany them to restaurants, tourist attractions or hiking trails, turning what might have been a lonely outing into a shared experience.

2 In June 2026, Reuters described a growing industry in which companions advertise their services online. Some providers specialise in particular activities, such as helping customers climb Mount Tai. Their value is not necessarily emotional intimacy; it may be local knowledge, encouragement, practical help or simply the reassurance of not being alone.

3 The trend reflects wider pressures on social life. Working long hours, moving away from home and living in enormous cities can make friendships difficult to organise. Traditional social networks weaken, even when people remain constantly connected through their phones. A paid appointment offers something ordinary friendships cannot guarantee: the other person will definitely be there, even at short notice.

4 That reliability may explain more of the appeal than loneliness does. Most people have had plans fall through at the last minute, and an arrangement that cannot be cancelled on a whim has an obvious attraction for anyone with limited free time.

5 The idea is also less new than it first appears. Tour guides, personal trainers and language partners all sell their time and attention, and hardly anyone objects to that. What makes this different is that company is the product itself, rather than something that comes along with a lesson or a tour.

6 For students and other flexible workers, providing companionship can become a useful source of income. Yet the arrangement raises practical questions. What happens if the two people fail to get along? How should personal boundaries be agreed in advance? And does a relationship become less meaningful once money changes hands?

7 It may also be misleading to describe every customer as isolated. Some simply want a hiking partner, or somebody who can navigate an unfamiliar place and strike up a conversation with the staff. In that sense, the service overlaps with tourism, coaching and personal assistance rather than replacing traditional friendship.

8 There is also the question of what happens afterwards. A good day out with a paid companion ends with a payment rather than a plan to meet up again, which some customers will find perfectly comfortable and others may find less satisfying.

9 Nevertheless, its popularity reveals something about modern society. People can have hundreds of online contacts and still find it hard to arrange a real conversation or a shared afternoon. The companionship economy may be selling convenience, but the demand behind it points to a much less convenient problem.

Sources: Reuters. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

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

1. Companions advertise their services online. T F NG
2. The text suggests a paid companion is more certain to turn up than a friend. T F NG
3. Every customer who hires a companion is lonely. T F NG
4. The industry is regulated by the Chinese government. T F NG
5. A day out with a paid companion usually ends with a plan for the next meeting. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

appeal	boundaries	expanding	intimacy	isolated	reassurance	reliable	satisfying

1. The manager gave the nervous new employee some _____ that the first week would be easy.
2. Because the city is _____ , new shops and cafes open every month.
3. Teachers and students should agree clear _____ before the first lesson, such as when messages can be sent.
4. Living in a village with no bus service, many older residents feel _____ from the rest of the community.
5. Finishing a long project can be deeply _____ , even when the work was tiring.
6. The _____ of cheap flights has made weekend city breaks a common choice.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time we reached the trail, the other hikers _____ . (LEAVE)
2. If I _____ about the service, I would have booked a companion. (KNOW)
3. Last month, the service _____ in three more cities. (INTRODUCE)
4. By next year, the company _____ offices in ten cities. (OPEN)
5. It is the third time this month that she _____ her plans. (CHANGE)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Verbs, adjectives and nouns often take one fixed preposition. Learn the whole phrase, not the small word alone.

at for in of on to with

1. Some providers specialise _____ guiding visitors up mountains.
2. Few customers object _____ paying for someone's time.
3. You cannot always rely _____ a friend to turn up at short notice.
4. The company was criticised _____ failing to explain its safety rules.
5. Most customers were satisfied _____ the service.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 NG · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 reassurance · 2 expanding · 3 boundaries · 4 isolated · 5 satisfying · 6 appeal

6 Verb forms

1 had left · 2 had known · 3 was introduced · 4 will have opened · 5 has changed

7 Language focus

1 in · 2 to · 3 on · 4 for · 5 with

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