



# PARTICIPANT SUPPORT OVERVIEW

## Introduction

We are proud to offer an unrivaled level of support to all participants before, during and after their programme. We align our health, safety, security and risk management practices with Standard 8 of The Forum on Education Abroad's best practice guidelines. This document provides a general overview of our services in relation to participant care and support on our programmes.

This document serves as an overview to inform our valued partners about the pastoral care and other general support considerations that you may not be aware we provide **as standard** with our programmes.

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## General Support

One-to-one [support from Pagoda](#) is a key part of our success story. Our team genuinely care about every participant and 'rate our support' within feedback is included in our top 3 evaluation metrics. We have [pre-programme medical calls](#), [check-ins](#), [risk assessments](#), [self-care plans](#) and a centralised 'extra support system' to flag any issues to our leadership team. Participant will feel supported throughout their programme and well into their graduate career, many Pagoda alumni have even starred as [guest speakers](#) as part of our events and are [driving change in government](#) and for [cutting-edge businesses](#).

### For in-person programmes:

We employ [our own](#) full-time native-English and local language speakers in our in-person destinations. We do not offer destinations that we ultimately outsource to other companies and we do everything ourselves from the predeparture support to the facilitation of cultural activities, company visits and trips. This enables us to standardise our support without relying on third parties to deliver to our high expectations. We are a present and approachable team who are there when issues arise in-country, large or small. Our team can help translate for participants i.e. when going to the doctor, provide advice and support in relation to the internship and be there to support with personal problems. We conduct issue-specific staff training and provide more detailed processes for possible issues on our systems, such as lost passports or visa overstays. Every branch office has first-aid trained staff.

Participants provide us with confidential Health and Safety information via our webform prior to arrival. We provide participants who have allergies or dietary requirements with a translation card which they can keep on them to show waiters for ordering food in restaurants or in case they need to show it to a doctor. Our risk/escalation procedures for specific incidents and reporting procedures are available on request. People from 96 different countries have taken part in our programmes since 2007. We are proud of our genuine participant diversity and have measures in place to make our support is accessible in cases where potential language barriers, health conditions or access requirements occur.

### For digital programmes:

Our participants will benefit from the Pagoda community during and post-programme via the Pagoda app and alumni network. The Pagoda community includes speakers & industry experts, cultural mentors and fellow participants following similar pathways. Learning is not constrained to the programme. Participants will be pushed out of their comfort zones and encouraged to think beyond the programme to articulate their skill development to future employers. Focus on cultural and digital fluency, teamwork and other employability skills is emphasised at multiple points on the programme. The influence of the Pagoda community will continue as their career progresses.

## Pre-Programme

### For in-person programmes:

We understand that leaving one's home country, especially as a young person, can be a daunting prospect. The importance of the support we offer before participants even arrive on destination should not be underestimated and is a key factor in ensuring participants enjoy all aspects of their programme. Our UK team are responsible for ensuring participants understand what to expect. They receive extensive information via a webinar or in-person



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presentation, as well as one to one discussions via Skype and email to help manage expectations, reduce the likelihood of culture shock and minimise any anxiety. Our staff cooperate with participants to ensure they are carefully matched with suitable host companies prior to departure, thus reducing the risk that either party is dissatisfied whilst in country. Companies conduct phone or Skype interviews with participants during the application phase, which allows both parties to get to know each other and the participant is aware of the nature of their internship tasks and responsibilities prior to arrival.

### For digital programmes:

Participant experience is our top priority. Participants will be nurtured through the application process, engage live with our team, register, discuss expectations, prepare and on-board via an extensive orientation process. Nobody gets left behind with clear steps and the support of our team, especially once they have access to our app and the resources including the skills courses available.

### **Accommodation**

We offer various accommodation options for our in-person programmes depending on the destination and type of programme. Participants may be able to opt to reside in either a private room in a furnished apartment with other participants, or an immersive experience with a homestay family (all families have at least one English speaker). For some group programmes, hotels may be arranged instead.

For apartment accommodation, our staff go through a checklist with each participant, highlighting everything that should be present from CO2 / CO alarms to cutlery and agreeing action to be taken to satisfy individual requests or in the event a specific item is reported damaged or missing. We set up social media groups for participants in each apartment to raise any issues and all apartments have evacuation plans and safety information documents.

Our Homestay option also includes a private room as standard and families should have some basic comforts such as at least one western toilet. We visit and carry out due diligence with each family to ensure that their basis for hosting students is legitimately for cultural exchange rather than being exclusively for profit or other undesirable motivations such as having the participant provide formal English teaching to their children.

There are no additional bills or hidden fees to pay with our accommodation. Our [Accommodation Quality Policy](#) provides a more detailed overview of our requirements and the due diligence we carry out in regard to apartments and Homestays.

### **Inclusivity**

At Pagoda Projects we pride ourselves on our inclusivity and believe that everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy an international learning experience. We do not discriminate against nationality, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity or disability. We have processes in place to understand and support the participant with any physical or mental health considerations and we provide ample opportunity to sensitively capture information in our system within data protection laws, so our trained staff can prepare the appropriate support.

### **Insurance**

#### For in-person programmes:



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We ensure that all participants have a comprehensive travel and health insurance in place before the programme begins. Details of the level of expected cover is listed in previous [Insurance Policy Details](#) (this specific overview is subject to change). We work closely with our trusted insurance broker Bartlett Group, to ensure we are aware of any updates affecting international cover for all eventualities in relation to our programmes. We are therefore prepared to advise participants in terms of coverage, claims procedure, pay-out speed and emergency in-country support. To mitigate risk for host organisations, participants must sign a waiver in their contract with Pagoda Projects, which can be found in full in our [Participant Terms & Code of Conduct](#). Host organisations' liability is also clarified in the contract between the organisation and Pagoda Projects, which is available on request.

### Host Company Vetting

We aim to give participants a real experience in their chosen sector which has a meaningful impact on their journey within that sector after graduation and throughout their career. When placing a participant with a host company for the first time, we conduct additional checks with the company and the participant to ensure that the experience is a positive one. For any companies which fail to deliver to our high expectations we will terminate our partnership and no longer offer to participants as a placement option.

#### For in-person programmes:

We will visit every company to ensure that it adheres to our '[Internship Quality Policy](#)'. This policy covers general workspace safety considerations as well as our expectations in relation to the quality of tasks assigned to participants on our programmes. We sign an independent agreement with every host company to ensure that their responsibilities towards the participant are understood and agreed formally in writing. In addition to outlining our expectations, this document clarifies what our team are responsible for such as introducing the participant and ongoing/emergency support. Host companies provide fire safety certificates for their buildings in addition to an 'action plan' in case of emergencies.

### Arrival and Orientation

#### For in-person programmes:

Participants on internship programmes typically arrive individually rather than as part of a group. This encourages a certain level of independence from the very beginning of a participant's programme and enables us to offer a personal level of support upon arrival. We pick up every participant from the airport on arrival and accompany them to their accommodation. Our team follow guidelines on which points to discuss on arrival, what general tone to take with a new arrival and ensure that they receive their digital and physical welcome packages. Alongside a comprehensive digital welcome pack on WeChat, participants also receive a physical welcome pack, which contains:

- Emergency Contacts Card
- A SIM card with pre-loaded credit
- A local travel card
- Map of the city
- Welcome letter with some basic info for arrival English-language city guide
- Pagoda Projects T-Shirt



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The most important item in participants' welcome package is their Emergency Contacts Card. This business card fits into their purse/wallet and contains the following emergency contact information:

- Our office hours
- Our office address
- How to reach our office using public transport
- Office Phone number
- Primary Emergency Contact name and number
- Secondary Emergency Contact name and number International
- Clinic Details Hospital Telephone Number
- Accommodation Address
- Internship Company Address

Upon reaching their accommodation, the participant is introduced to their flatmates. Our team member stays with the new arrival for as long as is necessary so that they feel welcome at their accommodation and ensures their route to our office the following day for orientation is clear. Our team prepare fresh bedding and some drinks and snacks for each new arrival. For apartment accommodation, a professional cleaner cleans the apartment before each new arrival. As well as having social media groups for all participants in each city, we establish separate social media groups for each apartment, so that flatmates can communicate issues between each other and with the Pagoda team simultaneously. On each participants' first full day in country, our team conducts a full orientation at our local office.

### Internship Support

First and foremost, we work hard during the matching process and allow participants to speak directly to their host organisation during an interview to minimize the risk that both the participants' and hosts' expectations are aligned. Our team plan at least one 'backup' placement per participant so that if either party is not satisfied with the internship after it has commenced, we are ready to act quickly and relocate the participant with a more suitable position when necessary.

Should issues arise, our experienced team will provide advice and if necessary facilitate an in-person meeting between the participant and supervisor to discuss and resolve issues. Should the participant and/or supervisor continue to find the arrangement unsuitable, we will endeavour to source an alternative host company for the participant with minimal disruption to their programme and experience.

We take feedback from both the participant and company supervisor at the end of their placement and review whether it met expectations and fulfilled our quality policy. We have a zero-tolerance approach to substandard internships and those which do not meet our expectations are no longer offered.

### For in-person programmes:

On their first working day, a member of our team accompanies the participant to their host organisation and ensures they receive an adequate orientation from their internship supervisor. This introduction also serves to ensure that the participant knows their way to the company using public transport and has ample opportunity to ask questions and raise any issues for further action. We speak to participants regularly during their first week on place and conduct formal internship 'check-ups' with both participants and companies within the first 2 weeks of the placement commencing. This check-up takes the form of either a structured phone call or completion of a survey webform. Should our team deem the webform as the most appropriate form of feedback submission, a phone call will be made to follow up the result and identify any points for ongoing support.



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### For digital programmes:

On a few days before the participant's first working day, a member of our team conducts an induction call with the participant and the company to ensure that all questions regarding communication channels, time differences and remote work reporting procedures are clear to all parties. The participants check-in with either weekly or bi-weekly via webform and our app. If deemed necessary by our team, a phone call will be made to follow up the result and identify any points for ongoing support.

### **Emergency Support**

In emergencies our team are well trained to handle situations in a calm and professional manner, going above and beyond their regular office hours in order to offer impeccable customer service to participants on our programmes in exceptional circumstances. All staff contribute to our risk assessment & emergency procedures, which is reviewed thoroughly every 6 months. We also have a member of staff trained as a Mental Health First Aider.

### For in-person programmes:

All participants have two 24-hour emergency contacts for their city. Each office conducts a 6-monthly team training session related to risk assessment and practices a 'dry run' for a randomly selected hypothetical emergency situation. A separate risk-assessment session is conducted by Pagoda team members attending trips outside of our destination cities made by groups of participants.

### **Social Programme**

#### For in-person programmes:

An informal element of our ongoing support to participants on in-person programmes is our social events. We organise weekly dinners at local restaurants which would be difficult to find for participants and regularly organise optional activities, events and excursions for participants. Activities include calligraphy classes, dumpling making, cooking classes, tea ceremonies, ten-pin bowling, Kung Fu classes, hiking, swimming or beach trips. Events have included panel discussions, networking events and dinners. Weekend excursions have included visiting nearby famous culturally significant sites and national parks, as well as lesser-known places of interest. Our social programme is communicated to participants through regular updates our app and social media groups for each of our destinations.

#### For digital programmes:

Our app-based platform offers participants a unique level of interaction within a community of participants, cultural mentors, businesses and alumni. Weekly online events provide participants with on a professional level but also on a social level with quizzes and challenges. We have developed sector-leading best-practice to support participants' mental health.

### **Career Readiness**

We measure the participants via an compulsory self-assessment at the beginning and end of their programme, the questions for which are aligned with the [NACE Core Competencies for Career Readiness](#).



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Pagoda prepares participants for [the future of work](#) and works towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals 8 & 10 by promoting positive international relations through work and cultural exchange. We believe that valuable work experience cannot be superficial or a steppingstone to a graduate job. If participants engage in meaningful work, develop key skills and join a community, the benefits of a Pagoda experience will be visible throughout their career. We help participants [to reflect and articulate their skills](#) to future employers. In a survey of 663 alumni, respondents said Pagoda helped them improve their intercultural fluency (92%), problem solving (84%), communication (82%) and ability to spot opportunities and develop a career plan (86%).

We can provide the data to our partners for participants from the group programmes/cohort we facilitate internships for.

### Complaints Handling

A clear procedure for complaints in various circumstances is detailed to participants during orientation and can be found in our [Complaints & Grievance Policy](#), including the procedure for raising a complaint to senior management if required.

### Key Performance Indicator

Our KPI for participant support is related to participant feedback. We ask participants to rate our support either 'Excellent', 'Good', 'Satisfactory' or 'Poor' for several categories related to support, accommodation, orientation and mental health impact. Our target is to achieve 100% either 'Excellent' or 'Good' in each category.

End-of-programme feedback is compulsory for the vast majority of our participants. Following each cohort we conduct feedback reviews internally and with your team; discussing key data, learning points and actions with implementation deadlines. We collect formal weekly participant "check-in" feedback and informally through events and social engagements. Coaching participants during their programme is a key component towards excellent feedback outcomes.

For feedback we work on a 1-5 scale whereby anything below 4 is flagged and actioned. We have a range of internal processes to act on feedback, including a complaints procedure and 6-monthly 'Risk Assessment Week'.

Two highlights of feedback from over 1000 participants over the past four years:

- Rate your overall Pagoda experience: 96% Excellent or Good
- Would you recommend Pagoda to another person: 97% Yes

An uncensored report of quantitative feedback is available on request and a range of video testimonials is available on our YouTube Channel.