



HOW TO CHOOSE A PROVIDER:

***UNDERSTANDING SAFETY & BEST
PRACTICE IN THE OUTDOOR INDUSTRY***

1

IMPORTANT AREAS TO CONSIDER

STAFF



The selection, training, development and quality of staff is critical. Not only, to the success of a programme and to meeting the schools desired outcomes, but to the safety and well-being of the students. They are after all in the hands of the Group Leader and the ancillary staff and systems that support them.

COMMUNICATIONS + RESPONSE



A comprehensive, reliable and well monitored communications system is essential, especially for more remote programmes. They are used for the day-to-day programme logistics, to inform field staff of the daily weather, to pass information and updates to and from groups in the field especially for emergency and incident response.

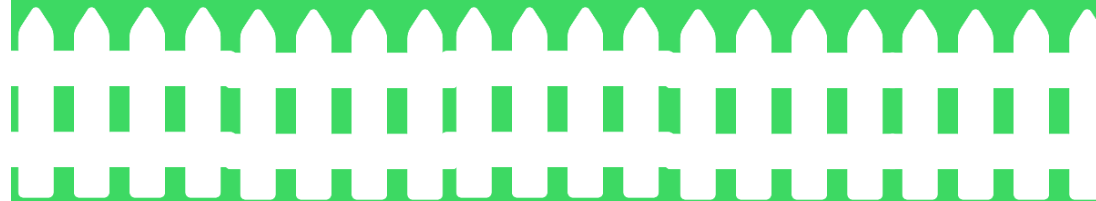
ACCREDITATION + LICENSING



Holding the relevant and required accreditation & licencing is essential for a safe and professional provider. Somerset recognises the importance for outdoor providers to undergo and maintain the validation and certification of their programmes in conjunction with their own internal policies, to ensure that their practices are safe and in line with industry approved and accepted standards

LAND + ACCESS

The exclusive and/or guaranteed, ongoing, safe and secure use and access to land, campsites, bushwalking routes, watercourses, etc is a key factor in ensuring the conduct of a successful programme.





STAFF

Qualifications - Do the group leading & activity support staff hold the appropriate qualifications & proficiencies for the tasks they are undertaking? (Such as, roping set-up & rescues, canoeing instruction, navigation & mapping, etc.)

In-house familiarisation - Are staff briefed, trained & competent in the procedures, policies & practices particular to the organisation?

First Aid - Are staff qualified in suitable levels of First Aid & response for the programme? (Such as, senior or remote area first aid, CPR currency, emergency response, etc.)

NSW Working with Children Check - Are staff verified according to the requirements of the NSW WWC, & does the organisation have child-safe policies in place?

Development & Mentoring - Does the organisation invest time & money in staff training, development & mentoring? (Such as, hard skills revision, soft skills enhancement, etc.)

Staffing Levels - Are staff to student ratios for activities appropriate & with reference to the guidelines set out in the NSW Adventure Activity Standards?

Continuity of Staff - Does the organisation have a solid, full-time staff base as opposed to revolving casuals?

Support & Coordinating Staff - Are the behind-the-scenes staff trained & competent for their roles? (Such as, duty drivers, programme coordinators, etc.)

COMMUNICATIONS & RESPONSE

Type - Do the chosen devices cover the programme area? Are these devices complementary? And what is the contingency for a device or communications failure?

Use - Are the communication devices for emergency response only? If so, does this suffice?

GPS Units - Is the reliance on the 'EPIRB' function only? If so, does this suffice? (Please note - EPIRB stands for "Emergency Position Indicating Response Beacon").

Method - One-way or two-way communication devices? If one-way - is the group self-sufficient with reference to weather and other updates up until they can check-in? If two-way - how are check-in procedures, battery life and other processes managed to ensure that this is reliable?

Monitoring - What monitoring & response system is in place? Is there someone at the other end 24 hours? And what capability do they have to respond?

Over-reliance on communications - What are the emergency procedures, training & response of the Leader in the field in the event of communications failure?



ACCREDITATION & LICENSING

National Accommodation, Recreation & Tourism Accreditation (NARTA) - NSW industry recognised accreditation – professionally and externally audited.

Outdoor Recreation Industry Council (ORIC) Membership - The NSW Peak Industry Body for Outdoor Recreation. To remain up to date with industry best practice and have access to forums and conferences, etc.

Roads & Maritime Services – Registered, inspected & maintained according to requirements.

National Parks & Wildlife Commercial Operators Licences – Required for ventures in a National Park.

NSW Adventure Activity Standards – Industry best practice, guidelines, ratios, etc.



LAND + ACCESS

Privacy & Security – Is the land owned or exclusively leased? How much control is there over external factors as a result? (i.e. External factors such as, guaranteed usage, safety of students on private land compared to public, etc.)

Amenities & Facilities – Management of facilities & presentation, ability to make additions or modifications, tailored facilities specific to needs, etc.

Access – Is there guaranteed entrance to bush land and/or waterways? Is there limited and/or controlled use by others?

Upkeep & Maintenance – Control over maintenance & presentation; quality of sites; will there be interruption of usage due to works; etc.

Flexibility – Ability to change to a different area in times of inclement weather, bush fire index or other vagaries.

Location – Is there a Base where operations are run from? How close or far are programme areas to each other and from 'Base'?



WHAT DOES SOMERSET DO?



STAFF

Somerset is proud of its staff and works to the points listed to maintain our camp at the forefront of the industry.

Our Group Leaders are tertiary qualified and hold the necessary skills in roping, canoeing etc. They are trained in remote area first aid and are verified according to the NSW WWC requirements.

Upon arrival at Somerset our Group Leaders participate in an in-house induction concentrating on Somerset procedures and activity particulars. Throughout a season they will also be involved in development sessions, reconnaissance hikes & more.

We work on an average of 18 students with one Group Leader and teacher for school programmes, and an average of 12 students with a Group Leader for Duke of Ed expeditions. Additional support staff will join groups for certain activities such as canoeing and roping.

Somerset employs staff on seasonal contracts under our own Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. Many of our staff return for subsequent seasons. Our coordinating, client liaison, management, logistics, and hospitality staff are all experienced and skilled to fulfil their roles. We also run familiarisation sessions and driver training for these pivotal positions.

COMMUNICATIONS & RESPONSE

Somerset maintains its own licensed VHF Digital Radio repeater system across the programme area to ensure regular communications for all groups, and emergency contact if required.

This radio network is supplemented with the use of landline, mobile and satellite phones, as well as GPS Locator Spot Trackers as appropriate.

Communications are monitored and recorded from Base Camp 24 hours, with designated co-ordinators and duty drivers each night. Our coordinators are onsite at Base, are Somerset experienced, have specific knowledge of each programme and are able to respond accordingly.

Our Base Camp lies in the heart of our programme area - ensuring any response is timely, with the back-up of our 10 vehicles and additional staff who have full knowledge of the programme particulars.

Our Group Leaders are briefed in Somerset emergency procedures and back-up contingencies if they are required in the field.





ACCREDITATION + LICENSING

We are an organisation accredited by NARTA, involving a process of external expert audit, to ensure our programmes are run at industry best-practice level.

We are a member of ORIC NSW.

We hold a National Parks Premium 10-year Eco-Pass licence.

We refer to the NSW Adventure Activity Standards for industry best practice, guidelines, ratios & maintenance in relation to roping, canoeing, bushwalking, & more.

Our canoes are registered, inspected & maintained according to the requirements of the Roads and Maritime Services.

Our vehicles & trailers are registered, inspected & maintained according to the requirements of the Roads and Maritime Services.

We maintain a Safety Management Plan (risk assessment), Bushfire Index Management Plan & Incident Response Plan, as well as our own standard operating procedures & protocols, drinking water management plan, etc. We regularly evaluate, review & update our internal policies & documents.

LAND + ACCESS

Somerset owns and privately leases over 600 acres of river-front land throughout the Colo Valley. Our programme area extends over 40kms from the Colo River and Valley and into the adjoining Wollemi National Park and Hawkesbury River. Across this area we have 15 fixed campsites on Somerset owned or leased land. For expedition programmes we utilise up to 10 expedition sites.

Our fixed campsites are well appointed with flushing toilets and hand washing facilities, a shelter for food preparation with LED solar-lights, fresh water, a campfire circle with log seating and grassed areas for tents.

Our Base Camp – where students begin and finish their adventure – is our bustling hub and lies in the heart of our programme area. Base Camp is picturesque and well-appointed with grassy camping areas, toilets and showers, undercover briefing areas, floodlight fields, a sick-room for sick or injured students to rest, the original Somerset Homestead for use by the coordinating teacher and by group teachers as they pass through, and a dining hall for meals and as a fall-back in extreme weather conditions.