

Basic guide to starting a **guest accommodation business**

This document is not intended to be used as a comprehensive guide, but has been produced to help you decide whether or not your premises will meet the regulations and recommendations relating to Guest Accommodation establishments which are designed to help fulfill the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

There are a number of considerations in relation to starting Guest Accommodation and you are urged to seek professional advice before embarking on such an enterprise. In addition, you must comply with all relevant legislation, in particular The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992.

What is Guest Accommodation?

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, there are eight categories of accommodation regulated by the Tourism Northern Ireland namely, hotel, guest house, B&B, self-catering, hostel, bunk house, guest accommodation and campus accommodation.

This category is accommodation whose primary focus is the provision of bedrooms for visitors, for example, this would facilitate restaurants wishing to provide rooms for visitors. In essence, Guest Accommodation offers comfortable overnight sleeping accommodation for visitors in **ensuite** bedrooms and shall be capable of making breakfast available to visitors.

What is the difference between a Guest House and Guest Accommodation?

There are a number of differences between Guest Houses and Guest Accommodation, e.g. Guest Houses must provide accommodation in not less than 3 double rooms which must be ensuite and offer evening meals. For more information, see “Basic guide to starting a Guest House business”.

Certification

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, certification is **mandatory** for every establishment offering visitor accommodation. To apply to be certified by Tourism Northern Ireland you can either apply and pay online via www.tourismni.com/forms or complete Form 2, and submit this, together with the relevant fee (£20 for each bedroom provided for visitors subject to a minimum of £80 and a maximum of £200). This fee contributes towards the cost of an inspection and is payable in advance for the first inspection. Statutory inspections take place once every four years although Tourism Northern Ireland can undertake an inspection at any time. The purpose of inspections is to ensure that the requirements appropriate to the Guest Accommodation category continue to be met. If not, Tourism Northern Ireland may add conditions to the certificate or revoke it. All documentation referred to is available at www.tourismni.com or by contacting the Quality & Standards department (details at end of this document).

A Certification Officer will conduct an inspection to determine if the premises can be allocated to the Guest accommodation category. If a certificate is issued, your premises is a Certified Tourist Establishment and you may start trading. The forms and checklist are available at www.tourismni.com/accommodation.

Grading

Grading refers to the rating of a property from 1 to 5 stars. Tourism Northern Ireland launched a new Quality Star Rating Scheme in July 2011, which is operated by other UK National Tourist Boards and the AA. This scheme is open to Hotels, B&Bs, Guesthouses, Guest Accommodation, Hostels & Self Catering. **Please note that this scheme is voluntary and you are under no obligation to apply for quality star rating.**

Research has shown that tourists give preference to premises that hold an official tourist board rating. Having a quality rating will give your premises credibility and visibility which is vital in today's competitive market. Further information on how the scheme works is available on www.tourismni.com/accommodation. If you have any queries or would like an application pack, please contact our office by emailing qa@tourismni.com or telephone 028 9044 1553.

Aim for Excellence

Tourism Northern Ireland encourages all operators to aim for excellence, whatever the size of the proposed project. By providing enhanced facilities, amenities and additional services, you are more likely to obtain a higher letting rate, be more assured of higher occupancy for longer periods and be more likely to generate profits.

These need not involve great capital outlay, but can add considerably to your product, for example the provision of a games room, internet facilities or children's play area.

Read the promotional literature from Guest Accommodation establishments elsewhere for cost-effective ideas which can be adapted for your establishment and look at the facilities offered and rates charged. Facts about accommodation in Northern Ireland are available on www.tourismni.com and www.discovernorthernireland.com.

Marketing

Successful marketing is important for every business and your accommodation business is no different. You could have the most desirable property in your area, but without marketing, no one will know about it.

It is important that the cost of marketing your business is considered early in the planning stage. It is unlikely that the cost of marketing your business will be a one-off payment, so consider marketing as a running business cost and build this into your business plan.

When you are thinking about your marketing options, consider who is your target market. Will you be marketing your business towards families, couples or outdoor adventurers? Once you have established who your target market is, then you can decide how best get the message out about your property.

Traditional marketing methods can be very effective for some businesses, however having an online presence is vital and there is an expectation from consumers that your business is fully accessible online. Once certified by Tourism NI, you can avail of a complimentary entry onto our consumer website discovernorthernireland.com. Whilst this website provides a great platform for going online, we recommend that you do not solely rely on this to drive business, but rather use it as part of your overall marketing plan.

You may also want to think about integrating social media, an online payment facility, using online booking agents and search engine optimisation (the process of affecting how high your property will appear in search engine results) to aid the marketing of your business. There will be costs associated with these. Facebook, for business purposes, is increasingly becoming a paid platform. You can also pay for increased exposure on Twitter. Online booking agents charge fees and each one will vary. However there is scope to capture your visitors details and encourage them to contact you directly if they are planning a return visit. This means you can avoid losing commission on repeat bookings.

Tourism NI have a large following across a variety of social media platforms. If you have interesting or engaging content you would like to share about your business, you can send your stories to digital@tourismni.com for consideration. Similarly, if you have a special offer, you will be able to submit your accommodation offers for placement on discovernorthernireland.com. There are also a number of bespoke marketing campaigns which Tourism NI run throughout the year and you will be notified about each one with the option of sending in seasonal offers.

Types of Visitor

There is a broad spectrum of people who choose to stay in Guest Accommodation. A friendly host, together with good quality facilities and value for money accommodation, are key elements for success in all sectors of tourism.

Environmental Consideration

Tourism Northern Ireland, in its promotion of sensible, sensitive and sustainable tourism, encourages 'good housekeeping' schemes such as recycling, energy conservation and waste minimisation. For further information on addressing environmental impacts, download Tourism NI's 'Going Green' Guide from www.tourismni.com (see Business Support/Grow Your business/Sustainable Tourism).

Tourist Signage (White on Brown)

If you are interested in obtaining 'White on Brown' tourist signage, you should contact our local council Tourism Officer who can provide you with an application form. Local councils coordinate the application process for white on brown tourist signs which involves liaising with Tourism NI and Transport NI. You can also download a signage application form and a copy of the joint Transport NI – Tourism NI Tourist Signing Policy from www.tourismni.com (see business support/legal and licensing/tourist signing).

Minimum and recommended criteria

The requirements and recommendations set out here are for guidance; they aren't comprehensive. During an inspection you will be advised on matters not specifically detailed here, however, statutory inspections do not cover all aspects of tourist accommodation; it is the responsibility of certified premises operators/owners to make every reasonable effort to ensure that visitors enjoy a safe and secure stay. As part of your duty of care to visitors you should remain vigilant of potential risk to visitors and of how you describe your premises in marketing and promotion.

The following list sets out minimum requirements for Guest Accommodation establishments under **Schedule 8 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011**. It also contains Tourism Northern Ireland recommendations, in italics. All criteria should be interpreted in such a way that your guests will be impressed by the quality of your facilities. This outline is not in order of priority; it goes through the requirements approximately in the sequence they will be encountered by visitors.

Advertising Signage:

*External advertising signage, either in the grounds of your facility or in any other public space, may require planning permission. Tourism Northern Ireland recommends that you discuss any proposed external advertising signage with the planning team at your local council prior to erection. **Do not claim to be 'Tourism Northern Ireland Recommended' or 'Approved'**; you may indicate that you have an Tourism Northern Ireland Certificate, if you wish. You should consult with Tourism Northern Ireland in relation to the wording of your sign.*

Car-parking:

Consider provision of parking with due regard to neighbours, traffic regulations and the fact that guests will not wish to carry baggage for long distances.

Display of Certificate and Charges:

Your Tourism Northern Ireland Certificate and scale of charges for accommodation must be prominently displayed, easily seen by visitors before, or immediately after, they enter. Where

breakfast is available, this meal should be identified and the charge shown. If your rates vary seasonally, or if there is any condition to be satisfied (e.g. age-eligibility for children's rates), or any other charges not included in the rate, then these must be displayed. All charges should be inclusive of VAT, where applicable.

Visitors' register:

As well as the name, address and dates of arrival/departure, you are legally required to record each visitor's nationality.

Tourist Literature:

A selection of current leaflets, brochures, maps and other literature relating to your locality should be available. It is a good idea to review these periodically to ensure that the information provided is still current.

Structural and Safety Requirements:

Your establishment should be of substantial and durable construction, structurally safe and in good repair throughout, and of suitable design. It should be in good decorative order and kept clean and well maintained throughout, including outdoor areas, grounds and car park areas. It should be exclusively or primarily used for the provision of sleeping accommodation for visitors, in separate bedrooms.

Entrance Hall:

This should have a reception desk for receiving visitors.

Sleeping accommodation:

Bedroom doors may be located on the exterior wall of the establishment. Bedrooms should be numbered, lettered or otherwise designated so as to identify them and shall be of adequate size for the number of visitors the room is intended to hold. Each bedroom shall have two locking devices from within and a single locking device from without on any door opening onto a corridor or outside of the establishment. It should contain at least two electrical outlets for the attachment of electrical equipment and contain furniture, fittings and equipment of good quality and condition for sleeping and toilet purposes and for the storage of visitors' clothing.

Such furniture, fittings and equipment should include a bed/beds for each visitor the room is intended to hold complete with interior sprung mattress or suitable equivalent; a supply of clean linen, blankets or duvets and pillows; loose or built-in units comprising wardrobe or cupboard, dressing table, mirror and drawer space for clothes; a bedside chair and table; a waste bin; a carpet or floor surface of suitable design; and window curtains or blinds for privacy and the exclusion of light.

Daily cleaning of rooms should be carried out when visitors are resident.

Ensuite Bathrooms:

In each ensuite bathroom there should be a bath or shower, a WC and a wash hand basin, of good quality and condition, with a continuous supply of hot and cold water.

The ensuite bathroom should have an effective means of ventilation and shall be equipped with a mirror, towel rails, clothes hooks, bath mat and a clean and ample supply of toilet requisites including towels, soap and toilet paper.

Breakfast:

Breakfast should be available for visitors.

Heating, Lighting and Ventilation:

The establishment should contain effective means of natural lighting and ventilation and have a means of heating capable of maintaining, when required, a room temperature of 18.5 degrees celsius.

Management:

Guest Accommodation shall be under the supervision of a person trained or experienced in guest accommodation management, and be adequately staffed to maintain appropriate standards of service at all reasonable times.

Useful Websites

- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/accommodation for further copies of this document
- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/forms to apply online for certification
- Tourism Northern Ireland's website www.tourismni.com/ResearchIntelligence.aspx for facts and figures
- Tourism Northern Ireland's consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com
- www.worldhostni.com – information about customer service training programmes to assist the industry provide first class standards of service
- Divisional Planning Office www.planningni.gov.uk
- Tourist Signage Policy www.tourismni.com/brownsigns
- HM Revenue & Customs www.hmrc.gov.uk (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
- Music Licence requirement www.ppluk.com and www.prsformusic.com (for details on how to obtain a music licence when playing music in a public area)
- Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service www.nifrs.org
- The Health and Safety Works NI www.healthandsafetyworksni.gov.uk – A guide for small businesses to help manage health and safety in the workplace and relevant legislation
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/private_water.shtml
 - Information regarding the registration of private water supplies to holiday accommodation
- A copy of The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992 can be viewed at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1992/uksi_19920235_en_1.htm. Copies of all Tourism regulations can be obtained from The Stationery Office, Arthur Street, Belfast.

Contact details for further information:

For more information/application forms for certification contact any of the following staff in the Quality & Standards Department:

Diane Lynas	9044 1686
Damien Murray	9044 1545

You can also email this department at qa@tourismni.com or write to us at our offices:

Tourism Northern Ireland
Floors 10-12 Linum Chambers
Bedford Square
Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7ES

To request a copy of this document on disc or in other accessible formats, please contact the Quality & Standards Department.

