

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 Hostels which are designed to help fulfill the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

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

What is a hostel?

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

In essence, a hostel is a form of accommodation that is the letting of single beds. These beds, or bunks, can be in bedrooms or dormitory rooms, with shared or ensuite bathroom facilities. Hostels all have common kitchens, lounges and laundry facilities. Because of these common facilities, visitors tend to interact with each other more than in other forms of accommodation.

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 (£2.00 for each bed provided for visitors subject to a minimum of £70 and a maximum of £175). 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 Hostel 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 Hostel 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 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 café.

Read the promotional literature from hostel 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

It is not just young people who stay in hostels, but people from all walks of life and every corner of the world. Hostels provide a great way to meet new people and experience new things which is why they appeal to such a diverse range. More frequently, hostels also receive people who are looking for a quick, inexpensive place to stay without the cost or formality of other types of accommodation.

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 intended for guidance; they are not 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 hostel establishments under **Schedule 5 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992 and (2009 & 2011 amendments)**. 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 a Tourism Northern Ireland Certificate, if you wish. You should consult with Tourism Northern Ireland in relation to the wording of your sign.

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. Charges for extra facilities such as internet usage, etc, should also be displayed unless these are included in the rate. All charges should be inclusive of VAT, where applicable. Hostels must also prominently display the rules and regulations of the establishment and management should ensure that visitors comply with them.

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.

Entrance Hall

This should be of adequate size to cater for the number of visitors for whom sleeping accommodation is provided. It should be well laid out and contain good quality furnishings, fittings and equipment. There must be easy access by internal or closed stairways or corridors to public rooms, toilets and bedrooms.

Dining Room

The hostel must provide a dining area, of adequate size for the number of visitors expected to use it. There must be at least one window or roof light, the glass area of which is not less than one-tenth of the floor area and, where there is no adequate mechanical system of ventilation, at least half of which shall be capable of being opened. Furniture, fittings and equipment must be of good quality and condition and be adequate for the number of visitors for whom sleeping accommodation is provided.

Kitchen

This should be adjacent to or easily accessible from the dining area and include: storage facilities for food and utensils, refrigerators, food preparation tables, cooking equipment for boiling, roasting and grilling, sink unit(s) with hot/cold water, wash hand basin and towel. Garbage should not be stored in the kitchen area and must be removed at least twice weekly.

Common Room

There must be one common room, either carpeted or with rugs, which should contain moveable, comfortable seating (upholstered chairs, sofas etc) and occasional tables, sufficient for the number of visitors for whom sleeping accommodation is provided and a television. Each common room must have at least one window or roof light, the glass area of which is not less than one-tenth of the floor area and, where there is no adequate mechanical system of ventilation, not less than half of which is capable of being opened.

Bathrooms, Shower-rooms and Toilets

Separate facilities for men and women must be available and clearly designated. There must be one bath/shower for every 10 visitors (or proportion thereof); one toilet for every 10 visitors (or proportion thereof); wash hand basin for every 10 visitors. Rooms must be ventilated and equipped with a mirror, towel rail, clothes hook, toilet seats, a soap tray in the shower area and a clean and ample supply of toilet requisites.

Sleeping accommodation

Sleeping areas must be separate and can comprise bedrooms, cubicles, dormitories, chalets or a combination of these. Each sleeping area shall be of adequate size for the number of visitors, have at least one window, one electrical socket for every 10 visitors or proportion thereof and a suitable door which can be locked. Furniture and fittings should be of good quality and include a bed for each visitor with interior sprung filled mattress and loose washable covers and pillows; clothing storage, carpets or rugs, curtains or blinds and waste baskets

Resident Supervisor

The hostel must be in the continuous charge of an experienced supervisor or deputy.

Management

Hostels mainly intended for visitors under 25 must be under the direct management of an organization primarily concerned with the provision and management of youth hostels. In other cases, hostels have to be under the direct control of proprietors or their agents.

Other requirements

A hostel must provide storage for cleaning materials and bed linen; a suitable room for visitors to launder clothing, at least one public telephone, first-aid equipment, secure storage for bicycles and other personal equipment.

Useful Websites

- Tourism Northern Ireland website www.tourismni.com
- Tourism Northern Ireland website www.tourismni.com/forms to apply online for certification
- Tourism Northern Ireland consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com
- www.welcometoexcellenceni.com – information about customer service training programmes to assist the industry provide first class standards of service
- Hostelling International Northern Ireland www.hini.org.uk
- Divisional Planning Office www.planningni.gov.uk
- Tourist Signage Policy www.tourismni.com (see business support)
- 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)
- HM Revenue & Customs www.hmrc.gov.uk (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
- 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.ni-environment.gov.uk/private_water.shtml for 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.
- Regional Tourism Partnerships (RTPs)
 - Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau: www.gotobelfast.com
 - Causeway Coast and Glens: www.causewaycoastandglens.com
 - Western RTP: www.visitwestnorthernireland.com

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	90441686
Damien Murray	90441545

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.

