

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 self-catering which are designed to help fulfill the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

Making a start in the self-catering business is not simply a matter of re-decorating a house and advertising it as self-catering accommodation. The cost of building, refurbishing, converting, furnishing and equipping premises for use as a self-catering establishment can be considerable, depending on the number of units involved and the nature of the project. The financial implications can often be complex, 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 self catering establishment?

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

In essence, a self-catering establishment provides one or more self-contained units offering clean, comfortable, furnished accommodation for visitors who are also provided with the means to cater for themselves. This can be anything from a village of purpose-built chalets, luxurious lodges and restored farmhouses to a single studio apartment in a town house, from country cottages and suburban bungalows to apartments in historic castles and former hotels.

Certification

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, certification is mandatory for every establishment offering visitor accommodation. To apply to be certified by Tourism NI you can either apply and pay online via www.tourismni.com/forms or complete form 2, and submit this, together with other relevant documentation (see information pack letter) and fee (£40 is payable for every unit you intend to let, subject to a minimum of £40 and maximum £350). 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 NI can undertake an inspection at any time. The purpose of inspections is to ensure that the requirements appropriate to the Self Catering Category continue to be met. If not, Tourism NI 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 Self Catering 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. The establishment must be open from April 1st to September 30th in any year.

Grading

Grading refers to the rating of a property from 1 to 5 stars. Tourism NI launched a new Quality Graded 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 NI 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. Here are just a few ideas:

- Provision of fuel for a 'real' fire
- Children's safe play area
- Interesting gardens or nature trails in grounds
- Hire of bikes, fishing tackle, boat, golf clubs, etc
- Guided tours of the locality
- Provision of services such as additional cleaning, food delivery etc
- Central games room, books and board games, etc

Another example of an additional service is the provision of a 'welcome pack' of basic food items such as milk, tea, coffee and bread, or washing-up liquid, dishcloths and toilet-paper. Whilst not mandatory, by supplying these basics, you are extending hospitality and creating a good impression. Some larger establishments offer a welcome drink and snack at the reception area to guests on arrival. This can be combined with a briefing on the attractions in the area, an introduction to any extra facilities available on site, and instructions on the operation of equipment.

Guests will be encouraged to stay longer if you have something special to offer. Read the promotional literature from self-catering establishments elsewhere for cost-effective ideas which can be adapted for your establishment whatever its size. You should also look at the existing establishments in your intended area of operation, the facilities they offer and the rates charged. Facts about self catering in Northern Ireland are available on www.tourismni.com/ResearchIntelligence.aspx.

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 enjoy the freedom of a self-catering holiday. Families can enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of a self-contained unit rather than a more formal setting of a hotel. Sports groups, couples, groups of friends sharing a similar interest and dog owners, who find that their pets are unwelcome in many catered establishments, make a deliberate choice of comfortable, well equipped premises which offer the flexibility they require. 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).

Advertising Signage

External advertising signage, either in the grounds of your facility or in any other public space, may require planning permission. Tourism NI 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 NI Recommended' or 'Approved'**; you may indicate that you have a Tourism NI Certificate, if you wish. You should consult with Tourism NI in relation to the wording of your sign.

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, 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 self-catering establishments under **Schedule 4 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992**. It also contains Tourism NI 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.

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.*

Reception arrangements: These should be adequate to cope with the arrival and departure of visitors.

Hotels offering self-catering chalets could provide keys to guests at reception; for apartments or single-unit cottages, these formalities may be carried out at the proprietor's dwelling or in a dedicated office.

Display of Certificate and Charges: Your Tourism NI Certificate and scale of charges for accommodation in each unit must be prominently displayed, easily seen by visitors before, or immediately after, they enter. Charges for extra facilities such as electricity, tennis court, hire of bikes or fishing tackle, etc, should also be displayed unless these are included in the rate. 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.

Many establishments keep a book of comments for completion by guests on departure or make a notebook available in each unit for visitors to record hints, recommendations and observations helpful to future visitors.

Tourist Literature: *A selection of current leaflets, brochures, maps and other literature relating to your locality should be available.*

Instructions and inventory: *Any house rules you wish to be observed or any other information which would be of interest to guests/potential guests should be brought to the guests' attention at the earliest opportunity, e.g. at reservation.*

A guest information folder is a useful way to relay information and can be provided on guests' arrival. This should also contain copies of instructions on operating equipment and other items.

Structural and Safety Requirements: Units should be of substantial and durable construction, structurally safe and in good repair throughout, and of suitable design. They should be in good

decorative order and kept clean and well maintained. Access roads, paths, gardens and surrounding areas should be well maintained.

Laundry Facilities: Access to laundry facilities must be provided

Electrical fittings, gas and mechanical equipment should be regularly and routinely checked for safety reasons – before every letting, at least.

The following provisions do not apply to caravans. For additional caravan requirements please see the next page.

Catering facilities: The catering facilities must be adequate to provide hot meals at any one time for all the people the unit is intended to hold. This area should be well ventilated and must contain facilities, equipment, utensils and fittings of good quality and condition for the storage, refrigeration, preparation, cooking and service of food, and storage and cleaning of utensils for these purposes.

Provision should to be made for the speedy disposal of waste into bins or other suitable containers which are regularly emptied. Cutlery, utensils and dinnerware should be of good quality.

Lounge and Dining areas: A self-catering unit must have an area suitable for use as a lounge and dining area. This area should contain good quality furniture and fittings and equipment, which is in good condition and is sufficient for the number of persons for whom sleeping accommodation is provided.

Sleeping accommodation: The sleeping accommodation shall contain adequate furniture, fittings and equipment of good quality and condition and a supply of linen, blankets or duvets and pillows sufficient for the number of beds provided. Window curtains/blinds should ensure privacy and the exclusion of light.

Furniture should comprise of wardrobe or cupboards, dressing-table with mirror, and drawer space for clothes; bedside chair and table; non-flammable wastepaper basket; carpet, or, if the floor surface is suitable, a bedside rug. Ideally single rooms should be more than 8 square metres and double rooms more than 14 square metres. Serious consideration should be given to the provision of ensuite facilities. You should also consider the provision of towels.

Bathrooms and toilets: Every unit should contain a separate room or rooms providing bathroom and toilet facilities. These facilities must include a wash hand basin, mirror, toiletries cupboard, towel rail, a bath or shower of good quality and good condition complete with all plumbing for the continuous supply of hot and cold running water and the disposal of waste water.

Cracked, soiled or poorly installed fittings give a bad impression and it is worth investing in high-quality fixtures, plus equipment such as hair dryers.

Heating, Lighting and Ventilation: Each unit shall contain effective means of natural lighting and ventilation, and generally conform to modern standards of cleanliness, orderliness and sound insulation. They should have a means of heating capable of maintaining, when required, a room temperature of 18.5 degrees celsius. Adequate storage facilities should be provided for clothing, bed linen and other household articles.

Services: The unit must be under the supervision of a person capable of the efficient management and supervision of a self-catering operation and should be serviced at least once a week to keep it clean and orderly.

The following provisions apply only to caravans.

Caravans: Each caravan shall be on a caravan site, licensed under the Caravans Act (NI) 1963(a) and be under the regular supervision of a person capable of maintaining order and control.

Caravans should be of proprietary make and in a good state of repair and decoration throughout. They should be thoroughly cleaned and all contents checked against an inventory, and replaced if necessary, before each letting.

Caravans should not be occupied by more than the number of persons for which they are designed and should contain adequate furniture, fittings and fixtures for the purposes of providing self-catering accommodation. They should contain a sound, clean and properly functioning cooker with at least 2 boiling rings.

Caravans should contain adequate heating, lighting and ventilation for the comfort of visitors and have adequate locking devices for doors and windows.

Where linen is provided for visitors using the caravan, it must be changed at least once every week and in any event before it is used by any other visitors.

Useful Websites

- Tourism NI's website www.tourismni.com/accommodation for further copies of this document
- Tourism NI's website www.tourismni.com/forms to apply online for certification
- Tourism NI's website www.tourismni.com/ResearchIntelligence.aspx for facts and figures
- Tourism NI'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 and Standards Department:

Damien Murray
Diane Lynas

028 90 441545
028 90 441686

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