



# Basic Guide to Starting a Bunk House Business



tourism  
northernireland

[tourismni.com](http://tourismni.com)

**Operating a Bunk House business can be a very positive experience. Aside from the financial benefits, many owners also enjoy the social aspect of the business, including the opportunity to welcome guests from all over the world.**

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

## **What is a Bunk House?**

**A bunk house is simple, hostel-style accommodation, usually in a remote or rural location where facilities and services may be limited.**

**A Bunk House can be booked by groups or individuals; and services and facilities may be limited but will include a self-catering facility. Bunk Houses are not star rated but will meet or exceed minimum standards for cleanliness, maintenance and quality.**

## **What is Certification and why is it required?**

Tourism legislation requires all tourism/visitor accommodation to hold a current Tourism Northern Ireland (NI) certificate. This involves a visit to the property from a member of Tourism NI's certification team, who will inspect the property to ensure it meets certification requirements. Under current legislation, a statutory (legal) inspection of the premises is undertaken every four years. A certificate issued by Tourism NI, following this inspection, is valid for four years.

## **How do I Apply?**

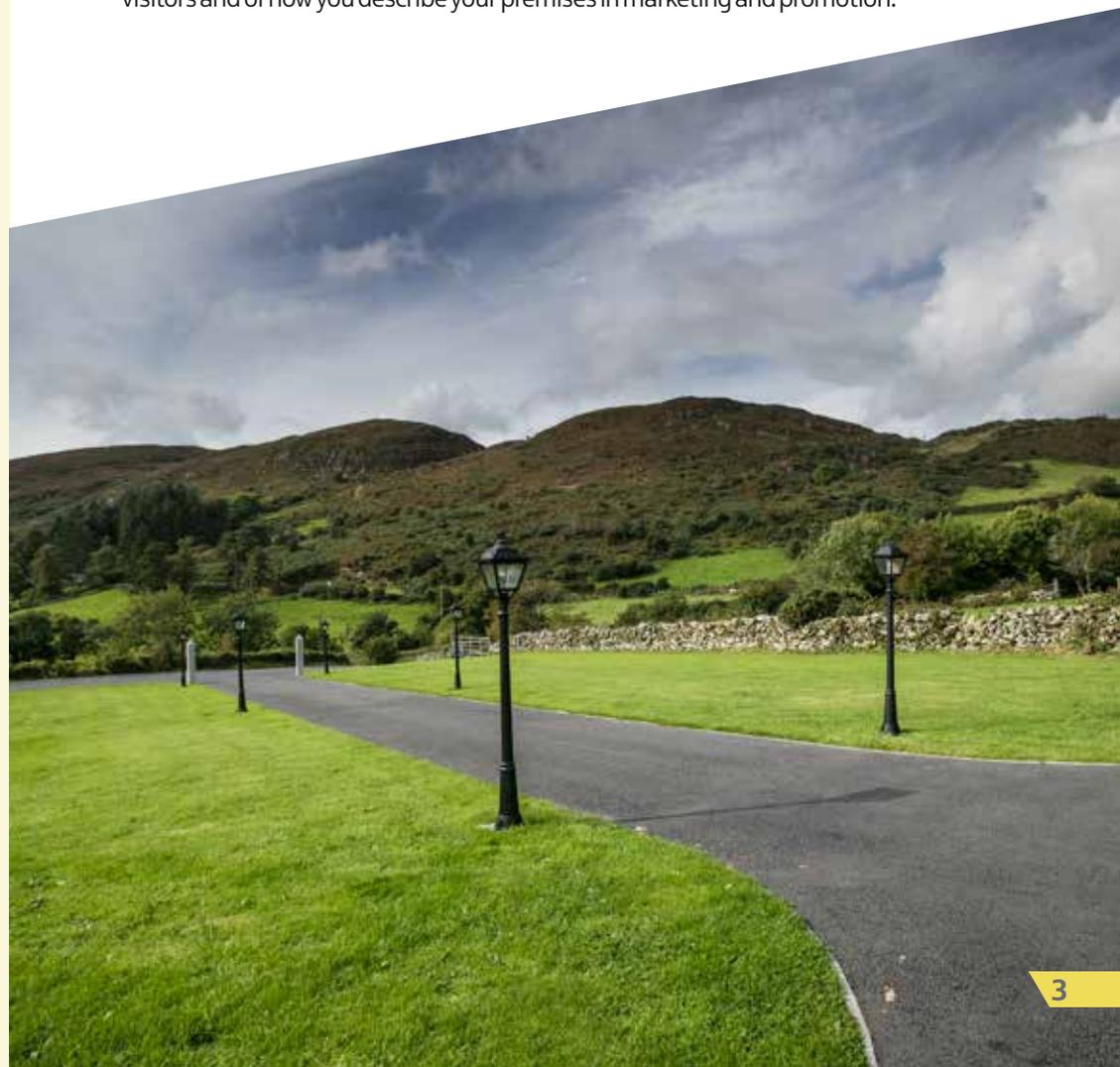
Applications can be submitted online at [www.tourismni.com/forms](http://www.tourismni.com/forms) accompanied by a fee. At the time of printing, £2 is payable for every bedspace you intend to let, subject to a minimum fee of £70 and a maximum of £175.

Payment and application can also be made by post, or by visiting Tourism NI's offices. You can request an application pack by contacting the Quality & Standards team by email to <https://forms.tourismni.com/Forms/> or telephone 028 90 441545. When a

completed application form and fee are received, a member of Tourism NI's inspection team will contact you to arrange a suitable time and date for the visit.

## **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 specific to your property, 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.



# About the Inspection

## The Exterior

The inspection process starts when the inspector arrives at the property. They will look at the exterior appearance to make sure the paintwork is in good order and that the car-parking areas, paths and grounds are well-maintained and safe.

## Structural and Safety Requirements



Your establishment should be of substantial and durable construction, structurally safe, wind and watertight, in good repair throughout, and of suitable design. It should be kept clean and well maintained and be adequately lit throughout.

Reasonable provision for securing the establishment internally and externally should be available.

## Arrival

The owner needs to make arrangements for the arrival and departure of guests arriving at the property.

## 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.

## 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.



## Visitors' Register

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

## Instructions

Any house rules you wish to be observed or any other information which would be of interest to guests/potential guests e.g. WIFI code, should be brought to the guests' attention at the earliest opportunity. 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.

## Cooking and Dining Area

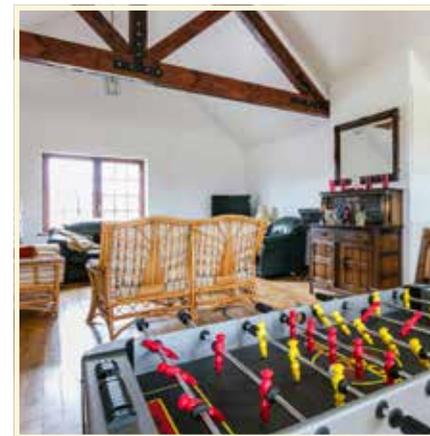


The cooking and dining area should have within it a hygienic counter for the preparation of food and contain adequate refrigeration facilities for the storage of perishable food items.

Garbage should not be stored in the kitchen.

## Common Room

A separate communal area should be provided for visitors and should contain sufficient furniture, fittings and equipment to cater for the number of visitors who may reasonably be expected to use it at any one time. Such furniture shall be robust and durable.



## Sleeping Accommodation



Sleeping accommodation should consist of beds, bunks or wooden platforms. Mattresses should be provided for beds and bunks, or sleeping mat foam for wooden platforms. The area should have at least one external window, window curtains or blinds which ensure privacy and exclude light and should have sufficient space between bed spaces to ensure ease of movement for the number of visitors accommodated and for storage of belongings.



## Bathroom Facilities

Bathroom facilities should comprise showers, wash hand basins and toilets and should be provided at a minimum ratio of one per 20 bedspaces. These should be provided for men and women in separate rooms, with separate entrances clearly designated and provided with doors or curtains to afford privacy.

Bathroom facilities may be located inside or adjacent to the establishment. If located inside the establishment, then the bathroom facilities must be separate from the cooking and dining areas.



## Other Requirements

A Bunk House must provide an electricity supply and be adequately heated as required. It should contain effective means of natural light and ventilation.

A sink for the washing of cooking utensils, plates, cutlery, etc. shall be provided with hot and cold running water. There should be sufficient coat hooks, a mop and bucket and cleaning materials and basic first aid equipment shall be made available to visitors. Covered waste disposal bins and bin liners should also be provided.

## Inspection Outcome and Advice

Following the inspection of the property, there will be time to discuss the outcome of the inspection and, where there are conditions on the certificate, they will be discussed with you and an agreed timeframe set i.e. not less than 30 days for the work to be completed.

The certification officer will also advise you on a number of other additional areas such as compliance with other statutory legislation, creating and maintaining your presence on the [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) website and other relevant sites, obtaining public liability insurance, best practice and operational standards.

## After the Inspection

In normal circumstances, a certificate will be posted to you within a few weeks. Sometimes a follow-up inspection is required, usually after 30 days, where there are facilities yet to be provided. There may be a need for the inspector to return for this final check, but there is no charge for this.

## 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 installation. Do not claim to be 'Tourism NI Recommended' or 'Approved'; you may indicate that you have a Tourism NI Certificate, if you wish.

## Tourist Signage (White on Brown)

If you are interested in obtaining 'White on Brown' tourist signage, you should contact your local council Tourism Officer who can provide you with an application form. Local councils co-ordinate 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 <https://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/tourist-signing--brown-signs/>



## Social Media

Providers are encouraged to direct guests to online review sites or Social Media platforms to post a review of their experience. Customer reviews can highlight positive experiences, verified tips and useful observations. Generating positive feedback may influence potential customers when researching or booking accommodation.

## Management

The establishment should be under the supervision of a person trained or experienced in Bunk House or similar accommodation management and that person doesn't have to be resident in the establishment. However in the absence of a management presence, the manager's contact details should be provided, alongside emergency contact information.

## 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.

Once certified by Tourism NI, your premises will appear on our consumer website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com) at no additional cost. A short narrative about the property including facilities, nearby attractions, amenities, location and website address as well as up to 9 images can be uploaded at [www.tourismni.com](http://www.tourismni.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.

Tourism NI also has 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](mailto:digital@tourismni.com) for consideration. Similarly, if you have a special offer, you will be able to submit your accommodation offers for placement on [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

## Environmental Consideration

Tourism NI, 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](http://www.tourismni.com) (see Grow Your Business/Sustainable Tourism).



## Aim for Excellence

Tourism NI encourages all operators to aim for excellence. 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 a few ideas:

- Bike hire/storage
- Guided tour of locality
- Central games room, books and board games, etc.
- Internet facilities

Guests will be encouraged to stay longer if you have something special to offer. Read the promotional literature from Bunk House 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.



# Useful Websites

Tourism Northern Ireland - Further Information

<https://tourismni.com/startup-advice/>

Tourism Northern Ireland - Online Certification

<https://forms.tourismni.com/Forms/>

Tourism Northern Ireland – Star Rating Schemes

<https://tourismni.com/startup-advice/quality-grading/>

Tourism Northern Ireland – Facts and Figures

<https://tourismni.com/facts-and-figures/>

Tourism Northern Ireland - Signage Policy

<https://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/tourist-signing--brown-signs/>

Tourism Northern Ireland – Alcohol Licensing

<https://tourismni.com/startup-advice/legal--licensing/>

Discover Northern Ireland Website

[www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)

World Host Customer Service Training

(for information about customer service training programmes which assist the industry in providing first class standards of service)

<https://tourismni.com/Grow-Your-Business/programmes/worldhost-customer-service-programme/>

Divisional Planning Office

[www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk)

HM Revenue & Customs

(for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)

[www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)

Music License Information for Public Areas

(for details on how to obtain a music license when playing music in a public area)

[www.ppluk.com](http://www.ppluk.com) and [www.prsformusic.com](http://www.prsformusic.com)

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service

[www.nifrs.org](http://www.nifrs.org)

Health and Safety Advice for Small Businesses

(to help manage health and safety in the workplace and relevant legislation)

[www.hseni.gov.uk](http://www.hseni.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Environment Agency

(for information regarding the registration of private water supplies to holiday accommodation)

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/private-water-supplies](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/private-water-supplies)

The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992

(copies of all regulations can be obtained from The Stationary Office, Arthur Street, Belfast)

[www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1992/235/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1992/235/made)





## Contact details for further information

For more information/application forms for certification contact the Quality and Standards Department:

**Tel: 028 9044 1545**

You can also email this department at [qa@tourismni.com](mailto: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.**



**tourism  
northernireland**