



BASIC GUIDE TO STARTING A

GUEST ACCOMMODATION BUSINESS

TOURISMNI.COM



Operating a Guest Accommodation establishment 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.

There are 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.

What is Guest Accommodation?

Guest Accommodation's primary focus is the provision of bedrooms for visitors. For example, this would include restaurants wishing to provide rooms for visitors. In essence, Guest Accommodation offers comfortable overnight sleeping accommodation for visitors, in separate en-suite bedrooms, with a means to make breakfast available to visitors.

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. Under current legislation, a statutory (legal) inspection of the premises is undertaken every four years and a certificate issued by Tourism NI following this inspection is valid for four years.

How do I Apply?

Applications can be submitted online at <https://forms.tourismni.com/Forms/>, accompanied by a fee. At the time of printing, £2.00 is payable for every bedspace you intend to let, subject to a minimum fee of £70 and 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 qa@tourismni.com 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 all certified 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



Your establishment should be of substantial and durable construction, structurally safe, in good repair throughout, and of suitable design.

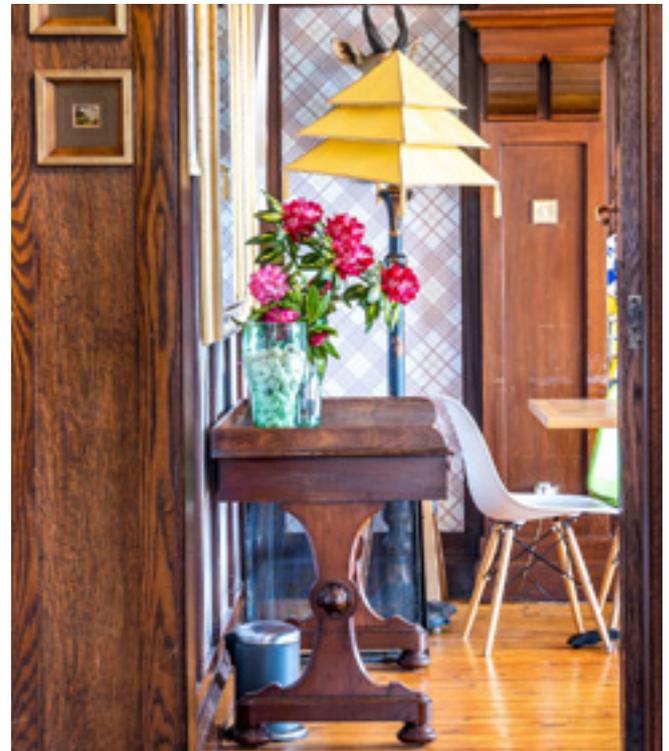
It should be in good decorative order and kept clean and well maintained throughout, including outdoor areas, grounds and car park areas. It should be exclusively or primarily used for the provision of sleeping accommodation for visitors, in separate bedrooms.

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.

Entrance Hall

This should have a reception desk for receiving visitors.



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.

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. Many establishments keep a book of comments for completion by guests on departure to record hints, recommendations and observations helpful to future visitors.

Instructions and Inventory

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.

Breakfast

This may be providing a breakfast pack and cooking utensils, or by providing vouchers to a neighbouring café, for example.



Sleeping Accommodation

Bedroom doors may be located off a corridor or 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 be secured with two locking devices from within and a single locking device from without. Rooms 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 for each visitor the room is intended to hold, complete with mattress, a supply of clean linen, blankets or duvets and pillows; loose or built in units comprising wardrobe, 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 rail, clothes hooks, bath mat and a clean and ample supply of toilet requisites including towels, soap and toilet paper.

Heating, Lighting and Ventilation

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

Management

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



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 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.

Quality Grading



Grading refers to the rating of a property from 1 to 5 stars. Tourism NI offers a Quality Star Rating Scheme, which is operated across the UK. This scheme is open to Hotels, B&Bs, Guest Houses, Guest Accommodation, Hostels & Self Catering.

The scheme focuses on enhancing the visitor experience across all visitor touch points. In addition to providing a star rating which helps visitor decision making, the scheme also provides businesses with advice and support.

Having an official star grade 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/grading

If you have any queries or would like an application pack, please contact our office by emailing qa@tourismni.com or telephone 028 9044 1682.

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 www.tourismni.com/touristsigning

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.



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.

Once your property has been certified, you can avail of a free, bookable business listing on discovernorthernireland.com

It is important that your listing remains up to date with good quality content and photography.

If you would like to list your business on the Discover Northern Ireland website, you will need to complete a one-off registration. Once you have completed the product registration you will be able to update your listings via the new Product Manager.

You can register via Tourism NI's Business Hub: www.tourismni.com/business-guidance/business-support/how-to-guide/

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 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

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.

Aim for Excellence

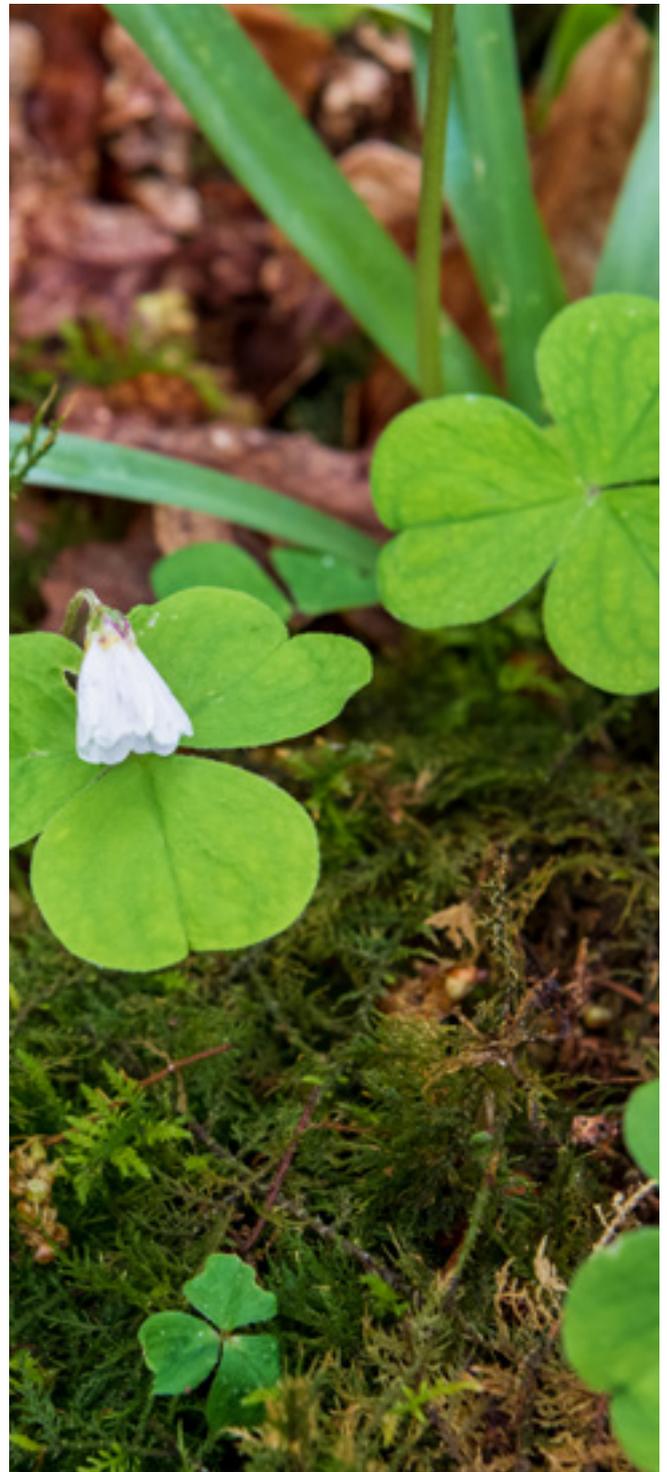
Here are just a few ideas:

- Guided tour of local area
- A games rooms, books and board games
- Wi-Fi
- Coffee dock

Guests will be encouraged to stay longer if you have something special to offer. Read the promotional literature from other similar establishments for cost-effective ideas which can be adapted for your establishment whatever its size.

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, go to <https://www.tourismni.com/business-guidance/business-support/sustainability/>



Useful Websites

Tourism Northern Ireland - Further Information
www.tourismni.com/accommodation

Tourism Northern Ireland - Online Certification
www.tourismni.com/forms

Tourism Northern Ireland – Star Rating Schemes
www.tourismni.com/grading

Tourism Northern Ireland – Facts and Figures
www.tourismni.com/factsandfigures

Tourism Northern Ireland - Signage Policy
www.tourismni.com/touristsigning

Discover Northern Ireland Website
www.discovernorthernireland.com

Tourism Northern Ireland - People and Skills
<https://www.tourismni.com/business-guidance/business-support/hr-and-people-support/>

Divisional Planning Office
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/contacts/planning-offices-ni>

HM Revenue & Customs (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
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 and www.prsformusic.com

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service
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

Northern Ireland Environment Agency
(for information regarding the registration of private water supplies to holiday accommodation)
<https://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



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 or write to us at our offices at:
**Tourism Northern Ireland, Floors 10-12 Linum
Chambers, Bedford Square, Bedford Street,
Belfast, BT2 7ES.**