



BASIC GUIDE TO STARTING A

HOTEL BUSINESS

TOURISMNI.COM



**TOURISM
NORTHERN
IRELAND**

Operating a hotel business can be a very positive experience. Aside from the financial benefits which can be derived from running a hotel, it is also an opportunity to welcome guests from all over the world. Hotel accommodation is quite popular with travelers who prefer a formal setting with the added option of extensive menu selections to cater for individual needs. Bookings can range from short stay business trip guests who travel light to long stay family holidays with a packed agenda; from basic overnight accommodation to luxury resort and spa breaks.

What is a Hotel?

In essence, a Hotel offers overnight sleeping accommodation for visitors in not less than 15 double rooms, all of which must be en-suite*, and provides meals (including breakfast and evening meal) and midday refreshments. A hotel should also provide daily cleaning of bedrooms when visitors are resident and should be exclusively or primarily used for the provision of sleeping accommodation for visitors. Meals and refreshments will be provided at all reasonable hours on a daily basis.

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 also valid for four years.

How do I Apply?

Applications can be submitted online at www.tourismni.com/forms accompanied by a fee. £20 is payable for every room you intend to let, subject to a minimum fee of £300 and a maximum of £2,000. 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.

*Applies to hotels certified for the first time on or after 11/11/09

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 premise 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, in good repair throughout and of suitable design. It should be in good decorative order and kept clean and well maintained throughout the property.

The hotel must also have proper lighting and have means of space heating capable of maintaining room temperatures of at least 18.5 degree celsius. Bedrooms and public areas must have an effective system for communicating with the management or staff.



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

This should be adequate for the reception of the number of guests. It must be well laid out and contain good quality furnishings, fittings and equipment and afford easy access to the public areas and bedrooms.



Display of Certificate and Charges

Your Tourism NI Certificate and scale of charges for accommodation must be prominently displayed, easily seen by visitors before, or immediately after, they enter. Where food other than breakfast and evening meals are provided, these meals 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.

Visitors' Register

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



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.

Instructions

Any hotel 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. It is also a good idea to check guests' requirements at this time as some people may suffer from allergies (i.e. pets, nuts etc.). A guest information folder is a useful way to relay information and can be provided on guests' arrival.

Dining Area

The dining area must be sufficiently large to cater for the number of guests who may reasonably be expected to use it at any one time. It must also have sufficient cutlery, condiments, trays, napkins and good quality crockery for the number of diners who may be expected to use it at any one time.

This area must have solid tables, completely covered with a clean tablecloth, or surfaced with polished hardwood or veneer and comfortable, strong seats including high chairs (or suitably adapted chairs) for children. The ventilation must eliminate cooking smells from the kitchen. There must be carpeting or other suitable flooring and the area should be clean and in good decorative order.

The dining area of an establishment which provides sleeping accommodation for the number of bedrooms mentioned in column 1 of the table below shall provide a dining area which has a floor area not less than that specified opposite thereto in column 2.

Dining	
Column 1	Column 2
No. of Bedrooms	Dining Area
Up to 50	50 m ²
51 to 60	60 m ²
61 to 70	70 m ²
71 to 80	80 m ²
81 to 90	90 m ²
91 to 100	100 m ²
101 to 125	125 m ²
126 or more	150 m ²

Kitchen Area

The kitchen and associated service areas should be adjacent to or accessible from the dining area. It should contain facilities, equipment and fittings which are of good quality and condition, constructed of easily cleaned materials and adequate for the storage, refrigeration, preparation, cooking and service of food for the number of visitors and the storage and cleaning of all utensils. The kitchen must be adequately ventilated and be such that doorways and passageways used by staff to serve food to customers in the dining area are separate from the means of access to that area normally used by diners.

Provision should to be made for the speedy disposal of waste into bins or other suitable containers which are regularly emptied.

Visitors' Bedrooms

Rooms must be numbered, lettered or otherwise designated to identify them easily, should be properly constructed and have suitably sound resistant walls or partitions, floors and ceilings. Each bedroom should have separate access from a corridor or another bedroom, and contain two locking devices from within and a single locking device from without on any door opening onto a corridor.



Rooms must have a floor area (excluding any en-suite bathroom) of not less than 7.50 square metres for single rooms, and not less than 13.00 square metres for double rooms. Rooms without an en-suite bathroom must have access to toilets and bathrooms via corridors which are closed off from public areas by a door or screen. The establishment may provide bedrooms outside, but adjacent to, the main building and all bedrooms shall be en-suite.

The rooms must contain furniture, fittings and equipment, of good quality and condition, for sleeping and toilet purposes, and for the storage of visitors' clothing. In general, these furnishings should include: beds, complete with interior sprung mattress; a supply of clean linen, blankets/duvet and pillows; loose or built-in units comprising wardrobe or cupboards, dressing table with mirror, and drawer space for clothes; bedside chairs and tables; luggage racks, wastepaper baskets; carpet, or, if the floor surface is of a suitable design, a bedside rug and window curtains/blinds.

The room should contain at least two electrical outlets suitable for the attachment of electrical equipment including heaters and cleaning equipment. A supply of clean linen, blankets or duvets, pillows and soap should also be provided.

Bathrooms and Toilets

The en-suite bathroom of a bedroom should contain a bath or shower, a WC and (unless one is already provided in the bedroom) a wash basin of good quality and in good condition and be fitted with a mirror wash light and accessories for holding toilet equipment.

All bathrooms should have plumbing in good working order to ensure a continuous supply of hot and cold running water and the disposal of waste water. They should also have an effective means of natural or mechanical ventilation. Bathrooms and toilets should be equipped with mirror, towel rails, clothes hooks, bath mat, plus an ample supply of toilet requisites, including towels, soap and toilet paper.

Hot water should be available at all reasonable times; you should have a system of water heating which copes with peak demands.

General Toilets

Toilets must be provided separately for men and women and be adjacent to, or easily accessible from, the entrance hall or any of the public areas. The area must contain suitable WC units (in separate compartments and capable of being locked) and fixed wash hand basins which can provide a continuous supply of hot and cold running water, and dispose of waste water. Toilets must be equipped with mirrors, towel rails, clothes hooks and a clean and ample supply of toilet requisites (including both towels and hand drying facilities, soap, toilet paper, sanitary disposal bins and other necessary accessories). Toilets must be well ventilated (by direct or mechanical means), be kept in a clean and hygienic condition and be under proper supervision.

In the case of an establishment which provides sleeping accommodation for the number of bedrooms mentioned in column 1 of the table to this sub-paragraph the toilets provided for men shall contain the sanitary fittings specified opposite thereto in column 2 and the toilets provided for women shall contain the sanitary fittings opposite thereto in column 3:

Toilets		
Column1	Column2	Column3
No. of Bedrooms	Toilets for Men	Toilets for Women
Up to 20	1WC 1urinal 1wash hand basin	1WC 1wash hand basin
21 to 50	1WC 2urinals 1wash hand basin	2WCs 2wash hand basins
51 to 100	2WCs 2urinals 2wash hand basins	3WCs 3wash hand basins
101 to 200	3WCs 3urinals 3wash hand basins	4WCs 4wash hand basins
201 or more	4WCs 4urinals 4wash hand basins	5WCs 5wash hand basins

First Aid

Your establishment must provide basic first aid equipment .

Management and Staff

Those employed in the management of the establishment shall be trained and experienced in hotel management and operate a routine which provides regular and direct supervision of all persons employed in the hotel. The establishment shall be staffed by persons neat and clean in their appearance and adequate in number and training to maintain appropriate standards of service for visitors at all times.



Staff Facilities

There shall be staff facilities provided which may be located separately from the kitchen area and, if appropriate, outside but adjacent to the main building. Staff facilities shall include adequate toilets with hand washing facilities, changing areas with locker provision and a combined lounge and dining area.

Service

High expectations among your customers will require staff to provide levels of service and attention appropriate to a modern hotel establishment. The statutory criteria relating to the need for management to be 'trained and experienced in management of a hotel establishment' may not be strictly enforced, at the Board's discretion, as an encouragement to new start-ups. However, staff should make every effort to undertake training courses and gain experience as soon as possible.



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 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 days. Sometimes a follow-up inspection is required, usually within a month, where there are facilities yet to be provided. There may be a need for the adviser to return for this final check, but there is no charge for this.

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 by other UK National Tourist Boards and the AA. 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 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/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.

Please note that this scheme is voluntary and you are under no obligation to apply for quality star rating.



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 erection. **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.

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: <https://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



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 just a few ideas:

- Refreshments on arrival
- A hospitality tray stocked with loose leaf tea, ground coffee, biscuits and fresh milk
- Enhanced services such as afternoon tea
- Multi-lingual staff, menus and room information
- Branded information packs, walks and trails
- Guided tours of the local area
- Hire of bikes, boats or golf clubs
- Tasting menus and a wealth of local produce
- Cookery lessons or recipe cards from the chef
- Children's activities packs
- A bespoke turndown service
- The latest in-room technology

Guests will be encouraged to stay longer if you have something special to offer. Read the promotional literature from hotel 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 hotels in Northern Ireland are available on <https://www.tourismni.com/research-insights/>

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

Tourism Northern Ireland – Alcohol Licensing
<https://www.tourismni.com/business-guidance/sector/accommodation/accommodation-getting-started/legal-considerations/alcohol-licensing-for-hotels-guest-houses-and-conference-centers/>

Discover Northern Ireland Website
www.discovernorthernireland.com

Tourism Northern Ireland - People and Skills
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)
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

NI Hotels Federation
www.nihf.co.uk

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.**