

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 Bunk House establishments which are designed to help fulfil the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

There are a number of considerations in relation to starting a Bunk House 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 bunk house?

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 Bunk House offers simple overnight accommodation which retains its character and original internal and external features wherever possible. Bunk houses will usually be located in remote or rural locations where facilities and services may be limited.

## 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](http://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 NI can undertake an inspection at any time. The purpose of inspections is to ensure that the requirements appropriate to the Bunk House 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](http://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 Bunk House 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](http://www.tourismni.com/accommodation).

## 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, for example the provision of a games room or internet facilities etc.

Read the promotional literature from Bunk House 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](http://www.tourismni.com) and [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://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 your target market is. 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](http://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](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 [discovernorthernireland.com](http://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 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.

## 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](http://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](http://www.tourismni.com) (see business support/legal and licensing/tourist signing).

## **Minimum and recommended criteria**

The requirements and recommendations set out here are for guidance; they aren't 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 Bunk House establishments under **Schedule 6 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011**. 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.

## **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, wind and watertight and 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.

### **Cooking and Dining Area**

The Bunk House must provide a cooking and dining area with sufficient tables and chairs or benches to cater for the number of visitors expected to use it at any one time. It should be separated from the sleeping area by either a partition wall or by space.

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 with mattresses being provided for the beds and bunks and sleeping mat foam for the 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 of 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.

### **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 responsible person from the establishment details of means to summon assistance day and night in the event of an emergency should be provided and clearly displayed to guests (this shall include contact details).

### **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.

## Useful Websites

- Tourism Northern Ireland website [www.tourismni.com/accommodation](http://www.tourismni.com/accommodation) for further copies of this document
- Tourism Northern Ireland website [www.tourismni.com/research](http://www.tourismni.com/research) for facts and figures
- Tourism Northern Ireland website [www.tourismni.com/forms](http://www.tourismni.com/forms) to apply online for certification
- Tourism Northern Ireland consumer website [www.discovernorthernireland.com](http://www.discovernorthernireland.com)
- [www.welcometoexcellenci.com](http://www.welcometoexcellenci.com) – information about customer service training programmes to assist the industry provide first class standards of service
- Divisional Planning Office [www.planningni.gov.uk](http://www.planningni.gov.uk)
- Tourist Signage Policy [www.tourismni.com](http://www.tourismni.com) (see business support)
- Music Licence requirement [www.ppluk.com](http://www.ppluk.com) and [www.prsformusic.com](http://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](http://www.nifrs.org)
- HM Revenue & Customs [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
- The Health and Safety Works NI [www.healthandsafetyworksni.gov.uk](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.gotobelfast.com)   ○ Causeway Coast and Glens, [www.causewaycoastandglens.com](http://www.causewaycoastandglens.com)   ○ Western RTP, [www.visitwestnorthernireland.com](http://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	9044 1686
Damien Murray	9044 1545

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

