



Basic Guide to Starting a

Hostel Accommodation Business



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northernireland

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Operating a Hostel business can be a very positive experience. Aside from the financial benefits which can be derived from running a Hostel property, 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 Hostels, but people from all walks of life and every corner of the world. Hostels provide a great way to meet new people and experience new things which is why they appeal to such a diverse range. More frequently, Hostels also receive people who are looking for a quick, inexpensive place to stay without the cost or formality of other types of accommodation.

What is a Hostel?

In essence, a Hostel is a form of accommodation that is the letting of single beds. These beds, or bunks, can be in bedrooms or dormitory rooms, with shared or en suite bathroom facilities. Hostels all have common kitchens, lounges and laundry facilities. Because of these common facilities, visitors tend to interact with each other more than in other forms of accommodation.

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 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 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.

Entrance Hall

This should be adequate for the reception of the maximum 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. 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



Visitors' Register



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

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.

Dining Room



The Hostel must provide a dining area, of adequate size for the number of visitors expected to use it. There must be at least one window or roof light, the glass area of which is not less than one-tenth of the floor area and, where there is no adequate mechanical system of ventilation, at least half of which shall be capable of being opened.

Furniture, fittings and equipment must be of good quality and condition and be adequate for the number of visitors for whom sleeping accommodation is provided.

Kitchen



This should be adjacent to or easily accessible from the dining area and include: storage facilities for food and utensils; refrigerators; food preparation tables; cooking equipment for boiling, roasting and grilling; sink unit(s) with hot/cold water; wash hand basin and towel. Garbage should not be stored in the kitchen area and must be removed at least twice weekly.

Common Room



There must be one common room which should contain moveable, comfortable seating (upholstered chairs, sofas etc) and occasional tables, sufficient for the number of visitors for whom sleeping accommodation is provided and a TV.

Each common room must have at least one window or roof light, the glass area of which is not less than one-tenth of the floor area and, where there is no adequate mechanical system of ventilation, not less than half of which is capable of being opened.



Bathrooms, Shower and Toilets



Separate facilities for men and women must be available and clearly designated. There must be one bath/shower for every 10 visitors (or proportion thereof); one toilet for every 10 visitors (or proportion thereof); wash hand basin for every 10 visitors.

Rooms must be ventilated and equipped with a mirror, towel rail, clothes hook, toilet seats, a soap tray in the shower area and a clean and ample supply of toilet requisites.

Sleeping accommodation



Sleeping areas must be separate and can comprise bedrooms, cubicles, dormitories, chalets or a combination of these. Each sleeping area shall be of adequate size for the number of visitors, have at least one window, one electrical socket for every 10 visitors or proportion thereof and a suitable door which can be locked. Furniture and fittings should be of good quality and include a bed for each visitor with interior sprung filled mattress and loose washable covers and pillows; clothing storage; carpets or rugs; curtains or blinds and waste baskets.

Resident Supervisor

The Hostel must be in the continuous charge of an experienced supervisor or deputy.

Management

Hostels mainly intended for visitors under 25 must be under the direct management of an organisation primarily concerned with the provision and management of youth hostels. In other cases, Hostels have to be under the direct control of proprietors or their agents.

Other requirements

A Hostel must provide storage for cleaning materials and bed linen; a suitable room for visitors to launder clothing; at least one public telephone; first-aid equipment; secure storage for bicycles and other personal equipment.

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



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 certified by Tourism NI your premises will appear on our consumer website 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 to 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 for consideration.

Similarly, if you have a special offer, you will be able to submit your accommodation offers for placement on www.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

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:

- **Bike hire/storage**
- **Guided tour of locality**
- **Central games room, books and board games, etc.**
- **Internet facilities**
- **Provision of a games room, books and board games, etc.**
- **Wi-Fi**
- **Café**

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, download Tourism NI's 'Going Green' Guide from www.tourismni.com (see Grow Your Business/Sustainable Tourism).



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

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

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



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.**



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