



Basic guide to starting a hotel business

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 hotels which are designed to help fulfill the expectations of visitors to Northern Ireland.

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, all accommodation offered to tourists/visitors must be certified and this function is carried out by Tourism Northern Ireland. There are eight categories of accommodation namely hotel, guest house, B&B, self-catering, hostel, bunk house, guest accommodation and campus accommodation.

What is a Hotel?

In essence, a Hotel offers overnight sleeping accommodation in not less than 15 double bedrooms, all of which must be ensuite, and provides meals (including breakfast and evening meal) and midday refreshments. A hotel should provide daily cleaning of bedrooms when visitors are resident. The establishment shall be exclusively or primarily used for the provision of sleeping accommodation for visitors, in separate rooms, and meals and refreshments both for visitors and others; such services to be provided at all reasonable hours on every day of the week.

Certification

Under The Tourism (Northern Ireland) Order 1992, certification is **mandatory** for every establishment offering visitor accommodation. To apply to be certified by Tourism Northern Ireland can either apply and pay online via www.tourismni.com/forms or complete Form 2, and submit this, together with the relevant fee (£20 is payable for every room you intend to let, subject to a minimum of £300 and maximum £2,000). 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 Northern Ireland can undertake an inspection at any time. The purpose of inspections is to ensure that the requirements appropriate to the Hotel category continue to be met. If not, Tourism Northern Ireland may add conditions to the certificate or revoke it. All documentation referred to is available at 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 Hotel 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.

Grading

Grading refers to the rating of a property from 1 to 5 stars. Tourism Northern Ireland launched a new Quality Star Rating Scheme in July 2011, which is operated by other UK National Tourist Boards and the AA. This scheme is open to Hotels, B&Bs, Guesthouses, Guest Accommodation, Hostels & Self Catering. **Please note that this scheme is voluntary and you are under no obligation to apply for quality star rating.**

Research has shown that tourists give preference to premises that hold an official tourist board rating. 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/accommodation. If you have any queries or would like an application pack, please contact our office by emailing qa@tourismni.com, or telephone 028 9044 1553.

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 (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 (see business support/legal and licensing/tourist signing).

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, annual 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 Hotels under **Schedule 1 of the Categories of Tourist Establishment (Statutory Criteria) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1992 and (2009 & 2011 amendments)**. 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.

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

The establishment must have public entrances and exits of sufficient size to cater adequately for the number of visitors which may reasonably be expected to use it at one time. It must be well laid out and contain appropriate good quality furnishings, fittings and equipment. A service entrance should also be provided separate from any entrance for visitors and suitably located for the reception of goods necessary for the operation of the establishment.

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. Meals should be identified and the charge shown. If your rates vary seasonally, or if there is any condition to be satisfied (eg. 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.

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.

First Aid

Your establishment must provide basic first aid equipment

Instructions

Any rules you wish to be observed or any other information which would be of interest to guests/potential guests should be brought to the guests' attention at the earliest opportunity, eg at reservation. It is also a good idea to check guests' requirements at this time as some people may suffer from allergies (i.e. nuts etc). A guest information folder is a useful way to relay information and can be provided on guests' arrival.

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, including outdoor areas, grounds and car parking areas. It should contain effective means of natural lighting and ventilation and have sufficient general lighting in all areas, it should also have means of space heating capable of maintaining room temperatures of at least 18.5 degrees Celsius. Bedrooms and public rooms should contain an effective system for communicating with the management or staff.

Dining Area

(See Table 1 on page 5) This area must provide for the service of meals at tables and contain adequate furniture of good quality and condition, of a sufficient size to allow diners to dine in comfort. This area must have solid tables, completely covered with quality tablecloths, or surfaced with polished hardwood or veneer and comfortable, strong seats including high chairs (or suitably adapted chairs) for children.

The establishment must provide sufficient cutlery, condiments, trays and other necessary table appointments of good quality and in good condition. The area must have sufficient good quality crockery of uniform design to serve the number of diners who may reasonably be expected to use this area at any one time. 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.

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. Adequate toilets, hand washing facilities, changing areas with locker provision and lounge and dining areas must also be provided for the exclusive use of staff.

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

General Toilets

(See Table 2 on page 5) 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.

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 ensuite bathroom) of not less than 7.50 metres for single rooms, and not less than 13.00 metres for double rooms. Rooms without an ensuite 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 ensuite.

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.

A selection of suitable literature on tourist amenities and facilities in the surrounding area should be available.

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.

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.

Dining Area

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.

Table 1

Column 1	Column 2
Number of Bedrooms	Dining Area
Up to 50	50 square metres
51 to 60	60 square metres
61 to 70	70 square metres
71 to 80	80 square metres
81 to 90	90 square metres
91 to 100	100 square metres
101 to 125	125 square metres
126 or more	150 square metres

General Toilets

Where an establishment provides sleeping accommodation for the number of bedrooms mentioned in column 1 of the table below, the toilets provided for men shall contain the sanitary fittings specified opposite in column 2 and the toilets provided for women shall contain the sanitary fittings specified opposite in column 3.

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

Useful Websites

- Tourism Northern Ireland website www.tourismni.com/accommodation for further copies of this document and a copy of the classification document
- Tourism Northern Ireland website www.tourismni.com/forms to apply online for certification
- Tourism Northern Ireland website www.tourismni.com/research for facts and figures
- Tourism Northern Ireland consumer website www.discovernorthernireland.com
- www.welcometoexcellenceni.com – information about customer service training programmes to assist the industry provide first class standards of service
- Divisional Planning Office www.planningni.gov.uk
- Northern Ireland Hotels Federation www.nihf.co.uk
- Tourist Signage Policy www.tourismni.com (see business support)
- Music Licence requirement www.ppluk.com and www.prsonline.com (for details on how to obtain a music licence when playing music in a public area)
- HM Revenue & Customs www.hmrc.gov.uk (for implications of starting a business and VAT considerations)
- Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service www.nifrs.org
- The Health and Safety Works NI 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 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/ksi_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
 - Causeway Coast and Glens, www.causewaycoastandglens.com
 - Western RTP, www.visitwestnorthernireland.com

Contact details for further information:

For more information/application forms for certification contact any of the following staff in the Quality and Standards Department:

Diane Lynas	9044 1686
Damien Murray	9044 1545

You can also email this department at qa@tourismni.com or write to us at our offices:

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To request a copy of this document on disc or in other accessible formats, please contact the Quality & Standards department.

