



A photograph of a man in a wheelchair at a hotel reception desk. The man is wearing a light-colored jacket and dark trousers, and is leaning forward to sign a document on the desk. A female receptionist in a blue blazer is looking at him. In the background, another staff member is visible behind the desk. The setting is a well-lit hotel lobby with modern decor.

Welcoming Disabled Travellers

words of advice on providing
for people with disabilities

Tapping the potential

More than eight million people living in Britain are officially recognised as having some form of disability. This may be difficulties in mobility, failing eyesight, hearing problems, a learning disability or less obvious impairments such as asthma or epilepsy. Together with able-bodied carers, if each disabled person were to take a holiday, the total spent on accommodation, transport, eating out, shopping and entertainment would amount to billions of pounds each year.

Add to that the huge number of disabled travellers who might visit Britain from overseas, especially given the more accessible transport links such as the Channel Tunnel, and the size of the potential market becomes apparent.

But it's not just about money. In a civilised society it is unthinkable to ignore the needs of nearly 15% of the total population.

Yet 34% of disabled people did not take a holiday in 1998, and a further 6% took a short break only.

One of the main reasons is that the tourism sector has largely ignored their needs, making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to stay away from home and enjoy the activities able-bodied visitors take for granted. Research shows that only 3% of disabled people travel as part of an organised group of people with disabilities, and that those with families tend to holiday as a family/couple unit. Yet despite government legislation and determined efforts by many service providers, the fact remains that fewer than 1500 hotels, B&Bs, farms and self-catering establishments in Britain have qualified for Tourism for All National Accessible Standards accreditation.

To ignore the needs of this large and varied group not only risks breaking the law, but also means limiting occupancy rate and therefore profit. With relatively few establishments catering for the particular needs of disabled people and their carers, marketing such facilities effectively is bound to bring in extra business, while providing an essential customer service.

Of course, physical facilities are only one side of the equation – personal attitudes can be as much of a barrier to improvement. Greater awareness and sensitivity to the needs of disabled travellers can only enhance the tourism experience for providers and guests alike.

What people say ...

A former occupational therapist, Sue King realised there was a big demand for accommodation suitable for disabled people, including those with asthma or other allergies. As these are often triggered by animal hairs, Stratton Farm near Wisbech in Cambridgeshire is not only accessible to wheelchairs, but is also an animal-free zone.

'It is clearly important to inform people in advance what they can expect at any property. I felt it important that I used my knowledge to improve life for as many disabled people as I could. I therefore converted one large bedroom in the farmhouse measuring 21 feet by 14 into a fully accessible unit with everything at the correct height and width. Now everyone who discovers us is absolutely thrilled and keeps returning.

'Making the changes was not prohibitively expensive, either. As long as you have ample space and follow the basic designs, it need not be costly at all. We now have people using wheelchairs coming from as far afield as Scotland or Kent, yet the room can also be used by those without mobility difficulties who hardly notice that it has been designed for use by disabled people.'

Sue King has two other rooms, and all three can be prepared for allergy sufferers. Apart from allowing no pets, the farmhouse can remove flowers or pot pourri on request and all the food is organic and naturally produced.



Trading places

How accessible is your property?

Before you can decide what you can do to help people with disabilities enjoy their stay, you need to be aware of what their needs might be.

Advice is available through organisations such as the Centre for Accessible Environments and Holiday Care and from literature published by the English Tourism Council.

In the first instance, it may be helpful to put yourself in the position of a disabled person visiting your property.

What people say ...

Heiko Figge, general manager of the Thistle Marble Arch is determined that every one of his staff fully appreciates the needs of disabled guests.

'Tourism for All is a growing and relatively untapped market and as a result we have invested heavily in our disabled rooms. Every member of staff is, on joining, given details of what our disabled guests will expect and then receives regular disablement equality training.'

'Now with both disabled and able-bodied guests using our specially adapted rooms, we expect to make a return on our investment and significantly increase our profits.'

The hotel has doubled the number of rooms for disabled people from five to ten. The conversion was completed in April 1998 at a cost of £45,000 per room. Special features include inter-connecting carers' rooms, extra wide doors operated by remote control or entry card, wheel-in power showers with body height angled heads, flip-down seats, support rails and emergency pull cords and deaf alert

screen telephones and a vibrating pillow to alert guests of a fire alarm. Through careful design, non-standard items such as electronically operated curtains are presented as positive improvements which can only be found in five star accommodation.

As a result the Thistle Marble Arch won the 1995 Holiday Care Award for Best Hotel Accommodation with 20 bedrooms or more, and was also awarded the Hotel Spec European Design and Development Award for the Most Innovative Hotel Design Feature for Disabled People.

Among the facilities in the 690 bedroom hotel are a low level check-in desk, smooth marble floor corridors throughout the hotel, braille buttons in all lifts and braille menus in the restaurants.

Twenty-one Thistle Hotels have now been rated for their accessible facilities, including seven which have gained the coveted 'category one' which guarantees the facility is accessible to an independent wheelchair user.

Ask the right questions

- ◆ How would you be able to cope if you were a wheelchair user, or even a parent with a pushchair? Or if you were visually impaired, deaf, had learning difficulties or cerebral palsy?
- ◆ How would you cope as a carer of any of the above?
- ◆ Do your staff understand the particular needs of those with mobility problems, or difficulty in speaking or controlling their movements? Will they ensure that a guide dog has been adequately fed, watered and exercised?
- ◆ Are your parking bays wide enough to allow access from a wheelchair? Are routes to and from reception, lifts, the main entrance, toilets and the restaurant clear of obstructions, well lit and clearly signed? Are ramps permanently installed or at least readily available? Are the doors wide enough for a wheelchair? Are the light switches at the right height and the directional signs and information boards visible from a wheelchair?
- ◆ Can disabled people use the loo? Is there enough room for a wheelchair user to turn around?
- ◆ Can you accommodate carers in the same room if necessary, and are you set up to accept disabled children as well as adults?

Much of the work that needs to be done to make sure a disabled person is properly catered for is basic common sense. Simple changes to layout, the provision of better signage and information, and above all better training, need not break the bank.

Visit other similar establishments and find out how they have made their properties more accessible, or how they intend to do so. Contact Holiday Care for details of a property near you.



Consider too having your accommodation inspected for access by the Regional Tourist Boards on behalf of the English Tourism Council or by Holiday Care, against standards laid down under the Tourism for All National Accessible Scheme. This should then enable you to gain one of three categories which gives wheelchair users the comfort factor of a guaranteed level of accessibility, and is also an excellent marketing tool to promote wider occupancy.

Access Audits

Given the advent of the Disability Discrimination Act, you would do well to consider a full access audit of your facilities. These are available from organisations such as the Centre for Accessible Environments, which will have a register of consultants approved to National Standards by December 1999. In addition, many of the support organisations for disabled people such as RADAR and RNIB also offer an audit service.

Training

Disability equality training is also a worthwhile investment. The Welcome All module in the ETC accredited training programme offered by the Regional Tourist Boards is designed to build understanding and help in a practical way to improve the experiences of those with disabilities or special needs. RADAR and other organisations also offer training.

What the law says

The main provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came into force at the end of 1996. It is designed to ensure that people with disabilities are offered the same services and facilities and on the same terms as anyone else, and that those who wish to travel, take a holiday or visit attractions around Britain are able to do so without unnecessary obstacles being put in their path.

The Act protects everyone with a disability that makes it difficult for them to carry out normal everyday activities, whatever the nature of the disability. It gives disabled people new rights of employment, access to goods and services and the buying and renting of land and property.

While the English Tourism Council cannot give legal advice, the following guidelines may prove helpful. As the implications of the law are fully realised, its interpretation is also likely to change. For specific questions contact the Disability Discrimination Act Helpline (see back page).



When do I have to act?

You should have done so already – since 2 December 1996 Part 3 of the DDA has placed duties on those providing goods, facilities and services not to discriminate against disabled people. However, the second key date was October 1999 when the next phase Part 3 was introduced. It requires providers in the hospitality and tourism industries to:

- ◆ Change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.
- ◆ Provide auxiliary aids or services which would make it easier for, or enable, disabled people to use a service.
- ◆ Overcome physical features which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service, by providing the service by a reasonable alternative method.

From 2004, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter, or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.

Are there any exceptions?

It is not against the law to refuse to provide the service to a disabled person or to provide it on different terms in limited circumstances:

- ◆ If the health or safety of a disabled person or other people is in danger.
- ◆ The customer is not capable of understanding the terms of a contract.

In any event, the discrimination may need to be justified in a court of law.

Service providers will not, of course, be able to charge a disabled person more to meet the cost of making it easier for them to use their service.

The Act is non-specific about what changes are necessary, and requirements will undoubtedly evolve as test cases are brought to court. Central to any decision, however, will be the court's interpretation of the word 'reasonable' as used throughout the Act. It does not propose to cap the costs which service providers will incur, on the basis that doing only what is reasonable will keep costs within bounds.

What is reasonable?

From October 1999, for example, service providers will have to take 'reasonable' steps to change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or 'unreasonably difficult' for disabled people to use a particular service. Somewhat confusingly, if it is genuinely impossible for a disabled person to use that service, then the hotelier or other provider will have to find ways of enabling disabled people to use that service by 'a reasonable alternative method'.

The exception to this is if the way the service is run is fundamental to the business. For example, dim lighting could be considered essential for a nightclub, even if it creates difficulties for someone with poor eyesight.

A revised Code of Practice issued in June 1999 offers further guidance to service providers about their responsibilities under the Act and how to adopt best practice. An abridged version is available from the DDA Helpline, the full version from HMSO.

See 'Where to go from here' for contact details.

Where to go from here ... further help

This guide can only offer first pointers as to the need to make your accommodation more accessible to disabled people and the information provided is by no means definitive.

The organisations below can all offer additional help and advice.

British Polio Fellowship

Eagle Office Centre
The Runway, South Ruislip
Middlesex HA4 6SE
Tel: 020 8842 1898
Fax: 020 8842 0555
Email: british.polio@dial.pipex.com
Charity supporting people with polio. Runs own accommodation.

Centre for Accessible Environments

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY
Tel: 020 7357 8182
Fax: 020 7357 8183
Email: cae@globalnet.co.uk
Website: www.cae.org.uk
Gives advice and information on making buildings and places accessible to all users including disabled and older people, and on enhancing quality in design.

Hoteliers Forum - A Disability Partnership Initiative

Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street
London SE1 2NY
Tel: 020 7403 9433
Fax: 020 7403 3957
Email: thedp@lineone.net
Aims to make the hospitality sector a leader in disability equality in the fields of service provision and employment.

Holiday Care

2nd Floor, Imperial Buildings
Victoria Road
Horley, Surrey RH6 7PZ
Tel: 01293 771500
Fax: 01293 784647
Email: holiday.care@virgin.net
Website: freespace.virgin.net/hol.care
The UK's central source of holiday and travel information for disabled people.

Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR)

12 City Forum
250 City Road
London EC1V 8AF
Tel: 020 7250 3222
Fax: 020 7250 0212
Email: radar@radar.org.uk
A national campaigning and advisory body on disability, offering information, access audits and disability awareness training.

Royal National Institute for the Blind

224 Great Portland Street
London W1N 6AA
Tel: 020 7388 1266
Fax: 020 7388 2034
Charity providing services for the 1.7 million people with serious sight problems in the UK.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People

19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL
Tel: 0870 605 0123
Fax: 020 7296 8199
Email: helpline@rnid.org.uk
Charity working towards improved standards of living for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Tourism For All

11 Y Waen
Gwernaffield, Flintshire CH7 5DP
Tel: 01352 740552
Fax: 01352 740515
Email: jenny.murphy@virgin.net
Works to create and support a mainstream tourism, hospitality and leisure industry which is accessible to all customers and staff, irrespective of disability, age or income.

Disability Discrimination Act Helpline 0345 622633

HMSO Orderline 0870 600 5522

What people say ...

Catering for those who suffer from learning difficulties is all in the mind, according to the owners of the Laxfield Hotel in Clacton. Betty Smith and her husband Peter were both trained health service workers and decided that there was a moral motive, as well as a business niche, for providing holiday facilities for people with learning difficulties.

'We haven't had to alter any of the hotel structures. People with learning difficulties do not need anything special – just a friendly welcome like any other guest. In fact, they are a lot less trouble than most others guests.

'We can now take 24 guests at a time and usually cater for Mencap parties, although we have a large number of guests who come to stay independently. We also cater for

non-disabled people and let rooms to both groups at once provided we know they will mix in well.'

The hotel provides protected beds for anyone who suffers from incontinence and will offer help and advice about medication, as well as where to visit in the immediate area.

'But we do not employ additional staff to help look after them. The groups who come bring their own carers with them.

'Catering for the leisure needs of those with learning difficulties is all down to attitude. As far as the premises are concerned there is no difference between our hotel and any other, and our guests would not expect there to be either.'

Useful publications

Approved document M. 1999 edition.

Part M of the Building Regulations

Covers access and facilities for disabled people.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

The Stationery Office, 1998

33pp A4

ISBN 0 11 753469 2

Cost: £9.00

Building Sight

A handbook of building and interior design solutions to include the needs of visually impaired people.

Peter Barker, Jon Barrick, Rod Wilson

HMSO in association with the Royal National Institute for the Blind

181pp A4 (paperback)

ISBN 185878 074 8

Cost: £25.00

Access by Design Video

A new video that aims to help providers of goods, facilities or services to the public to plan for meeting the access provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Made by CAE with the support from the Department of Social Security on behalf of the Minister for Disabled People.

Cost: £14.10

Access Audits: a guide and checklists for appraising the accessibility of buildings

Newly revised and updated pack reflecting the state of the art in access auditing. Includes new checklists on car parking, wayfinding, lighting, acoustics and building management, and the 1999 edition of Designing for Accessibility.

A4 ring binder, guidance notes, 21 proforma checklists and Designing for Accessibility.

ISBN 0 903976 30 7

Cost: £20.00

All the above are available from the Centre for Accessible Environments

Tourism for All: providing accessible visitor attractions

Designing access that allows more people to get at and enjoy visitor attractions.

Bob Donaldson

English Tourist Board, 1994

52pp A4

ISBN 86143 186 3

Cost: £5.00

Available from the English Tourism Council,
Orderline 0870 606 7204

Photographic Credits:

Page 1 &

this page: ETC/Zac McCauley

Page 2: National Trust Photographic Library/Ian Shaw

Page 3: Format/Sally Lancaster

Page 4: Disabled Living Foundation



PUBLISHED BY THE ENGLISH TOURISM COUNCIL

Thames Tower

Black's Road

London W6 9EL

Tel: 020 8563 3000

Fax: 020 8563 0302

The English Tourism Council (incorporated under the Development of Tourism Act 1969 as English Tourist Board) is the strategic body for tourism in England.

© English Tourist Board

The information in this leaflet is given in good faith and every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy. The English Tourist Board can accept no responsibility for any error or misinterpretation. All liability for loss, disappointment, negligence or other damage caused by reliance on the information contained in this publication is hereby excluded.

Printed in England by Trident