



VisitEngland™



Quality Standard

Guest Accommodation

VisitEngland's quality standard for guest accommodation

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Quality is the key

VisitEngland understands that quality is the key to success within the modern hospitality industry. In order for the English guest accommodation sector to be successful both nationally and internationally, it is important that quality standards are set high and continue to improve.

Our commitment to you

Our professional assessors will work with you in order to maximise the potential of your business. As a member of the VisitEngland star rating scheme you will receive an overnight mystery assessment visit in the first year. From year two, you will receive either a day visit or an overnight visit, depending on your star rating. An overnight visit will be scheduled at least every third year. The visit will look at all aspects of your customer facing business from the initial booking to check out. Each visit will be followed by a full verbal debrief and a detailed written management report. Both these tools are designed to help you to improve your business.

Quality across the star ratings

Our assessors will quality grade each aspect of your business to five levels, based on customer expectations of quality and current standards seen across the sector in the UK. The assessment is objective and judgements will not be made about any aspect of your business based on style or personal taste. The aim is to add quality without taking away any of the character and style of the property. In advance of their visit your assessor will review your property's website, as would a typical potential guest.

Service & Hospitality

A smile, a warm and genuine welcome and a willingness to please and serve customers is a common requirement and achievable across all star ratings.

Seamless and efficient service requires thought and planning. A small bed and breakfast business can rely on the natural friendliness and hospitality of the owners, whilst a large business

will require a team of well-trained staff and this can present a different challenge.

Bedrooms & Bathrooms

Whatever the style or concept of the bedrooms and bathrooms, both quality and comfort is what guests and our assessors will be looking for, specifically:

- The quality and comfort of the bed
- The quality of the bed linen
- Attractive, well co-ordinated décor and soft furnishings
- The quality of bathroom fittings, of towels and toiletries
- Ease of use, being well designed without necessarily being large and spacious
- Those extra touches that make the rooms more welcoming

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is of paramount importance to all customers at all star levels. It is expected that all properties will be clean throughout.

Hints & Tips

Be objective and self-critical when thinking about quality:

- Do not over promise: Do not be tempted to claim you offer luxury on your website unless the facilities you are selling are truly luxurious. Customers travel with expectations. It is better to exceed these rather than not to live up to them.
- Be a customer at your own business: Take time to use your own website, sleep in your own bedrooms and eat your own breakfast in order to experience what you are offering your guests.

How do we measure quality?

During your visit, your assessor will make quality judgements across all areas of your customer facing business. When the scores are totalled you will have an overall percentage score that will place you within one of the five different star rating bands. However, in order to confirm a particular star rating, the scores awarded within each of the **five key areas** also need to fall within that band or higher. In this way we, and you, can be confident that the business is offering a consistent level of service at the star rating awarded. These key areas are:

- Cleanliness
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Hospitality & Friendliness
- Breakfast Quality

Assessors are trained to award scores against national benchmarks in an objective and consistent manner.

Assessment Example

In the example on the next page, the bed and breakfast provides all services and facilities required of a four star property and is seeking a four star rating.

In order to be awarded four star, the property needs to meet the overall percentage required (at least 70%) as well as the percentages required in each of the key sections (listed above). The business meets the overall percentage required for four star (with 75%) and achieves four star for cleanliness, bedrooms and bathrooms. However, the property fails to meet the score required for hospitality & friendliness. Although the property meets the four star score for breakfast, this score is borderline.

The outcome is that a three star rating is awarded but with potential for four star. Advice

is provided as to how to improve the scores for hospitality & friendliness and breakfast quality in order to meet a four star rating at the next visit.

Scores

For each area included in the assessment, the assessor will decide whether to award a score of

- 1 mark – Poor
- 2 marks – Disappointing
- 3 marks – Good
- 4 marks – Very good
- 5 marks – Excellent

After your visit you will receive a detailed written report on the customer experience with individual scores for each criteria. Positive aspects of your business will be outlined as well as areas for improvement. This will give you a benchmark for maintaining the quality of your services and facilities and will help you to prioritise and plan future developments to increase standards and boost your bottom line.

Hints & Tips

- No need to follow the crowd, don't be afraid to do things your way. For example, locally sourced toiletries can be of equal quality to national brands.
- Remember that first impressions matter. Paying attention to the following critical areas will pay dividends:
 - Clean and tidy parking areas
 - Well-tended grounds and gardens
 - A welcoming smile
 - Fresh flowers
 - The final touches in bedrooms & bathrooms with care taken over the presentation of bedding, towels and toiletries

Quality Assessment Report

Cleanliness

Dining area	3
Public areas	4
Bathrooms	5
Bedrooms	4

80%

(4 star quality)

Hospitality & friendliness

Booking & arrival service	4
Dinner & general service	3
Breakfast service	3
Departure service	4

70%

(3 star quality)

Bedrooms

Decoration	4
Furniture, fittings & furnishings	3
Flooring	3
Beds & bedding	4
Lighting, heating & ventilation	4
Bedroom accessories	5
Space, comfort & ease of use	4

77%

(4 star quality)

Dining room & restaurant

Decoration	4
Furniture, fittings & furnishings	3
Flooring	3
Lighting, heating & ventilation	4
Table appointment	5
Space, comfort & ease of use	4

76%

Exterior

Building appearance	4
Grounds, gardens & frontage	4
Car parking	5
Leisure	3

80%

Bathrooms

Decoration	5
Fixtures & fittings	4
Flooring	4
Lighting, heating & ventilation	4
Towels & toiletries	4
Space, comfort & ease of use	3

80%

(4 star quality)

Public areas

Decoration	3
Furniture, fittings & furnishings	4
Flooring	3
Lighting, heating & ventilation	4
Space, comfort & ease of use	3
Stairs, corridors, hallways & WCs	3

66%

Service & efficiency

Booking service	4
Dinner & general service	4
Breakfast service	4
Departure service	4

80%

Breakfast quality

Dinner choice & presentation	n/a
Dinner quality	n/a
Breakfast choice & range	4
Breakfast presentation	3
Breakfast quality & culinary skills	4

73%

(borderline 4 star quality)

Overall score

75%

The outcome is a 3 star rating

NB – this report is an example. Marks and scoring thresholds may be subject to change in future.

Determining a star rating

A property will need to satisfy three elements to reach a particular star rating:

- All relevant requirements must be met (detailed later in this booklet)
- The overall percentage score for quality must reach the appropriate band (see quality bands below)
- The relevant standard of quality in the five critical areas:
 - Cleanliness
 - Bedrooms
 - Bathrooms
 - Hospitality & Friendliness
 - Breakfast Quality

The star rating level across all of these five areas must be met in order to achieve a particular star rating. The remaining four areas are: exterior, public areas, dining room & restaurants and service & efficiency.

Dispensations

Dispensations for certain individual requirements within the VisitEngland Quality Standards may be given as long as all the remaining requirements and quality levels for that rating are met or exceeded. This flexibility will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Any exceptions will need a proportional increase in quality in other areas to compensate for the area where an exception is sought.

Overall quality bands					
	1 Star	2 Star	3 Star	4 Star	5 Star
Overall	30%-46%	47%-54%	55%-69%	70%-84%	85%-100%
Cleanliness	40%	50%	65%	75%	90%
Hospitality & Friendliness	40%	50%	65%	75%	90%
Bedrooms	30%	47%	55%	70%	85%
Bathrooms	30%	47%	55%	70%	85%
Breakfast Quality	30%	47%	55%	70%	85%

Note

- For Room Only accommodation, breakfast is not scored.
- Percentages are correct as of April 2019

Guest Accommodation Designators

Within the scheme, there are a number of designators to allow you to obtain a rating which matches your type of business and give potential guests an idea of what to expect. At the time of your assessment, you will have the chance to discuss your designator with the assessor.

B&B

Accommodation provided in a private house, run by the owner.

Breakfast must be provided.

Farmhouse

Accommodation provided on a working farm or smallholding.

Breakfast must be provided.

Inn

Accommodation provided in an establishment with a full liquor licence.

Breakfast must be provided and food may be served at lunchtime and in the evening.

Restaurant with rooms

A restaurant offering overnight accommodation with a full liquor licence.

Breakfast must be provided.

Room only

Accommodation which generally does not provide breakfast.

Guesthouse or Guest Accommodation

Accommodation which does not meet one of the above descriptions.

Breakfast must be provided.

NB: It is unlikely that any establishment offering accommodation to DSS residents or operating as a refuge hostel for homeless people will be eligible to participate in the scheme

Accolades

VisitEngland's Gold & Silver Awards

VisitEngland's unique Gold and Silver awards are given in recognition of exceptional quality. These awards help customers find those special places where the owner and staff go the extra mile, whatever the size, style or star rating of the business. In order to achieve an award, you will need to demonstrate consistent levels of high quality in the five key areas identified by consumers as very important:

- Cleanliness
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Hospitality & Friendliness
- Breakfast Quality

Eligibility for an award is triggered by the property's overall score meeting a minimum level, plus a minimum score in each of the critical areas listed above (see separate sheet showing the percentages required).

Awards are confirmed with the written assessment report, but Gold awards require confirmation by the Quality Assessment Area Manager and may involve a second 'mystery visit'. The assessment report will show the scores in all areas, so owners can check how close they are to achieving an award and can ask the assessor's advice about the key improvements required to aim for a Silver or Gold award.

A Gold or Silver award can give a significant marketing advantage. The logos can be displayed on websites and in other forms of advertising. Certificates are provided for display within the property and exterior signage is also available.

VisitEngland's Breakfast Award

As part of the overnight assessment, the assessor will score the breakfast served based on the following criteria:

- Choice and range of dishes offered
- Presentation
- Food quality and culinary skills
- Service and hospitality

The assessor will confirm during the assessment debrief if you have achieved the award, based on the marks scored.

The Breakfast award logo can be used on websites and in other forms of advertising. Certificates are provided for display within the property and exterior signage is also available.



VisitEngland's assessors

All of our assessors are hospitality professionals and each has a proven background in the industry. More importantly, our assessors now spend their working lives as professional guests. They experience best practice in all areas and are able to pass that knowledge on to you for the benefit of your business. They are your eyes and ears for the duration of their visit. They will assess the quality of your business honestly, but always with the objective of helping you to improve your operation. Make use of your assessor.

Hints & Tips

Your assessor is there to help your business succeed, so make use of their knowledge and expertise:

- Their aim is to maximise the quality potential of your business, whilst allowing the character and uniqueness of your business to shine through.
- They are an industry professional with extensive knowledge of the bed & breakfast and guest accommodation sector, and they are there to share all of that knowledge with you, so be sure to ask plenty of questions.
- Stay in touch. Assessors are happy to answer your questions in between visits.
- You might like to arrange an interim visit in order to measure improvements that you have made to your business, especially if you are aiming for a higher rating or a Silver or Gold award at your next assessment. The assessor can help to organise this for you.

Hints & Tips

- The first time you meet your assessor is likely to be when they arrive at your property for an overnight visit. Even then, they will not reveal their identity until the following morning.
- This will allow them to experience your service as a customer would and begin to understand your business prior to your meeting after breakfast.
- You might be concerned that you have not yet provided or understood all of the requirements of the assessment scheme. Do not worry, your assessor will discuss this with you and allow you time to add any items or services that might be missing.
- Beyond that, the assessment is about help and advice. The style and character of your property are what make it unique. Your assessor is there to enhance that, not to change it.
- Your assessment in the second year is likely to be a day visit. If you believe you have a good chance of achieving a higher rating, or a Gold, Silver or Breakfast award, you can request an overnight visit.

Hints & Tips

- Your website is the first contact most customers will have with you. Make sure it is up to date, easy to use and engaging.
- Good quality photographs are the best way to show off your business. Modern smartphone cameras are often up to the task, and online tutorials are widely available.
- If you have the time for social media, it's a great way to engage with potential guests. Your assessor can help with advice on how to get started.

Sustainability & Accessibility

Sustainability: Doing Business Even Better

Green tourism and sustainability practices in your business are one and the same thing; it's all about taking small steps that enable you to do business even better, not differently. Small changes will not only save money, improve employee relations, enhance profitability and provide a richer experience for customers but over time you will also improve your business' impact on the local economy, community and environment. 'Going Green' does not have to be a chore and is just as applicable to properties in a city centre as a rural location.

VisitEngland Can Help

VisitEngland is committed to promoting the adoption of sustainability practices among all tourism businesses. It is our aim to ensure that a sustainable approach is complimentary to improving the overall visitor experience in England. Your help is needed in this aspiration.

For further information on how to enhance your business to be more sustainable, along with case studies on the benefits of adopting sustainable practices, please visit www.visitengland.org/green.

Improving your Accessibility – A Lucrative Market

Many people have accessibility requirements including disabled people, such as those with hearing loss and visual impairments, wheelchair users, older and less mobile people and people with pushchairs. The accessible tourism market is worth around £12bn to tourism businesses in England and is growing due to an ageing population.

By making some small adjustments to your facilities, providing information on your accessibility and understanding the needs of disabled people, your business will appeal to a wider range of visitors and attract more business. Demand for accessible accommodation outstrips the current supply. Find out how other tourism businesses are benefitting from this loyal market at www.visitengland.org/access

Legal Obligations

Tourism businesses have obligations under The Equality Act 2010, which replaced the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995 and 2005 (DDA) on 1 October 2010. Tourism providers should treat everyone accessing their goods, facilities or services fairly, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, gender reassignment, religion or belief, and guard against making assumptions about the characteristics of individuals.

The Equality Act 2010 requires that service providers must think ahead and take steps to address barriers that impede disabled people. Providers should not wait until a disabled person experiences difficulties using a service, as this

may make it too late to make the necessary adjustment.

1. Make 'reasonable' changes to the way things are done – such as changing practices, policies or procedures where disabled people would be at a 'substantial disadvantage' e.g. amend a 'no dogs' policy.
2. Make 'reasonable' changes to the built environment – such as making changes to the structure of a building to improve access e.g. altering or removing a physical feature.
3. Provide auxiliary aids and services – such as providing information in an accessible format, an induction loop for customers with hearing aids.

A service provider cannot legally justify failing to provide a reasonable adjustment. The only question is whether the adjustment is a 'reasonable' one to make. What is 'reasonable' will depend on a number of circumstances, including the cost of an adjustment, potential benefit it may bring to other customers, the resources an organisation has and how practical the changes are.

We Can Help

VisitEngland provides tourism businesses with a range of guidance, tools and resources to help increase engagement with the valuable accessible tourism market. Go to www.visitengland.org/access.

It is important to provide information on the accessibility of your facilities and services. This can be achieved by producing an Accessibility Guide (an improved format that replaces Access Statements), which is a requirement for all scheme participants. To produce and publish an Accessibility Guide go to www.visitengland.org/accessibilityguides.

More detailed guidance and accessibility ratings are provided by the National Accessible Scheme (NAS): www.visitengland.org/nas.

1 Overall Standards

1.1 Statutory obligations

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Public Liability Insurance: whilst not a statutory requirement, it is a requirement for participation in this scheme. Proprietors may be asked to provide evidence that Public Liability Insurance cover is being maintained and that the requirements are being fulfilled.
- Produce an Accessibility Guide – a description of facilities and services offered, specifically in relation to accessibility, to inform people with access needs. For guidance and a free tool refer to www.visitengland.org/access. Whilst not a statutory requirement, it is a requirement for participation in this scheme.

Fulfilment of all relevant statutory obligations, including but not restricted to:

- Fire risk assessment: to comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005; supply evidence that a fire risk assessment has been carried out annually (for guidance refer to www.visitengland.org/fire).
- Food safety/hygiene: register with the local Environmental Health department.
- Guest Register: provide a register of all guests; this must include full name and nationality and ideally address and contact number. This need not take the form of a registration card on arrival, but can be a detailed record taken at the time of booking. Record passport number of all overseas guests.
- Health & Safety: operate safely with due regard to health and safety legislation and with evidence of consideration for the safety of guests and security of guests' property; supply clear information on how to contact proprietor/management in case of emergency. Supply multi-lingual instructions or a diagram of the fire evacuation procedure in all bedrooms.
- Planning: comply with all local planning regulations.
- Licensing: comply with all local licensing regulations.
- Hotel Proprietors Act: comply with this act.
- General Data Protection Regulation: comply with these regulations.
- Prices & Payment: make clear to guests exactly what is included in all prices quoted for accommodation, including taxes and any other surcharges. Adhere to and not exceed the prices quoted at the time of booking.
- Cancellation Policy: communicate clearly the cancellation policy to guests at the time of booking i.e. by telephone, fax or email.
- Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008: comply with these regulations by describing accurately in any advertisement, brochure, or other printed or electronic media, the facilities and services provided.
- Advise visitors at the time of booking and subsequently, of any change, if the accommodation offered is in an unconnected annexe or similar, and indicate the location of such accommodation and any difference in comfort and/or amenities from accommodation in the main property.
- Equality Act 2010: comply with this act. Welcome all guests courteously and without discrimination in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Make 'reasonable' adjustments to improve services for disabled customers.
- Provide guests with clean, hygienic, safe and well-maintained accommodation at all times.

Hints & tips

For more information on your legal obligations, see VisitEngland's Pink Book: Legislation for Tourist Accommodation. A digital version can be accessed for free at www.visitengland.org/pinkbookonline and a free hard copy is available for VisitEngland scheme participants via your assessor. Additional hard copies can be purchased online.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure the fire evacuation procedures consider emergency exits for disabled people. Remember guests with hearing loss may not hear knocking at the door. Record their room location and any specific requirements.
- Welcome assistance dogs (this is a legal obligation). Many disabled people rely on assistance dogs to provide independence. See the dog as being part of the person.

Sustainability best practice

- Consider drafting and promoting an environmental management policy, setting out the environmental and sustainable management actions taken by your business.
- Join, or set up, a voluntary visitor payback/gifting scheme where a business collects and donates funds to a local charity, or make your own donation to an environmental charity.

1.2 Cleanliness

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

As the cleanliness of guest accommodation at every star rating is of paramount importance to the consumer, consistent standards of cleanliness are essential. Particular attention should be given to items involving direct contact for guests including:

- Bedding, linen and towels
- Baths, showers, washbasins and WCs
- Flooring and seating
- Crockery, cutlery and glassware
- All bathrooms and shower rooms cleaned daily and checked to ensure appropriate standards of cleanliness
- Bathrooms and shower rooms clean and fresh smelling. Particular attention paid to WCs, plugholes, shower curtains, mirrors and extractor fans

Accessibility best practice

- Do not move furniture and personal items in the bathroom or bedroom as in most cases they are placed in positions that are accessible to the guest.

Sustainability best practice

- Consider using low impact and chlorine-free cleaning products, such as microfibre cloths that reduce the amount of cleaning liquid required.

2 Service, Efficiency, Hospitality & Friendliness

2.1 Bookings & pre-arrival information

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Guests and prospective guests should be given an accurate description of the amenities, facilities and services that the establishment provides – in any advertisement, brochure or any other printed or electronic media used.
- As part of the booking process, guests should be made aware exactly what is included in the prices quoted for accommodation, meals and refreshments. For example, if breakfast is not provided, this must be made clear. The price must include service charges, taxes and other surcharges. Legally, the price should not exceed that agreed at the time of booking. Guests should be informed in detail of any charges for additional services or available facilities and cancellation terms, if applicable. If a deposit is required, guests should be told when they book, along with an explanation of how it will be taken and whether or not it is refundable if they cancel.
- When taking a booking, describe in detail any in-house policies e.g. no-smoking/vaping policy, payment methods, access restrictions.
- If prospective guests ask to see the accommodation before they book, they must be shown.
- Make sure to tell all prospective visitors about any major issues that might affect their stay, e.g. refurbishment work, rooms in annexes.

Accessibility best practice

- Offer your guests a choice of how to contact you, e.g. telephone, letter, email and find out about the Next Generation Text Service used by people with hearing loss at www.ngts.org.uk.
- Always ask if the enquirer or any of the guests in the party have any specific access requirements.
- Promote your Accessibility Guide.
- Specific training is available on how to welcome all types of guests, e.g. Welcoming All Customers and WorldHost Customers with Disabilities. Consider learning to communicate in basic British Sign Language (BSL).

Sustainability best practice

- Make best use of local tourist information in your visitor information folders.
- Include public transport options for getting to the property in promotional and booking information.
- If you employ staff, brief them fully on your environmental and sustainable tourism policy and, if relevant, membership of any green tourism management schemes.

2.2 Guest arrival, welcome and access

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- The owner or staff should be on duty during the main arrival and departure periods and during meal times. It is acceptable that the entrance may be locked and the guests may have to ring or knock for access or be provided with details of secure access.
- Registration of all guests on arrival (this is a legal requirement).
- Once guests have registered, they should have access to the establishment and to their bedrooms at all times, unless they were previously told about any restrictions. A key or security code may be given for the main entrance.
- Provide service that is appropriate to the style of accommodation, and deal promptly with all enquiries, requests, reservations, correspondence and complaints from guests.
- There must be an effective means for guests to call for the attention of the proprietor or staff, who need to be available at all reasonable times (as above). If the proprietor or staff are temporarily off-site or live away from the property, guests must be provided with a means to call for personal assistance 24 hours a day, without the need to use their own mobile phone. The contact telephone number needs to be clearly displayed. If foreign guests are accommodated, consideration needs to be given to the best ways of helping them understand this information, possibly by using symbols and/or diagrams.
- The proprietor or staff (or their designated representative) must be available to attend promptly in case of emergency.

Hints & tips

Many people choose not to stay at a hotel because of the informal and friendly service available in the bed & breakfast and guest accommodation sector. Greeting your guests is an opportunity to give a great impression of your business:

- Being friendly and welcoming might come naturally to you, but don't leave it to chance. The best welcomes are well planned and are delivered consistently.
- Guest registration is a legal requirement. Your assessor will have ideas as to how this can be carried out quickly and unobtrusively.
- Your welcome procedure might include assistance with luggage. Your paintwork is less likely to be damaged if you are carrying the bags!
- You might like to offer refreshments to your guests on arrival, but if they go straight to their room, fresh milk is always appreciated for that first cup of tea.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure guests identifying themselves as being disabled are offered a familiarisation tour of your property.
- Provide a vibrating alarm clock for guests with hearing loss.
- Provide information in a range of formats, e.g. large print, Braille, photographs, video, virtual tour and audio description on websites.

2.3 Guest payment & departure

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- The means of payment must be clearly detailed to guests i.e. how and where they pay. If payment is requested on arrival then this should be made clear at the time of booking, especially if only cash is accepted.
- Provide written details of payments due and a receipt to any visitor who requests it. Clearly identify the VAT element of the bill where applicable.

3 Breakfast

3.1 Breakfast

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- A cooked or substantial continental breakfast should be available, depending on the designator. If a cooked breakfast is not available (e.g. only a continental breakfast is served, or breakfast is not provided at all), guests must be made aware at the time of booking and this must be highlighted in pre-booking information.
- All food must be properly cooked and carefully prepared and presented.
- To achieve the higher star ratings, a greater choice and quality is expected.
- If breakfast is served off site, guests must be made aware of this when booking.
- The owner and/or staff should be available at breakfast for responding to guest's needs e.g. clearing of dishes, replenishing buffet and offering top-ups of tea and coffee.
- Where breakfast is served in the bedrooms, service should be of an equivalent or better level than if it were to be served in a breakfast room. This includes service of hot beverages.
- It is acceptable to offer a buffet style cooked or continental breakfast.

Hints & tips

A traditional English breakfast is what most guests are expecting in an English bed & breakfast or guest accommodation establishment, but how do you make your breakfast stand out? Perhaps consider the options and ideas below and pick out those that are right for you and your customers:

- Serve good quality local produce wherever you can, and shout about it on your menu. Look for fresh local eggs, locally produced bacon and sausages, locally baked bread and pastries.
- Rather than just orange juice, offer a selection of juices, including freshly squeezed options and a smoothie. You can increase choice and reduce waste by keeping individual bottles or cans of less popular juices, such as tomato or grapefruit.
- Fresh fruit salad or a fruit platter can be very popular, accompanied by natural or fruit yoghurts.
- Dried or fresh fruit compote and pastries are other popular options for the menu or buffet table.
- Consider a speciality dish that will make your business stand out, possibly a local or regional dish.
- Offer options for vegetarians, vegans and those with other special diets.
- Keep the high quality theme throughout the meal, with good tea and coffee, preserves, butter and healthy options.

Accessibility best practice

- Try to be flexible with meal times to help diabetic people regulate their blood sugar.
- Ensure tables are stable and provide support for people rising from their chairs.
- Ensure crockery contrasts with table linen or surface to assist visually impaired guests.
- Offer guests a choice of seating location. Provide a selection of chairs with and without arm rests.
- Provide a large print menu, minimum font size 16pt, in a clear font such as Arial.
- Provide for different dietary requirements, e.g. dairy free, gluten free, lactose free, nut free.
- Offer guests assistance with a self-service buffet where appropriate.
- Provide meals in rooms on request where appropriate.

Sustainability best practice

- Where possible, source food and drink products locally. Build relationships with local producers and suppliers.
- Menus highlighting local specialities can really help differentiate your offering from that of your competitors, so highlight the connection with local producers wherever possible. Incorporate a description of where ingredients are sourced, who the producer is, and why you have chosen them.
- Staff dealing with food and drink service should be fully briefed on the source, characteristics and significance of local food and drink products.

4 Bedrooms

4.1 Size & spaciousness

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All bedrooms should have sufficient space for guests to move easily around the room.
- When we assess bedroom size we take into account the usable space available around furniture and fittings.
- Bedrooms that are smaller than the following sizes are unlikely to meet the minimum requirements:
 - Single 5.6 sq m / 60 sq ft
 - Double 8.4 sq m / 90 sq ft
 - Twin 10.2 sq m / 110 sq ft
- The ceiling height for the major part of the room needs to be sufficient for a person of 6ft to move around without stooping. Sloping eaves and ceilings are acceptable as long as they do not restrict guests' movement to an unacceptable degree.
- It should be possible to fully open doors and drawers without having to move other furniture.
- Rooms for family occupation need to be significantly larger.

NB: Where there is access to only one side of a double bed, a maximum rating of Three Star can be awarded and guests must be made aware at time of making the booking

Accessibility best practice

- Try to provide a ground floor bedroom.

Sustainability best practice

- Bedrooms need to be warm when guests arrive, but consider how much heat is required and when to turn it on. Lights can be turned on at the time of arrival.
- Use could be made of towel and laundry agreement notices, whereby guests are asked to indicate if they wish their bed linen and towels to be laundered less frequently. Signs could be made in-house or sourced externally.

4.2 Bed size

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Minimum bed sizes:
 - Single: 190 cm x 90 cm (6ft 3ins x 3ft)
 - Double: 190 cm x 137 cm (6ft 3ins x 4ft 6ins)
 - 122 cm (4ft) beds to be designated as singles.
 - Beds of 183 cm x 75 cm (6ft x 2ft6 ins) will only be acceptable for children and can only be used as part of a family room
- Rooms with bunk beds only are not acceptable for adult use.
- All mattresses should have a sprung interior or be made of foam or similar.
- All mattresses should have a protector. Plastic or rubber mattress protectors are not acceptable except when used for small children.
- All beds and mattresses should be of sound condition with a secure headboard or equivalent.

NB: Bunk beds should have a minimum 75 cm (30 ins) clear space between the mattress of the bottom bed and the underside of the top bed

Accessibility best practice

- Provide zip and link beds so that a guest and partner or a guest and carer/personal assistant can be accommodated, particularly in accessible bedrooms.
- Provide blocks so that bed heights can be adjusted.

4.3 Bedding provision

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All beds should be made daily.
- All bedding should be clean and in sufficient quantity, according to the season and the needs of guests.
- As a guide each bed should have either:
 - a. Two sheets, two blankets and a bedspread or
 - b. A duvet with duvet cover and one or two sheets.
- If duvets are provided, alternative bedding should be available on request.
- There should be two pillows in individual pillowcases per person (one pillow is acceptable at One Star). If feather pillows or duvets are provided, a non-allergenic alternative should be available on request.
- All bed linen (sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers etc.) should be fresh for each new guest. It should be changed at least once in every week for guests. At higher star ratings, bed linen should be changed more frequently.
- Spare blankets and pillows should be available on request.
- Any spare pillows and bedding are clean, fresh and preferably wrapped.

NB: 100% man-made fibre sheets are not acceptable

General best practice

- Use pillow protectors.

Sustainability best practice

- Spare bedding does not need to be wrapped in disposable bags, its freshness can be indicated by tying the folded bedding with a re-usable ribbon, or other tie, placing in a re-useable bag, or simply folding neatly.

4.4 Furniture, furnishings & fittings

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

Each bedroom should have:

- A bedside table, cabinet or shelf for each bed, although twin beds may share and 75 cm / 2ft 6ins bunk beds are exempt.
- A dressing table, writing desk, small table or equivalent, with a mirror adjacent.
- A chair or a stool.
- Consideration will be given to seating in rooms where a lounge is not available.
- An adequately sized wardrobe or clothes hanging space with sufficient hangers. Wire hangers are not acceptable. Coat stands, hooks on walls or behind doors are not acceptable.
- Adequate drawer or shelf space.
- Opaque curtains, blinds or shutters on all windows, including glass panels to doors, fanlights and skylight windows, so that guests have privacy and can exclude any light from outside the room.

NB: Where bedrooms are located on the ground floor, consider providing additional privacy with a net curtain or blind

Accessibility best practice

- Consider having the door frames a contrasting colour to the wall and avoid high gloss finishes to assist visually impaired guests.

4.5 Windows & ventilation

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Rooms without windows, or with windows that do not open, are acceptable, but must have air conditioning and pass all building regulations. The lack of a window needs to be clearly communicated in pre-booking information.
- Windows should be well fitted, easy to shut and open and remain open.
- Security fittings should be installed on all bedroom windows where, when open, access could be gained from outside – for example, patio or French doors, ground floor windows and windows overlooking fire escapes.

- An effort should be made to insulate against external noise.
- Guests should be provided with a pole for opening high 'Velux'-style or skylight windows, where these are the only opening windows.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure windows and curtains can be reached by your guests and are easy to open and close.

Sustainability best practice

- Consider checking windows for draughts to ensure that heat is not lost.

4.6 Lighting

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Bedrooms should be well lit.
- A shade or cover should be provided for all bulbs, unless decorative.
- At least one light should be controlled from the door.
- There should be a bedside reading light for each person, controllable from the bed, in addition to the light controlled from the door. However, twin beds may share a central bedside light.

Accessibility best practice

- Enable lighting levels to be adjusted using a dimmer switch and/or make available additional bedside or dressing table lamps.

Sustainability best practice

- Using energy saving light bulbs is one of the easiest ways to reduce your energy bills. It might also be possible to make greater use of natural light in some rooms.
- Signs could be used to ask guests to switch off lights when not in use.

4.7 Heating

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- There should be adequate in-room heating provided.
- Additional heating should be available on request.

Sustainability best practice

- Improved insulation and greater use of thermostatically controlled and zoned heating will save on energy use.
- Fit thermostatic valves to your bedroom radiators.

4.8 Flooring

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All flooring, carpets, rugs, hard wood flooring etc. properly fitted and of an acceptable quality and condition.

Accessibility best practice

- Avoid deep-pile carpets that may cause trips or make it difficult for a wheelchair to manoeuvre.

4.9 Beverage making facilities

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Tea/coffee-making facilities should be available and accessible 24 hours, either in bedrooms or in public areas (a self-service/vending option in public areas is acceptable).
- Self-service ingredients for making hot drinks are to be provided, and kept topped up. They should be kept wrapped or in lidded containers.
- Bedroom kettles should not have to be operated at floor level.
- Fresh milk should be available on request.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure hospitality trays are at a height accessible to all guests. The kettle should be cordless and a variety of drinking cups and mugs either provided or available on request.

Sustainability best practice

- For items on hospitality trays, locally produced goods, like biscuits, or Fair Trade products (e.g. tea, coffee, sugar, hot chocolate) could be sourced.
- Items on hospitality trays, such as sugar and biscuits, do not need to be individually wrapped – use can be made of airtight containers for dried goods.

4.10 Telephones & general connectivity

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Where telephones are provided, a rate card must be displayed in bedrooms illustrating typical charges for local, long-distance, international, internet, use of phone card and connection to mobile phones.
- Sample call charges are required, priced by minute, not unit.
- WiFi should be provided free of charge, where feasible.

4.11 Miscellaneous requirements

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

Each bedroom should have:

- A means of securing bedroom doors from inside and out.
- A waste paper container. It should be non-flammable if smoking is permitted.
- An ashtray if smoking is permitted.
- One drinking tumbler per guest. This should be glass or a wrapped disposable.
- Sufficient, conveniently situated, power sockets to allow for the safe use of all electrical equipment provided. Consideration given to provision of USB sockets for charging of mobile phones and other devices.
- Printed advice on how to obtain emergency assistance at night. This needs to be clearly displayed somewhere within the bedroom. Consider how a guest would obtain assistance if they don't have a mobile phone or there is no phone signal.
- Iron and ironing board available on request and advertised in the bedroom.
- For bedrooms without an en-suite or private bathroom, a towel rail or equivalent should be provided.

Hints & tips

When planning your bedrooms, remember that quality is the key to success:

- Beds are very important. Buy the best quality you can afford. If you have room for a 5 ft double, choose this instead of a 4 ft 6 ins bed. Zip and link is another good option if space allows.
- Choose good quality bed linen and pillows. Washable mattress protectors are essential and ideally pillow protectors too. Your guests will appreciate a comfortable night sleeping in well-laundered fresh linen.
- When selecting a carpet, aim for high quality but easily washable in case of stains or marks.
- Do not be tempted to cram too many beds into a room. If you are looking for flexibility of sleeping options, then a 6 ft zip and link bed will give you a super king double or twin beds. This will take up less space in your room than a permanent double and single bed.
- Most guests stay for only a few days, so if space is short, do not provide any more storage space than is necessary. Look for good quality space saving solutions.
- The easiest way to check the quality of your bedrooms is to sleep in them yourself. Find out how comfortable the beds are, whether there are enough power points and if they're in the most convenient places, if the blinds or curtains block out enough light and whether the heating and lighting are sufficiently effective.

Accessibility best practice

- Ensure TVs can provide subtitles to benefit guests with hearing loss.
- Provide all information in a clearly legible font at a height accessible to all guests.
- Consider providing door notices for guests with hearing loss as part of your emergency evacuation procedures.

Sustainability best practice

Visitor information folders help guests to find out more about your local area. They could include:

- Details of nearby outlets supplying local food, drink and gifts.
- Local visitor attractions and cultural information, including details of special events.
- Options for car-free travel, such as walking and cycling routes and public transport timetables.
- Suggestions for car-free days out.
- Your environmental policy, if you have one, or details about any green scheme you are affiliated with.
- Information about any visitor payback or gifting scheme which you participate in.
- Information asking guests to turn off all electrical appliances fully when not in use.

5 Bathrooms, Shower Rooms and En-Suites

What type of bathrooms do you have?

En-suite facilities

An en-suite facility consists of a bath or shower, WC and washbasin in a separate room within the bedroom and entered directly from it. The WC must always be in its own properly ventilated room. If the shower cubicle or bath is situated in the bedroom then additional ventilation should be added to take account of this and guests must be told at the time of booking. It is acceptable for the washbasin to be in the bedroom.

Private facilities

A private bathroom is one in which the bath or shower, WC and perhaps a washbasin are allocated for the sole use of the occupants of one particular bedroom. The bathroom should be on the same floor and be reasonably close to the bedroom. It should be lockable with a key provided. Access to the bath and/or shower rooms from the bedrooms through a lounge, dining room etc is not acceptable.

Public facilities

A public facility is one that may be shared by the occupants of more than one bedroom and perhaps the owners or their family. Access to the bath and/or shower rooms from the bedrooms through a lounge, dining room etc. is not acceptable.

When an establishment has four or fewer bed spaces for paying guests, it is acceptable for a bath or shower room to be combined with a washbasin and WC. When an establishment has five or more bed spaces for paying guests, there must be a separate WC and washbasin which can be accessed when the bath or shower is occupied.

If there are any guest bedrooms without washbasins, there should be a hand washbasin in the WC.

Where the maximum number of people, including proprietors, is no more than six, it is acceptable that facilities are shared between guests and proprietors. However, this will limit the achievable rating to Two Star. Where a shared arrangement exists, proprietors and their family should avoid prolonged use of the bathroom during the early to mid-morning period. They should also remove their personal belongings from the bathroom.

5.1 General

- **One to Three Star** – there is no minimum requirement for the number of bedrooms with en-suite or private facilities. However, where they are provided their quality will be assessed as part of the bathroom quality assessment.
- To achieve a **Four Star** rating, at least 75% of bedrooms must have an en-suite or a private bath/shower facility.
- To achieve a **Five Star** rating, every bedroom must have an en-suite or a private bath and/or shower facility.

Regardless of the bathroom type, all establishments must provide:

- Hot water at all times.
- A bath or shower. If a shower is provided, a screen or curtain should be provided, unless designed in such a way that this is not required.
- A lidded WC.
- A toilet roll holder with toilet paper.
- Fresh soap provided for each new guest. If liquid soap dispensers are used, pay particular attention to their cleanliness and hygiene. If washbasins are provided in bedrooms, soap should be available.
- A covered bin/open bin with sanitary disposal bags.
- An internal lock/bolt.
- Appropriate flooring. Washable flooring is more hygienic than carpeting.
- Opaque window curtains or blinds for privacy and comfort where the bathroom has a window.
- An extractor fan for adequate ventilation, or a window that opens.
- Adequate heating. All bathrooms with an external window must have heating.
- A hook for clothes.
- A non-slip bath mat should be available when shower trays and baths are not non-slip.
- A towel rail or equivalent. A radiator is not acceptable, but a towel ring or a hanging rack on a radiator is.
- A clean hand and bath towel for each guest. In public bathrooms, these should be in the guest's bedroom. Unless there is a clearly advertised environmental policy, they should be changed at least every three days.
- A clean bath mat for each new let.
- A suitably sized and located mirror.
- An electric razor point or adaptor available within easy reach of the mirror. This may be located in a bedroom or bathroom.
- Adequate lighting with a covered light.

Accessibility best practice

- Hot water supply should have at each fitting a mixer valve, controlled to a maximum 41°C to prevent scalding.
- Provide appropriate support rails at showers, baths, toilets and wash basins.
- Provide a selection of equipment, such as bath seats, toilet seat height raisers and shower chairs, as well as a support rail by the shower attachments.
- Provide towels that contrast in colour to the walls and floor to assist visually impaired guests.

Sustainability best practice

- Use thermostatically controlled settings for hot water.
- Although providing shower facilities can help reduce water consumption, remember that power showers can use more water than a bath. Therefore, consider using reduced water flow shower heads or gravity fed showers where possible.
- Use could be made of water saving devices such as “hippos” in the toilet cistern.
- Toiletries can be presented in large, pump action dispensers. Keep these topped up at all times for best presentation. Assessors will look at the contents and style of presentation.
- There is no need for the spare drinking cup or glass to be either plastic or wrapped.
- Use could be made of towel agreement signs.

5.2 Washbasins in bedrooms

- To achieve a **Three Star** rating all bedrooms require a washbasin – either free-standing or in a vanity unit (unless en-suite). The recommended minimum size is 36 cm x 24 cm / 14ins x 9.5ins. Its suitability will depend on its shape, position of taps etc.

Where a washbasin is provided in a bedroom, the following fixtures and fittings should be provided:

- A mirror with a light above or adjacent.
- A towel rail or equivalent. A radiator is not acceptable, but a towel ring or a hanging rack on a radiator close by is.
- Shelf space close to the washbasin, safely positioned.
- A clean hand towel or hand drying facility.
- Fresh soap. A liquid soap dispenser is acceptable.

Hints & tips

Bathrooms are expensive to build and set up and will probably need to last longer than any other part of the business between major refurbishments, so it is important to get it right first time:

- If you have room for a bath and a shower, provide both if possible. If not, a shower only is acceptable to most guests.
- Always try to fit a thermostatically controlled shower. Mixer taps can be fiddly, unpredictable and potentially dangerous.
- A good quality hard flooring might be easier to clean and more hygienic than a carpet.
- Ensure lighting is adequate throughout, particularly in the shower cubicle, over the bath and above the mirror.
- Large, soft towels will be appreciated by guests.
- If providing toiletries, aim for a high quality national or local brand. Larger, refillable containers are acceptable and will reduce waste.

6 Lunch & Dinner

6.1 Lunch & dinner (where provided)

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- All food must be properly cooked and carefully prepared and presented.
- If requested at the time of booking, there must be at least one vegetarian option available.

Accessibility best practice

- Try to be flexible with meal times to help diabetic people regulate their blood sugar.
- Ensure tables are stable and provide support for people rising from their chairs.
- Ensure crockery contrasts with table linen or surface to assist visually impaired guests.
- Offer guests a choice of seating location. Provide a selection of chairs with and without arm rests.
- Provide a large print menu, minimum font size 16pt, in a clear font such as Arial.
- Provide for different dietary requirements, e.g. dairy free, gluten free, lactose free, nut free.
- Offer guests assistance with a self-service buffet where appropriate.

Sustainability best practice

- Where possible, source food and drink products locally. Build relationships with local producers and suppliers.
- Menus highlighting local specialities can really help differentiate your offering from that of your competitors, so highlight the connection with local producers wherever possible. Incorporate a description of where ingredients are sourced, who the producer is, and why you have chosen them.

7 Exterior and Public Areas

7.1 Lounges, bars, dining areas, restaurants, hallways, stairs, corridors & landings

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Depending on designator, there should be a dining room or breakfast area available, unless meals are only served in bedrooms, in which case guests need to be told of this when they book and this should be highlighted in pre-booking information.
- Where televisions are not provided in bedrooms, there should be access to a lounge that has comfortable easy seating and a television. If there is a 'Peace and Quiet' policy that is clearly advertised in pre-booking information and guests are advised at the time of booking, a dispensation may then be made at the discretion of the assessing body.
- Corridors and stairs should be in good repair and free from obstruction.
- The levels of lighting in all public areas should be adequate for safety and comfort.
- All public areas should have an adequate level of heating.
- Free WiFi should be available in public areas where feasible for the use of email checking and light internet browsing. Charges are acceptable for downloading of music, films and other heavy internet usage.

Accessibility best practice

- Provide a variety of seating – low, high, firm, soft, with and without arms.
- On each step or change of level, provide a nosing strip that contrasts in colour to the floor.
- Provide at least one continuous handrail on steps and where changes in level occur.
- Provide clear signage. See the Written Communication Toolkit at www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/market-your-business.
- Ensure lifts provide audible messages and have raised letters and numbers on the control panel. A mirror on the rear wall assists a wheelchair user to manoeuvre in and out.

Sustainability best practice

- Use could be made of local artist's work, prints and/or photographs of images depicting local scenes, historical or heritage related images. It all adds to a visitor's enhanced sense of place.
- Energy saving lightbulbs could be used throughout the property. Make best use of natural light where possible.
- Improved insulation and greater use of thermostatically controlled and zoned heating will save on energy use.

7.2 Safety & security

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- The main entrance should be clearly identified and the doorway illuminated.
- A high degree of general safety and security should be maintained. All information on emergency procedures should be kept up-to-date.
- Adequate measures should be taken to protect the security of guests and their property. In particular consideration should be given to the safety and security of guests staying in bedrooms on the ground floor.
- For the safety of guests, all car parks should be adequately lit.

7.3 Exterior and condition of buildings & equipment

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- Buildings, their fixtures, fittings and exterior décor must be maintained in a sound, clean condition and must be fit for the purpose intended. All electrical or gas equipment should be safely maintained and in good working order.

Accessibility best practice

- Within the grounds of the property or at an identified location nearby, provide a toilet area for assistance dogs.
- Ensure paths are kept clear of obstacles, debris, moss, ice and fallen leaves and have firm, well maintained surfaces.
- Ensure that any permanent features en route are securely fixed, e.g. flower pots.

Sustainability best practice

- For grounds, gardens and frontages, consider the use of materials which are in keeping with the local environment and physical characteristics of the local geography, geology and age of the buildings.
- Consider using local varieties of flowers and plants.

8 Annexes

8.1 Safety & security

Minimum Entry Requirements (One Star)

- If guests are offered accommodation in an unconnected annexe or with separate external access, they must be informed when booking. They must also be advised if there is any change to a booking that involves an annexe or separate external access. They should be told where the annexe is.
- Paths or passageways to the annexe must be in good condition and adequately lit.

Appendix 1: Code of Conduct

All Guest Accommodation Quality Scheme participants must agree to comply with the following VisitEngland Code of Conduct:

Prior to booking:

- To describe accurately in any advertisement, brochure, or other printed or electronic media, the facilities and services provided.
- To make clear to guests in print, in electronic media and on the telephone exactly what is included in all prices quoted for accommodation, including taxes and any other surcharges. Details of charges for additional services/facilities should also be made clear, for example breakfast, leisure etc.
- To anticipate the needs of disabled guests and make reasonable adjustments to improve the premises and business practices.
- To make available an Accessibility Guide describing the accessibility aspects of the accommodation.
- To allow guests to view the accommodation prior to booking if requested.

At the time of booking:

- To clearly describe the cancellation policy to guests i.e. by telephone, fax, internet/email as well as in any printed information given to guests.
- To adhere to and not to exceed prices quoted at the time of booking for accommodation and other services.
- To make clear to guests if the accommodation offered is in an unconnected annexe or similar, and to indicate the location of such accommodation and any difference in comfort and/or amenities from accommodation in the establishment.

On arrival:

- To welcome all guests courteously and without discrimination in relation to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation (Equality Act 2010).

During the stay:

- To maintain standards of guest care, cleanliness and service appropriate to the type of establishment.
- To deal promptly and courteously with all enquiries, requests, bookings and correspondence from guests.
- To ensure complaint handling procedures are in place and that complaints received are investigated promptly and courteously and that the outcome is communicated to the guest.

On departure:

- To give each guest, on request, details of payments due and a receipt, if required/requested.

General:

- To ensure the accommodation is prepared for the arrival of guests at all times when the establishment is advertised as open.
- To advise guests, at any time prior to their stay, if there are any changes in what has been booked.
- To have a complaints handling procedure in place to deal promptly and fairly with all guest complaints.
- To hold current public liability insurance and to comply with all relevant statutory obligations including legislation applicable to fire, health and safety, planning and food safety.
- To allow VisitEngland representatives reasonable access to the establishment, on request, to confirm that the Code of Conduct is being observed or in order to investigate any complaint of a serious nature notified to them.
- When a business is sold or ceases to trade, every effort should be made to inform VisitEngland.

Appendix 2: Terms & Conditions

To view the up to date Terms & Conditions relating to participation in the VisitEngland Guest Accommodation Quality Scheme, please visit www.visitenglandassessmentsservices.com/terms.

