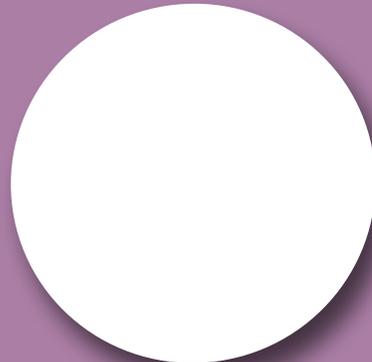


Accessible Tourism

As Scotland prepares to play host to three major events in 2014, we turn our attention to the quality of customer service. Whether it's overcoming seasonality, or ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to enjoy Scotland's unrivalled visitor experience, accessible tourism is relevant to us all. An EU funded project has revealed that the accessible travel market exceeds 133 million tourists and could generate nearly €90 billion.

Accessible Tourism is a win-win business model and you can make a big difference and attract a loyal new market by thinking creatively about your customers. Providing the right information and customer service is not only cost effective, but can give you a competitive advantage.

Eildon Holiday Cottages and Easter Kincapple Bed and Breakfast have opened their doors to guests with mobility needs and have seen positive results. Read on and be inspired to seize the opportunities that a new business market can offer you.



Eildon Holiday Cottages

Self-catering,
Melrose, Scottish Borders



The award-winning Eildon Holiday Cottages is a converted 18th century farm steading forming six accessible self-catering cottages. Situated in a fold of the Eildon Hills above the attractive small Border town of Melrose, the cottages have views over the Tweed Valley to the Lammermuir and the Moorfoot Hills beyond. Each has between one and three bedrooms, with the largest sleeping six. Five of the six cottages are graded category one for unassisted wheelchair access in VisitScotland's Accessibility Scheme.

Access facilities

The farm buildings were converted into cottages in the early 1990s and a lot of the accessibility features were installed at design stage. Proprietor Rob Martin explains: "If you can incorporate accessibility facilities you can open yourself to a bigger market and hopefully get more bookings."

All of the doorways have wide access and the floors are level. Three of the six cottages are on the ground floor, while three have bedroom and bathroom facilities on the ground floor. In all of the bathrooms there is plenty of room around the basins and toilets for wheelchair access. Light switches and kitchen facilities have also been designed for wheelchair access – with low sinks and easy access to pots and pans.

Business benefits

"We don't want to discriminate between disabled and non-disabled," comments Rob. "We want the holiday cottages to be open to everyone so that both disabled and non-disabled guests can holiday together equally, without discrimination." Ever since the Eildon Holiday Cottages opened there has been a strong demand from visitors with specific accessibility needs, helping Rob's business to attract new custom and build a loyal customer base.

"Today I've got six cottages and five of the six are full, with the sixth booked for a long weekend tomorrow," says Rob. "When you have disabled guests coming to stay, they really appreciate the facilities. They look after them and they come back year after year." ●



Rob's tips for businesses looking to tap into the accessible market:

- “ Provide what you can – not every property can do everything, but reasonable adjustments can make a big difference.”
- “ Be open to enquiries. We often get guests phoning up to talk through facilities we have here because they have particular requirements.”
- “ Provide clear information on your website to avoid guests turning up and finding out that facilities aren't quite as good as expected – which can be serious in some cases.”
- “ Be understanding and offer help where you can. If you can't provide specialist beds or mattresses then you can always hire them.”