



Considerations for Disabled Travelers: Accessibility and Customer Service in Unique Lodging Environments

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

Unique lodging environments offer many choices of experiences, from bed & breakfast inns to cabins. These accommodations promise unparalleled adventures for travelers seeking novelty instead of staying at conventional hotels. However, amidst the allure of these distinct stays, it's essential to address the accessibility needs of all guests, particularly those with disabilities.



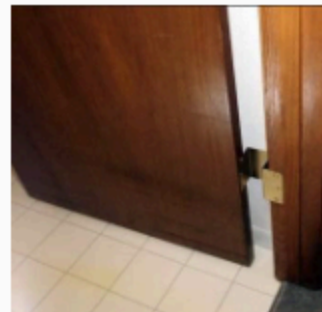
Accessibility encompasses far more than physical accommodations. It entails creating an environment where individuals with disabilities can navigate, communicate, and engage with ease and dignity. For all lodging environments, this involves anticipating and addressing the diverse needs of guests with disabilities, ensuring they can fully participate in the experience.

Accessibility Information

People have individual needs and require precise and accurate information to book a room confidently. Transparency is critical to empowering guests to make informed decisions about their stay. Detailed information about the property's accessibility features, amenities, and available services allows disabled travelers to plan accordingly. This information should be readily accessible on the website and promotional materials, enabling guests to assess the suitability of the accommodation before booking.

Physical Accessibility

Distinctive lodgings often present physical challenges due to their unconventional structures, building age, or remote locations. Owners and managers must meticulously assess the property's layout, identifying potential barriers such as stairs, narrow doors and hallways, and uneven terrain in the parking area and around the property.



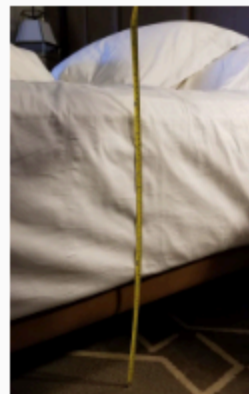
Features like ramps, accessible solid surfaces, and level pathways ensure that guests with mobility impairments can move freely and confidently throughout the premises.

Accessible parking spaces and entrances can enhance the overall accessibility of the property. Simple, low-cost fixes at the entry to the lodging environment include door threshold ramps, lever door hardware, and swing-away offset door hinges. These hinges can add two to three and one-half inches to the width of the door opening, thus allowing people with wheelchairs and walkers an accessible entrance. The goal is to have 32 inches of clearance on all doors.

Many people with disabilities will require accommodations in the bathroom, including a shower chair, grab bars in the shower and next to the toilet, knee space under the sink, and room to navigate in a wheelchair.

High beds are difficult for many people with disabilities to get into. Beds should be no higher than 23 inches and no lower than 17 inches above the floor.

For people who use wheelchairs or are short in stature, the kitchen needs to have fifty percent of the items stored in cabinets that are reachable. Ideally, items should be no lower than 18 inches from the floor and no higher than 48 inches. This includes the location of the microwave.



Take time to evaluate the furniture placement on your property. Trace the path of travel, entering, and maneuvering throughout in a wheelchair. Use a yardstick or tape measure as a guide, allowing for 36-inch wide passageways. Some furniture may need to be removed or repositioned.

Communication Accessibility

Effective communication is essential for providing exceptional service to all guests. In unique lodging environments, where staff may be limited or communication channels unconventional, offering alternative methods for guests with hearing or vision impairments is crucial. Visual aids, written instructions, or sign language interpreters can facilitate seamless communication and enhance the guest experience.

Personalized Assistance

Recognizing that every guest is unique, providing personalized assistance can significantly enhance the experience for disabled travelers. Whether arranging transportation, offering guided tours, or assisting with daily tasks, going the extra mile to meet individual needs demonstrates a commitment to exceptional service.

Training Staff

Empowering staff with the knowledge and skills to interact sensitively and effectively with disabled guests is essential. Training programs should cover disability awareness, communication techniques, and practical strategies for accommodating diverse needs. By fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding, staff can ensure that every guest feels valued and respected.

Conclusion

In hospitality, providing exceptional service means prioritizing the needs and preferences of all guests, including those with disabilities. In unique lodging environments, where creativity and innovation abound, ensuring accessibility requires careful consideration and proactive measures. By embracing inclusivity and tailoring customer service, owners and managers can create memorable experiences that resonate with disabled travelers and set a new standard for accessible hospitality.

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About the Columnist

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility consultant, speaker, author, and CEO of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. www.RosemarieSpeaks.com

She speaks to and consults with hotels and lodging venues to ensure the environments are accessible and that services are provided to accommodate people with disabilities.

Having been paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, sharing her experiences. She presents to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond as a recognized expert on accessible and universal design.

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