



VisitEngland™



HOTEL BOATS

VisitEngland's Quality Standards for Hotel Boats



MV Edward Elgar

Welcome to the VisitEngland Quality Standards for Accreditation

At VisitEngland, we're passionate about raising England's profile, increasing the volume and value of tourism, and developing England's visitor economy by working with organisations of all sizes and specialities. These quality standards will help you become part of this mission.

A VisitEngland Accreditation gives potential customers a label they can trust. Highlighting your dedication to quality shows that your business has been independently verified by the national tourism agency as offering a consistently high standard of service.

Over the years, our Quality Standards have evolved to keep pace with consumer expectations, and we've worked hard to ensure our accreditations are accurate, consistent and reliable. We also work closely with accommodation providers to ensure our standards are straightforward and realistic. This document is the result of an independently chaired Quality Advisory Board which included key stakeholders from across the hospitality industry, that was convened in 2023 to modernise and simplify the standards.

Our Quality Standards are the building blocks that form the basis of what our assessors will be looking for when they visit you. By reading and applying these criteria carefully, you can be confident that your establishment will meet the high industry standards required to become recognised by VisitEngland. And remember, the assessment is not only of the physical product, but also of the experience that your establishment provides. It's not just a box-ticking exercise. We focus on the quality of what you offer, and not on what you don't offer. We look forward to working with and promoting your property.

– VisitEngland

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How does it work

Quality is the key

VisitEngland understands that quality is the key to success within the modern hospitality industry. In order for your business 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 Accreditation Standard you will receive an assessment visit every 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 written management report. Both these tools are designed to help you to improve your business.

Service and hospitality

Seamless and efficient service requires thought and planning. This starts with your website, the arrangements for guests gaining access to the accommodation, the ability to obtain assistance in an emergency and the checkout procedures.

Bedrooms and bathrooms

Whatever the style or concept of your 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 accommodation more welcoming

Cleanliness

Cleanliness is of paramount importance to all guests at all levels. It is expected that all facilities will be clean throughout.

Hints and 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.
- 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.

Quality

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 confirm whether the Accreditation is achieved.

To achieve an accreditation your accommodation will need to satisfy three elements:

- All relevant requirements must be met (detailed later in this booklet)
- The overall percentage score for quality must reach the Accredited standard requirement of 60% and each of the critical areas (see below)

The relevant standard of quality in the critical areas must be achieved:

- Cleanliness
- Bedrooms
- Bathrooms
- Any Public Areas
- Kitchen Facilities (where these are available for guest use)

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.

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. 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 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.
- The first time you meet your assessor is likely to be when they arrive at your boat for a visit.
- You might be concerned that you have not yet provided or understood all of the requirements of the assessment standard. 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 boat are what make it unique. Your assessor is there to enhance that, not to change it.



Sustainability

Sustainability is becoming a business basic

To meet growing expectations from consumers and address our twin challenges of climate change and nature loss, it is increasingly essential that your operations are run as sustainably as possible. Many organisations and businesses are going further than just preventing more damage being caused, and are aiming to have a positive impact on people and places, by implementing regenerative tourism practices. Both sustainable and regenerative tourism make business sense. See the VisitEngland Business Advice Hub for more details: visitengland.org/businessadvice

Getting started

The crucial thing is to take steps to start doing something: think measure, monitor, reduce. Look to measure how much gas, electricity, water and waste is used each month, monitor this to identify patterns and track where efficiencies could be made, and then use this information to implement changes and reduce consumption. This not only helps our environment but will also save you money.

Taking things further

If you have gone beyond the basics and are already taking these and other steps to be more sustainable, you may wish to demonstrate this to the growing number of consumers factoring environmental and/or social criteria into their purchasing decisions by joining one of the sustainable tourism certification schemes that exist in England. See the VisitEngland Business Advice Hub for more information on how to choose the certification that's right for you: visitengland.org/businessadvice

Sustainability – easy wins

PEOPLE:

- Think local to keep money in the community. Welcome packs or hospitality trays can include local produce (or Fair-Trade items, which benefit communities in developing countries). Make use of airtight containers rather than providing things individually wrapped. Waste plastic can cause litter and impact health.
- Display the work of local artists or photographers depicting local scenes and historical and heritage related images – it all adds to a visitor's enhanced sense of place.
- Make it easy for customers to do the right thing. For example, including public transport options for getting to your boat in promotional and booking information to make it easier for guests to leave the car at home.

PLACE:

- Better insulation and greater use of thermostatically controlled and zoned heating will save on energy use.
- Food waste is a major contributor to climate change. Weigh your food waste for a week and see where you could make changes to cut this down.
- Examine your stock order history and review the single-use plastic items your business consumes. How many are just ordered from habit? Can you eliminate any items by doing things differently?

PARTNERSHIP

- Partner with other organisations looking to improve the local environment and support communities. For example, could you team up with a local college to provide work experience, or if you have space, can you work with a local wildlife trust to install bird or bat boxes.
- Consider creating a sustainability policy, setting out the environmental and sustainable management actions taken by your business. The VisitEngland Business Advice Hub has resources to help get you started. Ensure any staff are fully briefed on your sustainability policy and can articulate your progress to customers.

PROFIT

- Make best use of local tourist information in your properties promotional literature, on the website and in any visitor information located in the accommodation. Or consider an online information system, such as 'Touch Stay'.
- Consider installing solar panels on the roof to reduce energy costs.

Visit the VisitEngland Business Advice Hub for more information on all aspects of sustainability.



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Accessibility

Improving your accessibility – A valuable market

Many people have accessibility requirements including disabled people, such as those with hearing and visual impairments, wheelchair users, older and less mobile people and people with pushchairs. The accessible tourism market is worth around £14.6bn 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 [visitengland.org/access](https://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 sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, or age (this applies to those aged 18 or above), 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.

- 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' for example, amend a 'no dogs' policy.
- 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 free guidance and resources to help increase engagement with the valuable accessible tourism market in the Accessible and Inclusive Tourism Toolkit for Businesses. Go to [visitengland.org/access](https://www.visitengland.org/access)

It is important to provide information on the accessibility of your facilities and services and this is a requirement for all scheme participants.

You can provide details of your venue's key accessibility features on your website and supply this information for inclusion on your [RatedTrips.com](https://wwwRatedTrips.com) venue listing by completing a new questionnaire produced by VisitEngland.

Today's guests also want detailed and factual descriptions of venue accessibility, in the form of an Accessibility Guide, to empower them to make personal choices.

Participants can book and pay for a Detailed Access Guide with AccessAble to provide robust accessibility information on your venue. To learn more and book either a Guided or On Site Assessment, go to [visitengland.youraccessibilityguide.co.uk](https://www.visitengland.youraccessibilityguide.co.uk) (not a requirement of scheme participation).

Statutory obligations

Minimum entry requirements

- **Public liability insurance:** whilst not a statutory requirement, it is a requirement for participation in the Accreditation standard. Proprietors may be asked to provide evidence that Public Liability Insurance cover is being maintained and that the requirements are being fulfilled.

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

- Adhere to the regulations related to passenger capacity, seaworthiness and insurance. If in doubt, the [Association of Inland Navigation Authorities](#), provides a framework for safe operation on inland waterways.
- **Portable water suppliers (where applicable):** mandatory testing and evidence of certification.
- Alcohol licensing applicable where provided such as complimentary arrival drinks.
- TV Licensing (where applicable).
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 Amended 2023:** comply with this order, supply evidence that a written fire risk assessment has been carried out.
- **Portable Appliance Testing (PAT):** electrical appliances should be subject to service and testing in accordance with guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- **Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998:** to comply with regulations to ensure all fittings are maintained and annual gas safety inspections are carried out by a Gas Safe engineer, and certificate is issued and displayed in the accommodation.
- **Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (regulations 2022):** comply with these regulations.
- **Food safety/hygiene:** Register with the local Environmental Health department if food is served.
- **Health and safety:** operate safely with due regard to health and safety legislation.
- **Bunk Bed Regulations:** Bunk beds sold in the UK must conform to the current safety regulations.
- British Standards applying to items such as cots, high chairs and play pens.
- **Blind cord legislation:** According to the BS EN 13120 regulations, your blinds must have no accessible cords – if they do, they must be fitted with the appropriate child safety devices.
- **Planning:** comply with local planning regulations.
- **Licensing:** comply with all local licensing regulations.
- **Data Protection Act/General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) as of May 2018:** comply with this act/these regulations.

- **The 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.
- **Food allergy and intolerance:** (where applicable) In the UK, food businesses must inform guests if they use any of the 14 allergens as ingredients in the food and drink they provide on menus or verbally.
- **Natasha's Law:** (where applicable) Where food is freshly prepared, then packaged and displayed before being sold, must have a label listing full ingredients and highlighting any of the 14 major allergens it contains.
- **PCI compliance:** The standards of the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS). The standard contains a set of requirements designed to increase data security and protect merchants and customers when taking and making payments by debit or credit card.
- **Single use plastics:** An extension on the ban for customers including plates, trays, cutlery, bowls, balloon sticks and polystyrene boxes for ready to consume food items.
- **Equality Act 2010:** Comply with this act. Welcome all guests courteously and without discrimination in relation to sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, age (this applies to those aged 18 or above). Make 'reasonable' adjustments to improve services for disabled customers.

Standards

Minimum entry requirements for Accreditation

Emergency notices must be prominently displayed giving details of:

- 24 hour emergency site contact, location and telephone numbers (including 999) For: Police, Doctor, Dentist, Fire and Rescue, local hospital, veterinarian, other relevant local emergency services, for example, HM Coastguard or Mountain Rescue.
- In locations where there is no mobile telephone signal, a telephone capable of making emergency calls must be available to visitors. This may be located in the wheelhouse on a hotel boat.
- Tourist information to be provided including details of nearest shops, cash machines and local attractions.
- An appropriate degree of general safety and security to be maintained in the accommodation and facilities, appropriate to the scale of the business.
- Attention to customer care and security.
- All shower cubicles should have the following fitted or provided:
 - Door and/or shower curtain.
 - Non-slip shower base or non-slip shower mats.
 - A shelf or soap dish within the shower.
- Hooks for hanging clothes to be provided in both WC cubicles and inside shower cubicles.
- Adequate provision for refuse disposal must be made.
- Guests to be provided with a key to the to the entrance door of their bedroom on a boat.

Pre-arrival and arrival information

- To make clear to guests exactly what is included in the prices quoted for the accommodation, for example for a boat – meals, drinks, towels etc. Where VAT is applicable, all prices to be shown inclusive of VAT at standard rate.
- Full details of the style of accommodation offered, including sleeping arrangements and washing facilities provided on the website or printed form in advance of normal booking.
- Details of any in-house policies, for example, no smoking/vaping, no pets, etc must be communicated at the time of booking, for example, clearly stated on website.
- Prospective guests should be made aware, prior to booking, of charges for additional services or facilities available, including cancellation terms and/or breakage deposits.
- Prices quoted at the time of booking not exceeded.
- The following information to be readily available prior to booking:
 - Nature of water supply, drinking water must be provided.
 - Types of energy supply, if not electric.

Electricity voltage, if not standard.

Availability of WiFi and/or mobile phone coverage.

A map and/or directions provided showing the docking location of the boat on the day of arrival and departure.

- Potential check-in/ check-out times.
- Car parking arrangements whilst on the boat.
- Full terms and conditions clearly stated.

Exterior Facilities

- External areas to be maintained in good order.
- Where guests are able to sit on the roof or in an open area of the boat then garden furniture / appropriate seating should be provided.
- Exterior of the boat to be in good repair.
- All exterior furniture and fittings appropriate to the style of the boat and to be in good condition.

Beds

- Beds might not be traditional, but all must offer good space and comfort for sleeping. Adequate mattress protection required, the provision of pillows and bedding is recommended.

Shower room facilities

- Modern facilities to include a mirror, shelf and hook, shaver/hairdryer point (unless fitted in the bedroom), waste bin with lid, well maintained toilet seat, soap and clean towels.
- Hot water at all times.
- Adequate lighting provided.
- Adequate heating provided, when required

Living space

- Space might be limited, but should be adequate for the number of guests catered for.
- All interior furniture and fittings appropriate to the style of the accommodation and in good condition.
- Lighting and heating - Adequate means of heating must be available at all times, even if accommodation is only open during main season.

Housekeeping and cleanliness

- Cleanliness is of paramount importance to guests, so a high standard of cleanliness must be maintained throughout the accommodation.
- Particular attention must be given to kitchens (where applicable), shower rooms and toilets and items involving direct contact with guests, such as bedding, linen, towels, showers, washbasins, WCs, flooring, seating, crockery, cutlery, glassware, kitchen utensils and equipment.
- It is the proprietor's responsibility to ensure that all accommodation is thoroughly cleaned throughout, before each new let, irrespective of whether the guests have cleaned it prior to departure. Any broken or damaged items should be replaced between lettings.
- Grounds, gardens and parking areas (where applicable) must be well maintained and well presented at all times.

Code of conduct

All 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 allow guests to view the accommodation prior to booking if requested.

At the time of booking:

- To clearly describe the cancellation policy to guests such as by telephone, 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.

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 boat.
- 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 boat 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.

How does it work

- **Step 1 - Join a scheme on the [VisitEngland Assessment Services](#) site.** Fill out your details using the form on the Join page. You will then be contacted about the next steps.
- **Step 2 - We receive and process your payment.** For new applicants, the data received from you will be used to create a record for your property as 'awaiting grading'.
- **Step 3 - We assign an Assessor, once your payment has cleared**
- **Step 4 - The Assessor books the assessment**
- **Step 5 - The Assessor completes the assessment.**
- **Step 6 - We complete a report which is sent to you within 14 working days.**
- **Step 7 - Your establishment is now **Assessed** and you are entitled to unlimited use of your quality rating in all your promotional activity together with the internationally recognised Quality Rose Marque.**



CONTACT

VisitEngland Assessment Services

t: 01256 338 350

e: VisitEnglandAssessmentServices@aamediagroup.co.uk

w: visitenglandassessmentservices.com