



THE KINGDOM OF FIFE



HIGHLAND PALACE AND THE HOME OF FIFE
FROM 1800
BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST

In the 18th century the King had a view of Scotland and the surrounding islands from the palace. They created a series of paintings to show the king's view of the country. The painting shows the palace and the surrounding landscape of the Fife peninsula.

Long before
knew today
ruler of

**BECOME AN
AUTISM FRIENDLY
BUSINESS**

CONTENTS

2

3

Introduction

4

What is accessible and inclusive tourism?

5

The importance of accessible and inclusive tourism

6

7

The benefits of adopting accessible and Inclusive Tourism

8

TO

17

How to improve accessibility and inclusivity for autistic visitors

18

Create your own accessibility guide

19

20

Accessible employment for autistic adults

21

Further information and resources

INTRODUCTION

Accessibility is a hot topic in the travel and tourism space, but what does it all mean? How can you ensure your business is accessible for autistic clientele?

Human rights aside, there is now a recognized powerful business incentive for tourism businesses to become fully accessible, particularly with autism in mind. When you consider the fact that approximately **1 in 100 people in the UK are autistic** (the real figure may be much higher due to those who go undiagnosed) and that many will not engage with travel and tourism if they do not feel comfortable that their needs will be met, then there is a significant gap in the market that needs to be filled.

Having a comprehensive understanding of autism within your staff team and how to support your autistic customers will help to future-proof your business, increase customer satisfaction and potentially generate a higher revenue threshold - not to mention the fact that everyone involved will have greater awareness of autism and know how to treat those with hidden disabilities in daily life.

Adopting, implementing and keeping up to date with autism-inclusive practices will not only improve accessibility for autistic customers and their friends/family/carers, but for staff and the wider public as well - which should always be seen as positive and necessary action.

Visiting new destinations, exploring attractions, engaging with people working in the tourism industry and staying in accommodation of any kind can be very challenging for autistic travellers, as well as any travel companions and/or carers. Ensuring that all autistic visitors have their needs and accommodations met can not only give these guests an unforgettable experience, but also provide you with an enviable reputation that is currently lacking in the industry - which in turn can be extremely rewarding for everyone involved.

This guide aims to support tourism organisations and businesses of all sizes to become more accessible and inclusive of autistic visitors (and their travel companions) through a variety of concise and useful information such as; case studies, reports, existing resources and relevant and up-to-date information. It highlights the need for increasing awareness amongst staff teams and improving physical environments.

The guide also aims to remove common misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding autism and accessibility within tourism, as well as help industry leaders and professionals understand the market potential which is currently not being realised – and that **in many cases small and simple low or no cost changes can make a big difference**. As such, use this guide to focus your attention on the things you can do to move your business forward and be ahead of the game.

72%

OF DISABLED CUSTOMERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO VISIT NEW PLACES IF THEY FEEL WELCOMED BY STAFF OR IF VENUES APPEAR TO CARE ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY



ONLY 13% OF FAMILIES WITH AN AUTISTIC FAMILY MEMBER SURVEYED BY IBCCES* TAKE FAMILY VACATIONS. YET, 93% OF RESPONDENTS SAID THEY WOULD BE MORE INCLINED TO TRAVEL IF AUTISM CERTIFIED OPTIONS WERE AVAILABLE.

*IBCCES <https://ibcces.org/>

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM

Within the travel industry, tourism businesses who have already improved accessibility to the highest possible standard appeal to a wider range of visitors. It's not just disabled visitors themselves who benefit from the implementations - it also includes those who may travel with the disabled visitor (i.e. friends, family or carers), as well as anyone else who may benefit from any of the accessible measures put in place.

Accessibility is evolving at a rapid pace, and that is putting many tourism-related businesses off engaging with it. Many accessibility plans still focus solely on wheelchair users. While this previously might have passed as enough to be considered accessible, this is no longer the case.

Did you know? Only approximately 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair, there are many more disabilities to consider when working on your plan.

Some businesses find dealing with anything disability-related a scary topic. It is important for businesses in any industry to realise that it is very unlikely that they will get everything right the first time when implementing an accessibility plan and even if it feels they have achieved their goals, things will progress and evolve again making some - or all - components redundant. That is the nature of accessibility within the modern tourism industry; it is constantly evolving, and businesses should not be put off by this, but rather work with current organisations, disability advocates and engage with available resources to keep up-to-date and inform their business' accessibility plan. It is also important for businesses to welcome constructive criticism (primarily from disabled guests themselves) in order to maintain and develop not only your accessibility but also your own customer base.

This toolkit will help guide you in the right direction with this.

BENEFITS OF ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM

There are many social and economic benefits of accessible and inclusive tourism!



LONGER BREAKS

People with accessibility needs often take longer holiday breaks than average and therefore tend to spend more money per trip.



HIGHER SPENDERS

Disabled and senior travellers spend significantly more when they go on holiday than other market groups.



INCREASED LOYALTY

Inclusive businesses have higher occupancy rates and a more loyal customer base who is keen to recommend them.



HUMAN RIGHTS

Everyone deserves to have a positive tourism experience!



RECOGNITION AND AWARENESS

Accessibility/inclusivity is rapidly becoming a key component of modern tourism. Become known as a leader in your area of expertise and gain exposure to the autistic travel audience.



97% of respondents in a recent IBCCES survey said they are not satisfied with the current travel options for families with autistic individuals.

Did you know? You are legally obliged under The Equality Act 2010 to ensure that your business or service is as accessible as possible. For more detailed information on the Act go to

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-guidance>

*IBCCES <https://ibcces.org/>

WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSIVITY FOR AUTISTIC VISITORS

There are many options for your business in terms of improving accessibility and inclusivity for autistic visitors.

This guide has a list of points for your business to consider when working on your accessibility plan. While some points are essential for all businesses looking to become accessible, others may not be possible or relevant depending on the size and/or nature of your business.



Remember you don't have to do everything in this guide, and you might not get it right first time – that's ok!

Staff training

First and foremost, education for ALL staff members is fundamental in improving your accessibility. Lack of awareness and understanding from staff is one of the major barriers preventing many autistic people from engaging with travel/tourism, and remains a major criticism for those that do engage.

Education is the most powerful tool in both understanding and dispelling misinformation. If staff aren't educated in autism this can lead to a variety of unnecessary scenarios when they are dealing with autistic guests.



There are a variety of programs run by autism advocacy groups and other disability organisations aimed at offering comprehensive staff training for businesses and/or events. This will allow a clear understanding of differences to be expected in communication, behaviour, mannerisms, responses etc.

Many of the following points call for/rely on proper staff training being implemented and practiced successfully.

Work with and listen to Autistic Voices!

If you don't consult the autistic community in your campaign to make your business more accessible to autistic guests this will usually mean it will be less successful.

So, while good intentions may exist, the planning and development of any campaign or implementation that relies solely on people who do not have autism, and haven't consulted the autistic community, will not fully consider the implications and finer intricacies.

It is important to highlight how important using autistic voices in your plans are to guarantee they are both effective and successful.

Look at other destinations and attractions for inspiration

Looking at tried and tested accessibility initiatives to observe and explore is absolutely acceptable, and research into similar destinations/attractions elsewhere can reveal many accessible options that might have previously gone unnoticed.



A popular initiative being increasingly employed throughout major European destinations is to offer free entrance for disabled visitors (and many also offer free entrance for their companion/carer too). An increased risk of poverty is a major concern within the disabled community (especially the autistic community where the unemployment rate is very high), and using this initiative can increase your overall visitor numbers, as you now allow access to more visitors who would otherwise be excluded. Some attractions opt for discounted admission tickets instead.

Hiring a disability tourism professional with this area of expertise to advise can help if you do not have the time, resources or expertise to conduct your own research.

Consider external certification/ accreditation

While there is currently no centralised certification system for autism (or disabilities in general), there are many reputable organisations out there that can certify your business to show that you are achieving an accessibility plan set by their own high standards.

The exact nature of this accreditation will vary between organisations, and adopting the right one will make it clear to autistic guests that they can be assured their needs will be met upon visiting. An estimated 85% of disabled people will search for information about accessibility related to their disability online before visiting a venue for the first time.

Create a sensory friendly environment

Autistic individuals have a sensory system that operates differently to their allistic (non-autistic) counterparts. While the exact manifestations can vary between individuals, in general, autistic people do not process or filter sensory information in the same way as others, and often either experience sensory input at a much higher or lower intensity. This can get incredibly overwhelming and lead to distress in a variety of circumstances.

There are some specific things you can do related to sensory aspects of autism

Visual

Avoid harsh, bright lighting, especially fluorescent lights (this can trigger drowsiness, distraction, discomfort or excessive eye strain in many individuals).

Avoid bright colours, especially multiple or clashing colours. Instead go for more muted tones.

Avoid any unnecessary clutter, as this makes visual processing a lot more difficult when concentration is needed.

Touch and space

Some autistic people may have clumsy movements and problems with organisation and following instructions (developmental coordination disorder, or dyspraxia). Ensure there is enough space for manoeuvring, including no unnecessary obstructions, such as tripping hazards or sharp edges.

Clear signage and floor markings can also be beneficial to clarify pathways and routes. Clear signage will benefit everyone in the long run.

For some autistic people any form of touch is to be avoided at all costs as it can be uncomfortable or even painful to the individual – this also ties into the claustrophobia and social phobia that many experience.

Offer alternative waiting areas or queue-jump passes for individuals that require these accommodations.

Avoid any social expectations that may require any form of physical touch, for example handshakes.

Auditory

Ensure there are plenty of soft furnishings to dampen reverberation or echoes in the room(s).

Have clear visual signs warning of any alarms that might go off and information about what to do. All signs should be clear, well-placed and contain a visual element as well as a short text.

Allow the use of ear plugs, ear defenders and noise cancelling headphones for any individuals that need them.

Keep background music to a low volume. Having music playing too loudly, can lead to distraction and overstimulation.

Taste

If food and/or beverages are on offer, try to make sure there are a variety of options to suit a wide range of diets. It is also important that catering staff are open to customer requests for customisations where possible.

If you have a specific site that does not usually allow visitors to bring and consume their own food, this could be considered as a significant barrier to autistic visitors, those with medical conditions and severe allergies.

Smell

Avoid air fresheners, scented candles, incense, strong smelling perfume, and harsh smelling cleaning products in areas where guests will be present. If this isn't possible, for example, if there is a swimming pool on site and there is a strong smell of chlorine, ensure there is clear signage warning of the strong odour.

Some other things to think about

Create wide open spaces for customers and guests to eat and drink, with a variety of seating options available including single seating, small, medium, and large tables, benches, chairs and stools. Perhaps even a quiet area with bean bags and sensory friendly lighting.

Offer a designated sensory room for guests

Venues should create clearly marked, designated calm, quiet rooms or an area for guests to regulate themselves as and when they need it (this may however not be possible for smaller attractions and businesses). This space should not be policed by security – no evidence of diagnosis should be required to enter – as this is not something routinely carried by most disabled people.

Sensory rooms should always be available at larger/busier events and venues, as they help to create a safe space for users and provide opportunities to de-stress and reduce anxiety. These spaces also promote self-care/self-nurture and recovery as they are therapeutic in nature.

Provide quiet/autism-friendly hours for visits

This one is specifically for busier attractions/venues and/or those with more confined space(s). Advising guests on your quietest operating hours can help provide autistic patrons with a safe and comforting environment to enjoy your attraction.

Many autistic people experience overstimulation in noisy and busy spaces, with many reporting that these environments worsen their overall stress and anxiety. If you don't provide this vital information it will prevent many from considering your attraction as an accessible option to visit.

Accessible toilet facilities

Make sure sign posting for accessible toilets has a strong, yet clear indicator that these toilets are for all disabled guests/customers, including those with invisible disabilities. Staff members/security, should not challenge anyone from using these facilities on the grounds that they 'don't look disabled'.

Similarly, clear signage should be used throughout the facility to indicate where the closest toilets are, particularly highlighting disability facilities available. It is also important to offer adult size changing facilities to ensure you are fully accessible for a wide range of disabilities.

Offer sensory backpacks to guests

Sensory backpacks can vary in shape, size and contents, but usually include items such as noise-reduction headphones, fidget toys, and weighted cushions.

This service should be clearly communicated at every opportunity through your website, social media, leaflets, in emails, via signage at the entrance etc and can be borrowed for free from the front desk/reception (or designated pick-up spot). This should be a free service, but you consider asking for details from the guest or a form of ID to safely store until the pack is returned before the customer/guest leaves.

Implement a sensory map and social story

Sensory maps highlight the sensory elements of the venue that autistic guests might find some difficulty with. For example, this map could include differences in temperature, lighting arrangements and where some rooms/areas may feature strong smells (for example, where food is served).

Visitors should also be able to use this map to identify sensory-friendly spaces in the venue. Your map should be updated regularly to reflect any changes to the site or to include specific events planned.

Social Stories help autistic visitors prepare for a visit. This guide will walk guests through a visit, detailing the route(s) through the venue/site, the signage, and other other accessible spaces. This should also include additional information that will help individuals plan their trip, easily find their way around the venue, as well as highlighting activities and facilities available.

Both should be available before any visit/event takes place and will ideally be available to guests at the reception too. Autistic tourism professionals or autism advocacy groups can provide help in writing and structuring this.

Consider signing up to join the Sunflower Lanyard scheme

The Sunflower Lanyard subtly shows staff that the wearer has a hidden disability, and that the person might also need some extra support.

Many businesses and venues have now integrated this, and implementation should go along with staff training, as they also run a partner program to expand their network.

Once your accreditation is complete, and the scheme has been implemented, this should be clearly advertised to guests, customers etc. All staff should recognize the Lanyard upon sight and know how to appropriately behave around guests wearing one.

Encourage and welcome feedback

It is important for anyone working on an accessibility plan for their business, organisation or service to be open to constructive criticism to help improve future events and services, as well as general venue accessibility standards. (continued on next page)

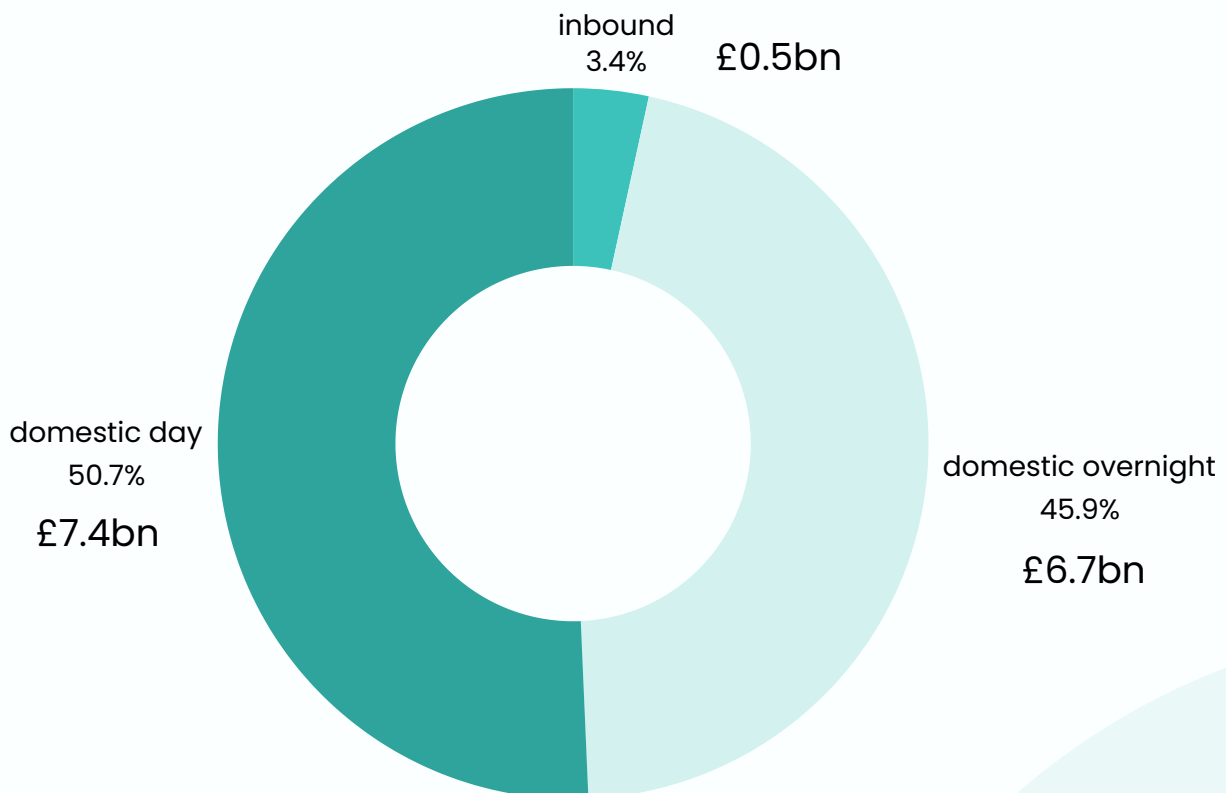
Have a system in place that encourages and enables customers to (anonymously if they wish) provide feedback based on their experience of your service or venue. It is important that the accessibility plan remains a working document that is continually reviewed and updated to enable it to remain relevant.

Disabled guests can offer a deeper insight into accessibility features that have been overlooked, not addressed properly or missed entirely. All suggestions and recommendations should be considered and implemented if feasible.

A report by Visit Britain in 2023 revealed the following facts about the national accessible tourism market within the UK



The total travel expenditure generated by those with a health impairment or travelling in a group where a member had a health impairment is estimated to be **£14.6 billion annually**



The spend from trips taken by those with an impairment and their travelling companions made up 2.2% of all inbound trip spending in England in 2018, 24% of domestic overnight trip spending and 18% of day visit spending in England in the 12 months to June 2023.

What sort of information should you include in your marketing?

Marketing your accessibility is just as important as implementing it. Many businesses and attractions fail to properly market their accessibility measures even after introducing them, which means they often go unnoticed and are not accessible online for those who are seeking relevant information to enable them to prepare for their visit.

Think about the following:

- **Accurate and up-to-date accessibility information about your venue or site.** For example, availability of facilities such as quiet areas, sensory maps, accessible toilets, accreditations etc.
- **Make sure anything new related to accessibility and inclusivity is posted to your social media accounts as well as your website.** Regularly posting about all access features, initiatives and events will increase your visibility within the disabled community.
- **Information related to your operations and what has been done to encourage a positive perception of disability,** otherwise known as social accessibility. For example, all staff have attended autism awareness training.
- **Information about what else to see and do in the area,** for example some time-saving recommendations of activities, attractions, pubs and restaurants that have good accessibility credentials (supporting other accessible businesses and advertising can go a long way within the disabled community).



CREATE AN ACCESSIBILITY GUIDE

Access surveys consistently show that a lack of published accessibility information is one of the top barriers. This is true for both disabled people and others with specific access needs.

85%

OF DISABLED PEOPLE
WILL CHECK A BUSINESS'
WEBSITE BEFORE
VISITING.

An Accessibility Guide can help you to communicate your facilities and services to disabled people and other customers who want specific accessibility information, such as older travellers and families with young children.

56%

OF VISITORS THINK THAT
IF A VENUE DOESN'T
ADVERTISE THEIR
ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES,
IT'S BECAUSE THEY
DON'T HAVE ANY.

Detailing the accessibility of your venue in an Accessibility Guide will enable these people, their family and friends to make informed decisions as to where to stay and visit in view of their individual requirements.

Visitors with access requirements will make decisions to visit based on what they can find out about your offer. Promoting your accessibility will ensure that you don't miss out on attracting this loyal customer segment.

VisitScotland and VisitEngland have developed **[accessibilityguides.org](https://www.accessibilityguides.org)**. This website allows you to work through a tailored questionnaire and create your own guide. It's free, quick and easy to use, and will enable you to provide all the information your customers need to prepare their visit.

ACCESSIBLE EMPLOYMENT

Encouraging job applications from autistic people is good for business too. Seriously considering their applications, and making reasonable adjustments to ensure they can thrive in the work environment, is equally good for business.

By providing an avenue for gainful employment of autistic adults:



It can help increase the number of high-quality applicants and help fill gaps created by the hospitality recruitment crisis.



You can create a workforce that reflects your diverse range of customers and bring additional skills and experience to your business.



It will allow those who are normally excluded from employment to gain a professional purpose.

This may require a complete revamp of the application and interview processes, as these are the primary factors that prevent most autistic adults from getting into work.

To find out exactly how this can be achieved for your particular business you can consult with a disabled professional or advocacy group with relevant experience and knowledge.

The costs of making reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled employees are often low.



Look at Albergo Etico <https://www.albergoetico.it/en/> as a case study in successfully introducing accessible employment.

Originally from Italy, they now operate globally as a non-profit social enterprise whose focus is on employing and training young disabled adults to work in the hospitality industry. Their staff across all locations are primarily disabled themselves.

Did you know?

Fife Council supports Fife employers to provide successful and meaningful employment opportunities for people with disabilities and health issues.

Fife Supported Employment Service offer employers:

- Information on current diversity and equality legislation
- Disability Awareness Training for staff to increase confidence when dealing with disabled colleagues and customers
- Support for employees who are struggling to stay in work due to disability or health issues
- Help to become a Disability Confident employer.

MORE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TO HELP YOU WITH ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM

Scottish Autism

<https://www.scottishautism.org/>

National Autistic Society

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/autism-friendly-guide>

Sunflower lanyard scheme

<https://hdsunflower.com/uk/>

IBCCES (Offer training in Autism & Neurodiversity Training and Certification)

<https://ibcces.org/>

VisitScotland guidance on accessible and inclusive tourism

<https://www.visitscotland.org/supporting-your-business/responsible-tourism/inclusion>

Visit Britain guidance on accessible and inclusive tourism

<https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/make-your-business-accessible-and-inclusive/visitengland-accessible-and-inclusive>

Creating an accessibility guide

<https://www.accessibilityguides.org/>

Euan's Guide

<https://www.euansguide.com/>

Fife Supported Employment Service

<https://www.fife.gov.uk/kb/docs/articles/jobs-and-training2/supported-employment>

This toolkit was researched and written by Alex Stratikis of [Autism Adventures Abroad](#)