



THE KINGDOM OF FIFE



HIGHLAND HALLS AND THE HOUSE OF FIFE
1700-1800
By Alexander Nicolson

In the 16th century the King had a right of patronage over the Scottish church. This meant that a king or queen could appoint bishops and other church officials. This was a source of power and influence for the monarchy. The House of Fife was a branch of the Scottish monarchy and the Scottish throne.

Long before
kings today
ruled...

BECOME AN AUTISM FRIENDLY BUSINESS QUICK GUIDE

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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?

This guide will give you hints and tips to help make your business autism friendly. It also aims to remove common misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding autism and accessibility within tourism.



In many cases small and simple low or no cost changes can make a big difference.

Use the guide to focus your attention on the things you can do to move your business forward and be ahead of the game!

WHAT IS ACCESSIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM?

Accessible tourism is focussed on anyone who has a specific access requirement such as hearing loss, visual impairment, learning differences, wheelchair users, older people, and families with young children.

Inclusive tourism is a more general concept that refers to making a destination or attraction inclusive for all visitors (for example disabled, ethnic minorities, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ etc).

Simply put, accessibility refers to removing all barriers (for example physical, digital or attitudinal) to promote and maintain positive and equal experiences for all.

Accessibility is fundamentally grounded in human rights, however it is also a business opportunity for destinations, attractions, organisations and companies to embrace all visitors and enhance their revenues to their fullest potential.

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>

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!

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 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.



There are a variety of programs run by autism advocacy groups and other disability organisations which offer 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**
- **Look at other destinations and attractions for inspiration**
- **Create a sensory friendly environment**
- **Consider external certification/accreditation.**

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.

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.

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.

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 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 from the front desk/reception (or designated pick-up spot). This should be a free service, but you could 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 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 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.

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.

Don't forget your marketing!

Marketing your accessibility is just as important as implementing it. 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.



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.

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/>

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>

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