



# Atlantis Holiday Apartments

## A case study in accessibility

South West Tourism

**Atlantis Holiday Apartments, Torquay, were a finalist in the South West Tourism Excellence Awards 2008 – 2009 in the 'Access for All' category. Co-owner Pauline Roberts writes about her experience of providing accessible accommodation.**

My husband John and I moved to Torquay with our three very young children 23 years ago. We ran a small hotel for 16 years and during that time we both learnt British Sign Language, this was something we had wanted to learn and we did not consider it would gain us any extra business, although it certainly did. After appearing on the 'See Hear' programme one Sunday, we welcomed many guests with hearing impairments.



Seven years ago we moved to Atlantis. Initially, the apartments were used as bed-sits and there was no real holiday trade. After much expense, and lots of hard work, we gained a Quality in Tourism 3-star rating.

I have attended many training events, including the *Welcome to Excellence* courses. The *Welcome All* course was really useful in demonstrating how to write an access statement, and over four years ago we produced our first one. Unfortunately, as we did not have level access or a full fire alarm system at the time, we were unable to accommodate many disabled people. We re-evaluated our situation and took on the huge task of making one of the apartments wheelchair accessible. This not only involved completely re-designing the apartment and putting in a wet floor shower room, but also taking out part of the garden and laying two concrete ramps each approximately eight metres in length. We re-assess our access statement every six months, and during the last three years we have made many changes. We now have a full fire alarm system with strobe lighting, and have completed our second wheelchair accessible apartment.

Apartment 1 was the first to be refurbished. We developed a more open plan scheme with a new kitchen and raised flooring and installed a double and single bed enabling the visitor to bring a carer. We have also installed an electric single bed and large shower room allowing plenty of space to manoeuvre. We do, however, realise that there are limitations both structurally and financially to what we can do, for instance, we have recently been asked if we are going to install a hoist for the pool, but at a cost of over £5000 this is not viable.

Apartment 2 has recently been completed using part of our own accommodation to extend the space ensuring there was level access. A family bedroom has been designed so we can accommodate two adults and two children, and we have installed a stair lift on the main staircase, which leads to our only two bed-roomed apartment. Five of the six apartments now have wet floor shower rooms. Some additional aids we have included in the



accommodation include bed risers, perching stool, lever taps and toilet seat risers.

The car park has recently been re-surfaced and we have two designated disabled bays. When we built the heated swimming pool, we put in internal steps to make the access easier. The depth is only 1.2 metres and many disabled guests have been able to use the pool especially with the aid of an installed ramp access to the pool terrace.

Three of our apartments have been awarded National Accessible Scheme (NAS) Mobility grading and we have found that having accessible accommodation has directly contributed to us winning various awards.

We do most of our advertising via the Internet. Our own website has information including our access statement and photographs of the apartments. We advertise in *The English Riviera Guide* including an advert on their website, which has a dedicated page for accessible accommodation, and also publicise our accommodation on various specialist websites. *Visit South West* and *Enjoy England* websites both have search facilities for accessible accommodation.

We are lucky to live in one of the most beautiful parts of the country, and the English Riviera Tourist Board is doing their bit to make it an 'Accessible Destination' and produce an 'Access for All' guide. After all, it is no use going on holiday to great accessible accommodation if you cannot enjoy the surrounding area. Many of the attractions in the area are doing what they can to be more accessible. We are fortunate that there are many pubs, restaurants and taxi firms in the bay, which are accessible. Each of the three towns in Torbay has a *Shopmobility* scheme where manual and motorized wheelchairs can be hired. There are also lots of places where equipment, such as hoists, can be hired locally. We use a firm who deliver the equipment at the start of the holiday and collect it when the visitors have gone home.



**I would advise any tourism business to consider making their premises accessible. It makes good business sense and may not cost as much as you think; small alterations can bring more business. Get involved in a disability-awareness training course. Guests with disabilities are individuals like everybody else. This is not a niche market but part of the global tourism market. Can you really afford not to make the changes?**

- To visit the Atlantis Holiday Apartments website go to [www.atlantistorquay.co.uk](http://www.atlantistorquay.co.uk)
- To find out more about accessibility and becoming assessed by the National Accessible Scheme go to [www.swtourism.org.uk/business-support/accessibility/](http://www.swtourism.org.uk/business-support/accessibility/)
- To find out more about the Welcome to Excellence, Welcome All Course, go to [www.swtourism.org.uk/business-support/training-courses](http://www.swtourism.org.uk/business-support/training-courses)

South West Tourism is the official regional tourist board, working with partners to stimulate and manage the development of tourism in; Bath, Bristol, Bournemouth/Poole, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Cotswolds & Forest of Dean and Wiltshire, in line with the regional tourism strategy.

South West Tourism is an independent body for tourism in the region with a board of directors drawn from predominately the private sector and partners, and is funded by the South West RDA and European commission funds.



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