



Hue's Piece Cottage

A case study in accessibility

April 2009

South West Tourism

South West
England

southwesttourism 
The Regional Tourist Board for the South West of England

Hue’s Piece Cottage was awarded gold at the South West Tourism Excellence Awards 2008 / 2009 in the ‘Access for All’ category.

The self-catering cottage started life as a calf house at Paynes Farm, a working 17th Century farm on the National Trust estate at Killerton in Devon. Nigel and Anna Hamlyn, who have lived there with their family for 12 years, spotted the potential for converting the barn into accessible holiday accommodation as it was a single storey building set in open level ground, a decision that would come to set their new business apart from 98% of tourism accommodation providers in the UK.



The farm sits in a beautiful rural location one mile from the village of Broadclyst and only 5 miles from the cathedral city of Exeter, the coast, Dartmoor and Exmoor all within easy reach. Hue’s Piece offers guests with accessibility needs a unique opportunity - to enjoy the Devon countryside with comfort and ease.

“We were interested in more than just another farm diversification project. We wanted to make a real difference to guests with specific needs,” said Anna.

The family had to raise the finance for the project from scratch, there was no grant aid or shared funding so they decided to get on with as much of the work they could themselves, adopting a very hands-on approach from the initial design through to as much of the building work as possible. With determination and a lot of hard work, the plan became a reality in 2002.

Being Open To All

Their commitment to creating an accessible holiday cottage from the start of the project allowed them to include features in the renovation to accommodate wheelchair users and those with mobility problems. They made sure the cottage’s parking and access areas were all level and that throughout the interior there were no obstacles to bump into or trip over. They included low light switches, lowered work surfaces with cooking hobs, sinks with knee-hole access, a roll in shower and grab rails in the bathroom that also features natural slate flooring and under floor heating. In two of the three bedrooms they ensured there was the required wheelchair turning circles.

A common misconception about accessibility, however, is that it is only about wheelchair access. Many business owners believe that due to the location or age and size of their building there’s nothing they can do to become accessible. In fact, only 5% of the 10 million registered disabled people in the UK use a wheelchair.

Significant efforts are made at Hue's Piece to make it accessible for guests not only with mobility needs but also those with visual and hearing impairments. Some simple examples include the use of rich period colours on the walls that help the white sockets and door frames to stand out, and the provision of welcome packs available in large font with good colour contrasts. For those with hearing difficulties the TV/DVD has Teletext and subtitles and the front door has glazed panels so that guests can see when visitors arrive - or more importantly, when Anna is dropping off a home cooked meal!

The Extra Mile

Anna, an Interior Designer specialising in accessible accommodation, wanted to create a non-clinical interior, something that can often be a downfall of wheelchair accessible accommodation. Retaining the original charm of the barn and creating a building that is full of character and warmth was a real challenge. She said *"I wanted our guests' first reaction to be 'I am on holiday' rather than 'I am a disabled person on holiday'."*

A vegetable garden filled with tactile, fragrant and culinary plants is a simple but innovative feature that's proved especially popular with guests at the cottage who have learning difficulties. Guided by their carers or Anna, they can find, feel, smell and pick fresh produce and then prepare and cook it for their own lunch. The farm animals, which are encouraged to graze in the fields adjacent to the cottage, have been really therapeutic for some guests too, especially those from cities who may not have much exposure to wildlife at home.



Anna and Nigel have a readiness to go the extra mile to ensure guests have an easy, comfortable and enjoyable holiday is really what makes Hue's Piece exemplary - whether it be shopping before or during the stay, providing home-cooked meals, hiring in specialist equipment, arranging transport, recommending and assisting on outings or simply inviting guests over to the farmhouse to share a bottle of wine on a summer's evening. Careful thought is given to the personal and flexible touches which can also help take the pressure off carers who may need a break themselves.

Respecting Privacy

The cottage is part of a traditional range of buildings but has been designed to face away from the farmyard, with separate access, parking and garden area. This creates a private feel but provides easy access to the farmhouse via the cottage's back door. Anna makes real efforts to establish a rapport with guests over the telephone or by email before they arrive and then respects their privacy and independence once their holiday starts, letting them know that help is on hand if it's needed.

Guests come with a range of different needs. Some with learning difficulties, Alzheimer's, visual and hearing impairments, some are elderly and some have terminal illnesses. Some guests have unseen disabilities and don't necessarily want to go into detail but stay at the cottage because of the reassurance of a caring and inclusive attitude over and above the actual facilities.

Business Sense

Hue's Piece received 4 stars in the VisitBritain grading scheme and Level 3 in the National Accessibility Scheme (NAS) who benchmark the levels of accessibility in tourism accommodation to internationally recognised standards. Becoming assessed means Hue's Piece is listed on www.tourismforall.org.uk, the UK's central source of holiday information for people with access needs. Getting graded also enables Hue's Piece to be searched for by accessibility rating on the VisitBritain and Enjoy England websites which receive millions of hits by potential domestic and overseas customers every year. Being accessible offers great opportunities for free PR promotion and the ability to advertise in niche media which is often cheaper and offers a higher return on investment.



The accessible market is a very loyal one with repeat bookings significantly higher than in other sectors largely due to the fact that as there is such a shortage of accessible accommodation in the UK. When customers find accommodation they like, that can cater for their needs, they are far more likely to advance and repeat book and recommend via word of mouth.

Good Communication

The provision of accurate and thorough information about the cottage to potential guests prior to booking is an essential part of running a successful accessible accommodation business. Anna states that good practice at Hue's Piece is inviting detailed questions about the facilities, so guests can judge exactly what to expect before committing to a booking. In addition, trying and find out detailed information from the prospective guest, taking time to listen and to offer any reasonable adjustments if needed. This includes being prepared to acknowledge where the facilities may not be right for an individual and asking for feedback and constructive criticism after a stay, and taking it on board.

- To visit the Hue's Piece website go to www.paynes-farm.co.uk
- As part of Anna's interior design business, Hue's Piece Cottage is available to visit as a working resource in accessible holiday accommodation when not booked for holidays. For more details visit www.annahamlyninteriors.com/designService
- To find out more about accessibility and becoming assessed by the National Accessible Scheme go to www.swtourism.org.uk/business-support/accessibility/

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.



South West Tourism, Woodwater Park, Exeter EX2 5WT

www.swtourism.org.uk
info@swtourism.org.uk



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE