

Accessible Hospitality in the UK's Independent Hotels: The Case of Marsham Court Hotel

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In the dynamic world of UK hospitality, accessibility is no longer just a compliance requirement but a vital component of inclusive guest experiences. One hotel that has embraced this ethos wholeheartedly is the Marsham Court Hotel, an independent property in Bournemouth that has become the benchmark in accessible hospitality. By focusing on thoughtful design, innovative technology, and staff training, Marsham Court Hotel offers a compelling case study on how the industry can cater to the growing and often underserved disabled market.

A Legacy of Inclusivity

Established in 1913, the Marsham Court Hotel has a long-standing history of providing excellent hospitality. Originally founded by Mr. and Mrs. Marsh, who owned a ham curing business, the name of the hotel combines elements of their family name and business. Over the years, the hotel has expanded significantly from its original 13-room property to a 95-room facility, including five rooms specially designed for wheelchair users.

The hotel's current leadership, siblings Rosie Radwell, James, and Russell Dixon-Box, represents the fourth generation of hoteliers in the family. Since acquiring the hotel in 1987, they have made substantial investments to transform the property into a model of accessible and inclusive hospitality. Their efforts build upon a family legacy of quality, service, and attention to detail. These values remain central to the hotel's identity today.

Located on the East Cliff in Bournemouth, the hotel is ideally situated near the town's attractions, shops, and beaches. This prime location further enhances its appeal to a broad range of visitors, including families, business travellers, and international tourists.

Image 1: The Marsham Court Hotel in the early 20th century



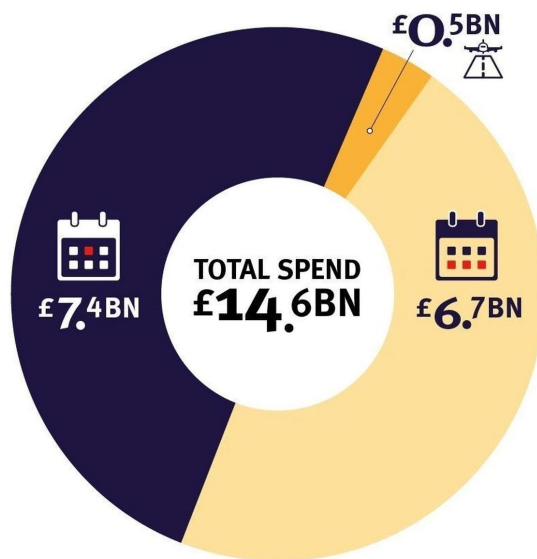
Source: Courtesy of the Marsham Court Hotel

Understanding the Disabled Market: The "Purple Pound"

The decision to prioritise accessibility is not just a moral one for Marsham Court Hotel but also a strategic business choice. The disabled market, often referred to as the "Purple Pound," represents a significant economic opportunity. According to VisitBritain, disabled individuals and their companions contribute £14.6 billion annually to the UK's travel and tourism sector. Despite this, many businesses fail to address this market adequately, resulting in a collective loss of £2 billion annually due to inaccessibility.

Data highlights the spending power of this demographic. The average spend per inbound visit to England in 2023 was £660 for all trips, compared to £740 for trips taken by disabled individuals and their companions. These figures underscore the higher spending potential of this market, which often seeks high-quality, accessible services. However, accessibility is not limited to physical spaces. Seventy-three per cent of disabled consumers report facing barriers online, such as inaccessible websites and booking platforms, emphasising the need for businesses to adopt a more holistic approach to accessibility.

Figure 1: Total Spend in the UK disabled market



Source: <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/value-purple-pound>

The Accessibility Features at Marsham Court Hotel

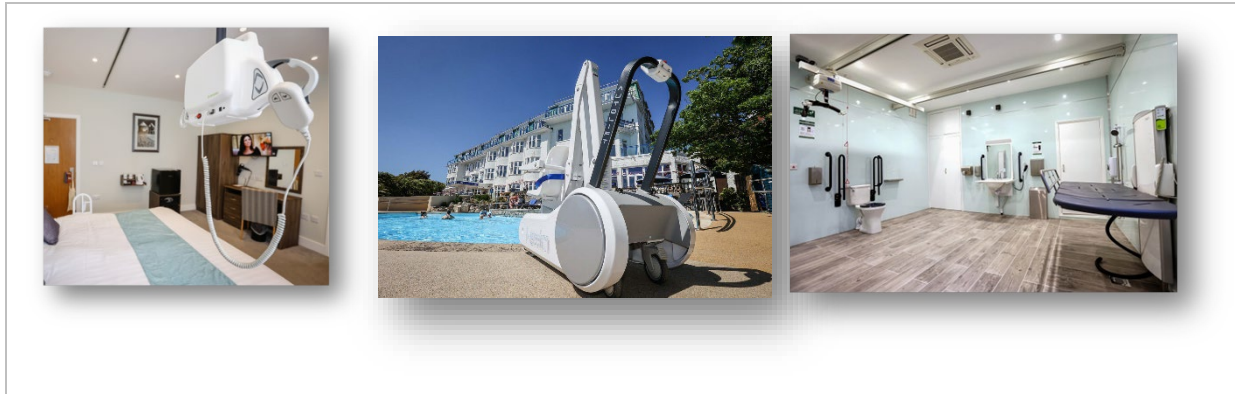
Marsham Court Hotel has gone beyond merely meeting regulatory requirements to create a genuinely inclusive environment. The property's accessible features are carefully designed to accommodate a wide range of disabilities, including mobility, visual, and auditory challenges. Some of the key features include:

Accessible Rooms: Five specially designed bedrooms cater to wheelchair users, with wide doorways, step-free access, and accessible bathroom facilities.

Public Spaces: Lifts, staircases, and communal areas are thoughtfully configured to ensure ease of movement.

Virtual Tours: Designed specifically for wheelchair users, these tours allow guests to preview the hotel's layout and accessible features before booking.

Image 2: Examples of accessible features



Source: Courtesy of the Marsham Court Hotel

Leveraging Technology for Accessibility

Innovation plays a significant role in Marsham Court Hotel's approach to accessibility. The hotel has integrated advanced technologies to enhance the guest experience for people with disabilities. For example:

WelcoMe App: This app allows guests to communicate their specific needs to the hotel staff before arrival. By doing so, it ensures personalised and attentive service tailored to individual requirements.

Assist Me App: Available on the hotel's website, this app adapts the interface for visually impaired users, making it easier for them to navigate and book their stay.

Video and Virtual Tours: These features provide a comprehensive, accessible preview of the hotel's facilities, helping guests plan their visit with confidence.

AccessAble: The hotel is connected to the *Your Accessibility Guide* portal, supported by VisitEngland. This platform is AccessAble's solution, designed to help businesses and venues provide essential accessibility information based on feedback from disabled individuals and carers, ensuring they have the information they need to make informed decisions.

These innovations demonstrate the hotel's commitment to using technology as a tool for inclusivity, ensuring that all guests can enjoy a seamless and stress-free experience.

Staff Training: Building an Inclusive Culture

Accessibility at Marsham Court Hotel extends beyond physical infrastructure and technology; it is deeply ingrained in the culture of the organisation. Comprehensive staff training programs are a cornerstone of the hotel's accessibility strategy. Employees receive training in:

- **Disability Awareness:** Equipping staff with the knowledge to understand and meet the diverse needs of guests with disabilities.

- **Mental Health First Aid:** Ensuring staff can support guests and colleagues experiencing mental health challenges.
- **Customer Service:** Focusing on delivering respectful and effective assistance.
- **Health and Safety:** Including First Aid, Fire Safety, and Water Testing to maintain a safe environment.
- **Food Safety and Allergens:** Addressing dietary needs and health considerations to ensure a safe dining experience.

This investment in training not only improves service quality but also empowers staff to provide thoughtful and empathetic care, creating an inclusive atmosphere for all guests.

Recognitions and Awards

Marsham Court Hotel's dedication to accessibility has earned it numerous accolades. In 2024, the hotel received the Tripadvisor Traveler's Choice Award, highlighting its commitment to inclusivity and outstanding guest experiences. Customer reviews frequently praise the hotel's thoughtful design and exceptional service, reinforcing its reputation as a leader in accessible hospitality.

Perhaps the most prestigious recognition came when the hotel won the Cateys Award for Accessibility, often referred to as the "Oscars" of the hospitality industry. This award celebrates excellence and innovation, and Marsham Court's victory underscores its efforts to set new standards for inclusivity. The hotel's commitment goes beyond compliance, actively investing in technology, staff training, and thoughtful design to create a welcoming environment for all.

Lessons from Marsham Court Hotel

The success of Marsham Court Hotel provides valuable insights for other independent hospitality businesses looking to enhance their accessibility. Key takeaways include:

Leadership Commitment: A genuine passion for inclusivity from leadership can drive meaningful change across the organisation.

Understanding the Market: Recognising the financial and social importance of the disabled market is essential for long-term success.

Innovative Solutions: Leveraging technology can make accessibility seamless and practical, benefiting both guests and staff.

Staff Training: Comprehensive training ensures that accessibility is not just a feature but a core value embedded in daily operations.

A Call to Action for the Industry

Marsham Court Hotel exemplifies how independent hotels can lead the way in accessible hospitality. Its efforts not only enhance guest satisfaction but also unlock a lucrative market segment that many businesses overlook. For the UK hospitality industry, the challenge is clear: accessibility is not merely an option, it is an opportunity.

As Rosie Radwell, the hotel's Managing Director, aptly states: "*Some disabilities are not visible... every hotel guest deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.*" This philosophy captures the essence of Marsham Court's approach and serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of inclusivity.

By embracing accessibility, hotels can not only meet the needs of a diverse range of guests but also set a new standard for excellence in hospitality. For businesses seeking to thrive in a competitive landscape, Marsham Court Hotel provides an inspiring blueprint for success in accessible hospitality.

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