

Accessibility Tips and New Expectations

Ways hotels, attractions, and events can present themselves as accessible to a wider range of people:

1. **Wheelchair Accessibility:** Ensure entrances, hallways, and bathrooms are wide enough for wheelchair access. Include ramps, elevators, and automatic doors where needed.
2. **Accessible Parking:** Designate parking spaces near entrances with clear signage and ensure they meet accessibility standards.
3. **Elevators and Lifts:** Install accessible elevators with Braille and large-print buttons for visually impaired guests.
4. **Accessible Bathrooms:** Provide bathrooms with grab bars, lower sinks, and emergency call buttons. Ensure stalls are large enough for a wheelchair user to maneuver.
5. **Signage with Clear Instructions:** Use large, high-contrast, and readable fonts for signs. Include Braille or tactile elements where necessary for people with visual impairments.
6. **Hearing Impaired Support:** Provide services like hearing loops, captioned videos, or text-based communication methods such as TTY (text telephone) for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.
7. **Assistive Technology:** Offer assistive listening devices, visual alarm systems, and other technologies that help guests with disabilities enjoy the experience.
8. **Specialized Staff Training:** Train staff to be knowledgeable and respectful about various disabilities and how to assist guests with specific needs.
9. **Service Animal-Friendly Policies:** Ensure that pets and service animals are welcomed, with clear guidelines for their care and access to common areas.
10. **Accessible Rooms and Features:** Offer hotel rooms that are specifically designed for guests with mobility issues, including lower beds, accessible closets, and communication devices within reach.
11. **Alternative Formats for Information:** Provide brochures, maps, and menus in accessible formats like large print, Braille, or digital formats compatible with screen readers.
12. **Accessible Tours and Experiences:** Offer guided tours with accessibility features, such as audio guides for the visually impaired or tactile exhibits for a sensory experience.
13. **Online Accessibility:** Ensure the website and online booking system are fully accessible, with compatibility for screen readers and easy navigation for all abilities.
14. **Adjustable Lighting and Temperature:** Allow guests to adjust lighting and room temperature to their preferences, making it more comfortable for individuals with sensory sensitivities.
15. **Inclusive Events and Activities:** Host events that are designed with accessibility in mind, such as sensory-friendly performances or inclusive fitness classes, and promote them clearly.

These approaches help create an environment where everyone, regardless of ability, can fully participate and enjoy what's being offered.

Going beyond basic ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance means embracing a more inclusive, thoughtful, and proactive approach to accessibility.

As society becomes more aware of diverse needs, the expectations for hotels, attractions, and events are shifting from mere compliance to creating a truly welcoming environment for people of all abilities. Here are some of the new expectations:

1. Universal Design

- **What it is:** Designing spaces and experiences that are usable by all people, regardless of age, ability, or status in life, from the start.
- **New Expectation:** Move beyond “accessible” features and integrate universal design principles that ensure products, services, and spaces are inherently usable by everyone. This includes intuitive layouts, non-restrictive spaces, and flexible features (e.g., adjustable desks, multi-use spaces).

2. Proactive Staff Training & Cultural Sensitivity

- **What it is:** Ensuring staff are not only trained in compliance but are also culturally and socially aware of the diverse needs of guests with disabilities.
- **New Expectation:** Staff should have a deep understanding of not only the ADA but also specific accommodations for different disabilities (e.g., invisible disabilities, cognitive impairments, neurodiversity). This can include learning appropriate language, how to help with technology, and being proactive in offering assistance.

3. Holistic Accessibility (Physical + Digital + Service)

- **What it is:** Ensuring accessibility is considered across all touchpoints—physical, digital, and service experiences.
- **New Expectation:** This means that digital content (websites, apps, online booking systems, etc.) must be fully accessible. Beyond physical accommodations, this can include offering virtual assistance, captioning for video content, and creating interactive experiences online that reflect the needs of all users.

4. Sensory-Friendly Environments

- **What it is:** Creating spaces and experiences that are sensitive to individuals with sensory processing differences, such as those with autism, PTSD, or anxiety.
- **New Expectation:** Offering sensory-friendly spaces that may include quiet rooms, dimmable lights, reduced noise, and tactile experiences. For events, it’s increasingly expected to offer quiet hours, sensory-free performances, or accommodations like noise-canceling headphones for attendees.

5. Inclusive Customer Service

- **What it is:** Ensuring that all guests, regardless of ability, feel respected, welcomed, and heard.
- **New Expectation:** It goes beyond helping guests to actively listening to their needs and providing personalized, thoughtful accommodations. For instance, offering text messaging options for

individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, or recognizing the importance of allowing extra time for those with mobility challenges.

6. Personalized Accessibility

- **What it is:** Offering options for people to personalize their accommodations based on their unique needs and preferences.
- **New Expectation:** This includes customizable room settings (lighting, temperature, sound), but also more specific adjustments—like pre-arrival surveys that ask about specific needs, dietary restrictions, or mobility preferences to ensure the experience is tailored for each individual.

7. Empathy-Driven Design

- **What it is:** Designing spaces and experiences with empathy for those who may experience physical, cognitive, or sensory challenges.
- **New Expectation:** Hospitality services should go beyond basic functional needs and think about the emotional experience of a guest. For example, designing welcoming spaces where individuals with cognitive disabilities don't feel stigmatized, or where those with invisible disabilities feel safe and understood.

8. Accessible Transportation & Navigation

- **What it is:** Ensuring that transportation (shuttles, parking lots, public transit) and in-destination navigation (signage, pathways) are fully accessible.
- **New Expectation:** In addition to providing accessible entryways, there is a growing expectation that the whole journey is considered. This could include offering accessible shuttles, digital navigation apps that cater to various disabilities, or providing clear maps of accessible routes and amenities.

9. Increased Use of Assistive Technologies

- **What it is:** Implementing technologies to help guests with specific needs navigate, communicate, and interact with their environment.
- **New Expectation:** Many venues are now offering voice-activated controls, virtual concierge services, and AI-powered assistance. Additionally, attractions are expected to offer technologies like AR/VR for virtual tours that can cater to different abilities.

10. Inclusive Marketing and Representation

- **What it is:** Ensuring marketing materials, website imagery, and promotional content reflect a diverse range of abilities.
- **New Expectation:** Representation matters. It's no longer just about showing accessible features; it's about highlighting real people with disabilities in advertisements, brochures, and websites. By doing so, companies send the message that they truly embrace inclusivity in their offerings.

11. Mobility Solutions and Comfort

- **What it is:** Providing mobility aids, like electric scooters or wheelchairs, on-demand and with ease.

- **New Expectation:** It's not just about having a wheelchair at check-in. Today, there's an expectation for on-demand, seamless mobility services—such as on-site scooter rentals, seamless access to mobility aids, or even providing wheelchair users with elevated viewing areas at concerts or sports events.

12. Inclusive Event Programming

- **What it is:** Hosting events that cater to a broad spectrum of abilities, ensuring that everyone can participate fully.
- **New Expectation:** Expect more events that actively cater to people with different needs. This can include providing sign language interpreters for performances, having captioning or subtitles for all video content, offering sensory breaks, or even having staff on-hand to assist in crowd management for those who need extra space.

13. Flexible and Transparent Policies

- **What it is:** Developing policies that are flexible and transparent to better serve guests with disabilities.
- **New Expectation:** Offering flexible cancellation policies, clear information about accessibility features (and limitations) before booking, and being transparent about the types of accommodations that can be made at the time of reservation. This helps reduce uncertainty and ensures a smoother experience for guests with specific needs.

14. Community Engagement & Partnerships

- **What it is:** Collaborating with local disability organizations and advocacy groups to ensure that all needs are understood and met.
- **New Expectation:** Businesses are expected to engage with advocacy organizations to stay updated on best practices, improve their accessibility offerings, and continuously create partnerships that enhance the experience for all.

In essence, going beyond ADA compliance means embedding accessibility into the very fabric of your service, design, and culture. It's no longer enough to provide basic accommodations; the expectation is that businesses anticipate needs, provide thoughtful and personalized solutions, and create a space where all guests feel valued, included, and comfortable.