

CASE STUDY:

The Hytte

Self- catering accommodation, Northumberland

With occupancy rates more than 40% above the region’s average, The Hytte has carved out a unique niche in the Northumberland tourism industry.



It is not just the special design - recreating a traditional Norwegian timber hut (a hytte, pronounced ‘hutta’), facilities including a sauna and hot tub, and location that are behind its success as a large, five star rated self-catering property.

It is the deliberate development, sales and marketing policy of targeting families and friends who need accessible accommodation that has driven this remarkable performance.

Local market research and the early impact of Welcome All training convinced owners, husband and wife team Sonja and Simon Gregory, of the opportunity to tap into an undeveloped market in the North East.

Sonja, a professional midwife, and Simon, previously a sheep-shearer, bought land bordering their own rural home near Hexham, with the aim of building a very distinct self-catering property.

“We soon realised there wasn’t any accessible accommodation around, so we decided to go the whole way - building a property and developing our own knowledge to give us a unique selling point,” said Sonja.

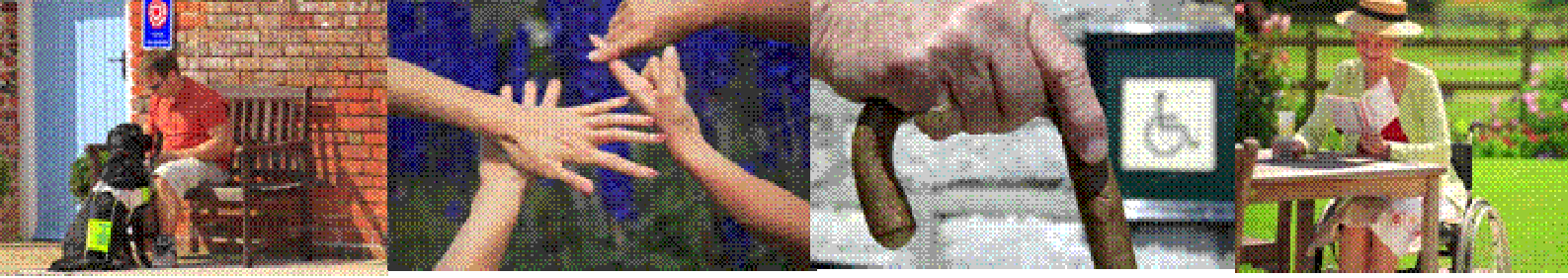
She attended a Welcome All training course at the very outset: “I have experience of nursing, working with people who have spinal injuries, who are deaf or visually impaired, but the training really made the difference,” she said.



“I picked up so many tips, and an understanding of the huge variety of accessibility issues. As a new build, we could design and build our property with this in mind, and make sure we offered the additional services that would really make people feel welcome.”

The couple had identified some clear target audiences, including groups of families and friends who wanted to holiday together in an environment where disabled members of the group would be totally comfortable. The Hytte sleeps eight people, and some 70% of bookings have included at least one member of the party with some form of disability. Customers have been drawn from all corners of the UK, with high numbers of repeat clients, including a group of friends from Scotland and Cornwall, who meet up “around half way” for a week.

The single-level property is wholly accessible, with facilities like a shower room, electric hoist, garden and children’s play area, plus accessible information, all helping earn it National Access Award ‘Access Exceptional’ and Level One Visual and Hearing status.



Through highly targeted online advertising, joining specialist and local tourism organisations and increasingly word-of-mouth, they have enjoyed occupancy levels rising to 97% in the last financial year, compared with a Northumberland average of 55%. The Hytte mainly provides for week-long stays through the key seasons and weekend breaks during winter.

The Hytte has been featured as an example of best practice by the regional tourist board and is now highlighted on other Welcome All courses and Sonja continues to spread the word about making the tourism industry accessible to all. However, they retain a huge niche regional marketplace advantage as an accommodation provider.

“Welcome All also taught us the importance of learning from our customers and being committed to continuous improvement. We have recently purchased an electrically-operated chair, an overbed table and kitchen steps, all to meet specific customer needs. We want people to feel comfortable and to simply focus on having a great holiday.”

