

Accessibility Evaluation

Radisson Blu Dublin Castle - Dublin Ireland

Review of Accessible Guest Suite #309

Regardless of whether there is a law or not, I always like to preface my comments and recommendations by saying that I am thankful that there is an accessible room when I travel – and that some thought has been put into providing the necessary amenities.

I say some thought, because yes, I was able to use the guest room, all be it with assistance, but my experience could have been so much better. I wish that hotels in general would ask for professional assistance from an access consultant prior to making room modifications.

To put these comments into perspective, I am a wheelchair user, and a former Paralympic and World Champion athlete, so that puts me in the top 10% of strength and agility compared to the majority of wheelchair users, and yet I still had extreme difficulty accessing and using this room independently.

1. Room Entry

Immediately inside the entry to room, behind the very heavy door, is an extremely large wardrobe cupboard. This has the effect of

- (i) preventing the door from opening completely when trying to enter the room from the main corridor, resulting in a clear width that is insufficient, even for someone with a small manual wheelchair;
- (ii) making it impossible to exit the room independently as there is no clear manoeuvring space on the latch side of the door, and the cupboard prevents wheelchair users from being able to adequately manoeuvre in the space near the door.

Recommendation:

1.1 The pressure on the door closer needs to be drastically reduced.

1.2 Furthermore, People would be much better served by having a power door operator on the entry door.

1.3 See comments on the Wardrobe closet to follow.

The Wardrobe

The wardrobe closet itself is useless to persons using mobility aids (wheelchair, walker, canes, etc). It is not possible to get close enough to the wardrobe and open the doors to the wardrobe without the wall and/or mobility aid being in the way.

Recommendation:

1.4 People would be much better served by having an open closet space with some hanging rails at a variety of heights, and some shelving at a variety of heights. This solution would also create a great deal more maneuvering space at the door, and enable the door to open fully.

2. Washroom

Upon first impression, the washroom is very lovely – it is very visually attractive – functionality is a completely separate matter.

The washroom door swings outward to provide more space in the washroom, and that is great.

The problem is that the door swings outward in such a manner - that when the person is in the room, they have to go past the washroom door completely, leaving them facing the door to the hall, reach behind them, swing the door open and back into the bathroom. (Alternatively, they had to back down from the clear space in the room to the main door to be able to wheel forwards into the bathroom) One way or the other, you are required to wheel backwards into a corner.

Recommendation:

2.1 The washroom door swing should be changed so that it swings outward (as it does), but so that it is accessibility primarily from the main sleeping area of the room (not from the near the front door) So the hinge should be near the main door and the opening near the sleeping area.

I had no issue with the lavatory or controls. And the toilet and grab bars were fine.

The shower looks lovely.... big glass doors... “PLEASE OPEN OUTWARDS” the sign says, the problem is, once you get yourself seated on the shower chair you have push your chair out of the way to close the shower doors ...and once your shower is done... no chance of every being able to reach far enough from the shower chair to reach the wheelchair... luckily I had my husband otherwise I would have been showering with the door open... and the water would have been everywhere.

To get the water running... you have to pull out and hold the diverter while turning on the water, (and while holding the handheld shower head too— you'll ready why next) You can't pull the diverter on once the water is already running. There are many people that this would be impossible to do as the diverter is small and requires a very tight grasp while pulling. Failure to get the diverter on after you've turned on the water means the initially cold water will shower down on you from the overhead rain head. (Don't ask people using mobility aids to run the water first to warm it up, that is the last thing we need for safety; transferring onto a shower chair that is now wet and slippery, with slippery grap bars and a wet floor.)

Having the handheld shower head is great... the one installed is a very visually attractive model.... The problem; once the water is running, if you put it back in the cradle designed to hold it, it sprays directly into your face or throat with sandblasting force... no need to exfoliate after that type of pressure wash. Like I said, it looks nice, but is not very practical.

The soap dish, is pretty useless for holding anything other than the tiny soap – where does a person put their shampoo, conditioner, etc.?

Having the towel holder in the shower at a very high height, also meant I couldn't get my own towels down.

Recommendation:

- 2.2 The shower doors need to be replaced with a glass sliding door, or glass accordion doors or a shower curtain, something that people can use while seated in the shower.*
- 2.3 Mixers/diverters need to be changed to independent units so that people can easily, with one hand. There are diverters available that enable you to select the shower head you wish to activate – overhead or handheld (I know, I have such a system.)*
- 2.4 You need to install a model of handheld showerhead device that sprays the water in an arc downwards, not straight out.*
- 2.5 The towel holder should be relocated out of the shower stall, and onto the empty wall space in the corner between the toilet and lavatory.*
- 2.6 Install a larger, more practical soap dish – this isn't just an accessibility issue, all of your guests would appreciate it.*

3. Controls

The light switch for the bathroom is outside of the washroom, and on the hinge side of the door... which means that if I forgot to turn on the light while heading down the corridor before I back into the bathroom, I have to re-close the bathroom door, back down the hall again, turn

the light on, head back into the corner and back into the bathroom all over again. (Luckily I don't mind going to the Loo in the dark.)

Recommendation:

3.1 A light switch should be added to the inside of the washroom. (A nice thing to do even after you change the door swing to the proper direction – this improvement does not preclude doing the other!)

4. Fire and Life Safety

I do not recall seeing any visual strobe alarms that would notify a person who is Deaf or hearing disabled about a fire alarm.

Not only am I a person with a disability, but I was at the hotel for a conference on Fire and Life Safety for Persons with Activity Limitations, so I asked about the Hotel's fire safety plan... the conversation went like this:

GUEST: If there is a fire tonight, what is the hotel's plan to evacuate me?

HOTEL: well, we know where you are, and we'll send staff to get you. *[Pleased Smile and a Nod]*

G: [Pause].....then what? *[Smiling with anticipation of the news of a great plan]*

H: then we'll escort you to the stairs – because we can't use the lift *[Emphatically Smiling]*

G: [Pause]...then what?

H: Then we'll carry you down the stairs. *[Confident Smile]*

G: SERIOUSLY !! You have an evacuation chair or device? *[with Great Joy]*

H: Oh no, we'll just pick you up and carry you. *[Sheepish Smile]*

G: So you've practiced this? *[in Disbelief]*

H: Oh yes, we practice quarterly. *[Confidently]*

G: So every quarter you practice picking up a staff person and carrying them down 3 flights of stairs ?? *[Incredulous Disbelief]*

H: Oh, the carrying part, we've never practiced that. *[Embarrassed]*

G: So in other words, if there was an emergency tonight, you would have staff carry me down 3 flights of stairs – something that NO-ONE here has ever practiced? *[Resigned Curiosity]*

H: Yes, that's about right *[Sheepish Embarrassment]*

G: And then what will you do with me? My wheelchair is upstairs?? *[To Prove the Point]*

H: [Pause].....[Pause]... Right....*[Shrugging with no idea how to answer that]*

Why Have A Fire Safety Plan That Is Completely Unrealistic and UNSAFE!

Why have it in a plan that you're going to carry someone down the stairs, and then NEVER practice it to see whether it is a viable and safe option, not only safe for staff, but safe for the person you are carrying. And then what do you do with the person once you get them outside, plunk them on the sidewalk ???

Make a realistic plan... call a professional accessibility consultant with experience in fire and life safety to help you - not a company that only does fire plans... if you do, you'll end up with more of what you already have... a plan that says you will provide assistance to persons with disabilities and activity limitations – with absolutely no clue what that means, or how to do it.