

Going “Exclusively for Non-Smokers”

By B&B Association member **Bob Briggs** of Swiss Cottage B&B, Great Yarmouth.



For me and my wife Barbara, moving into Swiss Cottage in 2004 was our first venture into guest house ownership. Barbara is experienced in the hotel trade and I had many years in management and administration. We had a few guests booked that were smokers, so honoured these bookings.

From the start though, we strived to advertise our accommodation for non-smokers only, as both of us are ex-smokers and enjoy a smokefree life as much as possible. We believed there are many like us (and more now). We gained a Gold Clean Air Award by creating a policy of non-smoking throughout the building and grounds. In addition we stipulated the accommodation is just for non-smokers.

The idea did well and the business improved considerably in 2005 and 2006. The Smoking law of July 2007 led to an assumption by prospective guests that although no smoking was allowed in public areas, anyone could stay by right and go outside to smoke.

The law allows accommodation owners to decide whether to provide for smokers. Guest bedrooms can (if the owner decides) be allocated for smoking. The rooms' ventilation system must not allow smoke to enter the building, and nor can people smoke in 'public' rooms such as the breakfast room or lounge etc.

Owners may state that no bedrooms are allocated for smoking, but allow smokers to sleep in the rooms and go outside the building to use designated smoking areas.

The majority of smokers are polite and respect the premise of 'no smoking' inside but they cannot help having the 'aura' of a smoker. Better not to mix the two, and create a place that is 'Exclusively for non-smokers'. Owners can designate the whole building and grounds just for non-smokers:

Accommodation providers often highlight 'pet friendly' or 'adults only, no children'. In the UK alone there are over 40 million non-smokers and they often want non smoking places to stay.

We spent a lot of time altering our advertising and booking processes to show that we are for non-smokers only. We used the phrase 'Just for non-smokers' to try to get the message across. Despite this, it was still assumed owners must allow guests who smoke to stay. The online booking system of the Visit East of England tourist authority, Guestlink, allows terms and conditions to be displayed during the





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booking process to emphasise the non-smokers only concept. Our website has details under the terms and conditions as well numerous No Smoking icons.

We finally altered the wording to 'Exclusively Non-Smokers' as this, at last, seems to get the message across.

“Non-smoking” accommodation does allow smokers to stay, providing they stick to the law and smoke outside; accommodation for non-smokers is just that, all those who have booked to stay are non-smokers and all those who wish to book are non-smokers.

Owners can ask those booking in to sign they are non-smokers, and warn that they will be asked to leave if they are untruthful. It is the owner's right to do this despite the misperception of the smoker that they have a right to stay. The same process is used for online bookings and reservations

where the guest again has to tick a box to show all are non-smokers. Additionally the guest may receive an email asking for confirmation that members of the booked group are non-smokers.

Our decision to be Exclusively Non Smokers came about in fairness to those who prefer an environment where there are no smokers. We can safely say that anyone who is booked at Swiss Cottage is a non smoker. Our guests appreciate this, as their comments show – for example:

“we loved the fact that this B&B is for non-smokers. How nice to walk into a clean and crisp B&B without having to dodge smokers and cigarette butts on the doorstep.” ■

The Swiss Cottage website is at: www.swiss-cottage.biz

