



Redefining Accessibility: Inside an Accessible Hotel Room Experience

By: Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D.

An accessible hotel room should be designed thoughtfully to ensure that guests with disabilities have comfort, convenience, and safety. As a person who uses a manual wheelchair, I frequently stay in hotels. My first-hand experiences provide a unique view of the features of an accessible hotel room that transforms a stay from merely acceptable to inclusive.

The Guest Room Door and Threshold

Upon arrival at a guest room, the door must have at least 32 inches of clearance when fully open. It also must be easy to open. Some doors are power assist and open automatically when the keycard is inserted and the door handle is turned.

Other doors must be pushed open while the guest, using a wheelchair, navigates rolling over the threshold and opens the door. I have often found that the pressure to open the door requires too much effort, and I can't get into or out of the room. The ADA standard is a maximum

opening force of five pounds. Door thresholds should be no greater than ¼ inch.

Design and Layout

The first impression of an accessible hotel room begins with its design and layout. These rooms are typically more spacious to allow for easy maneuverability, particularly for guests using mobility aids.

There should be ample clearance under desks and tables, allowing a person in a wheelchair to fit comfortably. A chair by the desk should be on wheels to move it out of the way. A luggage rack or bench is needed so that luggage is at an accessible height.

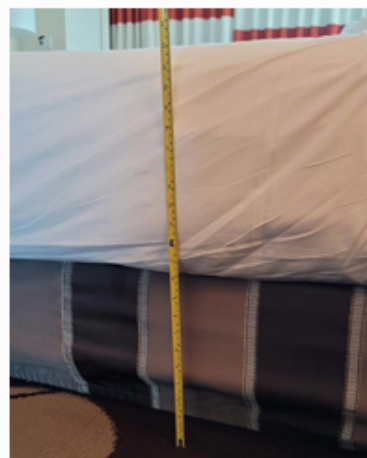


If the floor is carpeted, it should not exceed a thickness of 1/2 inch. Slip-resistant solid surface flooring is easier to roll on than carpet.

Lighting switches, drapery pulls, thermostats, and power outlets should be placed at accessible heights, allowing all guests to effortlessly control their environment. Furniture should not block these controls. A full-length mirror is helpful. Closet rods and shelves should be no higher than 54 inches from the floor.

The Bed Environment

The ADA does not regulate hotel bed height. The most common complaint from people with disabilities is that the bed is too high. Most wheelchair users prefer a bed 22-25 inches off the ground, which makes transfers from wheelchairs easier and safer. The ADA regulates at least 36 inches of space on both sides and the foot of the bed.



The Bathroom Environment



The door to the bathroom must provide at least 32 inches of clearance. I require a roll-in shower to position my wheelchair at the shower entrance and transfer to a bench or shower chair. The shower area must have grab bars, a shelf for soap, and a handheld showerhead that can be adjusted for height and ease of use. The controls to adjust the temperature and force of the water must be within reach of the person seated in the shower. The shower should have a floor drain and slope so water does not enter the bathroom floor.

Toilet seats in accessible bathrooms are typically 17– 18" tall, providing a comfortable height for transfers from wheelchairs. Grab bars are strategically placed around the toilet to ensure stability and safety. Sinks need to be installed with knee space underneath. There must be plenty of accessible height (30 – 34 inch) counter space around the sink. Towel bars and shelves for towels should be within reach from a seated position. Faucets with lever handles are easier to operate. The mirror above the sink should be visible to a person seated in a wheelchair.



Summary

The in-room experience in an accessible hotel room exemplifies the best in inclusive hospitality. From the spacious design and thoughtful layout, guest rooms are designed to provide a safe and comfortable stay for all guests. By focusing on the specific needs of travelers with disabilities, hotels can create environments that are not only ADA-compliant with accessibility standards but also genuinely welcoming and accommodating. The combination of accessible features allows the guest to be independent. With each improvement, accessible hotel rooms move closer to realizing the ideal of a truly inclusive world where everyone can relax, be comfortable, and enjoy their journeys without barriers.



About the Columnist

Rosemarie Rossetti, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized accessibility consultant, speaker, author, and CEO of Rossetti Enterprises LLC. www.RosemarieSpeaks.com

She speaks to and consults with hotels and lodging venues to ensure the environments are accessible and that services are provided to accommodate people with disabilities.

Having been paralyzed from the waist down with a spinal cord injury, she speaks from her wheelchair, sharing her experiences. She presents to audiences throughout the U.S. and beyond as a recognized expert on accessible and universal design.

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