

Access:LARP

Guide to Choosing an Accessible Venue

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
First steps.....	3
Conducting your search.....	5
Making a site visit.....	6
Communication with players.....	7
Outdoor games.....	8
The Legal Obligations of Venues.....	10
Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms.....	11
Appendix 2 Useful Links.....	12

1

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Introduction

First of all I should be clear that this is not simply a list of venues that are “accessible”. Instead this guide is designed to help you identify what access and accommodations you need from a venue and what you will be looking for when conducting your venue search.

This Guide is therefore obviously aimed at game organisers who take care of the logistics for their game however, the information in this guide is still useful for others to know to help us all identify problems where they arise or to be able to offer solutions when we can.

As with previous Guides these are all suggestions and guidelines. I think it is best to aim for being as accessible as we can, though in reality we may not be able to meet our ideal requirements. That shouldn't mean we don't aim for them though. Finding a fully accessible venue for a game isn't an easy task but it is better to know that we are as accessible as we can be within our limits and also to be aware of any shortcomings so that we can do our best to remedy them if needed.

This Guide is written with the core principal of Access:LARP:

“Accessibility is about making it no more difficult for disabled players as for any other player.”

First steps

In some ways this is the most crucial phase. Early on in the design of your game you will be thinking about what are core features and themes of the game. You will also be thinking about what sort of venue you require – in terms of size, accommodation, location and look. Your needs may be very simple or more complex but they are often shaped by those core features of your game. Ideally you should be thinking about accessibility early on too – it is far easier to start with an accessible venue or features than it is to add them in at a later point.

It is useful to draw up two lists of features you want from a venue. The first list should be headed “Needed” or “Priority” and the second list should be headed “Desirable”.

For example:

Needed	Desirable
Step free access	Accessible shower facilities
On site sleeping	Industrial architecture
Kitchen facilities	All on one floor or lift to other floors
An accessible bedroom	Hearing loop system
Several small rooms for IC areas	Outdoor area

It is likely that you will not be able to meet all conditions on both lists, but you should aim for all conditions on the first list.

We will go into the specific accessibility features you may want to consider, later in the guide.

At this stage you may not know who is going to attend so it can be difficult to know what accommodations will be necessary. By aiming for some general and common accommodations, such as step free access, you are more likely to be able to accommodate players once you know their needs.

By considering access at this stage you will also encourage more players to sign up who otherwise may have had to miss out.

Note:

This process isn't just good for accessibility – it can also help you fine tune your whole game concept, by focussing on what is a “core feature” of your game and knowing what will really make your game special.

- Not all accessibility accommodation are related to your venue, but many are. These may include: level access; first floor accommodation; accessible toilet and wash facilities; hearing loop systems; types of lighting.
- What makes a venue “accessible” may vary from person to person so your goal is to choose a venue that is broadly accessible to a wide range of people.

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- People may also talk about accessibility in terms of location. While this is a separate issue from disabled access, proximity to transport links can have an impact on disabled access too.

Example:

Avril uses an electric chair and does not have a car. She struggles to get to venues that are far away from public transport links as arranging wheelchair friendly taxis can be expensive. Additionally because of the difficulty of travelling on trains she tends to avoid journeys which involve more than one change of train.

Example:

Leon wants to run a survival horror game. A core part of the concept is being in a dark woodland and having to navigate the terrain as well as enemies. This is not accessible to some people and Leon must consider either how this can be circumvented or what compromises can be made for accessibility. For example, he considers a flat woodland site compared to a woodland set on steep hills.

Conducting your search

While there are a few websites out there that are dedicated to accessible accommodation, their focus is often on holidays and small groups and often are not suitable for LARP games or larger groups of adults. However they may suit your needs and so I have included links to these sites in the appendix.

Many venue websites and listing sites are starting to give accessibility information up front however not all do and the information can be confusing or incomplete.

Take time to look at pictures and floor plans to see if there are areas which may not have level access or where access is not clear.

Some venues may list themselves as “accessible” without listing particulars. Because accessibility needs can vary so much don’t take this on face value without checking the details.

Common things to look for include:

- What facilities are included in their accessible/disabled toilet
 - if showers and wash facilities are needed are these also accessible?
- Is the level or step free access to the building part of the main entrance or a separate entrance?
 - How will this impact your use of the space and player experience.
- If there are areas which do not have level or step free access does this limit you play area or can it be managed.
- What comprises the accessible bedroom?
 - Is it fully adaptive with things like grab rails and hoists and easy access to bathroom facilities?
 - Is there space for more than one person to sleep there, if a companion or carer is needed?
 - How far away from main play areas is it?
- If it’s an outdoor site ask what the terrain is like and if there are any paved or levelled paths.

Example:

Mel is looking at venues and finds one which has the majority of sleeping upstairs but does advertise an “accessible bedroom” on the ground floor. Further examination of the floor plan shows that while this ground floor bedroom does have level access it is actually at the other end of the building to the toilet and wash facilities. This will be accessible to some players but not for others and Mel will have to consider suitability carefully.

Making a site visit

It is common for organisers to visit sites either prior to booking or at some point between booking and running the event. The usual purpose is for picturing the LARP in-situ and figuring out where things like the crew room will go and prime location for any set pieces or specific play areas. Site visits are generally conducted with a proprietor, caretaker or some other member of venue staff present to answer questions.

During these visits it is also crucial to check for accessibility features.

- Ensure that any accessibility features that were listed in the advertisement are actually there.
- Ensure that these features work as they should, including:
 - Are ramps navigable and not too steep
 - Are any lifts operable.
 - Is the accessible toilet as described and in a useable condition. It is not uncommon to find accessible toilets being used as storage space.
 - Is the accessible bedroom as described? Might there be limitations on who it is accessible for?
- If features are not as described or not in a fit to use state ask firmly but politely how and when this will be remedied. Be clear that these make up a part of your hire agreement.
- Make note of uneven surfaces or difficult terrain. This can include carpeted rooms.
- Take note of parking spaces and if there is any specific disabled parking.
- If there are rooms which do not have level access due to doorway lips or small steps ask if the venue has a moveable ramp, and where it is stored.
- Take a note of what lighting is available and if any of it is dimmable.
 - Be particularly aware of fluorescent strip lighting as this can often be a trigger to people with light sensitive conditions such as migraines and epilepsy.
- Ask about emergency alarms and if there is a visual as well as auditory alarm.
 - If there is not a visual alarm (i.e. a red flashing light) then take this into account with any fire safety or evacuation plans.

Example:

Felix is visiting a site that is described as having accessible wash facilities. He notices that while there is an accessible bathroom it has a sign on saying “out of order”. He asks when that is expected to be fixed and ensures that that is well before the date of the event.

Additionally this is a good time for you to think about your game and plot and where things will run.

Consider where your gameplay will take place and key in- and out-of-character areas. Be aware of unexpected barriers to access and be prepared to alter your plans if you can't alter the venue.

Example:

Val and Dylan are running a game which needs a secret lab. From the venues photographs they had hoped to use a small stone walled room that looked like it had the right atmosphere. However on the site visit they see that while it does have level access the doorway is very old fashioned and narrow and you wouldn't be able to get in in a wheelchair. As the secret lab is a core part of the game they decide to use a different room for their lab.

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Communication with players

Access:LARP recognises that because access needs are varied it is difficult to make all games accessible to all people in every way. We are also aware that the vast majority of LARP sites available in the UK are often older buildings or properties which may not have up-to-date accessibility. Additionally, not all games are going to be accessible to all people due to their themes, style or content. A way of ensuring that we are not ignoring people's needs or excluding people unnecessarily is by being open and honest about accessibility from the start and allowing players to make their own choices about what is accessible for them. These means good communication throughout the entire process from the initial pitch to the post-game debrief.

Alongside finding a venue for your game, if you have been following the Access:LARP guides, you will have also produced an accessibility statement. Make sure this is available before or at the same time as releasing details of the venue.

Note: make sure your choice of venue is inline with your own policy!

Post clear descriptions of the venue and any features which may influence accessibility. This may include descriptions of lighting, temperatures and other features not commonly associated with accessibility but which can impact a person's ability to attend and participate in an event. Keep this up to date following any site visits or changes of plans.

Example:

“The venue chosen has step free access to the ground floor. The ground floor is level throughout but there is a small bump between doorways which should be navigable by wheels. All IC areas will be on the ground floor and a small OOC area will also be available. There is a large bedroom sleeping two people on the ground floor. It is large enough for a wheelchair but does not have any additional features. There is a combined disabled toilet and shower room next to the ground floor bedroom that has a wheeled shower chair, grab rails by the toilet and shower and moveable shower head. This will be reserved for use by players with access needs. There is an additional gender neutral toilet on the ground floor. Other bedrooms are on the second floor as well as more toilets and showers.

The canteen room on the ground floor has bench seating but they can be moved for those who use a wheelchair or need other seating. The canteen has florescent lighting – please contact us if this is a difficulty for you and we will consider options to help you.”

Make it known that players can ask questions and do your best to answer them. This may require additional conversations with the venue staff to check particulars. Be honest and open about what you can change and what you can not. Listen to players who have access needs as they may have solutions that you were not aware of.

Example:

Rosie is deaf but is hoping to play a particular game. She uses hearing aids but these don't help much in some circumstances. She asks the organisers what the acoustics are like in the venue because lots of echo can be a problem for her. The organiser is able to clarify that one of the rooms

has a vaulted ceiling which may cause echo but that though this is an IC area it is not where the main action will be focussed. Rosie is now able to weigh up if this game is for her.

Outdoor games

This section is particularly aimed at camping events or those that primarily make use of outdoor space rather than indoor accommodation. However, it can be applied to any events which make use of outdoor spaces.

Camping events are often generally less accessible than indoor events due to the extra logistics involved and the extra complications of having to sleep in a tent. This doesn't mean that a camping event is inherently inaccessible. By taking certain measures and with good communication with players, camping events can be accessible to many disabled players with varying needs.

- Ensure there are disabled toilet and shower facilities equivalent to the facilities available to non-disabled players.
- Consider having an “accessible” camping area designated that is near to both toilet facilities and the main play area.
- Try and avoid sites with steep inclines – they can be difficult or impossible to navigate for people with mobility impairments including those who use mobility scooters or electric chairs.
- Ask what drainage on site is like. Very muddy fields may be impassable for people with mobility impairments.
- Ensure there are clear paths and walkways between rows of tents and to main play areas and any OC facilities.
 - If necessary you may need to request or supply woodchips or similar in order to create a clear navigable path in poor conditions.
 - Clear paths through wooded areas are also beneficial to those with mobility difficulties or those who are blind or have vision impairment.
- You may want to consider provision of a large tent or marquee that can be used for seating either IC or OC for those that need to rest during the game.
 - It is not always practical for people to get into a standard tent during a game, especially if they are in costume or if it is wet.
- You may want to consider how food is being provided and if there is some way of providing hot drinks and snacks to players throughout the game
 - Some players may have difficulties preparing hot food and drinks in self catering set ups, especially those “between meal” drinks and snacks.
 - Quick access to snacks and drinks is important for managing many health conditions
 - this can be especially important in colder weather when the cooler temperatures may exacerbate some people's conditions or impairments.
- Look at the different areas you will use for IC action and consider how long it takes to walk to and from them.
 - Consider IC or OC camping relative to these distances.
 - You may want to create OC “short cuts” to reduce the distances people have to walk.
- Vehicle access may be important for some disabled players. Talk to the site owner about where vehicles can access and plan camping accordingly.

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Example:

The IC gateway to the IC field is a 15 minute walk away from the wooden arches at the far end of the site which is where some important plot will occur. There is a second smaller gate halfway up the field and Jay and his team decide to place the accessible camping near that gate, so that those with mobility impairments do not have as far to work to important IC areas.

Example:

Ollie wants to hire a site but realises that while there is an accessible toilet, there is not an accessible shower. There are showers available to non-disabled players though. Ollie talks to the organiser and points out that this is discriminatory and unequal. They agree to split the cost of hiring a temporary disabled shower block for the event. This is factored into Ollie's budget for the event.

The Legal Obligations of Venues

The obligation to make venues accessible comes under the Equality Act 2010 and is described as “The duty to make reasonable adjustments”.

Referring only to the accessibility of a building or venue it is the responsibility of the buildings owners, managers or leaseholders to comply with the Equality Act of 2010. This means they should be providing accommodations and “reasonable adjustments” so that disabled visitors are not discriminated against.

In practice this is not strongly enforced or some building owners and landlords will argue that the cost of making adjustments or the age or status of the building means that making changes falls outside of what they consider to be “reasonable”.

- This means that as a LARP organiser it is reasonable to expect that a venue is accessible and does not discriminate against those with disabilities.
 - You are within your right to ask for reasonable accommodations to be made and you should not expect to incur any costs or fees for those changes.
- Whilst you are not obliged to, if a venue is not accessible and they refuse to make necessary accommodations so as to be useable you can make a claim to the Equality Commission under the Equality Act 2010 of discrimination based on disability.
- If you are an amateur, hobbyist or not-for-profit organiser you yourself are not required by law to comply with the Equality Act though it remains good practice to do so.
- If you are a business or formal organisation such a university society or other group with has formal oversight or membership you are required to comply with the Equality Act.
 - This means that where reasonable you should choose venues which are accessible OR provide reasonable adjustments yourself.

Example:

Ray and Jodie are professional LARP organisers. The site they have chosen for their next event has rough and uneven cobbled paths between the buildings and Ray and Jodie think this may make it inaccessible to a range of people with disabilities. The site owner says that it is unreasonable to cover or remove the cobbles as it is a historic site. Ray and Jodie decide to go ahead with the site but bring wooden boards to form a temporary walkway covering the cobbles so that their game is accessible and complies with the Equality Act 2010. They consider making a claim to the Equality Commission that the venue owner is obliged to make alterations to the site long term.

Note: This section refers to laws in the UK. Laws may be different in your country. Please see the appendix for links to relevant laws in different countries.

Appendix 1 Glossary of Terms

IC – In character – refers to acting as your character or times and areas where people would be acting as their characters.

OC/OOC – Out of Character – being as yourself or those times and places which are not a part of the game.

Ref – referee – may be an organiser or not but is a non-player responsible for administering rules

NPC – non-player-character

Appendix 2 Useful Links

For accessible accommodation:

Disabled Access Holidays <http://www.disabledaccessholidays.com/disabled-holidays/accessible-holidays/UK.asp>

Access At Last <http://www.accessatlast.com/>

Accessible Accommodation <http://www.accessibleaccommodation.org.uk/>

Please note that Access:LARP does not endorse these organisations and links are being shared as a useful reference only.

For legal information:

United Kingdom

The Equality Act 2010 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

The Citizens Advice Bureau Guide to the Equality Act <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/law-and-courts/discrimination/what-are-the-different-types-of-discrimination/duty-to-make-reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-people/>

Canada

Disability Rights in Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-people-disabilities.html>

USA

Americans with Disabilities Act <https://www.ada.gov/>

ADA National Network <https://adata.org/learn-about-ada>