

Golden Gate Hotel – Accessibility to guests with Mobility Challenges, particularly those in wheelchairs

The following document reflects my thoughts on the accessibility of the new revitalized Golden Gate Hotel in Golden Gate Highlands National Park.



History:

Formerly the hotel had no lift between the hotel’s 3 levels and none of the rooms were fitted with accessible adaptations to cater for guests with mobility challenges. Guests in wheelchairs staying at the hotel would have to make use of one of the more spacious units and make use of a bath they could get alongside and then be portered up and down the stairs between levels, or make an elongated journey outside and travel about 200m and use the excessively steep ramp that leads from the adjacent chalets. Neither option was anywhere close to satisfactory.

The situation after the refurbishment is a wonderful improvement and the architects need to be complimented on making use of sound access guidelines. The most noteworthy additions are the presence of a lift between the 3 levels, and the presence of 5 rooms that are adapted and intended to be universally accessible. The table below reflects images of the new layout and comments on the facilities.

	<p align="center"><u>LEVEL 3 – Entrance Level</u></p> <p>The entrance into the hotel (left) is ideal with a firm smooth surface, and a suitably ramped entrance with spacious doorways. The reception desk (right) is fitted with a specially lowered section suitable for interacting with guests in wheelchairs or children.</p>	
<p>The lift on the entrance level (level 3) is ideal and will take a mass of 8 people at one time. The lift is a one entrance lift and the access corridor on level 3 is through a confined space where it is not possible for wheelchair users to turn around immediately in front of the lift’s door, so it is recommended for wheelchair users to reverse into the left so they can go forward when getting to the 2 lower levels.</p>		
<p>Entrance Lobby Ablutions: There is a unisex accessible abluition in the entrance lobby with a widened entrance door. No grab rails were present in the facility and with the toilet paper dispenser and basin limiting the space available a fold down grab rail on the open side is recommended instead of the conventional wall mounted rail</p>		



The above ablution's flush handle is on the closed side of the toilet which will make it harder to reach once a wheelchair user has returned to their chair or if they only lifted their leg onto the toilet to drain a leg bag and having it on the open side would have been ideal. The basin is fitted with lever style push taps and while the hand drier (left) is at a suitable height for use, it would be advantageous to add a grip handle to the wall about 10cm below the bottom of the drier to assist folk with spinal injuries who battle to balance when they raise their arms.



The entrance level's lounge and coffee bar are generally pretty accessible. The furniture in the lounge area is a little cramped to allow for wheelchair passage, but this furniture is not fixed and if need be can be shifted to accommodate people in wheelchairs. The armchairs and couches are also of a good height and are suitably supportive if wheelchair users chose to transfer from their chair. The tables in the eating section have good clearance from all sides and a wheelchair user can easily get beneath the tables. The service bar is at standard bar height and the stools prevent close access to the bar, but these are only along the one side and the other side is completely open. The view from the lounge is fantastic and the lounge will be a real feature of the new hotel.

LEVEL 2: Conference, Restaurant and Accessible Room Level

Level 2 is the location of the hotel's restaurant, the 5 conference rooms and the 5 rooms that have been adapted to be accessible to all guests. There was some criticism as to why there are not accessible rooms on the upper floor of the hotel, but I suspect it is because the emergency exits for rooms on the upper floor are not accessible to guests in wheelchairs as they are down steel stairs, while for the rooms on level 2 the emergency exit is at ground level.

The **lift** on level 2 also has the narrow corridor leading to the entrance, so once more reversing into the lift will allow for wheelchair users to make an easier exit on their floor of choice.



The restaurant is very accessible. Large access doors and a smooth firm surface, plus tables with easy clearance below the table top and sufficient space between adjacent tables and all counters make the facility easy and comfortable to use. The restaurant staff that I interacted with seemed receptive and well trained. Several offered to help carry my plates

Conference facilities and break away rooms: There are 5 separate rooms:

1. – the largest (below far and middle left) is the Free State Room.
2. The Oribi Room (below middle right)
3. The Eland Room (below far right)
4. The Blesbok Room (is adjacent the Eland Room and the 2 can be made one)
5. The Ribbok Room (not shown here)

All the conference facilities are relatively accessible to guests in wheelchairs as the tables have sufficient clearance.



Accessible Bedrooms: Of the five accessible rooms all have toilets equipped with grab rails positioned appropriately and four (50-53) are next to each other and equipped with roll-in showers. The fifth (47) has a bath. Some of the rooms have a queen-sized bed, while others have 2 single beds. The unit's with the queens have more space for manoeuvring, but the beds are quite high and older people in wheelchairs may struggle to transfer to and from their chair.



Room 53 was the only completed unit at the time of assessment. It was equipped with a queen-sized bed (left). All units come equipped with limited channel DSTV (right)












Like all rooms in the hotel, there is a spectacular view. There is a tiny balcony and the access ridge in the doorway has been made as smooth as possible. There is just enough space for a wheelchair to turn around in, but there is no kick plate or rail to prevent a chair from rolling off the edge and into the flower bed. This may still to be added, but if not it is something that needs to be added.



The **wardrobe** of room 53 (and all the other accessible rooms) is partially accessible, but efforts should be made to make it more so. The door of the wardrobe does not open fully, making it awkward for a wheelchair user to position themselves in a suitable position to access the interior. There is a full length mirror on the interior of the left hand door of the wardrobe, but for a person in a wheelchair to get to use it when the wardrobe door is open they have to reverse to where the door to the exterior of the room is. If the hinge could be extended to allow the wardrobe door to open wider it would make things much easier to access. Then the interior of the wardrobe has a dual rail in the interior hanging space (see below middle). The upper rail is out of reach for a wheelchair user, but the lower rail is in reach, although perhaps it is a little too low. A tall standing person will use the top rail for shirts and jackets, and the bottom rail for trousers. A wheelchair user will hang everything on the bottom rail, and if this bottom rail was about 20cm higher it would provide better hanging space for jackets and shirts. Then here's the rub, the room's safe has been placed below the bottom rail (see below right) and is compromising the hanging space a wheelchair user. The safe needs to be used and could easily be moved into the second lowest shelf immediately on the right of the hanging space.



<p>The room's ablution has for the most part followed the recommended accessibility guidelines, but unfortunately there are a couple of critical shortcomings. In the roll-in shower the grab rails, push style mixer and fold down seat are positioned in the correct positions but the fold down shower seat is not the recommended size and is both dangerous and uncomfortable to use. This needs to be replaced as a matter of urgency. Also the sliding pole that the detachable shower head is mounted on is too close to the perpendicular wall and too low down. This means that for a person seated on the seat the shower flow comes from behind a person and not from the front. This makes washing more difficult, but also means that a person has to detach the handset and use it manually. With the small seat meaning a person is struggling to balance this makes the process very difficult. But these units are intended to be universally accessible and at the current height a tall standing person has to stoop to use it when at its highest point. With this and its closeness to the wall the hotel will find that able-bodied people using the unit are dissatisfied and request to move. This needs to be resolved and should be easy to shift it to a more central position</p>		
	<p>Room 53's toilet (and those in all the 5 accessible rooms) is well provided. The grab-rails are correctly located and the basin fitted with a push style mixer and importantly within reach of a person seated on the toilet (see right). However the doors to the ablutions (left), although specially widened, are spring loaded and this make it difficult for a wheelchair user to open the door and then release it to push themselves through, without the door closing on them. It is recommended that the spring gets removed entirely and each door is fitted with a small grip handle near the door's apex to allow a person to easily pull it closed behind them.</p>	
<p>The other 4 accessible rooms were not quite complete at the time of assessment. The shower seat size is universal in 4 of the units, while the spring loaded door and the safe and hanging rail problem with all 5 units. The room layout differs does differ slightly between units (or significantly in room 47 with a bath) and these are depicted below</p>		
	<p>Room 52 is an inversion of Room 53. However the shower pole is more centrally positioned and while it may need to be raised a little in height, does not have to be shifted sideways like the other shower units</p>	
<p>Room 51 is similar to 52 and 53 but it is smaller and has 2 single beds as opposed to the queen-sized bed. These single beds are of a better height, but care needs to be given when the room is complete to make sure there is sufficient space between the beds for a wheelchair to turn around. The room's shower has the same problem as 53 with the pole the adjustable shower head is on too low and close to the perpendicular wall.</p>		

		
	<p>Room 50 is the inversion of room 51 and has the same seat, safe and spring problems as the other rooms. The position of the shower pole is again a problem and at the time of the visit there was a gaping hole in the floor of the shower.</p>	
<p>Room 47 is the only accessible room with a bath instead of a roll-in shower. While most guests in wheelchairs find shower's easier to transfer to and from because less strength is required due to the depth of a bath, everyone is different and some people prefer the stability of a bath. There are some other units with baths in the hotel and these may be partially accessible units without adaptations such as grab rails and basins within reach of the toilet. However the bath in room 47 is narrow and has a well positioned grab rail that should make transfer fairly easy. The mixer is also within easy reach.</p>		
	<p>The unit's toilet is within reach of the basin and people should find it comfortable to use. The basin vanity is larger than those used in the rooms with roll-in showers, but this should not impede people.</p>	

Level 1: Sport's Bar

Level 1 is where the sports bar is to be found and this is the only reason for any person, wheelchair user or not to descend to the basement level. The bar has an open layout with screens mounted on 2 of the walls, some tables and chairs in one section and a bar and bar stools in one of the corners. At the time of assessment some of the floor tiles immediately outside the lift were missing. Leaving a rough and uneven surface. There is apparently a problem sourcing the desired tiles, but I'm sure this problem is only temporary.

