

Homes & Property

Bright ideas for bedsits

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London's burning

Cut fuel bills: wood burning stoves

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JANE FITZJONES

Homes & Property Christmas renting

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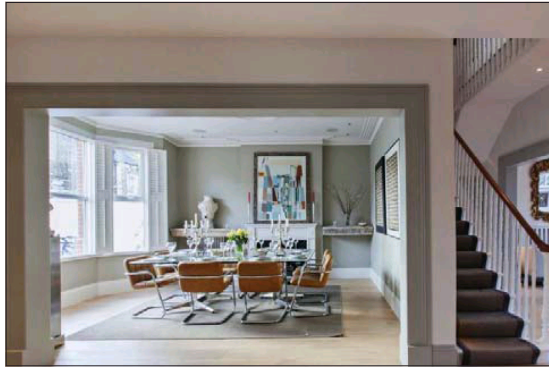
CELEBRATE IN THE CITY

Hurlingham Road, a townhouse in Fulham, sleeps 10. Priced £546 a night over Christmas week.

DODGE the hordes leaving the city by renting a home in central London and enjoy the novelty of empty streets, no queues for restaurants and front-row passes to the Christmas sales.

Hurlingham Road is a glamorous five-bedroom townhouse in Fulham with French grey paint, pale oak floors and impressive art on the walls. It is home to a French-Portuguese couple and their three trilingual children who rent it out when they are away visiting their own relatives in Europe.

■ Through Onefinestay (onefinestay.com; 020 3468 5909)



Home from home: shun the great getaway and enjoy Hurlingham Road in Fulham

HAPPINESS, said American actor George Burns, is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family... in another city.

Once a year though, the clarion call of Christmas means that we have to confront the reality of our own family, probably for more than 24 hours and preferably all in the same house.

But whose house do you choose? For some families it is an easy decision based on who has the most space, but how about Plan B, where you all chip in and choose a Christmas holiday home? Neutral territory with, hopefully, enough pampering interior design to give everyone the feelgood (with your relatives) factor.

FOR ACTIVE FAMILIES

The Inn at John O'Groats sleeps up to 54 in one- to four-bedroom apartments, priced from £80 a night in Christmas week.

FOR some individual privacy within a community setting, how about Natural Retreats' The Inn at John O'Groats? After a complete facelift, the iconic hotel in the north of Scotland has 23 super-comfy one- to four-bedroom flats, the latest part of a £6 million regeneration project.

Outside there is plenty to do – from a boat ride along the coast spotting orca and minke whales and grey seals, to fishing in nearby lochs, diving on wrecks, hiking along Shell Beach or taking a day trip to Orkney.

■ Natural Retreats (naturalretreats.com; 0843 636 4308)



JUST THE TWO OF US

Stardust, a Scottish loch-side retreat for two with hot tub, costs £1,600 for seven nights over Christmas;

Turtledove Hideaway, a cosy cottage for two in Shropshire, is £850 for a week at Christmas.

NOT sold on the family reunion?

Leave home at Christmas ...but take the family, too

Spread the festive feelgood factor and rent a luxury home for Christmas. That's sure to keep the whole family happy, says **Cathy Hawker**



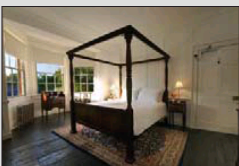
FOR HISTORY BUFFS

Wainman House, Cambridgeshire, sleeps 10 from £896 for three nights, and £1,234 for three nights in Christmas week.

STAY in carefully restored Wainman House in Wisbech and you get a four-floor, six-bedroom Georgian townhouse in a row of merchant houses with thoroughly modern plumbing. There's free entry to the National Trust's nearby Peckover House and Garden and it's an easy stroll to several pubs and restaurants.

The North Norfolk coast is a day trip away, as are National Trust properties in East Anglia including Blickling Hall, Ickworth House, Anglesey Abbey and the Anglo Saxon royal burial site at Sutton Hoo.

■ National Trust Cottages (nationaltrustcottages.co.uk 0844 800 2070)



Georgian dream: Wainman House

homes
triathlon
at east village E20



£9,995: sleep 18 for five days over Christmas at Flore Manor, set in 19 acres of landscaped gardens in

Northamptonshire. Includes a cinema, billiard room and easy access to Towcester races on Boxing

Day. Through The Wow House Company (thewowhousecompany.co.uk; 01242 220006)

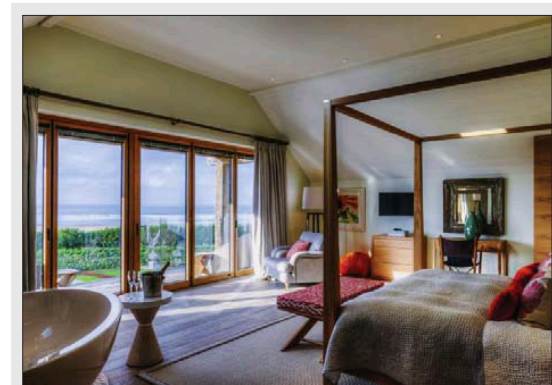
There are some great options for an escape à deux. Stardust in the Western Highlands, a 90-minute drive from Inverness, is a former boathouse-turned-splendid bolthole. Sip champagne in the hot tub as you watch otters and seals play in Loch Ewe. From £850 for four nights. Or try

Turtledove Hideaway, a cosy Shropshire cottage for two decorated in Farrow & Ball colours, with fine linen sheets and the squishiest bed. From £385 for four nights.

■ Both through Unique Home Stays (uniquehomestays.com; 01637 881183)

SLEEK SOPHISTICATION

The Find sleeps 12 in the Cotswolds near Cheltenham, from £2,600 for four nights. A week over Christmas is £7,950. TAKE a traditional listed Cotswolds cottage, add a stone extension that features floor-to-ceiling glass, plus a minimalist, all-white theme and you



Cornish cream: four-poster and glorious views at Little Polgarron, Booby's Bay

BEAUTY AND THE BEACH

Little Polgarron, a modern Cornish beach house, sleeps 10 from £4,050 for four nights, and £8,500 for seven nights over Christmas week. CORNWALL is not just for summer – its beaches can be life-affirming on a blustery December day, too. Little Polgarron sleeps 10 and has interiors sourced by Jill Stein who, with her ex-husband – the TV chef

Rick – rules most of nearby Padstow. The newly built house faces Booby's Bay on one side and Trevose Golf Course on the other, has five en suite bedrooms, a fabulous cinema room and a dining table facing the Atlantic for a memorable Christmas feast.

■ Through SimonEscapes (simonescapes.com; 07595 466955)

get the most sophisticated pad for a family reunion. The Find, designed by Found Associates, was a Royal Institute of British Architects National Award winner last year. Children will love exploring the 16-acre wooded valley outside, while teenagers will hunker down in the

games and cinema rooms. There's a rooftop terrace, six bedrooms and gleaming Corian-lined bathrooms, all of which, despite the pale colour scheme, makes for a wonderfully welcoming, family-friendly house.

■ Unique Home Stays (as before)

LUXURIOUS WINTER SUN

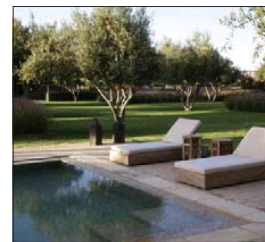
Dar Ourika, near Marrakesh, sleeps 14. Priced £14,000 for seven nights in Christmas week.

FOR warm sunshine and turkey with an exotic twist, head south to Marrakesh where December daytime temperatures average 19C.

Dar Ourika is 25 minutes from both the airport and the Atlas Mountains in a quiet valley, but with easy access to Marrakesh. There are seven bedrooms split between two houses with a pool and tennis court, a roof terrace with fireplace for the chilly evenings and three acres of gardens planted by a double gold winner at Chelsea Flower Show.

Best of all, you can hire the skills of three full-time housekeepers under the vigilant eyes of magnificent Aziz, who will arrange anything from a trip to a Berber market to a shopping expert to guide you through the Medina – or simply serve you sweet mint tea in the garden.

■ Through Scott Williams (scottwilliams.co.uk; 01963 33046)



Tan-tastic: spend Christmas by the pool at Dar Ourika in Marrakesh

You share jokes, meals and good times? Why not your first home on the Olympic Park?

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* Based on buying a 30% share of a 2 bed apartment via shared ownership, with £5000 deposit each and a 25 year mortgage.