

London 2012

# Book now to get a Games room

Many hotels in London are already full for the Olympics. But there is still space if you know where to look, says **Tom Chesshyre**

Coming to London for the Games? Many hotels are already fully booked for the period from July 27 to August 12. However, there are still lots of places from which to choose. Book soon to avoid disappointment and the price increases that are likely to be imposed closer to the Olympics.

**Go cheap and cheerful**

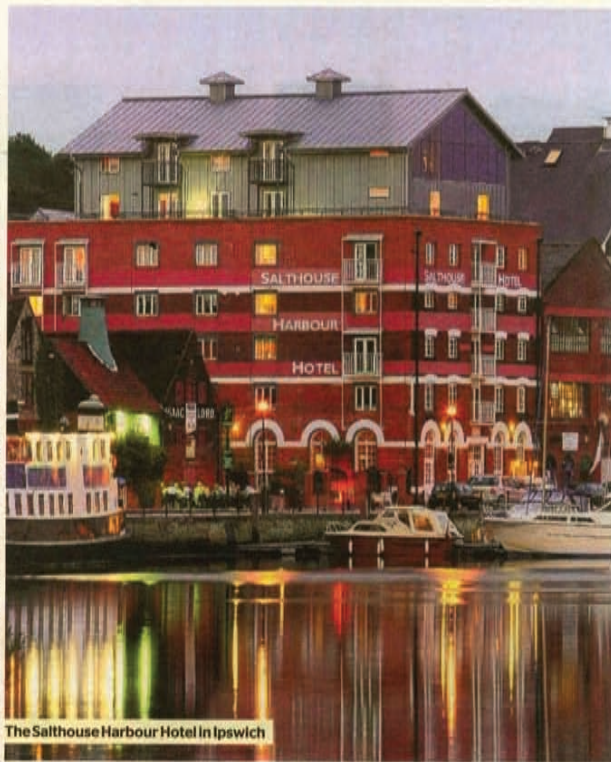
They're cheap (usually). They're clean. They're increasingly stylish. And you have a chance of finding a room. The number of budget rooms in the capital has ballooned in recent years, with **Travelodge** ([travelodge.co.uk](http://travelodge.co.uk)) leading the way with its 44 hotels and 6,592 rooms now, and a further ten hotels being built in the run-up to the Games — taking the total to 7,705. Rooms during the Olympics will start from £43 a night, including the slightly larger family rooms that sleep four. However, this will be for a small percentage of rooms, with others being priced at an average of £110. One of the new hotels, opening in February with 188 rooms, is at Stratford, a short walk from Olympic Park, while another planned to open its doors in June will be at the ExCeL Centre, where the boxing, fencing, weightlifting and wrestling is taking place.

Meanwhile, **Premier Inn** ([premierinn.co.uk](http://premierinn.co.uk)) is also in the middle of a period of wild expansion in London. It plans to open 20 new hotels in the next two years and has just completed a property at Stratford overlooking Olympic Park, adjacent to Westfield shopping centre. At the moment the company says that it has 6,127 rooms in London and a total of 150,000 rooms in 109 hotels within a 35-mile radius of Olympic Park. Room rates start at £159 in London during the Olympics, which the firm says is a "competitive rate".

**Tune Hotels** ([tunehotels.com](http://tunehotels.com)) has two London properties with very simple rooms in which you pay extra for things such as air conditioning and a remote control for your TV. There is one by Liverpool Street station (especially good for travelling to Olympic Park) and one in Lambeth. They're basic but spotless, and rooms are available from £145.

**Easyhotel** ([easyhotel.com](http://easyhotel.com)), which has five properties in London, offers a similar product to Tune Hotels. The rooms are even more simple and pared down, with prices from about £85 in its Victoria hotel.

Or try the website **Hostelbookers.com**, which specialises in hostels and has several choices, with prices in dorms from £14.99 a night; though some of the hostels also offer small private rooms from as little as £23pp, based on two sharing. The **Clink261** hostel near King's Cross station looks particularly good, with funky public areas.



The Salthouse Harbour Hotel in Ipswich

**Try a booking website...fast**

Get in there now and you may just find a decent price for a room on sites such as [laterooms.com](http://laterooms.com), [hotels.com](http://hotels.com), [lastminute.com](http://lastminute.com) or [expedia.co.uk](http://expedia.co.uk) — each of which is already taking bookings for next summer. When we checked **Laterooms.com** we found the SO Sienna four-star serviced apartments in Hammersmith from £246 a night. Rooms have mini-kitchens and dining tables, and the style is minimalist and slick. There was also the Saint Georges Hotel on Regent Street, with reasonable rooms in the heart of the West End at £236 a night during the Olympics, down from £320.

**Lastminute.com** seems to have a particularly good selection for the Games. There's the four-star Belle Cour hotel and spa near Victoria Station from £190; the decent-sized Battersea Park Apartments (very modern, with kitchens) from £200; and the upmarket Four Seasons on Park Lane from £416. **Hotels.com** has a range of properties, from a cosy alehouse with B&B rooms in Camden from £150, to five-star Sofitels from £311.

**Expedia.co.uk** is releasing most of its properties towards the end of January. There are a few London options on the site now, though they're a little pricey, with the All Seasons London Leyton hotel (bright simple rooms), near Olympic Park, from £340.

**Go camping**

**Visit London** ([visitolondon.com/2012](http://visitolondon.com/2012)) has a good section that lists camping options in the capital along with hotels and B&Bs. The Crystal Palace Caravan Club site is on the edge of a pretty park and offers tent pitches per night for £13, or caravans from £13 to £27, depending on the size of the vehicle. From the camp site you can catch a No 3 bus all the way to Oxford Street. Alternatively, the Lee Valley Camping and Caravan Park, close to Epping Forest, has tent pitches and spaces for caravans from £12. Whitewater rafting,

cycling and hiking are all available — and pets are welcome.

There are also temporary camping sites that are being created especially for the Games. The Romford Campsite on the Westlands playing fields in Romford will be run by the Camping and Caravanning Club. It will have 430 pitches and will be open from July 24 to August 20. Listings of temporary sites can be found at [2012camping.co.uk](http://2012camping.co.uk) (or call 0845 1307633). Each will have big screens showing events, as well as bars, food and activities for kids. Pitches cost from £30 a night.

If all the regular campsites are booked, there are still places to pitch your tent. Canny East Londoners are renting out their gardens to people looking to camp. A trends report by World Travel Market says that the [Campinmygarden.com](http://Campinmygarden.com) website is a leader in alternative accommodation options for the Games. One homeowner in Eltham, not far from Blackheath — site name [Welcome2012](http://Welcome2012) — is offering "a large tent which sleeps 4-8 people" with "full breakfast" from £15pp per night; they can also help to arrange transportation if needed. Other options among the 30 listed as Olympic sites include **Wheats68's** place in Bromley (£20pp per night for a garden that can accommodate two five-man tents) and **Amanda's** place, a garden near Greenwich Park from £25pp per night.

**Stay in someone's home**

Staying at home with a Londoner is another possibility, and the best first port of call is again the Visit London website. This lists several accredited agencies that offer the opportunity to stay in people's homes — usually in flats or houses that are empty as owners are temporarily away. Prices vary enormously depending on what the agencies have in stock. **Coach House London Vacation Rentals** ([rentals.chslondon.com](http://rentals.chslondon.com)), which has properties in Kensington, Chelsea, Notting Hill and Knightsbridge, is worth a try, as is **Welcome Assured**

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(welcomeassured.co.uk), which specialises in finding places in homes with carefully selected host families.

**Stay outside London**

One great way to get a decent room — and avoid the London crowds — is to go for an hotel in a "satellite town" with good rail links. Ipswich is a little more than an hour's train journey from Stratford — and it's lovely down by the marina; just off the River Orwell, from which George Orwell got his writing name. The Salthouse Harbour Hotel (01473 226789, www.salthouseharbour.co.uk) is right by the water and has recently had a makeover, adding stylish new rooms. Many have exposed brick walls, modern art is dotted all around and there's a good restaurant. B&B doubles are available from £125. Its sister hotel in Bury St Edmonds, The Angel (01284 714007, www.theangel.co.uk), is another solid choice that is even closer to Stratford, being only 40 minutes away by train. The modern and colourful rooms in this converted 18th-century coaching inn are available during the Olympics, from £125 for a B&B double. The bright restaurant has views across the market to the cathedral and is run by the well-regarded chef Simon Barker.

Or how about heading for the seaside at Broadstairs in Kent, about an hour and a quarter away by high-speed train? The Royal Albion Hotel (01843 868071, albiombroadstairs.co.uk) has pride of place by the promenade overlooking the cliff, with the sandy beach below. Charles Dickens often stayed at the hotel, with its

jolly, laid-back atmosphere, preferring the best sea-facing B&B rooms, which are available during the Olympics from £130; town-facing doubles are £110. A little way up the road is Belvidere Place (01843 579850, belvidereplace.co.uk), a boutique B&B with five rooms, each tastefully decorated with retro furniture and modern art. It is run by the ebullient and charming Jilly Sharpe, who says that there is availability during the Games; B&B doubles are from £135 for a minimum two-night stay.

Alternatively, the chic Brew House Hotel (01892 520587, www.brewhousehotel.com) in Tunbridge Wells in Kent — about 1hr 20min away from Stratford by train — has B&B doubles from £155 during the week and £200 at weekends. The hotel, which has a minimalist look, also has a buzzy restaurant. It's a short walk from the station. Or if you prefer peaceful walks along the clifftops by the Channel (after watching all the athletes hard at it on the track), try Walllett's Court Country House Hotel (01304 852424, walllettscourt.com), which is four miles from Deal. New high-speed trains from Deal to Stratford have reduced the travelling time to about 80 minutes. There are comfortable modern rooms from £170 and a spa with an indoor pool. All prices and availability were correct at the time of going to press

For regular updates on Olympic accommodation, go to Times Online at [thetimes.co.uk/travel](http://thetimes.co.uk/travel)

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