Olympic hosts: Londoners open their homes to the world

 

**Article Summary**

Write a one-paragraph summary of the article including information that answers the questions Who?, What?, When?, etc.

**Vocabulary**

1. Couchsurfing - **verb**.: definition
   1. + *sample sentence*
2. Homestay -**verb:** definition
   1. + *sample sentence*
3. Exorbitant – **Verb**: definition +
   1. sample sentence

LONDON – When one of the most expensive cities in the world hosts the Olympics, high prices for tickets and hotel rooms are no surprise. But Londoners have embraced the spirit of the Games by opening up their own homes free of charge to athletes’ families and spectators from around the world.

Dozens of British residents have invited guests to use spare rooms as part of organized homestay schemes, while countless more have offered up their sofas through message boards for budget travelers such as [**Couchsurfing**](http://www.couchsurfing.org/).



For some, it was reports of hotels and homeowners attempting to cash in on the Olympics that motivated them to offer open up their homes.

In February, [**NBCNews.com revealed that landlords in Britain's capital**](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2012/02/02/10288441-olympic-housing-crunch-london-landlords-evict-tenants-to-gouge-tourists?lite) were evicting tenants in order to cash in on the Games by charging tourists many times the usual rent.

“I didn’t want the world to come away from London thinking we were only interested in trying to make money from people,” said Liz Gill, who is hosting Graham and Delwyn Cure, from Tasmania, Australia, whose 19-year-old daughter Amy is due to represent her country at the women’s track team cycling later on Friday.

“When you visit a country for the first time you take away an impression of the place and the people and when I read all these reports of exorbitant hotel prices I thought it would be such a shame if that’s what Britain was remembered for. We’re delighted to have visitors,” she added.

As long ago as February, when the biggest tranche of tickets for London 2012 went on sale, hotel rooms in London had already peaked during Games dates. British [**consumer organization, Which?, found**](http://conversation.which.co.uk/transport-travel/london-hotel-prices-2012-olympic-games/) a double room at the Best Western hotel on Shaftesbury Avenue for Saturday – the night of the men’s 10,000 metres final – was $733 compared to only $435 for a normal Saturday night last month.

Gill offered space in her north London home through [**More Than Gold**](http://www.morethangold.org.uk/about-us/our-history.html) – a charitable organization originally set up to represent the work of local churches at the 1996 Atlanta Games.

She is not charging anything for her spare room – something she says is “part of the spirit of the Olympic Games.”

“We have only known for a few weeks that Amy was definitely going to be part of the Olympic squad,” said Graham Cure. “There was no doubt we didn’t want to miss our daughter in her first Olympics, but by now air fares were more expensive and we were thinking about where to stay.

“We’d already spend AUS$3,000 ($3,150) each on tickets and I’d previously looked at renting a house from a list on an official website, but most people on it wanted upwards of AUS$4,500 ($4,750) a week and wanted bookings for the entire three weeks, whereas we only needed one week. There was no way we could spend that sort of money.”

Delwyn Cure added: “We always hoped something would fall into place, and in the end somebody at Cycling Australia mentioned homestay schemes and we were put in touch with Liz.”

While athletes’ families are usually given free tickets for events, offers of accommodation are rare.

For others, it was not just the price of London hotels but the atmosphere that was unappealing.

“I hate soulless and expensive chain hotels,” said Shamey Cramer, a postgraduate student originally from Los Angeles who secured a spare sofa in east London – minutes away from the main Olympic Park - through the Couchsurfing site.

“Some people like hotels, but I much prefer to meet people and experience more of the place I’m in. This is my first time doing this and it seemed the perfect way to see London during the Games.”

His host, Emy Ritt, who is working as a transport organizer for London 2012, said: “It’s a great way to meet people. You can see each other’s profiles before making arrangements, so you generally can tell it’s people you’re likely to get along with.”