

A heap of towels, crisp sheets and a pile of books: who wouldn't want to stay in a room like this?

# Home truths

THIS MONTH, IN OUR SERIES ON WHAT REALLY GOES ON INSIDE A HOME, WE **WELCOME GUESTS FOR THE WEEKEND**. JOIN US AS WE PLUMP UP THE PILLOWS AND PUT THE KETTLE ON

Compiled by **CLARE GOGERTY**

**THE BEST THING** about having friends or family to stay for a couple of nights is the luxurious amount of time you have at your disposal. A weekend spent together enjoying leisurely meals, mooching around your neighbourhood and chatting into the night over a bottle or two of wine makes for the ideal opportunity to properly catch up. Instead of keeping an eye on the clock, monitoring the amount you drink and gabbling through your news, you can

relax, knowing that no one has to worry about getting home.

There are downsides, of course: extra people in the house means extra mess and extra clearing up. Rooms must be cleaned, beds must be made, meals cooked and activities lined up. How much effort you expend depends a little on who is coming to stay. A mother or mother-in-law will, most likely, have more exacting housekeeping standards than a teenage nephew. And if friends with small children are coming, it is sensible to remove valuable items from grabbing reach.

The secret to making the weekend go well is to emphasise the whole 'my home is your home' thing. Show guests where they will be sleeping, pour them a drink and let them take off their shoes. Tell them to help themselves to snacks and that they can have a shower without asking.

There are limits, of course: it's best to keep bedroom doors – yours and your guests' – shut and hide anything potentially embarrassing; you don't want any *Come Dine With Me*-style revelations at supper.

## WHICH GUEST BED?

**Folding bed:** once folded away, this steel bed can be moved around on castors and tucked away in a cupboard or behind a curtain, say, ready to be pulled out again for night two.

**Sliding bed:** two single beds, one tucked under the other. When wheeled out, the underbed's legs extend to either butt up to the other to make a double bed, or keep as a single. Clever, neat and solid: it's made from oak.

**Inflatable:** plug this in and watch it rise like a hovercraft, filling with air to your guests'





**You probably won't need**

Guest towels: what's wrong with your normal ones?

Guest soaps: ditto.

Bathrobes: tell them there's no shame in padding around in their pyjamas.

An alarm clock: only for the elderly. Doesn't everyone else use their phone?

Miniature guest toiletry products such as shampoo and shower gel: remember this is your home, not a hotel.



**THE GUEST ROOM**

If you have a guest room, you will already have certain key things in place. These will include a double bed, made with crisp bedlinen, a bedside table, a chair to heap stuff on, and somewhere to hang clothes. If your guests are staying in an adapted children's bedroom or home office, you will have to improvise. A vintage chair, old trunk or crate makes a good substitute bedside table. Add a reading lamp, posy vase and a carafe of water and glass, and you're all set. Remember to include a stack of magazines and books, too.

*"Proud I am that I am able to have a spare bed for my friends"*  
Samuel Pepys

desired level of puffiness or firmness. Then marvel at its comfy velour topping and generous amount of space. Folds up neatly, too.

**Sofa bed:** more of an armchair-bed than a sofa-bed, this neat little fold-down suits smaller spaces or teenage bedrooms. And it's really easy to unfold, no complicated cantilevers here.

**Camp bed:** no guest will be delighted to sleep on this – it's flimsy, thin and has no mattress – so it's best kept for camping. But when needs must, it's good to have handy. And it's got a neat dangling pocket thing to tuck away 'personal items'.



**JAY-BE DOUBLE BED | £149.99**  
Tucks away neatly, and is padded.  
[tesco.com](http://tesco.com)



**MORGAN GUEST BED | £550**  
Two beds in one! Genius.  
[johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)



**SUMMIT CAMP BED | £19.99**  
Handy, but not as comfy.  
[robertdyas.co.uk](http://robertdyas.co.uk)



**AEROBED DOUBLE BED | £121**  
Inflates like a hovercraft.  
[homebase.co.uk](http://homebase.co.uk)



**HARU SMALL SOFA BED | £269**  
Small and easy to unfold.  
[made.com](http://made.com)

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; LOUPE IMAGES; NARRATIVES/POLLY WIREFORD



“Guests, like fish,  
begin to smell  
after three days”  
Benjamin  
Franklin

## THE SWEET SMELL OF HOME

The old estate agent adage about filling the house with the smell of coffee to impress potential buyers, also applies to guests. A delicious fragrance makes an inviting olfactory welcome mat. Air freshener won't cut it, unless you want your house to smell like a minicab: better to run the Hoover over carpets, empty bins and dump the cat litter. Open windows to let a good, wholesome gust of fresh air blow through and if things still smell musty, some baking soda or white wine vinegar in a bowl by the offending item eradicates odour.

It's best to be restrained in the use of scented candles: one is plenty, any more looks like you are masking something dreadful or initiating a ritual. Go for quality: inexpensive candles burn in a jiffy, leaving a trail of paraffin vapour. Welcoming fragrances include tuberose, vetiver, mandarin and rose. From Diptyque ([diptyqueparis.co.uk](http://diptyqueparis.co.uk)), Jo Loves ([joloves.com](http://joloves.com)) and The Future Kept ([thefuturekept.com](http://thefuturekept.com)).

## A WORD ABOUT BREAKFAST

Having guests is a welcome opportunity to make a meal of breakfast. Now you can lay the table with all those vintage milk jugs, teapots and toast racks you've bought, heap up croissants, bagels, Kellogg's Variety boxes, and get the juicer going. Make guests feel like they are staying at a boutique B&B with a buffet-style spread complete with jars of home-made jam, boiled eggs, toast, and butter in an actual butter dish. If feeling ambitious, go for the Full English and get some rashers and heritage tomatoes going. A proper breakfast will occupy guests for an hour or so and, if hearty enough, obliterate the need for lunch.



## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WEEKEND

by etiquette expert  
Mary Killen

1. To pre-empt things starting badly, give false arrival times. Thirty minutes should be enough. Email driving directions as most people's sat navs take them the wrong way.
2. Show guests their accommodation as soon as they arrive. Also indicate to couples which, if any, rooms are available as overspill if their partner's snoring becomes unmanageable.
3. Food allergies (real or imagined), usually to wheat or dairy, are likely to come up. Determine what these are before people arrive.
4. Tell guests your plans for activities during their stay. They may grumble to one another that you are a control freak but will secretly love an imposed schedule, and the chance to leave their own brains at the door.

*Mary Killen's online course 'A Guide to Modern Manners' is available from [idler.co.uk](http://idler.co.uk). The Simple Things readers can order it at a 50% discount. See page 45 for details.*

**YOU MAY NEED...**

- Crisp, freshly-laundered bedlinen.
- Extra blankets for chilly nights.
- Hot water bottle: ditto.
- Extra towels, laid on guests' beds.
- Scented candles or reed diffusers.
- A dustpan and brush to sweep away pet hair and cobwebs.
- A feather duster to avoid guests running fingers along picture frames.
- A posy vase for the bedside.
- Egg cups and cosies.
- A toast rack and artisan bread.
- A cafetière: the smell of fresh coffee will rouse lie-a-beds in the mornings.

# EXTRA SOMETHINGS

*Create a bit of a boutique B&B vibe with one or two clever additions*



**Fontana bedlinen set, £75**  
[made.com](http://made.com)



**Posy vase, £16**  
[lsa-international.com](http://lsa-international.com)



**Wool cob weave throw, £49**  
[thefuturekept.com](http://thefuturekept.com)



**Double wall cafetière, £20**  
[sainsburys.co.uk](http://sainsburys.co.uk)



**Folk felt egg cosies, £5.60 each**  
[elsieandfleur.co.uk](http://elsieandfleur.co.uk)



**Day Birger et Mikkelsen candle, £20**  
[johnlewis.com](http://johnlewis.com)



**Ceramic toast rack, £46**  
[swankymaison.com](http://swankymaison.com)



**Saffron green cotton towels, £2-£22**  
[habitat.co.uk](http://habitat.co.uk)