

Ultimate festive TV guide

Charity telethon today
Lines open from 10am

→ Page 15

Saturday
13 December 2025
£4.20
From £2.30 for subscribers

The Guardian

Doctors' strike during flu crisis 'beyond belief' – PM

Rowena Mason
Andrew Gregory

Keir Starmer has said it is "frankly beyond belief" that resident doctors would strike during the NHS's worst moment since the pandemic, in remarks that risk inflaming tensions with medics.

Writing for the Guardian, the prime minister made an outspoken attack on the strikes planned for 17-22 December for placing "the NHS and patients who need it in grave danger".

Starmer's intervention comes a

day after the health secretary, Wes Streeting, argued that the strikes could overwhelm the NHS, increasing pressure on resident doctors to accept his offer of more training places but no extra money.

The British Medical Association said the government "should not be scaremongering" and making the public think "the NHS will not be able to look after them and their loved ones".

Dr Jack Fletcher, chair of the BMA resident doctors committee, said ministers were "laying the blame for the failings of the NHS to cope with

an outbreak of flu at the feet of resident doctors".

Fletcher said he would meet with Streeting any time "to try to agree a deal to avert next week's strikes", but it was "cruel and calculated" for the health secretary to fail to have any engagement outside strikes and then come to the BMA "with an offer he knows is poor and expects us to just accept within 24 hours".

An indicative online ballot of resident doctors, formerly known as junior doctors, is due to close on Monday.

"I am a Labour prime minister, who

believes in workers' right to strike," Starmer said. "But let's be clear when it comes to the strikes planned by resident doctors next week. They should not happen. They are reckless."

He added: "Right now, resident doctors' colleagues will be cancelling operations, cancelling their Christmas leave and preparing for this coming storm. The idea that strikes could still take place in this context is frankly beyond belief."

With the NHS saying it is facing a "worst-case scenario" with an unprecedented wave of super flu, Streeting has

Delicious desserts
Inside your free food magazine



King says he is to reduce his cancer treatment in the new year

News Page 2

Double vision: what his and hers dressing really means for a couple

News Page 9

New Epstein photos of Trump released

News Page 4



Lioness Chloe Kelly

Interview
Saturday



25 travel discoveries of 2025

Saturday



50

9

SEX
28 years
on, we still
make love
every day
PAGE 63

ADVICE
For my
influencer
friend, I'm
content
PAGE 64

FASHION
How to get
Christmas
shopping
right
PAGE 66

TRAVEL
Writers'
favourite
discoveries
of 2025
PAGE 70

LIFESTYLE



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Change it up this Christmas with
interiors experts' tips for a stylish sleepover



Got guests staying this Christmas? Interiors experts offer hacks and tips on how to transform your spare room from a dumping ground into a hotel-like retreat

Words: Kate Jacobs

Test drive the room

Do as the top hoteliers do and scope out any issues by spending a night in your spare room, living out of an overnight bag. This is the best way to identify what needs to be added or changed before guests arrive.

Declutter

If you're lucky enough to have a spare room, there's a good chance it's become a dumping ground, so make time for a strenuous declutter ahead of guests arriving.

"We often hold on to things that no longer serve us, so clear away visual noise, empty the bedside drawers and keep surfaces clear to make intentional space for your guests," say interior designers Zoë Starreveld and Alex Forbes, of Starreveld Forbes. Lay out holdalls and bin bags designated for rubbish, recycling, the charity shop and "elsewhere in the house". If you run out of time or space, things can always be relocated to the loft or shed - or, worst-case scenario, just drape a throw over the offending stack of (ideally boxed) clutter.

Clean up

Many of us are grossed out by grime in someone else's house that we would turn a blind eye to at home. So it's time to get the whole household on board and blitz the areas your guests will use, in particular the bedroom and bathroom.

Create some character

A vase, jug or even a jam jar of greenery, flowers or berries will bring life to the room - but keep it small so it won't get in the way. If you're looking for a steer on the decor itself, interior designer Tanya Selway, of Stelly Selway studio, advises treating "the spare room as a little escape: less guest room, more boutique retreat. Give it personality with layered textures, a few unexpected vintage pieces and something that hints at travel or leisure. It should feel like a place where guests can exhale, with its own, distinct character rather than a pared-back afterthought."

And so to bed

If you need to buy bed linen, the options are vast, but Piglet in Bed (1), M&S (2), Dunelm, La Redoute and H&M Home are all good for duvet sets. To create a coherent colour scheme, look for shades that are already in the room, or play it safe by sticking to white.

Make sure your duvet and pillows are up to the job - Soak & Sleep have a wide range, if you need to stock up, and a cosy throw such as Habitat's velvet bedspread (£50, 3) is a nice touch. Cushions on a bed can feel fussy, but if there isn't space for a comfy chair in the room, they will allow guests to relax on the bed during the day. Try La Redoute, H&M Home and Dunelm for bargains, while independent brands such as Nkuku and Palava (4) have beautiful, sustainable designs.

Peace and quiet

To give your guests a great night's sleep, you could add blackout linings to your bedroom curtains. Dunelm's blackout pencil pleat linings (£12-£40) are easy to attach to existing curtain hooks. If that's too

much fuff, provide a sleep mask. Perhaps you have some left over from a flight, or if you need to buy some, opt for silk ones such as Alaska Bear's twin-strap mask with nose baffle (£15.99 from Amazon).

If neighbourhood noise or early-rising children are an issue, raid that flight kit again for earplugs, or check out the options at Happy Ears. You could also provide a simple white noise machine, such as the Hushing mini (£19.99). These can be incredibly effective at drowning out intermittent noise.

Good lighting

It's a crime against hospitality to make guests stumble their way to bed in the dark after turning off the big light. Bedside lamps are essential. These can be appropriated from elsewhere in the house, or look for a bargain. Dunelm have plenty of strong, affordable options, including Hera table lamp (£6), or if you've a bigger budget, try the Spool table lamp (£91, 5) from Dār Lighting.

Starreveld Forbes suggest a handy portable light such as the Ferm Living Arum (£169, 6), from Earl of East, and advise: "Light the room with intention. Low-level lighting makes a huge difference, so always turn on at least one lamp before guests arrive. It makes the room feel welcoming."

Chargers on hand

Another bedside essential is access to a plug, while a generously long phone charger cable shows that you've thought of everything. If there isn't a socket on each side of the bed, make sure there's an extension lead - Amazon and eBay are good for a wide choice of sockets and lengths. Ikea does a great range of multi-USB port chargers, including Småhagel (£6) - pair it with colourful Lillhult and Sittbrunn charger cables (from £1.50, 7).

Carafe and glasses

Make sure guests have a glass of water at bedtime or, if you're staying in for a festive night, place water in the room in advance. A carafe and glasses are a lovely touch too. You can pick up a stylish Nardo olive green



set from the Futon Company for (£16, **8**) or for something fancier, a Nine Milk carafe set (£40-£49) from twentytwentyone.

Make sure to provide a vanity mirror, ideally placed in good natural light. If you don't have something suitable, Dunelm's Elements dressing table mirror (£20, **9**) is a fun design. If you can spare a hairdryer too, guests will appreciate it and won't come knocking on your door when you're getting dressed.

Neat and tidy

To help everything stay pleasingly in its place, provide a container for cosmetics. A trinket tray by the bed is also useful. Oliver Bonas has a great selection, including a set of two Sun Swirl trinket dishes (£14.50, **10**). Similarly, a wastepaper bin helps keep things spick and span. Zara Home's cylindrical metal wastepaper basket (£69.99) is a chic solution.

Keep cosy

It's horrible when you feel cold in someone else's house, so make sure to provide throws and blankets in the living room as well as the bedroom. Hot-water bottles are a lovely gesture - zhuzh them up with a stylish cover such as the Forte wool cover (£52, **11**) from Toast. A heated throw can be moved around the house and even draped over the bed on cold nights. Dreamland's are among the best, including a Cosy Up faux fur warming throw (£109.99, **12**) in a gorgeous terracotta tone.

Create surfaces

Many a guest bedroom and bathroom fails in this area. Guests need somewhere to unpack their bag or place a washbag. "Aim to set up like a hotel room - include a small side chair, stool or bench to rest a bag on or layer clothes," say Starreveld Forbes, who recommend the X Collagerie shiny and matte side table (£129.99, Zara Home, **13**), and the Rylee nesting bedside table (£399) West Elm. If space is tight, the Futon Company do a great range of small-space furniture, including their Hale narrow bedside table (£40) which is just 24cm wide.

Somewhere for clothes

If you aren't able to provide wardrobe space, Gemma Tucker, of Balance Interior Design, suggests "adding a clothes rail with wooden hangers - it's an easy and affordable touch. If there's enough room, include a small chest of drawers for things like underwear and cosmetics."

She recommends the elegant black iron clothes rail from Design Vintage (available in three sizes, from £245). For a more contemporary look, try the compact Turner single clothes rail (£50, Habitat, **14**). If space is ultra-tight, a rack of hooks on the back of a door, or on a wall, will do the job. Nordic Nest has a great selection, including the Relief hook rack (£134, **15**) used with a set of 10 hangers (£9) from Argos Home.

Scent the room

"Set the mood before your guests arrive by lighting a scented candle. Opt for rich, woody notes in the cooler seasons, and lighter, fresh fig aromas as the weather warms. True Grace (**16**) offers a great selection," advises Tucker. A sweet-smelling bathroom is an essential too. Ailsa MacConnell, of Studio Mac, says: "For me, it's all about creating a beautiful scent, so guests relax and feel comfortable. The Sweet Pea reed diffuser (£33.99) from St Eval, is my absolute go-to, and so many of my friends and family comment on the scent after they've stayed a couple of nights."

Home entertainment

If you have a small television and smart stick, you may want to put them in the guest room to avoid TV clashes. Or perhaps a digital radio or Bluetooth

It's a crime against hospitality to make guests stumble to bed in the dark. Bedside lamps are essential

speaker, so guests can entertain themselves in the room. A tailored selection of books from your own shelves is always lovely - perhaps include some short-story compilations.

Antonia Winkler von Stiernhielm, of Studio Anton, likes to add "a slim magazine rack with a few well-chosen titles, because it brings a quiet sense of care and makes the room feel thoughtfully personal". She suggests a rattan magazine holder (£85, Uru Home, **17**), or Stackers garnet magazine rack (£40), available from John Lewis, is another stylish option.

Tea and biscuits

If there's space, it's lovely to provide guests with a tea or coffee. Use a tray and include a small kettle, such as the John Lewis Anyday (£20, **18**) and perhaps a fancy tin of biscuits. Amazon sells a selection of small, insulated milk bottles (**19**).

Boost the bathroom too

Obviously, make sure you provide your best towels. If you need to restock, La Redoute (**20**) and Dunelm are good go-tos. Give the bathroom a declutter to free up space, provide an empty candle jar or presentable mug as a toothbrush holder, and perhaps create a basket of some of your favourite spa treats to indulge guests.

Winkler von Stiernhielm also suggests "a freshly laundered linen robe on the back of the door, because comfort should feel like it's been beautifully thought through. I always stick to white sheets and robes, so they feel like a luxury hotel." The White Company's long lightweight waffle robe (£65, **21**) fits the bill.

After the guests go

Selway has thoughts on this: "Your spare room doesn't have to wait for visitors to come to life. Add a turntable and records, or a reading nook, so it becomes a place you enjoy too. It should be a little retreat that reflects your interests while still welcoming guests." ●