

# Priced out: tough choices facing London renters

Soaring costs for tiny rooms with nightmare landlords are forcing many London renters to move to the outer suburbs, or even leave the capital altogether — with mixed results, finds **Ruth Bloomfield**

**A**fter years of renting around London, Gaby Levine had had enough. Partly it was the money — her “tiny little box room” in West Hampstead cost £875pcm, with bills adding another £175pcm — and she was also fed up with awkward flatmates and all the stress and claustrophobia that comes with life in the capital.

“I have lived in London my whole life, and I never thought I would move out,” says Levine, a freelance graphic designer. “But it just started to get too much. Then two of my best friends

down,” says Marc Vlesing, chief executive officer at Pocket Living.

Levine was an early adopter of the great London exodus. She and her friends left London last September after finding a flat on Spareroom.com. Because of the logistical difficulties of viewing homes, they made an offer on their three bedroom flat without having seen it. “It was the best decision I ever made,” says Levine, 27.

“We have a gorgeous flat, the nicest landlord I’ve ever had and because we’ve signed a two-year lease he’s said he’s not going to put the rent up.”

Levine’s spacious room costs her £750pcm, with her share of bills coming in at £125pcm. Over the course of a year

Wales she thought she was done with small-town life when she moved to London.

She works as a TV production secretary, has made great friends and until a few weeks ago, was living in a three-bedroom, £2,100pcm rented flat in Turnpike Lane with two flatmates.

The flat was far from perfect but Raw-Rees, 24, was happy enough with it to be willing to stay on after its lease ran out in November.

Unfortunately, her landlord had other ideas. “Both my flatmates had decided to move home, so I found two new people to rent their rooms and called the agent in August to say that we wanted to keep it on,” said Raw-Rees.





started talking about moving to Brighton and I thought: "Why not?" and joined them."

Levine is now settled a few minutes' walk from the seafront, her rent is cheaper and her stress levels have plummeted.

According to a recent study by Pocket Living, one in four London renters aged 25 to 45 are considering a similar escape, either to the far-flung suburbs or out of the capital altogether to avoid its spiralling rents.

"A situation where young talented people are now being forced to leave the capital because the prospect of owning a home here is so bleak is one of the clearest indicators so far that London faces being gradually levelled



### *My friends are in London, my boyfriend is in London. It is where I have built my life but it is on pause for now*

she can expect to save more than £2,000. "The quality of life is also so much better," she says. "Everything is much calmer here and living by the sea is amazing."

While Levine has embraced her new life, however, Gabrielle Raw-Rees is a more reluctant exile.

Having been brought up by the sea in

"He said, 'I was actually planning on serving you with your notice next week'. I was shocked. Our lease ran out in November but they wanted us out in October so that they could re-let it."

Raw-Rees reapplied to rent the flat, offering the asking price which had risen to £2,300pcm. Another desperate renter offered £2,900pcm.

That was mid-September and Raw-Rees tried her best to find somewhere new to live but in London's overheated market she struggled.

Raw-Rees's brother and sister both live near Grantham, Lincolnshire, and during the summer her mother had decided she wanted to join them. Raw-Rees decided that her best short-term option would be to team up with her mum and



at the start of November she packed her bags, her two pet rabbits and moved into a rented two-bedroom cottage, which costs £1,000pcm (including bills).

"We are about 15 or 20 minutes' drive from Grantham and I don't have a car," says Raw-Rees. "There is not a shop, pub or anything. If I want to go any-

where I have to ask my mum for a lift, which hasn't been a situation since I was about 15.

"My friends are in London, my boyfriend is in London. It is where I have built my life but it is on pause for now."

Raw-Rees's company has a one-day-a-week-in-the-office policy, but luckily her

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Renters can make significant savings if they are prepared to expand their postcode horizons without compromising too much on journey times into central London.

Exclusive research by lettings platform Goodlord has found that the most affordable locations within a 15-minute commute of central London include **Lower Sydenham**, where the average rent is £1,012pcm; **Hither Green (1)**, where it is £1,135pcm; and **Grove Park (2)** at £1,208pcm.

For those prepared to commute for half an hour the best value options include **Letchworth Garden City (3)** in Hertfordshire, with average rents coming in at £968pcm.

A 45-minute commute will take you to **Bedford (4)**, where average rents drop to £676 pcm.

And within an hour of London you could consider the Lincolnshire market town of **Grantham**, where you will pay an average of £531 for a rental property.

