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GARETH CATTERTMOLE/GETTY IMAGES  
The Memory Cabinet is but one of the highlights of Harry Potter studio tour near Watford, England.

## Walk in Harry Potter's footsteps

Studio tour enthalls fans of the boy wizard

**By Sarah Lyall**  
*New York Times*

My daughter and I were half-way through the new Making of Harry Potter studio tour when we met Dan, whose job was to attend to our Harry Potter needs.

"Ask me anything about Harry Potter," Dan said. "I love Harry Potter. I love telling people about Harry Potter. Should I tell you one of my favorite interesting facts?"

Yes, indeed.

"When they made the hour-glasses that keep track of the house points," he continued, referring to Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Slytherin and Ravenclaw, the four Hogwarts houses, "they used so many beads that they created a national bead shortage in England!" He beamed.

How could you not fall under the spell of attendants like Dan, a 20-year-old part-time actor who secured a job as a "tour interactor" after working as a Potter movie extra (because of his "sneaky" physical appearance, he said, he played a Slytherin). And how could you not be impressed at how lovingly, lavishly and thoughtfully the organizers have distilled 11 years of filmmaking into a single enormous spectacle bound to appease even the most incurable Harry Potter addict?

If the movies were heroin, this is the methadone.

The tour, which is mostly self-guided, takes place in two vast Warner Bros. sound studios on the Leavesden Studios lot, about 20 miles northwest of London, where the Harry Potter movies were filmed. There are complete sets, like the Gryffindor boys' dormitory, with its velvet-trimmed four-poster beds. There are the

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### ONLINE EXTRA



com/travel.

### IF YOU GO

Tickets for the Warner Bros. Studio Tour: The Making of Harry Potter are 28 pounds for adults (\$45) and 21 pounds for children (\$33) and must be bought in advance. Details: [www.wbstudiotour.co.uk](http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk).

# How green is that hotel?

It takes work to find those justly 'certified'

### 3 WAYS TO FIND AN ECO-FRIENDLY ROOM

**BY WEB:** Use Travelocity's "accommodation type" sorter to easily find, city by city, its 1,100 independently certified U.S. hotels (and even more non-U.S. listings).

**BY RATINGS:** Look for Leadership for Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) ratings.

**BY STATE:** Check state certification programs. California, Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts, New York and many others perform on-site audits to varying degrees.

**By Stephen P. Nash**  
*Correspondent*

Maybe for one reason or another you've thought about staying in "eco-friendly" hotels when you travel, but you're not eager to join the League of Environmental Hairsplitters to figure out a conscientious choice.

You're not unusual. The most recent industry survey of U.S. travelers, funded by a consortium of rental car, hotel, credit card and online travel booking companies, concluded that "green is mainstream."

"We didn't have an idea of what we wanted to see," said the study's author, Carroll Rheem of PhoCusWright market research. "We went out with a clean slate rather than taking a stance of 'green is good and we want to push that agenda.' It was about staying neutral and observing the marketplace."

More than four out of 10 people surveyed considered environmental impact to be important when planning travel.

For that to work, there are a few useful shortcuts to consider, but first meet Rachel Muir, an ecologist employed by the U.S. Geological Survey. For her, traveling green is "part of the culture I'm immersed in," but she finds it pretty frustrating.

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"Unfortunately, we are in a time when you could today, right now, get on a website, find a certification program where you fill out an online questionnaire and print out your 'Okay, we're green now!' certificate."

— Alison Presley,  
manager of Travelocity's green travel program



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# Hotel

Continued from Page 1

“A thoughtful life is not a simple one,” Muir says. In Atlanta last year for a meeting on global warming impacts, she found that the conference center was a model of ecosensitivity, but “the entire landscape around it was suburban sprawl hell. It all involved cars, traffic, and buildings thrown up, for the most part, without any regard for their impacts on watersheds or the landscape as a whole.”

She looked for a hotel with a coveted Leadership for Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) rating, but there were none in the area. She settled for a hotel with a short commute to the meetings, because at least that generated less pollution.

Complexity can wilt good intentions. And add to the tricky green equation that more than half of the respondents in the industry survey said they’re skeptical when companies make “green” claims. Of self-described “green travelers,” only 8 percent thought it easy to find green travel options.

Glenn Hasek, editor-publisher of the trade publication Greenlodgingnews.com, points to inspiring initiatives: hotels with a windmill or some solar power, an embryonic hotel chain with plans for “revolutionary new environmental practices and sustainability principles,” more LEED-rated lodging, increased focus by the industry as the economy improves.

**What’s really working?**

The common problem for consumers, though, is distinguishing window dressing from serious commitment. Some practices touted as “green” — admonitions to reuse towels, save water, turn off the lights or skip the room make-up, for example — are also overtly self-serving. Others — recycling newspapers or providing windows that open, installing some solar panels — are trivial unless they’re a small part of a comprehensive program.

All that green noise not only bestows unearned merit on the underwhelming. It also makes it harder to discern genuine efforts.

What Rachel Muir needs, industry specialists say, is a credible, independent certification program that sets high standards yet has enough market share to provide lots of choices and locations.

Not that there’s a shortage of green certifiers. Alison Presley, manager of Travelocity’s green travel program, knows of more than 300. Because of



The Magnolia Courtyard of the Bardessono, a hotel in Yountville in the Napa Valley. It’s one of only two hotels in the United States to achieve LEED platinum certification.

the high level of consumer interest, the U.S. travel market is all a-sprout with rating systems: green hearts and coronets, checkmarks, arrows, suitcases, stars and planets, trees, keys and leaves.

“And it is daunting,” Presley says. Some certification systems are for-profit businesses, others are nonprofits or run by trade associations or government. Some are demanding, others are laughably complaisant. “Unfortunately,” she adds, “we are in a time when you could today, right now, get on a website, find a certification program where you fill out an online questionnaire and print out your ‘Okay, we’re green now!’ certificate.

“We wish that there were some organization, even the U.S. government, that would decide ‘These guys are doing what we feel comfortable with,’ she says. “It’s unfortunate for the consumer, who’s just trying to do the right thing here.”

Travelocity’s approach goes some distance toward “certifying the certifiers” to help clear the fog. It uses data from 22 different certification programs whose standards are more or less meet those of the international Global Sustainable Tourism Council. Just as important: They include periodic independent on-site audits to verify compliance. No self-certifiers are on this list.

So here’s the first shortcut: Whether you book through Travelocity or not, you can use the “accommodation type” or “amenity” sorter on its website to find its 1,100 independently certified U.S. hotels (and even more non-U.S. listings). Thirty hotels are rated “eco-friendly” in the San Jose/Silicon Valley/Peninsula area, for example.

It’s not a nuanced system, Presley readily concedes — they’re green or they aren’t.



Bardessono, California’s only LEED platinum hotel, features sleek suite rooms.

Travelocity has de-listed about 200 hotels since its program began five years ago — another truth index.

Other bookers take different approaches, sometimes listing miscellaneous green features of hotels that users are left to puzzle through. Orbitz offers such lists — hard to dig out of the website — and states that it has “started the process of researching hotels with ‘eco-friendly’ policies.” Independent certification audits are not listed as a criterion for joining the list.

Hotels.com’s online system sorts for properties that are “green/sustainable,” but the basis for these choices is not always clear, and many on the “green” lists are self-certified, as the fine print explains. Kayak and Priceline do not incorporate eco-friendly filters in their booking systems.

Expedia.com’s site can’t select for it, but if you enter “sustainable” in the search box from the home page, you get a list of a hundred cities and you can click through that to a list of hotels. Once

again, however, the criteria for choosing these hotels aren’t explained. Read far enough in the fine print for each listing, and you can figure out whether the hotel has been independently certified and audited. Expedia declined a request for an interview.

A second suggestion is to look for one of those LEED-rated hotels, of which there are nearly 100 in the United States. A rigorous and expensive program for participants, LEED is run by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council. Properties are rated as “certified,” silver, gold or platinum (there are only two platinums in the country — Bardessono in the Napa Valley, and The Proximity in Greensboro, N.C. There’s also one in China, and six in India. You can find the list this way: go to usgbc.org/hospitality, then

“If there is ever to be a ubiquitous consumer standard, it must come from a travel rating brand that U.S. consumers already trust, and is likely in partnership with an environmental advocacy group and/or government agency.”

— PhoCusWright green travel survey

click on LEED Hospitality Projects list.

**Rely on the states**

A final suggestion for this quest is conditional: Consider using one of the certification programs that are run by 17 states. These, too, vary in credibility, transparency and toughness. You can easily find them online.

California’s Green Lodging Program is among the more exacting, with field surveys to verify compliance. They’re listed at [www.dgs.ca.gov/travel/Programs/GreenLodgingProgram.aspx](http://www.dgs.ca.gov/travel/Programs/GreenLodgingProgram.aspx).

Many on the list are fully certified and have earned a two-palm-trees designation, but be careful. Many others are listed with a single palm, which means they’ve met only a lesser number of the program’s long list of “green” standards. They have three years to meet the stringent requirements of full certification.

San Francisco has its own Green Business Program, with on-site audits, that includes a list of eight hotels. “We have rigorous criteria, and they cannot be paid for,” said Friday Apaliski, a spokesperson for the program. “That’s a benefit, compared with some of the other green labeling that goes on — certification that can be paid for in some way.” All but one of these hotels appear on the California state program list, too.

**No checks in place**

A number of states — Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Florida, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Vermont — perform on-site audits to varying degrees (some compliance audits are described as random or spot-checks). Pennsylvania doesn’t have a rating program, but the Department of Environmental Protection does recommend hotels that are part of the Green Seal certification system, one of the independent audits also used by Travelocity.

Several other state programs are more about educa-

tion and tourism promotion. Very little is asked of the hotels that participate, and there’s no effort at verifying their compliance.

“If there is ever to be a ubiquitous consumer standard, it must come from a travel rating brand that U.S. consumers already trust, and is likely in partnership with an environmental advocacy group and/or government agency,” the green travel survey concluded. That was 2009 ... it hasn’t happened yet.

In the past few months, I’ve stayed at four hotels whose eco-friendly credentials are impeccable: the Felix and the Burnham in Chicago; the Westin Times Square and the Ink48 in Manhattan. I can testify that all were competitively priced, the experience proved luxe rather than hair-shirt and there was no green horn-tooting to speak of, which I found odd. You really had to ask.

But perhaps you knew this was coming: There’s green lodging out there, but no immediate prospect of anything like “sustainable travel.” Just for starters, the cars and especially the jet airliners leave a massive carbon footprint.

As for the real-deal sustainable hotel: It feeds energy back into the grid, emits nothing into air, water or dirt, raises the standard of living for native cultures, is constructed of recycled plastic, and does not yet exist — though that platinum LEED rating is somewhere in range.

Meantime, we live in the world of the relative, not the ideal. Audubon International executive director Kevin Fletcher, responding to puristic challenges to his green lodging rating program, likes to quote Voltaire: “The perfect is the enemy of the good.”

Eco-travelers among us will just have to keep fingers crossed while the world plays on — and maybe push the limits when the opportunity arises.

Contact Stephen P. Nash via [travel@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:travel@bayareanewsgroup.com).

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