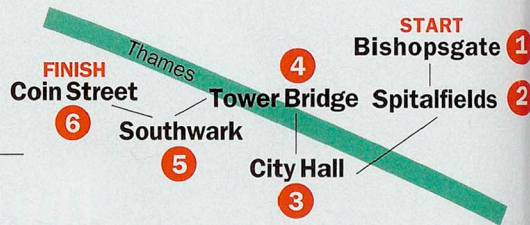


Around Town

London's green belt



Around Town



Sustainable sights Downings Road ancient moorings and, below, the Rootmaster vegetarian restaurant in Spitalfields

Surprisingly, the built-up heart of the capital is where you'll find some of our most planet-friendly enterprises. **Lisa Mullen** takes a tour of the city's eco-edifices

Cate Trotter is blunt. 'London's not even the most sustainable city in England – that's Brighton,' she says as we make our way down **Bishopsgate (1)** at the start of Insider London's tour of the capital's green hotspots. But she's upbeat, too. 'In terms of new initiatives it's making progress at a really rapid rate. In those terms, London's a world leader.'

This is hard to believe as we battle through the polluted streets of the City, past carbon-hungry office blocks and ubiquitous chain outlets shifting endless quantities of air-mile laden, unfairly traded, unsustainable products. But then we're swishing through the revolving door of Andaz, 'the first green five-star hotel in London' and it becomes apparent that the changes Trotter is so excited about are

happening almost invisibly all around us. Stamped as it is with the internationally recognised visual grammar of modern opulence – chrome, dark wood and statement sculpture – the Andaz, which used to be the Great Eastern, also boasts aeroplane-style suction toilets, ethical dining and a paperless check-in system. It's not exactly a yurt, but it's a start.

Next we turn away from the City and down towards **Spitalfields (2)**, where the sudden spick-and-span of fresh redevelopment in Brushfield Street makes it easier to believe that we are close to the eco cutting edge. The Allen & Overy building, designed by Foster + Partners, boasts the world's largest solar array – 600 square metres of cells – and a green roof so impressive that it was chosen as the venue for the launch party of the World Green Roofs Congress, coming to London later this month.

While we're in Spitalfields it is essential to stop at Jeanette Winterson's funny little deli – stocked entirely with goods from independent producers – and the marvellous A Gold next door, which sells food from England only. We

don't forget, either, to nip into Montezuma whose chocolate is not only of a legendary standard, but is ethical to boot. 'They didn't feel that the stamped Fair Trade chocolate was good enough quality,' says Trotter, 'so they sourced their own and pay better than fair trade prices for it. Then they ship the cocoa to their award-winning factory in Chichester, which has energy-saving lighting throughout the building and they reuse the water that melts the chocolate and the packaging that goes through the supply chain.'

This is a popular stage of the tour, and Trotter's guests usually have to be

The Andaz hotel: it's not exactly a yurt, but it's a start...

dragged away from the goodies. So who comes on a sustainability tour? Not surprisingly, at the moment it's often those with a green agenda already in place. 'Mostly people with a professional or semi-professional interest, but in weekend mode,' says Trotter. 'Or green tourists who are coming here on holiday anyway and want to see what's happening in London.' But the three-hour walk is worth going on even for hardened natives of the city: Trotter is a bubbly, engaging guide with a real

passion for her subject. 'There's so much to say, I could go on all day,' she says.

After a pause for refreshments at the Root Master – a vegan restaurant housed in a decommissioned double-decker parked outside the Truman Brewery – the tour continues with some sustainable fashion at the famed Junky Styling, which sells desirable clothes remodelled from old suits and other cast-offs. Then it's on to the Timberland Boot Company, a sub-brand of the global shoe firm which has green-vamped itself by reducing its carbon footprint as much as possible and launching the Boot Company as a premium line selling more sustainably produced shoes.

From here, the tour swings into architecture mode. A bus journey down to the South Bank is followed by a look at **City Hall (3)**, with its photovoltaic cells manufactured in 617 different shapes due to the curved profile of the building. Then it's over to **Tower Bridge (4)** where you can get a glimpse of the Downings Road ancient moorings, which not only boasts London's only floating gardens but is one of the city's top recycling communities. You don't get to see the boats up close, however. 'Unfortunately a lot of the tour is about timing and how close things are together,' says Trotter.

Inevitably, too, many of the projects she talks about are still at the planning stage, like the extension to Tate Modern, which has been redesigned to make it 40 per cent more sustainable. One building that does already exist though is Palestra in **Southwark (5)**, which houses the GLA, Transport for London and the London Climate Change Agency. Designed by Will Alsop, it has 14 wind turbines on the roof and is soon to house the country's first working hydrogen fuel cell. The tour finishes at the **Coin Street (6)** community which houses 1,000 people in affordable co-operative housing, benefits 15,000 local people via its neighbourhood centre and campaigns constantly to protect the river front from overdevelopment. It's fitting that one of London's oldest experiments in ethical living – should round off an afternoon which has often focused on what the capital could and should achieve in the future. We have a long way to go before we can call ourselves a sustainable city. But there are a surprising number of people out there already, giving it their best shot. *Insider London's 'Cutting Edge Green' tours happen on the first weekend of each month and cost £25. See insider-london.co.uk.*

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