

How green is this hotel?

You've seen the Travelife logo in brochures, but what does it mean? Ian Taylor joins a Travelife audit to find out

Travelife has been around since 2007. Most people in the UK trade know the name. But did you know that for a hotel to be Travelife-certified requires an audit of everything from environmental management and business and labour policies to community integration, child protection and animal welfare?

It's not easy to earn an award. Self-assessment plays no part, and it became a whole lot harder last year with the introduction of the Travelife Gold checklist (see box, page 49).

Travel Weekly joined an audit of the White Palace Hotel in Rethymon, Crete, to see what it involves.

08.30: Travelife auditor Sotiris Milonas explains the audit process to hotel general manager Ioannis Youlakis. "Transparency is number one," he says. "I ask questions, compile evidence, take pictures. If we find areas which don't comply and need improvement, you have time to fix them."

Sotiris has been auditing for Travelife for four years. He combines firmness with charm and offers plenty of help.

He has two pieces of equipment - a smartphone and a water flow gauge. Sotiris starts with the paperwork, checking the hotel layout, and asking: "Do you have a spa? Jacuzzis?

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Outsourced shops? Water sports? Public access to the beach?"

He goes through the hotel's licences for everything from fire safety to sun beds. Ioannis complains: "We need 100 licences and behind each is a tree of obligations." Sotiris moves on to policy statements on the

environment, child protection, and purchasing. "Have you communicated your policies to suppliers?" he asks. "Can you show me?"

As soon as he sees evidence, he moves on. He asks how the water is heated. Told that 40% is solar and the rest oil-heated, he asks: "How do you measure that? Explain the monitoring tool. Where do you get the water?"

The hotel supplements its municipal supply from a borehole. "Can I see the borehole licence? Is the borehole locked?" Now he wants water consumption records, noting a fall between May-June 2014 and this year.

He examines utility bills

→ saying: “We don’t ask hotels to reduce every year. We want to see that they manage it.”

We move on to maintenance and Sotiris requests a list of coolants in use, explaining that some are prohibited. He notes that the hotel recently changed coolants because of Travelife.

□ **11.00:** We head for the roof. Checking the solar panels, Sotiris asks how often they are cleaned and suggests more insulation on the pipes. Then we descend to check the boilers. Sotiris finds a small leak, and requests a photo when it’s fixed. He checks a chemical store and the system for returning chemical drums.

We move on to the swimming pools. At the first pool, Sotiris notes: “They use salt to kill the bacteria. How they backwash is important. I want to see it done efficiently. Some hotels do it twice a day when it’s not necessary.”

He photographs everything.

THE TRAVELIFE GOLD AWARD

Travelife was founded in 2007 by the Federation of Tour Operators and is now part of Abta.

It launched the Travelife Gold award in 2014. To gain the award, hotels must meet 163 criteria across 13 categories, including environmental management, business policies, labour and human rights, and community integration. More than half the criteria relate to environmental management.

Travelife audited 700 hotels in the 12 months to this June.

A typical audit might save a hotel €2,000 on top of energy and water savings. Two years’ Travelife membership plus an audit costs a medium-large hotel €1,400. Audits are required every two years, and take place only when a hotel is open. Afterwards, a hotel must submit requested evidence within four to six weeks.

We descend below the pool to see the continuous filtration and automatic backwash systems. He tells me: “In a lot of hotels you see an engineer with a bucket measuring chemicals.” He spots a chlorine tank next to a grille over seawater and instructs the engineer to box in the tank.

We check an air-conditioning unit, and visit rooms and a suite. Sotiris uses his gauge on taps. The flow is fierce. He tells the engineer to reduce the flow, and he wants the toilet flush reduced.

We move on to the gardens. Sotiris checks the irrigation system and asks to see the gardening equipment, then questions the head gardener about pay and overtime.

□ **12.45:** Back in the maintenance room, Sotiris explains: “They have a good maintenance file but don’t report everything. I’ve asked that they develop a maintenance log for the whole hotel.”

The kitchens come next. Sotiris



He checks the irrigation system, then questions the head gardener about pay and overtime

asks about cooking-oil recycling and checks a chemical store, picking products at random to see they are in a log book. He confirms the coolant in the cold stores, examines a daily food log, asks about the ordering process and use of local products.

We enter a dry food store. Ioannis says they have double the normal amount of stock because of the bank crisis.

Sotiris checks the unused food log before we check the other kitchens. He says: “I’ve seen the processes. I want to see if there is non-compliance.” →



HOTEL AUDIT:
Travelife auditor Sotiris Milonas (above) appraises all aspects of the White Palace Hotel’s operations





RETHYMNON, CRETE

- A Grecohotel property that opened in 1975
- Certified for Travelife award 2013-15 under previous system
- 263 rooms, 750 guests
- Up to 230 staff
- Open this year April 29 to October 29
- Customers: 25%-30% German, 25% Russian, 15% British
- Tui clients only, except from Russia
- 40% half-board, 60% premium plus (all-inclusive with waiter service and à la carte restaurants)
- Auditor Sotiris says: "What they have with local food is unique. They recycle everything. Plastic and paper goes to the municipality. Everything else – batteries, cooking oil, soap, glass, coffee, electrical equipment, scrap metal (documented down to the type of scrap) – goes to contractors."

→ 14.30: We move to housekeeping. A team of 30 staff clean the hotel's 263 rooms. Sotiris asks about training in the use of chemicals and how many times toilets are flushed when the bathrooms are cleaned. He says: "Flush twice and it's 4,000 litres a day."

"Once," says executive housekeeper Evaggelia Paragioudakis to his question. "Sustainability is about the future of our children." White Palace housekeepers no longer use water buckets but moistened microfibre cloths to mop floors.

Sotiris has checked the handling of rubbish from rooms when we passed a housekeeping trolley. He examines a housekeeping store cupboard and chemicals. "This is a good system, but I want better labelling on the bottles."

Then he asks: "What if you find a child alone in a room crying? Do you have a procedure?"



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We move on to the HR department. Sotiris requests a list of staff at the hotel, spots two 16-year-olds on it, and asks to see their contracts of employment.

He requests records of employee start and finish times, checks contracts and payments at random, asks about disciplinary procedures and finishes off by asking whether staff can join a union. He wants confirmation of this added to the staff handbook.

Moving on through reception, Sotiris asks about excursions, checks the hotel's 'Green Corner' and chats with staff.

18.00: Time for the wrap-up meeting. Sotiris says: "It has been an open audit. I'm confident to write my report. Some things you will have time to fix – I just need photos. For others, I need to see a plan."

"There are some issues with water. You need to reduce the flow in taps and toilets. I want you to have targets for water use, not just electricity."

"You need to increase the recycling bins. You have good information, but I want staff to read it. The rest will appear in the report from Travelife."

"You're one step away from the Gold award. Next time I can focus on what you've done. It will be faster."

Afterwards he tells me: "I've only done one audit where a hotel was 100% compliant, but to be less than 100% is not a failure. Sustainability is not easy. We want to motivate hotels to continue. It's a process." TW

BELOW: Grecohotel's White Palace is a five-star luxury hotel

