

Tips for Visiting the Wizarding World of Harry Potter

Wandering Diagon Alley with Butterbeer flavored ice cream and a wand is every Harry Potter fan's dream come true. If you grew up alongside the Harry Potter books and movies like I did, then you will love the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando, in Florida.

The best part about staying at an onsite Universal Orlando resort is having **early access** to the Wizarding World of Harry Potter. The rest of Universal Studios and the Island of Adventure still open at 9AM, but early access lets you start exploring Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade as early as 8AM! This allows you to take advantage of shorter ride queues and amazing photo opportunities!

Ollivander's Wand Shop can be found in both Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. Ollivander's is a unique, interactive experience. The wand chooses the wizard, not vice versa! Ollivander's can build a line during the day. My suggestion is to make this one of the events you enjoy at park opening or during Early Park Admission. It is a magical, interactive experience. However, if you do not want to experience the interactive, "show" aspect of Ollivander's, you can purchase any of the Harry Potter wands in most, if not all, gift shops on Universal property.

Ride twice and listen to the portraits. Universal Studios and Islands of Adventure are home to a few of the top-rated theme park rides in the world, and that includes **Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey** and **Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts**. One of the things that makes these rides so incredible is the storylines in them, which begin before you board the rides. Take your time making your way through Hogwarts and Gringotts, respectively, and make sure to eavesdrop on the conversations the portraits are having! Check out **Flight of the Hippogriff** too, and say hello to Buckbeak.

There's a lot going on in these rides, and some impressive animatronics. I noticed way more details (and, admittedly kept my eyes open more, as I have a tendency to recoil when magical creatures come at me) the second time around. The **Hogwarts Express** is also a ride itself. Ride it both directions, it's different!

Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure is the best ride ever. Seriously. It is amazing! I suggest getting to this attraction first thing in the morning, and hop in line. As the day goes on, the line does get busy and sometimes they close the line for the day before the park closes. A little tip....it is outside for awhile. Then when you enter the inside portion of the queue, you are a little over halfway through the queue. They do have an employee along the line outside selling water, sodas, and small snacks. This does only take cash, FYI.

Use Lockers While You Ride. Many of the rides in both the Universal Studios park and the Islands of Adventure park have lockers where you can stash your things while you ride. The lockers are free for the first little while, in accordance with how long the line up and ride are expected to take. The lockers are about 16 inches deep, 11 inches tall, and 10 inches across. This is an approximation. Purses, small backpacks, and wands fit comfortably in the lockers.

Explore the shops. Weasleys Wizard Wheezes, Owl Post, Quality Quidditch Supplies, and Honeydukes are just a few of the shops that you can explore in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade. Take the time to

explore inside and out, as many of the window displays are *enchanted*. Keep in mind that at the end of the day, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a theme park. The shops for you and me (muggles) so they're not *exactly* the same as the shops in the books or the movie – but they do come pretty close!



Food & Drink in Diagon Alley and Hogsmeade is amazing! Make sure you try the butterbeer! It's *delicious*. Best frozen, and fantastic in ice cream form from Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlour. I think my favorite activity was eating ice cream and watching people cast spells throughout Diagon Alley. Enjoy breakfast, lunch, or dinner at the Leaky Cauldron in Diagon Alley or The Three Broomsticks in Hogsmeade.

Keep An Eye Out for Magical Details. Wander your way into Knockturn Alley, and burst through a brick wall when you board the Hogwarts Express. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is full of small, enchanting details. I loved visiting for 2 days because on the first day I wanted to run everywhere and see everything. On the second day, I retraced my steps and discovered so much more than the day before!

Watch The Nighttime Lights at Hogwarts Castle. This show begins at dusk, and continues every 20 minutes until park close. Tip: Later showings often offer the best viewing experience. Make your way

from Diagon Alley to Hogsmeade more than an hour prior to the light show if you want to be near Hogsmeade. You can also backtrack toward Jurassic Park. Halfway across the bridge between The Lost Continent and Jurassic Park, we had a wonderful view of fireworks over Hogwarts! You cannot see the entire light show from the bridge, but it was an improvement over seeing nothing.



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