

The Tokeland Hotel: Washington's Oldest Hotel Is For Today's Travelers

We've probably all traveled to a place we connect with and indulged in the dream of buying a cool old building there, fixing it up and creating a whole new life. Heather Earnhardt and Zac Young did just that in April of 2018. The couple didn't buy just any old building; they purchased the Tokeland Hotel, Washington State's first hotel. The historic hotel first opened in 1885, four years before Washington became a state.

Today, their 18-room hotel is the perfect get-away-from-it-all destination. The Tokeland Hotel offers a comforting combination of 19th century rooming house charm with unique services and cool vibe of a boutique hotel. The inn has already become an anchor for a community that has more and more to offer visitors besides its natural beauty.

A New Business and a New Life

Heather and Zac were living in Seattle with their combined family of five children when they took over the Tokeland Hotel. There, Heather is chef and owner of the popular Seattle restaurant, the Wandering Goose, and Zac was an in-demand general contractor. (The couple first met when he did some work for her on her restaurant.) They'd often visited Pacific County, where the Tokeland Hotel is located, and had even stayed at the hotel with their kids. The cards fell together just so and the two purchased the hotel.

Zac immediately set about making renovations and repairs and refreshing rooms, while Heather got her kitchen and restaurant in order. They opened the hotel for business and at first went back and forth to Seattle. But it wasn't long before they decided to move there full-time, family in tow. Heather returns to Seattle as needed for the Wandering Goose. But their home is now in Pacific County, where the total county population is 21,000 and Raymond, the largest of the towns in their area is just under 3,000.

The Tokeland Hotel: Warm Hospitality

When we first arrive, Zac is helping unload a supply truck. He shows us a couple of his current and recent projects. There are the raised garden beds so that the restaurant can use raise some of their produce on site. The pig pens are in the back; the pigs eat kitchen scraps and provide compost for the garden. There's also a list of indoor projects. They've begun hosting events at the hotel for guests and area residents. And Zac and Heather recently purchased some of the property adjoining the hotel that includes the old golf course clubhouse. They're still debating what they'll

do with that. Wine bar? Music venue? Time will tell. Zac is clearly in his element.

Heather too is happy with the decision and they've increasingly become part of the community. Both have the hospitality piece of being innkeepers down pat.

Enjoy the Parlor and Other Common Areas

If you appreciate architectural details and the craftsmanship of yesteryear, original art, Northwest artifacts and edgy common space, little jewels of the Tokeland Hotel will catch your eye at every turn. There's plenty to keep you busy at the beach and in the towns of [Tokeland](#), [Raymond](#), and [South Bend](#).

But when it's time for down time back at the hotel, turn to the parlor.

"Schedule in" some time to read a book, work on a puzzle or play a game of chess. Check out the collection of hotel ghost stories written by hotel guests.

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The expansive dining room, filled with great woods and light through the wall of windows, sets the tone. Grab a coffee or other beverage and relax. Strike up a conversation with other hotel guests.

The hotel grounds, front and back, offer more spaces to gather and wander.

Tokeland's Rooms: Skip the Flat-Screen TVs

There may be those who miss the appeal of the Tokeland Hotel, however, but that's a loss. If you're looking for spacious rooms with large picture windows and black-out curtains, a control pad for room lighting options, and a workstation for your laptop, the Tokeland Hotel may not be for you. There will be no refrigerator or television (let alone a big flat-screen panel.)

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Each of the rooms are different, and my room charmed me with its line of hand-painted peonies decorating the walls. I loved the antique mirrored oak dresser. The big-enough-to-get-inside dumbwaiter worked just fine for my suitcase. Beds, bedding, and towels are great but Zac and Heather are in the process of upgrading both mattresses and bedding with top-of-the-line boutique hotel options.

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And the bathrooms, each with period tiles, décor and charm, are down the hall. Pick one out, lock the door, and take the time you need.



Artisan touches abound. I had to ask Heather about the dinner and serving ware. It turns out that she and Washington potter Ryan Lee of [BakerPotter](#) designed the set the inn uses, featuring a sketch of the Tokeland Hotel.

Dining at the Tokeland Hotel

Yes, you'll love the hotel itself and the hospitality, but with a top Seattle chef and restaurateur in the kitchen, it's perfectly okay if the dining experience is your major draw.

We sat down to a great meal. Piping hot hush puppies set the scene; the house garden salad was gorgeous. My shrimp and house-made Andouille gumbo was everything it should be, and included tender okra and heirloom Carolina Gold rice.



Just about everything on the Heather's menu are notable Southern treats. There's shrimp and grits, fried chicken, pot roast and Po' Boys. True to her Southern roots and upbringing, her choice of "peppa sauce" is either Texas Pete or Crystal and mayo must be homemade or Duke's. Where fresh matters, she's cooking with Willapa Bay oysters, Dungeness crab and other local ingredients. And yes, that's Olympia beer in the steamer clams.

Desserts are a highlight at her Seattle restaurant, and they're equally loved here at the Tokeland. Hummingbird cake is an easy favorite.

Sleep In, But Don't Miss Breakfast

Fluffy light biscuits, buttermilk pancakes, thick-cut bacon, shrimp and grits, a Hangtown fry, chicken-fried pork chop, and Hoppin' John; they're all here in their tasty, hearty glory. I enjoyed and recommend the breaded, fried rockfish and grits with poached eggs.



If you had a hard time choosing between desserts the night before, Heather's cakes are out on the counter again—here's your second chance. For that matter, if you did have dessert the night before, you're probably going to make room for a second go.

Before you leave, wander the grounds and watch the crash of waves just across the street from the hotel. The spot, protected by rocks and drift wood, is a great place for winter storm watching. When I returned my room key, it was with a return winter visit in mind. A little storm watching, with plenty of time to hang out and relax in the parlor would be heaven.

For More:

- [Tokeland Hotel](https://www.tokelandhotel.com/) <https://www.tokelandhotel.com/>
- *Big Food, Big Love*, cookbook from Chef Heather Earnhardt, on [Amazon](#)
- [Visit Long Beach Peninsula](#) tourism
- More history [Tokeland hotel history](#)
- On our site: [Explore Raymond, Tokeland, and South Bend, Washington](#)
- On our site: [Northwest Carriage Museum, World-Class Collection in Raymond, Washington](#)
- Also on our site: Pacific County is home to two notable heritage hotels—the Tokeland Hotel and Long Beach Peninsula's [Shelburne Hotel](#). While the Tokeland is the oldest hotel, the Shelburne, open since 1896, is Washington's oldest continuously operating hotel.

-All photos by Nancy Zaffaro.