

Lolita/Tokitae/Sk'aliCh'elh-tenaut can and should be returned to her native waters



Toki's teeth are in excellent condition. Photo: Anne-Marie Van Dijk

Transport is not dangerous or highly stressful.

For over 50 years marine parks have often moved orcas of all ages long distances, yet none have been harmed in transit. Keiko was near death when he was successfully flown from Mexico City to Oregon. When she is cleared for travel Tokitae will be returned to her home by professional handlers, with her veterinarian and trusted trainers, in a comfortable fleece-lined stretcher that is placed in a large container half full of chilled water for her journey home.

Tokitae does not appear to be psychologically harmed by long-term captivity

- 🐬 Toki is engaged and interested in people. She doesn't show distressed behavior or stereotypies many captive orcas do
- 🐬 Toki keeps herself fit – she does power laps around her tiny tank (as seen on Toki TV) – in her native habitat she will feel energised and have much more space to exercise.

Tokitae is not geriatric

- 🐬 “The natural lifespan of females can reach 80 to 100 years” –Ken Balcomb on TokiTV. In her mid-fifties, Toki could easily have 2 or 3 more decades of active life, in her native habitat.

Tokitae's native habitat will be therapeutic for her

- 🐬 “The general aim in maintaining marine mammals in captivity is to duplicate their natural environment as closely as possible.” –Merck Manual of Veterinary Medicine
- 🐬 “The chronic stress of living in tanks weakens their immune systems and leaves captive orcas vulnerable to well-known opportunistic infections” –Dr. Lori Marino ([The Culture of Killer Whales](#)).
- 🐬 She will be able to use her echolocation to catch live fish ([Echolocation by killer whales \(*Orcinus orca*\) while in pursuit of live fish](#)).
- 🐬 In Miami, Toki's tankwater is drawn from Biscayne Bay, where: “Drainage has permitted agricultural and suburban development in areas that were once vital wetlands and increased the flow of pollutants/nutrients to Biscayne Bay.” –[US Army Corps of Engineers](#)

Tokitae's home waters will be familiar to her

- 🐬 She still calls in the L pod family dialect her family taught her. [A recording of Toki making L pod calls](#) was made in the early 1990s that has been identified by at least two experts as being L pod calls). Learned calls are indelibly imprinted in orcas from birth and are remembered for life.

 “Remarkably, these (biological) adaptations are all based on behavior choices and learned cultural traditions adopted by each orca community” –Dr. Lori Marino ([The Culture of Killer Whales](#))

 Research shows that dolphins have the potential for lifelong memory for each other regardless of relatedness, sex or duration of association. This study shows that **social recognition can last for at least 20 years in dolphins** and the first large-scale study to address long-term memory in a cetacean.” [Decades-long social memory in bottlenose dolphins.](#) –Bruck, Jason N. (2013).

Returning home will be energising for Toki

 Orcas are well-developed at birth and are catching their own food around their first birthday. Toki was 4 when captured so she learned how to catch her own fish and was participating in family traditions such as food sharing.

 Before her capture Tokitae was communicating with her family, and knew how to behave as a member in good standing in her community.

 Orca brains have a highly developed paralimbic system, not present in humans, related to empathy, emotions, and long-term memories.

 Toki knows who she is and has retained her cultural traditions. Cultural learning and identity as family members are [deeply engrained in orcas](#).

Toki can heal in the Salish Sea

 “A sanctuary offers more choices, more challenges, and more stimulation to captive cetaceans.”
–Dr Naomi Rose

 “There is no inherent biological or physical reason why rehabilitation/ocean training cannot be prescribed for any of these naturally hardy animals, even after prolonged captivity.” A Proposal to Rehabilitate and Ocean Train Keiko for Potential Reintroduction to the Wild –Ken Balcomb

 Orcas have very big brains, perhaps the largest of all animals, which implies long memories, and nothing is more important to an orca than their family and traditions, and how to catch their special diet. She will recognize her native waters and will likely feel excited and energized to be home again.

 Keiko healed and thrived in a larger tank containing natural seawater in Oregon. Keiko then became even healthier in Iceland. According to Bob Ratliffe, Executive Director of the Free Willy/Keiko Foundation (*Newport News Times*, Sept. 9, 1998): “As soon as he is immersed, Keiko pumps his flukes to swim clear of the stretcher and immediately dives. He surfaces a full minute later, circling the pool, echolocating and vocalizing excitedly, as if calling out “Who's there?” After 10 minutes of energetically exploring his new home he turns to his human friends perched at the pool's edge. He allows Jen Schorr to scratch him briefly, but seems more interested in the place than the humans. Keiko is vocalizing like he's never done before – much more than when he was in Oregon.”

September 12, 1998: Keiko's activity level is much higher than it was in Oregon. He begins "porpoising," coming smoothly out of the water in a continuous, graceful arc to breathe and slipping immediately beneath the surface again. In the past he often stayed at the surface following a breath. Dr. Cornell is visibly moved by Keiko's response so far. “As a veterinarian, Keiko's medical supervisor and a human being,” he says, pausing to regain his composure, “it can't get any better.” In late September, winds of over 130 mph lash the baypen. Staff and Keiko come through unharmed. Baypen repairs continue through the winter months.

Food-sharing

- 🐬 Toki learned to share salmon as a member of her family before her capture. [Foraging by resident killer whales was found to frequently involve sharing by 2 or more whales](#). –John K. B. Ford, Graeme M. Ellis
- 🐬 When Keiko was returning fish to trainers he was likely practicing the tradition of sharing food he learned prior to his capture.

Is Toki habituated to humans?

- 🐬 While Toki is comfortable interacting with human companions, she was taught by her family how to be a Southern Resident orca. That early learning does not disappear no matter how many years they are separated. “The complex and stable vocal and behavioural cultures of sympatric groups of killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) appear to have no parallel outside humans, and represent an independent evolution of cultural faculties.” (*Culture in Whales and Dolphins*, Rendell and Whitehead 2001)
- 🐬 Toki possesses self-awareness as a member of the Southern Resident orca community. Lone orcas, such as Luna and Springer, sought out human company as substitute family after they were separated from their own families, but Springer eagerly rejoined her natal extended family when given the opportunity.

Is Toki stressed by changes in her environment?

- 🐬 Some say that Toki is stressed by any changes in her environment, such as if her food is cut in a way she is not accustomed to. However, she has endured many changes over the years, such as Hugo’s death by apparent suicide in 1980, without lasting emotional distress.

Salish Sea water is clean and clear

- 🐬 “Concentrations of harmful legacy metals and persistent organic pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) have been **decreasing** in animal and plant life over time in many locations.” –[Executive Summary: Health of the Salish Sea Report](#)

Would Toki carry pathogens to the Salish Sea?

- 🐬 Toki can be tested for every known pathogen and quarantined by double netting to be certain there is no significant danger for her and her family.
- 🐬 Toki appears to have a healthy immune system. She will be well fed, get plenty of exercise, and have constant medical supervision.
- 🐬 She will be examined regularly and treated for any issues.

Her seapen may only require a protected location to attach nets to shore.

- 🐬 While a more substantial or permanent facility may be ideal, Toki may not need such a facility or a Keiko-style floating seapen costing millions of dollars.
- 🐬 Staff quarters and a large freezer for fish, and a wetlab for food and medicine preparations will be needed.