

Stephanie Holmes checks into Dufur's Historic Balch Hotel, in Oregon

Location: Dufur, a very small city in rural Oregon, about 21km from the larger (but not that large) city, The Dalles. When I say small, I mean it; the population of Dufur – a city that spans 1.5sq km – was 638 in the last census back in 2017.

Getting there: It's just over a 90-minute drive from hipster haven Portland, but it feels like a world away. Dufur is between the Columbia River Gorge and the Oregon High Desert and sits among beautiful rolling wheat fields, orchards and farmland. It's a really beautiful area. Make sure you stop at the waterfalls along the way and make a detour to the Rowena Peaks viewing area for incredible views across the Columbia River, across the border to Washington State and further into the Oregon countryside.

First impressions: The grand, red-brick building is a stand-out landmark on the road out of town. As we pulled up it was glowing in the golden-hour sunlight.

Hotel history: The three-storey Edwardian-style building was built in 1907 and opened as a hotel in 1908. The location was chosen for its proximity to a stagecoach stop serving Barlow Rd on the Oregon Trail, which linked St Louis to Oregon City, and for travellers on the Great Southern Railroad. The hotel had hot water, steam heat and electric lights in every room on opening – a rarity in the area at the time, making it popular with travellers. Fortunes turned in 1928 when the railroad left town and the hotel was turned into, variously, a motel, boarding house, and private home. In 1986, a Portland contractor bought the building, refurbishing it to its former glory, and in 1987 the building was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Ownership has changed hands a couple of times since then – most recently in 2015 when Southern Oregon's Claire Sierra and Josiah Dean bought it and added dining, spa and art gallery, aiming to make it part of the community as well as a place for those passing through.

Check-in experience: No one was there to greet us when we arrived, but on-duty manager Debra wasn't



Photo / Supplied

far away – she'd just popped up the road to the food market to get some lunch. She was hugely apologetic, even though we'd only had to wait a couple of minutes and were happy checking out the historic hotel's stunning interior – all wooden floorboards, grand staircases, leaded window panes and – outside – views to Mt Hood.

Need to know: The hotel is part of the Bike Friendly Programme, a network of tourism-related businesses around the state that provide supplies and services to cyclists. Children and pets are not allowed as overnight guests.

Room: A queen room with en suite bathroom. There are 19 rooms and some have shared bathrooms. My queen room was compact – not much room to spread out – but it was comfortable and pretty, with high ceilings, vintage furnishings and views out to the surrounding fields.

Bed: A wrought iron bedstead and vintage-style floral bedspread and pillowcases. Comfortable and cosy.

Bathroom: Small, but with a claw-foot bathtub and

shower over the bath. Plus a window for natural light.

Facilities: The hotel has breakfast available from 8.30-10am and a light bites menu available until 8pm. Local wines and beers – Oregon has an abundance of great craft breweries and wineries – are available too. There's a small spa on site, offering reiki, chakra balancing, reflexology, facials and massages. Claire Sierra is a "spa priestess" and wellness retreat director as well as a certified True Purpose coach and author of *The Magdalene Path: Awaken the Power of Your Feminine Soul*, if you're into that kind of thing.

Wi-Fi: Free and surprisingly fast considering our remote location.

Noise: Absolutely nothing outside – a stark contrast for anyone who's stayed a few nights in Portland first. It's complete, rural silence. The only noise is a few creaky floorboards and low murmurs from guests in neighbouring rooms.

Contact: balchhotel.com

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