

Ghosts & Goodtime Girls Historical Walking Tour

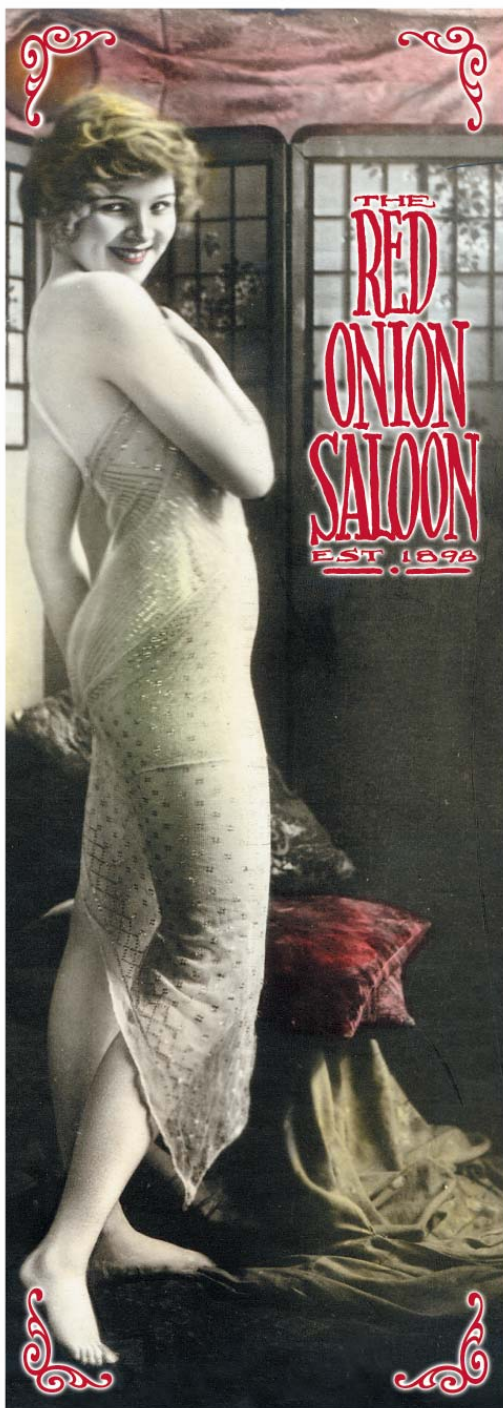
Duration: Approximately 2 hours



Step back in time with one of the sensational madams of the Red Onion Saloon. Lavishly costumed and highly entertaining, she will guide you through the streets and back alleys of Skagway, where women of the evening brushed shoulders with notorious characters such as Soapy Smith and Skookum Jim. Stories of Klondike Kate, Oregon Mare, Pea Hull Annie and Diamond Lil depict the lusty, adventurous, and sometimes tragic lives of thousands of women who stampeded north. You will pass historic 1898 buildings as you learn of Skagway's rich history. Your experience culminates with a stop at the world famous Red Onion Saloon's restored brothel museum. Here, join in a champagne toast and explore the halls and bedrooms of this celebrated brothel, observing original relics and images of the ladies who worked there. If you're lucky, you might even catch a glimpse of the resident ghost, Lydia!

Notes:

Minimum age is 16 years. The brothel museum is not wheelchair accessible.



Fetitele Vesele de la Cabaret

During the Gold Rush...

The Red Onion Saloon, now a National Historic Building, was Skagway's most exclusive bordello. Built in 1897 with planks cut by Captain William Moore, the founder of Skagway, the Red Onion Saloon opened for business in 1898. The saloon served alcohol on the first floor while the upper floor satisfied more than the prospectors thirst. The brothel consisted of ten tiny cubicles, called cribs, each ten foot by ten foot with three exits, one into the hallway and one into each of the adjoining rooms. Each room also had a hole in the floor which connected to the cash register in the bar by means of a copper tube.

In order to keep track of which girls were busy, the bartender kept ten dolls on the back bar, one for each of the girls in each of the rooms. When a girl was with a customer, her doll was laid on its back. When she sent her money down the tube, the doll was returned to the upright position signaling to the waiting prospectors that she was ready for business. The bartender safeguarded the girl's earnings, usually \$5.00, preferably in gold. The girls then utilized the loose floorboards to hide nuggets and private tips.

Because the rooms were divided by single planks toe-nailed into the ceiling and floor not much sound-proofing was provided. To decorate their cribs, the women stretched linen across the rough planks, then glued wall paper to the cloth. Remnants of the original wall papers still cling to those planks. Some of the girls who worked in Skagway were **Birdie Ash, Big Dessie, Popcorn Lil, the Oregon Mare, Babe Davenport, Pea Hull Annie, Kitty Faith, the Belle of Skagway and Klondike Kate.**

By late 1899, business began to suffer. Most of the women moved north to Dawson which was closer to the gold fields and had big gambling casinos and dance halls. As the railroad became the center of business for Skagway, numerous buildings were moved closer to the depot. The Red Onion was moved in 1914 with one horse from Sixth and State Street to its current Broadway location. Unfortunately, the Onion was dragged around the corner backwards and the front and back of the building had to be removed in order to switch them. During World War II the building was used as an army barracks and in subsequent years housed a laundry, bakery, union hall, television station and gift shop. In 1980, Jan Wrentmore purchased a liquor license and opened the building once more as a saloon.

Is the Red Onion a real brothel?

The Red Onion Saloon operated as a brothel in 1898 for nearly two years. By late 1899, business began to suffer. Most of the women moved north to Dawson which was closer to the gold fields and had big gambling casinos and dance halls. Today the Red Onion Saloon only operates “the brothel” as a museum.

Is the Red Onion Saloon open all winter?

The Red Onion operates seasonally. We are open for business from mid-April until mid-October.

Can we walk from to the Red Onion from the docks?

It is a short walk to the Red Onion from all docks in town. The walk is 4 – 5 blocks or approximately 10 minutes. There is also bus service available from all of the cruise ship docks to the downtown area.

What’s the weather like?

[Skagway’s weather](#) is quite enjoyable in the summer season. Maybe not the Alaskan climate that everyone envisions. Skagway has a cool, temperate marine environment with our temperature being about 10 degrees cooler than Seattle. However, our yearly precipitation is only 33 inches per year. The winter months bring a fierce wind that lowers the temperatures with the wind-chill factor.



Red Onion Brothel Museum

The Red Onion opened its doors for business in 1898. The saloon and dance hall downstairs helped generate business upstairs. The Red Onion was the classiest dance hall and saloon in the bustling gold rush town of Skagway. Our upstairs bordello consisted of 10 cribs (or rooms). Each crib was very small in size, but elaborately decorated. The cribs all had 2 or 3 doors for escape purposes and temperature control.

A weary miner could wander into the Red Onion for a taste of “liquid courage” and a dance or two with a beautiful lady. When the time came to cure his thirst for some love and affection, the anxious gentleman would choose his girl in a very unique way. Behind the bar were 10 dolls that represented the 10 girls upstairs. As each customer would choose a doll of his choice, the bartender would then lay the doll on her back, indicating that that girl was “busy”. Once the gentleman came back down the stairs, the doll was sat upright so every customer in the bar knew that she was once again available.

The Red Onion Brothel Museum is filled with many antiques from the gold rush days. Many of the items on display were found in the brothel----others are part of the owner’s personal collection. Step back in time with one of our “madams” and enjoy the many stories that she has to share. Time in the Red Onion Saloon today is not complete without a peek at the famous Red Onion Brothel. And maybe you’ll even catch a glimpse of Lydia our resident ghost.

