

Bodie State Park, CA

By Tibor Vari

Mid-October is a great time to visit the Eastern Sierra Nevada's to experience the peak fall colors. The aspens are in their full glory of yellow colors throughout the area. Two must see locations are Mono Lake (just south of Lee Vining), and Bodie state park (an abandoned mining town northeast of Lee Vining).

My recommendation would be to stay at a hotel in Lee Vining so you can shoot sunrise (or sunset), at Mono Lake (South Tufa Beach). After the sun rises you'll note that the colors get washed out quickly and it's basically time to leave and drive up to Bodie (a little under one hour).



From Mono Lake take Route 120 W to Route 395 N where just north of Mono Lake you can stop at Conway Summit (8,138 feet above sea level), for a beautiful panoramic view of Mono Lake, the White Mountains, the Mono Craters, and the mountain ranges to the east. From the summit continue the drive to Bodie (395N to 270E).



Bodie was founded by William Bodey after he had discovered small amounts of gold in 1859 during the wild rush for gold and silver. Unfortunately for William, he did not live long to enjoy his discovery as he froze to death the following winter bringing in supplies. At the height of the boom (1877), this community of 10,000 had 65 saloons, two churches and one very notorious reputation. It was claimed that the mixture of money, gold, and alcohol lead to a man getting killed every day in Bodie (good business for the undertaker). Ultimately, the gold and silver ran out and the place became a ghost town by the 1940s. The part that remains today represents only 10% as the other 90% burned down in 1932 as a result of little "Bodie Bill", 2 ½ years old playing with matches.

In 1962, Bodie State Historic Park was established to preserve the town's original structures (including the interiors, which have also been left as they were).

Fortunately, for photographers, this is an incredible place to take photographs. Early morning or late afternoon light on the wooden structures makes this a target rich environment! You can use a polarizer but be careful to back off a bit from the maximum polarization; otherwise you'll end up with very dark unnatural looking blue skies. Focus on the details of the town (windows, doors, equipment, wood grain, etc.), rather than scenic overviews. So if you are in the area, take the drive and shoot away during the hours that normally would be photographically unproductive.

