

Bodie – The Largest Ghost Town

A town that is a bit off the beaten path – the town of Bodie is worth visiting for any traveler. Bodie in California is the largest unrestored ghost town in the West. It is a must see if you are interested in visiting towns associated with the 1859 Gold Rush. The amazing thing about Bodie is that it is now totally deserted; however in 1879 it had nearly 10,000 residents and over 2,000 buildings.

Bodie is located about 75 miles of Lake Tahoe on the California – Nevada border so visitors to the Tahoe region can easily take a side trip to visit the town. The ghost town became a state park in 1962 as a National Historic landmark in California. As such it receives 200,000 visitors annually.



Bodie became a town of little notoriety following the discovery of gold in 1859, by a group of prospectors, one of which was W.S. Bodey. Bodey perished on a trip to Monoville to gather supplies. The town was renamed Bodie after a sign painter misspelled the name of the town on a sign. The discovery of the gold at Bodie also coincided with the discovery in Aurora, Nevada; Bodie received far less publicity however, and only two mills were built near Bodie and both failed.

In 1876, the Standard Company discovered gold ore on the mountainside and public interest was renewed in the little mining town. This transformed the town of Bodie from a sleepy little mining town into a proverbial boom town. Even more hopeful prospectors descended in Bodie and by 1879 the town had between 5 to 7 thousand residents and around 2,000 buildings. Bodie mines produced gold worth 34 million dollars.



At one time there were 65 saloons in Bodie, as well as a red light district and a Chinatown. It also had a newspaper and a telegraph line. However, within a few years the mine was worked out and the town began a slow decline, although there was a brief resurgence through a technological revival – machinery that used a cyanide process to continue to mine ore that had had been previously overlooked. However, once the mines continued to decline Bodie gradually lost population. As of 1910, the census recorded

less than 700 residents. By the beginning of World War II the last of the residents left the town.

Visitors from California can take US highway 13 from Central California. They will then take highway 395 to state route 270. Follow the paved road until it ends and drive for 3 miles on a dirt road. Make sure to stop for gas in either Bridgeport or the town of Lee Vining as there are no services near Bodie.

The town is liable to be extremely warm in the summer and cold in the winter, but temperatures can change rapidly so visitors should bring a sweater or sweatshirt with them even in the summer. Visitors may also find the elevation tiring so they should seek accommodations nearby. They should also come prepared with a bottle of water. Travel to Bodie can easily be an all-day affair as visitors will likely find plenty to see and do in the area.



There are plenty of books and written material on Bodie, and visitors can check them out at Bodie.com prior to their visit. Visitors to Bodie would appreciate their trip more by reading up a bit on the history of the area.

Tours are available of this historic town by going to the book store located on the premises. There are guided tours of the area that happen a few times each day in the summer months. The park is open all year, but is generally only accessible by snowshoe or snowmobile during the winter months. Call the park prior to visiting, as often buildings are closed to preserve their structural integrity. The general public is not allowed to enter the buildings, but photographic expeditions are allowed with a guide. Plan accordingly and enjoy a trip to Bodie.

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