



TRAVEL

A 90-mile-long adventure along Highway 395 is waiting for you in California's Eastern Sierra



Tracy Barbutes

MONICA PRELLE

April 22, 2022



The Eastern Sierra is one of the more remote and dramatic wilderness areas in California, and driving Highway 395 from Bridgeport to Bishop is a 90-mile-long gateway to adventure. Tall mountains tower over alpine meadows and sagebrush-covered rolling hills. Mountain streams spill out of the high country into craggy

valleys. Wildflowers brighten the landscape in the spring, and changing foliage illuminates canyons come fall. [Road-tripping](#) through the region means frequent stops along the way to hike into the mountains, kayak on alpine lakes, downhill mountain bike, soak in the thermal waters and learn about the region's gold mining and Indigenous history.

About 15 minutes past the big meadow and jagged peaks in Bridgeport, a bumpy dirt road branches off Highway 395 to [Bodie State Historic Park](#), a ghost town dating to the California Gold Rush preserved in a "state of arrested decay." Visitors can walk the streets and imagine life in a late-1800s boom town that once had 10,000 residents and produced more than \$35 million worth of gold and silver.



More from California Road Trips

Find 4 more scenic routes for an unforgettable summer

Back on Highway 395, drive up to Conway Summit, a mountain pass with expansive views of the Mono Basin. Turn off and go 10 minutes up to the [Virginia Lakes Trailhead](#) for a moderate hike. The route starts gently but then climbs up to an 11,000-foot saddle in the Hoover Wilderness with Green Creek and Northern Yosemite views in the distance. Return the same way for a 5-mile round-trip hike with 1,300 feet of elevation gain.

ADVERTISEMENT

Article continues below this ad

Continue south on Highway 395 for stunning views descending into the Mono Basin. Stop in the roadside town of Lee Vining, where the alkaline Mono Lake dominates the landscape. Take a short stroll on the boardwalk through the marsh and willows at [Mono Lake County Park](#). There you will learn about migrating California gulls and get up-close views of the otherworldly tufa towers. Before stopping for the evening, grab dinner and soft-serve ice cream at [Mono Cone](#) in Lee Vining, an old-fashioned-style hamburger stand with outdoor seating.

Road-tripping through the Eastern Sierra means frequent stops along the way to hike into the mountains, kayak on alpine lakes, downhill mountain bike, soak in the thermal waters and learn about the region's gold mining and Indigenous history.

[Via Dan O'Connell for The Chronicle](#)

The next morning, take a short detour 20 minutes south on Highway 158 to catch the morning glass on Silver Lake. Rent a kayak from the marina and paddle along the aspen-lined shore. It's one of the four lakes along a loop road that brings you to June Lake and has stunning views of Carson Peak. Then eat a late breakfast at the local favorite [Silver Lake Resort](#). It's difficult to decide between the "world-famous" three-egg omelet and French toast with bacon and fruit, but anything you choose will fuel the rest of your day.

Keep driving the June Loop past Gull and June lakes and turn right onto Highway 395, going south through a Jeffrey pine forest for 20 minutes to the Mammoth Lakes exit at Highway 203, where unobstructed mountain views return. Pass through the town up to [Mammoth Mountain's Adventure Center](#) at the Main Lodge. Those who want to ride down the slopes can rent a mountain bike and a lift pass, while others should purchase a scenic ride. Either way, everyone should take the panoramic gondola to the summit of Mammoth Mountain. At the top, visit the interpretive center and jump on an earthquake stomp pad, look through a mountain viewing scope and learn about the geologic history of the range.

1 of 6

October fishing at Virginia Lake in California's Eastern Sierra.

Tracy Barbutes

Mountain bikers will ride single-track trails back to the base, while gondola riders have the option of returning on the gondola or hiking down through the ski slopes and forest. End your day at [Mammoth Brewing Company and Eatery](#) with a casual dinner and a tasting flight in the beer garden. Stay the night at one of the many hotels and lodging properties in Mammoth Lakes.

ADVERTISEMENT

Article continues below this ad

Start day three at [Looney Bean Roasting Co.](#), a favorite for the locally roasted coffee, and then get back on Highway 395 going south. Ten minutes later, turn right onto Convict Lake Road and drive another five minutes to the marina. You can spend another morning on the water, fishing for the lake's legendary monster brown and rainbow trout. Or you can go for an easy hike around the lake (www.mammothtrails.org) via a [2-mile loop trail](#) that traverses a sagebrush-covered hillside and a lush aspen grove. At the west end of the lake, you'll get a closer look at Convict Canyon and Laurel Mountain's colorful geologic layers and mineral deposits.

Have lunch at Convict Lake Resort's [Aspen Grill Food Truck](#) in Mammoth Lakes, then hop back into the car for a quick ride across the highway to soak in the area's natural hot springs. Turn left at Benton Crossing Road and drive 3 miles to a dirt road on the right that leads to Wild Willy's, the largest of the region's pools. Or continue down the steep hill to the smaller and hotter Hilltop tub visible on the left from the road.

After a good long while in the healing thermal water, you'll be relaxed and ready to continue 35 minutes south toward Bishop. The highway drops rapidly to the Owens Valley, and along the way, the vertical profile of the mountains becomes higher and more dramatic. Next, swing by the [Paiute Shoshone Cultural Center](#) in Bishop to learn about the history and culture of the indigenous people of the region. The center showcases art and cultural artifacts and also has a nature trail through a conservation area.

Before calling it a day, spend some time walking Main Street (Highway 395) in Bishop, which has a downtown strip with plenty of foot traffic at local shops and restaurants. Stop in at the Gear Exchange (106 S. Main St.), where you might score a deal on secondhand outdoors clothing and equipment, and peruse the shelves at [Spellbinder Books](#) for local authors. And then hit the road for home.

Sign up for the Travel newsletter

Destinations, new and familiar, from Bay Area experts.

Email

SIGN UP

By signing up, you agree to our [Terms of use](#) and acknowledge that your information will be used as described in our [Privacy Policy](#).

Written By

Monica Prella

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)

San Francisco Chronicle

[TOP](#)

ABOUT

- [Our Company](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Notice /Notice At Collection](#)
- [Careers](#)
- [Your California Privacy Rights](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Interest Based Ads](#)

NEWSROOM

- [Ethics Policy](#)
- [News Tips](#)
- [Endorsement Process](#)
- [Newsroom News](#)

CONTACT

- [Customer Service](#)
- [Newsroom Contacts](#)
- [FAQ](#)

CCPA

- [Do Not Sell My Personal Information](#)

SERVICES

- [Subscriber Services](#)
- [Membership](#)
- [e-Edition](#)
- [Place an Obituary](#)
- [Reprints & Permissions](#)
- [Store](#)
- [Corporate Subscriptions](#)
- [Subscription Offers](#)
- [App](#)
- [sfgate.com](#)
- [Archives](#)

HEARST newspapers

©2022 Hearst

