



PHOTOS BY KARI J. BODNARCHUK

Celebrating Idaho’s sheep migrations and preserving age-old traditions

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KETCHUM, Idaho — One of the country’s top festivals originated from friction between cyclists and sheep-herders that boiled down to this: No more poop on the bike path.

Every fall for the past 150 years — right when the autumn chill hangs in the air and the aspens start turning yellow — ranchers have moved thousands of sheep from summertime grazing grounds high up in the mountains to winter pastures down in the valley. Per tradition, the herders — many of Peruvian, Scottish, or Basque descent — guide their flocks through the now-affluent and outdoorsy town of Ketchum and then further south through the Wood River Valley. These well-fed yet scared sheep do what any sheep would do: They poop — in the fields, on the street, and (after it was built) most definitely on the bike path where in-line skaters

and people on pricey Cervelos like to go.

As complaints from bikers mounted, local ranchers Diane and John Peavey had the idea to invite residents to walk with them and their sheep through town that fall so they could educate the cyclists — and all residents — about the age-old tradition of moving the flocks and about the industry that had supported this region for generations.

It worked — dozens of people showed up, including teachers with their students — and the town (led by the Peaveys’ efforts) soon launched the Trailing of the Sheep Festival, an event that celebrates this biannual migration and invites people to be a part of living history. What started as merely a “trailing” (moving) of the sheep seasonal occurrence has evolved into a lively and culturally rich family-friendly event that draws more than 25,000 people and stretches over five days (the sheep migrate twice a year, but the festival only happens in the fall).

This year’s festival — now in its 27th year — runs Oct. 4-8 with events taking place in the towns of Ketchum and Hailey, located about 20 minutes from each other, in central Idaho.

“I was insistent that the festival really tell the story of sheep ranchers,” said Diane Peavey, who is originally from Greenwich, Conn., but moved to the Ketchum area in the early 1980s and started documenting ranch life through her writing and photography. “We look at this event as a three-legged stool,” she added. For it to work, “it needs the storytelling, the celebration of the Scottish, Basque, and Peruvian herders (who came to live here over the years), and the sheep.”

The festival includes all that and more. It features the Championship Sheepdog Trials, when more than 100 of the nation’s top handler and border collie teams compete on grassy open fields just north of Hailey with the mountains as a backdrop; an insightful



Clockwise (from far left): Herders lead more than 1,500 sheep through downtown Ketchum, Idaho; the Championship Sheepdog Trials; ranchers Diane Peavey and John Peavey.

storytelling event (this year it’s Voices from the Land — Unique Stories of Women in Ranching, with three women from western sheep ranches who share their tales and perspectives); and a Wool Festival with workshops and classes on Navajo-style spinning, wet felting with power tools, creating animal sculptures from wool fibers, and other creative skills.

Head to the Folklife Fair in nearby Hailey and you can watch professional shearers use steady hands and electric blades to shave wool off dozens of sheep, sample everything from artisan sheep cheese to lamb burgers and lamb meatball parm, enjoy face painting and kids’ crafts, and watch traditional folk dancing performances by talented local Peruvian, Basque, and Scottish groups.

The many culinary events include lamb cooking classes (when you can watch a chef prepare dishes, ask questions, and then eat the creations); three farm-to-table lamb dinners during which you’ll dine family-style at a large table with locals and out-of-towners, several of whom will be ranchers who can answer your questions; and a town-wide food-tasting event called For the Love of Lamb, when Ketchum restaurants and food truck vendors offer mouthwatering small bites with lamb as the main ingredient.

The festival culminates in the Big

Sheep Parade, when more than 1,500 sheep — now the stars of the event — descend from the hills and funnel down Main Street in Ketchum. Here, thousands of people line the streets to watch the sheep as they click along the pavement. Typically, at least one priest and often a rabbi stand in the middle of the road to bless the sheep as they dash past. The flock continues onto the bike path, along county lanes, and over a small bridge — still leaving sheep droppings along the route — while being followed by curious walkers and cyclists. The sheep will rest for the night and then head for their winter ranches up to 60 miles away.

Many people go out early on parade morning to see the sheep in the fields. If you know where to look in nearby forests, you may find carvings on the bark of aspen trees in places where herders have camped over the years or stopped in the shade to escape the hot sun. These “arborglyphs,” as they’re called, often show herders’ names, dates, poems, or images of sheep wagons or hearts.

We found a carving just north of Ketchum in the Sawtooth National Forest, on a trail next to a canvas sheep-herder’s tent. It depicted an image of a Basque boarding house (or community center), a name, and the date “1969 — a herder leaving his mark on the landscape, much like the sheep still do, during a migration that’s now appreciated and celebrated by all, even those pedaling or in-line skating along the bike paths.

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Berkshires motor inns get pricey face lifts

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thorne hanging out at Arlo Guthrie’s house and listening to Carole King’s “Tapestry,” and you get the idea. And if that isn’t clear, just read a recent article from *Vogue* that states 1970s interior design is back in fashion.

Life House was once a Days Inn on Route 20. As we were driving west, my husband was reading unkind reviews from people who had stayed there. But when we arrived, I was happy to see that the building had molted out of its Days Inn skin. The lobby, which contains a restaurant, a swanky bar, and an artfully decorated lounge (called “the library lounge”), has 28-foot ceilings, dramatic glass chandeliers, and dozens of windows. The furnishings seemed inspired by Rhoda Morgenstern’s New York apartment (that’s a compliment).

We were feeling pretty jazzed, so we ordered a couple of cocktails before we went to the room. The hotel has self-check-in on an iPad. The woman tending bar helped us when we hit a snag. We took our cocktails and sat out by one of several fire pits, sipping and admiring the stars. I started to see why Life House, Berkshires made *Conde Nast Traveler’s* 2023 Hot List.

The price was not cheap. After taxes and fees it was \$407 for a night, so my expectations were high as we entered the room.

The first thing I noticed was a strange wire cage around the air conditioner. After studying pictures of the rooms before the hotel was renovated, it looked as if they were the same air conditioners used when the property was a Days Inn. But why the cage? Was it popular to build chicken coops to hide air conditioners in the 1970s? If so, Life House nailed that trend.

Aside from the caged AC, every part of the room was nicely renovated. The bed was comfortable, the bathroom was fresh, the toiletries were from the very upscale brand Le Labo, and the floor was wood laminate in a herringbone



PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER MUTHER/GLOBE STAFF

A standard room in the Life House, Berkshires hotel in Lenox.



The living room in the king suite at the Blue Vista Motor Lodge in Florida.

pattern. The footprint of the room was small, just as it had been when it was Days Inn. There was no coffee maker in the room, but most people I know aren’t fans of hotel room coffee.

The trouble started when we turned on the TV. It had an interactive page where you could request items from the front desk, everything from Q-Tips to wine bottle openers. I had forgotten my toothpaste, so I clicked on “toothpaste.” I also clicked on “ice,” because that seemed like a good hotel thing to do. It was around 11 p.m. when I submitted my request. I waited, and waited, and waited some more. Nothing.

If you offer services to guests, such as items from an interactive menu on a TV, you should provide the service. Otherwise, remove the option. Especially at a time when finding workers in the hospitality industry is challenging. Life House is striving to be an outdoorsy writer’s lodge inspired by the 1970s, and aesthetically it works, although it really is a motor lodge on a parking lot.

But it misses the mark on details, like the dust collecting on the shelves of the 28-foot bookcase in the lobby (please, someone buy a roll of paper towels and a can of lemon Pledge!), the parking lot noise, the strange caged air

Life House, Berkshires

- Pros:**
- 64 updated rooms
 - Nice cocktail bar
 - Large patio area with tables, sofas, and fire pits
- Cons:**
- Pricey
 - Service is lacking
 - Some highway and parking lot noise carries into rooms
- 194 Pittsfield Road, Lenox
855-967-5695
www.lifehousehotels.com

Blue Vista Motor Lodge

- Pros:**
- Incredible scenery
 - Tranquil
 - Service-oriented staff
- Cons:**
- Overly complicated television
- 229 Mohawk Trail, Florida,
413-664-0007
www.bluevistamotorlodge.com

conditioners, and, worst of all, leaving guests feeling ignored. Custom Murano glass chandeliers in the lobby don’t matter if guests walk away unhappy.

BLUE VISTA MOTOR LODGE

Like Life House, the Blue Vista Motor Lodge in Florida is a renovated motor inn, but the similarities end there. While Life House places its emphasis on style and automation, the owner of Blue Vista places her emphasis on service. At least that was my first impression when I arrived. Instead of checking in with an iPad, owner Stella Downie was behind the desk to check me in. (Downie did not know a travel writer from the *Globe* was staying at the hotel, and the *Globe* does not accept free hotel stays).

In true motor inn fashion, the check-in office also sells food, beverages, T-shirts, and other items that carry the hotel’s logo. It’s a well-curated mix of products. There’s no bar, restaurant, or library lounge, but what Blue Vista has is the best view on the Mohawk Trail. It sits 2,240 feet above sea level, making it the highest point on the trail. There’s nothing but trees as far as the eye can see (and also the historic bronze elk statue nearby).

Downie, an entrepreneur who once

ran a toy store in Cambridge (StellaBella Toys) and then opened several indoor trampoline parks, bought the decaying Whitcomb Summit Motor Lodge in 2021 and restored the building into a lovely mid-century throwback. My room was modern and up-to-date, the bed was comfortable, and the bathroom was spotless. It’s all about the view, so keeping the room decor straightforward was a wise move. There’s no way to compete with what’s outside.

There are two outdoor fire pits that offer more scenery, plus a pair of hot tubs behind the hotel. Because I booked at the last minute, the only room left was a king suite, which had a large living room area with a table at the window and a separate bedroom. It was a big room. I paid \$366 with taxes and fees for the room on a Saturday night. Weeknight rates are cheaper, as are off-season rates. I searched around the hotel’s website and found rooms in the late fall starting at \$129 a night.

With the location and views comes the challenge of finding dinner. Most restaurants are about 10 miles away and there’s no restaurant at the hotel. That’s mostly nitpicking. Truthfully there wasn’t much amiss at Blue Vista. The only complaint I came away with was the TV. There was one channel (I think) that could be watched live. The other options were streaming services that required a hotel guest to sign in with their own subscription. Many hotels are now setting up their systems this way, including Life House. But sometimes it’s nice to just turn on the TV and zone out rather than having to log into accounts.

Comparing Blue Vista and Life House is like trying to compare Elizabeth Taylor’s ex-husbands. Impossible. But, here it goes: Blue Vista can be described as a hotel in the Berkshires with 17 rooms located on 19 acres. Life House describes itself as “a vertically integrated hotel brand, management and software platform.” I don’t even know what that means.

I came away from Blue Vista with an appreciation of a solid, old-school motor inn where the owner is on-site and works long hours. These hotels are few and far between. Or maybe I was just feeling happy after a nice experience with an amazing view.

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