



Know Before You Go

9 QUESTIONS TO ASK AN OUTFITTER BEFORE BOOKING

Know what to ask an outfitter (and more importantly how he should answer) before sending him your check and booking a hunt with him. Here are some of the questions you need to ask:

1. Q. How many hunters can the outfitter accommodate at one time and how many guides to a hunter?

A. Some hunts will specify one-on-one or two-on-one hunter to guide ratios when you buy the hunt, while some deer camps where you're being dropped off on stands by a guide could have you piling in a truck with five or six other guys. Make sure you're comfortable with whatever the setup is and make sure the facilities where you'll be staying sounds like they are sufficient for the number of hunters you'll be sharing time with. Obviously, the fewer in camp, the better your options.

2. Q. How much land do you hunt and is it private or public?

A. Out west, it's not uncommon for outfitters to guide hunters on private and public land. There's nothing wrong with this, but obviously, the more private land an outfitter owns or leases, the more control he can exert in managing the game populations and who will be hunting them. The quality of the public land depends on many factors such as hunting pressure, habitat, genetics, age structure of the animals, remote location of camp, weather and others.

3. Q. How frequently is a stand or area hunted?

A. After you know how much land an outfitter has and how many people he runs through it, you can get an idea of how often an area is getting pounded by hunter pressure. But ask him the same. If you will be hunting the same couple of stands every day or the same valley an entire hunt, which may be too much. Likewise, if he isn't able to let stands cool down in between groups and give an area some rest, you can bet you're going to be hunting some pressured game.

4. Q. Will a hunter sit different areas or does he have the option to move if he isn't seeing game?

A. Some guides believe you are better off to hunt the same spot day in and day out until a quality animal appears, while others believe in pounding the countryside in search of a trophy. If one area doesn't produce, find another. Either way, make sure you're going to be happy with the outfitter's hunting philosophy. If not, find someone else.

5. Q. Aside from the listed cost of the hunt, are there other charges?

A. Beware of hidden fees such as service charges if the outfitter is assisting in securing your tag, cleaning or capping fees of your trophy (some South Dakota pheasant hunting operations and others will clean

your birds for a charge), fuel surcharges particularly since gas prices rose a couple of years ago and other costs. Will the outfitter pick you up at the airport for free or is travel from the airport to the ranch or camp up to you? There is nothing wrong with these charges, you just want to know exactly what you're going to be in for financially. Make sure it is all spelled out. Nobody likes surprises, particularly where money is involved.

6. Q. If you tag out early, what else is there to do? Can you depart early if necessary?

A. Okay, this is two questions, but they could be closely related. On the occasion that you tag out early, is there anything else you can do such as fishing, bird hunting, sporting clays or local sight seeing. Can you join another hunter on his hunt? If you have a friend with you, this is probably not a problem, but it depends. Not all hunts lend themselves to extra people. Sitting around with nothing to do for a week can get brutal. If that's the case, can you make arrangements to depart early? It's good to know upfront.

7. Q. If I kill a trophy animal, what options are available?

A. Will the outfitter help you cape the animal and prepare it for the taxidermist? Most will, but be sure. Likewise, have a plan on whether you are going to use a local taxidermist; some outfitters will have someone they recommend but some won't. Or will it be best to ship it home to a taxidermist you already know and use? Some outfitters will ship it for you, others are leery of being held responsible should things to go wrong with shippers and will require you to tote it home yourself. Again, have a plan before the animal is on the ground. Plan for success.

8. Q. Are you licensed and insured?

A. Most states require outfitters to be licensed. Get your outfitters license number and confirm it. See if any complaints have been registered against the outfitter and check to make sure he is incorporated and insured. The more professional an outfitter is about running his operation, the more legit he'll probably be in his approach to taking care of his clients.

9. Q. Can you get a list of references both successful & unsuccessful.

A. Every hunting outfitter should expect this question. If they refuse the request, keep looking for another outfitter. Most will have one ready for you. Make sure it includes hunters from recent years who filled a tag and who went home empty-handed. Make sure they are from around different parts of the country. It will do you no-good to check references from an outfitter who has stacked his list with local buddies.