



Know Before You Go

DIFFERENT TYPES OF HUNTS

When planning an out-of-state hunt, hunters have several options from which to choose on the type of hunt they wish to experience. Many sportsman initially think guided hunts with an outfitter when beginning to plan a trip, but indeed, there are a number of options available to match an individual's budget, skill level and even trophy expectations.

Even within the offerings from outfitters there are sometimes options that can save a hunter money and/or provide him with a more self-reliant experience.

Following are some of the options to consider along with pros and cons of each:

Fully Guided Hunt

Without a doubt, a fully guided, one-on-one hunt booked through a quality outfitter gives the non-resident hunter the best odds at filling his tag on a true trophy animal. Consider that big game hunters in most Western states enjoy overall success rates that average between the 10 and 20 percent range compared to guided hunters in these same areas who experience success rates at around 85 percent, and you can see why going with an outfitter is your best option. You can also see why it can be so costly.

When you book a hunt with an outfitter, you're not only paying for the use of his facilities, cooked meals and transportation (be it trucks, horses or ATVs), but you're also paying for the expertise and service of his guides who are out there scouting game day-in and day-out, who know the land and have likely worked with the outfitter to help manage the game and who have learned the best ways to hunt the terrain and animals that live there. When you consider do-it-yourselfers might hunt for years before they connect on a trophy animal, suddenly that \$3,000 to \$10,000 cost of increasing your odds five fold suddenly make it a worthwhile investment.

A fully-guided hunt is ideal for the sportsman willing to pay the price and for the one who has never done the type of hunting he is about to do. Traveling to country you've never experienced and hunting game you've never hunted before is not only incredibly hard, depending on your goals, it can be downright dangerous for the unprepared.

To save some costs with guided hunts, some hunts and outfitters, such as antelope hunts, lend themselves to two-hunter-per-guide and in the case of caribou hunting, even four-hunters-per-guide options. This basically allows you to still get the benefit of a guide's experience while sharing the cost of his services. For mule deer, elk, sheep or other game where it will take a lot of work to usually get on one true trophy animal, stick with a one-on-one option. Stand hunts such as for whitetails and black bears can accommodate a number of hunters per guide.

Drop Camps

As a crossover option, some back country hunts such as elk and mule deer in the Rockies and Caribou in Canada lend themselves to being transported in and dropped off by an outfitter who has set up a remote

spike camp. Such set ups may include only the tent and camping gear or it may include everything the hunters need including the horses and food. It's up to the hunters to care for themselves and hunt until the outfitter returns to pick them up. This is a good option for experienced hunters where available, as the cost of a drop camp can knock \$1,000 or more dollars off the price of a hunt and also allows a sportsman with the confidence in his skills to hunt on his own.

Apart from paying for arrangements through an outfitter, hunters can also pay individual operators to fly or pack them into backcountry public land via horseback, but in these situations, the hunter will need to plan and provide all of his own gear and food.

Not totally unlike a drop camp, there are currently some great budget options for South Dakota pheasant hunters to pay a service that provides them leased land to hunt and the hunters arrange for their own rooms at hotels, their own meals and bring their own dogs. With quality land access one of the biggest challenges facing sportsmen, this is a cost-effective and increasingly popular option.

Do-It-Yourself Hunts

For the serious budget-minded sportsman, you can of course, always go it alone. Some hunters get as much satisfaction from the planning of their own adventure as they do to the actual hunt. If you're a do-it-yourselfer with little experience hunting the game you're about to go after, do yourself a favor and find an experienced hunting partner to show you the ropes your first time out. It will save you a lot of hassles.

There are also some great resources to help you plan your next hunt such as web sites like NextHunt.com or books like Mike Schoby's "Do-It-Yourself Dream Hunts."

Swap Hunts

Other ways of creating your own do-it-yourself experience is to swap hunts with hunters interested in hunting game. There are entire message boards on various outdoor sites dedicated to folks that are interested in swapping the opportunity to hunt. Some of these people can even assist you with navigating their state's licensing process and may even join you on your hunt providing great insight into the local terrain and game habits.

Trespass Fee Hunts

Another option for hunters that some landowners have seized upon is to provide access to their land by charging a trespass fee or daily hunting lease. Some may charge by the day or by the season and depending on the charge, it could save a lot of money versus an outfitted hunt. Of course, these fees usually only cover the access and it's up to the hunter to take care of his own lodging, meals, packing and anything else involved. When considering the payment of trespass fees, ask how many hunters the landowner allows each day and each season. If you're going to have to pay for a place that is as overrun with hunters as public land, you might as well hunt the public land. After all, it's free.