

Tips for Traveling Hunters

By Kathy Butt

Every year thousands of hunters head west for long-awaited big game hunts. If you're planning on traveling westward this fall and dreaming of a successful big game adventure, more than likely you've carefully planned your hunt, have dotted your "i's" and crossed your "t's". You've probably been dreaming of a "hunt of a lifetime", so it never hurts to go over that checklist again, just to make sure you've planned not only for the hunt itself, but also for all the work that follows a successful hunt. By heeding the following tips on advanced preparations, perhaps you can come a little closer to that sort of a memorable experience, regardless of whether you take home a trophy for the wall, meat for the freezer or just a pocket full of snapshots. The following ten tips will save you time and money, and lead to a memory-making out-of-state adventure.

1. Be prepared. Take time to make advanced plans and remove all the guesswork on everything...including meat and trophy care, as well as to assure your comfort and safety while afield. Whether driving or flying to your destination, prepare a detailed packing list...and use it!
2. Check ahead with your outfitter and guide. Have you made reference calls on the outfitter you're booking to guide you on your wilderness adventure? By all means do so. Any reputable outfitter should gladly provide you with references. If they are reluctant to provide you with this info, you should book elsewhere. Ask your outfitter for a suggested packing list. They should be able to fill you in on the area's terrain and climate, allowing you to bring along all the necessary gear. Do-it-yourselfers should have topo maps of the hunting area. Calls to wildlife officials and residents can be a good investment in time and money.
3. Visit your taxidermist. If you haven't already found a good professional taxidermist, the time to do so is before making that long-awaited big game hunt. Look in the yellow pages for listings in your area or ask around. Call and visit their showroom. Viewing displays can tell you about the quality of their work. Ask for their current prices, as well as how long you can expect the professional to take in completing your trophy.

A taxidermist should gladly offer you suggestions on trophy care. Outfitters usually offer trophy care as part of their guiding service, when you have booked a fully-guided hunt. Knowing ahead of time

exactly how you would like your animal mounted will give them an idea how the trophy should be properly skinned. Keep your hides adequately salted and stored for the return trip home.

Before returning home, make a quick phone call to your taxidermist and inform him of your success. Some taxidermists will meet you at the airport or at their shop after hours to make sure your trophy receives the immediate attention it may require.

4. Check airline restrictions. If you plan on flying to your destination, checking with the airlines can save you money and worry when bringing home your wild game meat, as well hide and antlers. Most airlines have the same basic restrictions, yet some differ on dry ice regulations and charges for extra baggage. Call ahead and verify these restrictions so you'll know what to expect, be prepared for the cost and this will save you a lot of frustration and hassle at the airport.

As a rule, most airlines allow two or three checked bags per passenger. For anything above this limit, there is an additional charge (with each checked piece not exceeding 50 pounds). When bringing home large antlered or horned trophies, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. If your trophy has the possibility of making the record book, you must keep antlers and horns attached to the skull and intact. They cannot be officially scored once they've been cut apart. When you have a large trophy that definitely won't make the record book, you can save money by having the skull cap split down the middle and by tying and wiring, or taping the antlers together. Again, check airline restrictions ahead of time, as many vary on allowances.

To protect antler points use heavy cardboard and duct tape. You may also use short pieces of garden hose, spent shotgun shells or pipe insulation over the tips, then wrap with duct tape. Remember to attach all the necessary paperwork to hides and horns upon shipping them home.

5. Pack smart and save space. We recommend to our hunters they pack their clothing and an empty duffel bag in large coolers. This saves space and provides insulation for packaging meat while leaving the duffel to hold your clothing for the return trip home. To save money, hunters may ship their duffels via UPS or Federal Express and check meat coolers as baggage on the plane.

6. Get to the airport early. This will save you lots of panic and worry later. Checking bows or rifles in requires extra time at the check-in counter. Hard cases that can be locked are required. Ammo must be in the original packaging and placed in a separate checked bag.
7. If you plan on taking wild game meat home to be processed or process it yourself, you'll need the following: good sharp knives, a knife sharpener, plastic-coated freezer paper, freezer tape, insulated coolers and a permanent marker for labeling packages.

One of the best products on the market today is Liquid Game Bag. This liquid completely seals the skinned carcass and protects it from insects and birds. One bottle is enough to completely rub down an entire elk carcass.

For those hunters willing to spend their money for the convenience of having a professional do the work, the wild game processor has several options to offer. Check with the processor to see if they offer specialties such as smoked summer sausage, polish sausage or de-boning meat. De-boning your wild game meat will save weight, thus save you space and money in shipping.

8. Take care of any special medical needs before you leave. Being a long way from home can sometimes take some special forethought for things that may and can happen. Even though we don't like to think about it, accidents do happen and it's a good idea to supply your outfitter with information on any health problems you might have and whom they should contact in case an emergency arises. It will also give your family peace of mind for you to leave a telephone number where they can contact you in case of an emergency at home.

Items such as aspirin, Tylenol, antihistamines, antibiotic ointment, Band-Aids, Chapstick and sunblock are just a few things you should always have with you. If you're hunting with an outfitter, they should also be informed of any medications you're taking for illness such as high blood pressure or seizures, and also where you are keeping these medications. Keep a list of these medicines and the correct dosages in your pocket.

9. Train for your trip to the high country. For those of you who have experienced hunting in higher elevations, you know all about this one. For those making this trip for the first time, higher

altitudes will likely leave you gasping for air. Take it slow and easy your first couple of days in camp. The combination of thin, dry air slows down even the most physically prepared hunter, so allow your body time to acclimate to the thinner air.

10. Be prepared for photographing your trophy. Take at least two cameras and use both to take your photos. Take those photos from different angles and remember to wipe away excess blood or push the animals tongue back in it's mouth before snapping away, as this insure you of quality photos you'll be proud to show off back at home.

These are just a few tips to help the traveling hunter have a more successful and enjoyable hunting adventure. Something as simple as a checklist can, and will save you time and money, as well as keep you safe and comfortable. Whether you drive or fly....be prepared for success!

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