

A GUIDE FOR TIPPING YOUR GUIDE

By Dave Fulson

TYPE OF SAFARI	P.H. TIP	TRACKERS/ GAME SCOUT EACH	SKINNERS EACH	CAMP STAFF
7 day plains game	400.00	75.00	25.00	175.00
10 day plains game	700.00	100.00	50.00	250.00
10 day buffalo / plains game	1000.00	125.00	50.00	300.00
14 day buffalo / leopard / plains	1,250.00	150.00	60.00	400.00
10-14 day elephant hunt (Bots)	2000.00	200.00	75.00	800.00
21 day 'big 4' hunt	2,500.00	300.00	100.00 each	800.00

It had been one of those hunts where everything had gone as close to perfect as you can get on an elk hunt. My week of pre-scouting in New Mexico's Gila wilderness had helped me pinpoint several big bulls near the remote spike camp I had set up for my client and myself in an attempt to get away from big crowds on hand for the rifle season open.

It could have ended on day one when my hunter shot over the back of a 330 B&C bull at 200 yards because, as he stated later, he thought it was closer to 400 yards. One scouted bull long gone. But after passing two very nice bulls the next few days while looking for a 'monstah' (my hunter, if it matters, was from the deep south) we found one, and this time my hunter dropped the big bull at about eighty yards. The bull scored about 345 B&C points and my guy was beside himself with joy.

As I gutted, skinned, butchered and meat-sacked the bull by myself, my hunter anointed me with every compliment a guide could wish for as he sat in a patch of sunlight next to a small fire he had asked me to build him.

"Best hunt I've ever been on", was his comment as he finished a final bite of the t-bone steak lunch I bought him near the airport where I was depositing him after a four-hour drive on my gas and time.

"This worked out great, I didn't have to rent a car and you and I got to visit some more. You probably got out of some chores, too", he chuckled as I paid the bill, seeing that he sure wasn't reaching for it. "Hey, Dave, let me get the tip, that pretty gal's a good waitress", he said as he flipped a generous tip on the tabletop. Later as I unloaded his bags at the airport, he grabbed my hand, shook it vigorously, and restated that I was the best guide he had ever hunted with, and that when he returned for an even bigger 'monstah', that he would not think of hunting with anyone else but 'Super Dave' (the handle he had graced me with since day one).

With that, he gave me back my hand, picked up his bags and headed back to Sweet Home Alabama with a bruiser elk. A \$10 tip for a \$30 meal, but zip for five days of very hard hunting, packing, and driving, not to mention sixteen hours of free airport shuttle service. You know about death and taxes, let me throw in another of life's little guarantees: He may kill another big elk, but it won't be with 'Super Dave'!

Tipping, gratuity, 'greasing the guide' or whatever you choose to call it, is one of the most slippery slopes guided hunters negotiate when an outfitted hunt is considered. Many hunters have never been on a guided hunt and don't know what the protocol is.

Each year, I face the 'what to tip' question from three very different angles: 1) as an outfitter who employs guides, 2) as the client's personal guide, and 3) as a client.

As an outfitter who employs guides, I'm often asked by clients about tipping. In fact, I ease the subject of gratuities into every pre-hunt meeting I have with clients along with safety talks, hunt strategy sessions, bag limits, etc. I explain to my hunters that they are in the care of experienced professional guides whose skill and knowledge will most likely determine the success of their hunt. I state, up front, that tips are absolutely not mandatory, but are always appreciated and without a doubt well-earned. I am happy to give the tipping client suggestions on amounts and let them decide how much they wish to leave their guide.

When I am the guide, and the client says, "I'd like to tip you, but I don't want to offend you or overdo it", things are a bit more tricky. I usually give them a yearly average based on previous clients in camp and let them make their decision based on that.

Many times, the acknowledgement of your effort in words is as important to a professional guide as a tip, but this is after all, his profession, and hunting is this man's way to pay the bills, not a fun hobby.

As a client myself several times each year, I simply practice what I preach. If my man works hard, knows his stuff, runs his camp, equipment and staff in a professional manner, than I'm going to reward his efforts in cash at the hunt's conclusion. And the amount is NOT based simply on horn or antler scores on some damn tape measure. It will be based on the effort and overall enjoyment of the hunting experience.

A word of warning here to an ever-growing number of what I call 'bounty hunters', who seem to be showing up in my camps from Austin all the way to Africa. If you want to immediately insult an experienced guide or professional hunter at the beginning of your trip, just pull him aside and tell him that if he wants a 'really good tip' he'll see to it that you bag the biggest buck or bull in camp.

Trust me on this; you have just been categorized as a problem client regardless of your social status or bank balance. Guides are never happy to be saddled with this type of dude.

He may work his tail off for you regardless, as his professional credo demands, but he'll do it with a detached sense of 'get him shot out and back on a plane ASAP' attitude instead of the total enjoyment a fun-to-be-with client brings to the guide/client relationship.

Professional hunting guides, regardless of where they ply their trade, rarely make over \$150 US at the end of their long, hard and oftentimes dangerous days. Figure in gasoline, wear and tear on their own vehicles, insurance and the like, and it's easy to see that no one in this game is getting rich regardless of how much you shelled out for an elk hunt or African safari. The fact is that cash tips at the end of a hunt are a very important part of a professional guide's financial bottom line.

Another fact is that, without being delicate, most all the professional guides I employ, hunt with, and know around the globe consider it a slap in the face to be snubbed at the end of a hunt when they have put in their best effort and the client has the financial means to offer more than a handshake.

Since he's a pro, however, he will shake your hand, compliment the beastie you bagged, thank you for choosing him to hunt with and put you back on the plane with a smile. All with the class of a true professional, because that's exactly what he is.

But the truth is that your final thought of him will be far different from his of you, if you slighted him at the conclusion of your hunt. Oh, I can hear the wheels churning in some of your heads right now. "I didn't tip Ole' Bill on our hunt, but we were old friends by the time the trip was over, and he would have probably been insulted if I had". I hope you buy that, but believe me, Ole' Bill - and Ole' Dave - know better!

Professional hunters do not have stock options, bonus incentives, or mandatory pay raises and the like to fall back on. Their earning potential is limited to a few months on the calendar when they must make enough cash to see themselves and their families throughout the rest of the year.

They also share the same range of emotions found by folks in any other profession, including disappointment. Dozens of times over the years, I've been stiffed at the end of a hunt by guys that thought, and even told me from time to time, "You make a daily rate for doing your job, that's enough."

But let that same guy find out that this year there would be no Christmas bonus, (one he's come to count on each year) from his company even though his sales numbers were through the roof, and we'll see how the old "Well you've got your regular salary, that's enough" suits him then! I'm sure you get my point.

So, what is an appropriate tip amount? Well, that depends on many factors. Your overall enjoyment of the hunting experience should be a determining factor. Right here is a good time to state a very important fact. Not all hunts are enjoyable experiences and not all guides put forth the effort to be eligible for extra consideration at the hunt's conclusion.

I have seen lazy, unprepared, and unqualified people who impostered as true guides during my years in this business, and you may have as well. Am I insinuating that just because a guy has a business card that says 'Licensed Guide' on it that a tip of any sort is, or should be, mandatory? **ABSOLUTELY NOT!**

Yours Truly has suffered through a few of this type over the years, and you can be assured that all I left them was a piece of my mind at the hunt's end. Bad service and lack of effort should not be rewarded in the bush any more than it should be at a restaurant.

But if your trip was a well-run and enjoyable experience and you wish to acknowledge it as such with a gratuity, here are some guidelines. (see sidebar)

The degree of difficulty in securing your desired trophy should be a consideration. Sitting over a feeder with a client waiting for a good Whitetail is a vastly different proposition than wading into the long grass after a poorly shot lion. Some professional hunters, particularly those who pursue dangerous game in Africa, face serious bodily injury and even death as a regular part of their job. That should surely count for something.

Remember, the guide is usually not the outfitter, he simply works for him. It's easy and sometimes understandable for, lets say, a group of hunters on a top Whitetail ranch to shell out \$5000 per man with four men in the group, and say, "Well, we just made that guy \$20,000 in four days, that should be plenty."

Unless the outfitter owns the ranch and the animals, he probably only made a 10% commission on the total hunt (\$2000) from which he paid a cook, bought food, and had to hire guides at between \$100-\$150 per day, times 4. He probably spent around \$100 per group in long distance calls, brochures, gas for airport pick-up and the like, just to secure the booking in the first place. Are you starting to see the big picture? Men wishing to end up in the Fortune 500 listing seldom choose professional hunting as a career.

Most who do choose this career enjoy the game animals they hunt, the country they operate in and, in the vast majority of cases, the clients whom they join with on a mutual adventure. The good ones are fun to be with, know their game and their region, are honest and direct in their dealings and have the ability to make even the beginning hunter feel comfortable and confident during the hunt. A good guide will, no matter what the conditions or situation, always give a good effort. Your satisfaction will always be his number one goal.

A heartfelt 'Thank You' from a good client who gave a modest tip may indeed be more genuinely appreciated than \$500 being flung down on the table by some high-roller who did it more for the show, than to show true recognition for the effort.

Let your conscience and honest feeling for the guide be the determining factor, as well as your financial situation when deciding a tip amount.

This is a game with no written rules, although the 'Golden' one fits pretty well here. I hope you can use the above information to get a better foothold on the slippery slope of the tipping dilemma.

SIDEBARS

Gear in Place of Cash

In some cases a client may wish to tip the guide with a piece of gear instead of cash. While cash is preferable with most guides in the majority of cases, a quality piece of gear can be a very appreciated gesture. I have seen binoculars, spotting scopes, clothing and even rifles given as tips years ago, that are still in use today, long after the equivalent of cash would have been spent and forgotten.

If you choose this route, just make certain it is an item of better quality than your man currently owns, and not something you're simply trying to get rid of. If you think of a gift you think he may need but you don't have on hand, tell him to expect a surprise in the mail and then follow through as soon as you get back home. This important act of etiquette will be greatly appreciated.

Camp Staff

In most African camps, the staff of helpers can be quite large compared with most North American Hunts.

Trackers, skimmers, cook staff, tent boys, laundry workers and general helpers the like can make appropriate tips a bit tricky. Consult your P.H. or camp manager on what would be reasonable for the staff and he will be happy to assist you. Oftentimes, I tip the staff through the P.H. and he tips the help according to their position in the camp pecking order.

Remember, there are people working for you that you may never even see (example: shower boy, mechanic or tent cleaner) but let them take a day off, and you would immediately miss their service! Don't forget about these folks.

Trackers

The tracker is without a doubt the most important staff position on most safaris. You will be with them all day, every day, and it is normal that strong bonds and pleasant memories will be forged with them. Tipping trackers is something that each client usually feels strongly about since they "watch" them earn their pay daily, often under dangerous conditions.

Ask your P.H. his thoughts on the amount at the safaris conclusion and he will give you an idea of what might be appropriate. One more thing, it is customary to tip the trackers personally, away from the others. We usually carry cash on the last day for this and it is preceded by a short word of thanks and a handshake in the field. If you do not speak the lingo, your P.H. will translate, but your guys will know what you are saying and they will appreciate you for it.

Game Scout

In Zimbabwe and Botswana, a government game scout will accompany you in the field each day. He is legally there to observe and to ensure all game rules are obeyed. Some scouts simply observe the hunt and do little else. But, a great many become a very important part of the hunting team by tracking, changing flats, cutting brush, recovering game, etc. If you get a hard working scout, the entire Chifuti team very much appreciates you tipping him at the end of the hunt. His job is a dangerous one, and his paycheck is small, even by Zimbabwe/Botswana standards, so remember him if he was a hard worker.

Your PH

In today's society, most waiters and waitresses average a 10%-15% tip for taking an order and delivering it with a smile. Professional hunters and their staff usually work a lot harder for far less, so remember that fact before the final handshake on your next hunt.

Remember, our tipping suggestions are no different than any other portion of this information package. Their sole purpose is to help our client prepare for, and enjoy their safari experience. And as always, tipping is at the discretion of you, the client.