

Tipping Guide

Here is an article that I wrote about tipping, feel free to comment and discuss this subject further, give your opinion or share examples of what you have given as a tip.

Tipping Guide

Tipping is something that I get asked about quite regularly, I believe this is because there is a lot of conflicting advice and confusion surrounding this topic. I have heard complaints, usually from hunters who are very satisfied with their hunt, but then have felt pressured to leave more of a tip than they were comfortable with or even told what they should leave. I will let you know what I think the beneficial or normal practices are and expose some of the less ethical ones. I will try to clarify a rather ambiguous subject so that you can make an educated choice as to how much of a tip you wish to leave, because after all it is a choice.

What is tipping for?

Tipping is a good thing, it is a straight forward way to encourage great service. However tipping loses its most important purpose when others start deciding or dictating who should get tips, how much you should give or pooling tips and redistributing them however they see fit. These practices do not allow workers to make that connection between their effort and their compensation, after all what is a tip for?

Tipping is customary but it's also discretionary

In the hunting industry a tip is customary and should always be figured into your budget during the planning stages of your hunt. That being said, a tip is also always a reflection of the level and quality of service that you have received during the entirety of your hunt and should not be considered mandatory. It should however be a VERY rare occasion and a completely bungled hunt, due to human error, not nature or weather, when skimping on a tip should be considered acceptable. You should absolutely inform the owner or person in charge if you are dissatisfied to the extent that you do not feel that a tip is deserved by anyone involved in your hunting safari.

Why is tipping so important?

The reason is simple, P.H.'s, trackers and camp staff derive much of their income from the tips they receive which creates the incentive for them to perform at their highest level for each and every client. After all we must remember that hunting is a service industry. The custom of tipping has evolved over a long period of time and is responsible for creating an environment of ever evolving higher standards and better quality of service, leaving behind those who are less than hard working. I would like to point out however that if your P.H. is also the owner of the hunting outfit, you still need to give him a tip as you would with any other P.H., based upon your overall satisfaction no more, no less.

When to tip

Most people give their tip at the end of the hunt, which makes sense because it should be based upon overall satisfaction. There are some hunters who swear they get better service by offering a portion of the tip at the beginning of the hunt to the trackers and skinner, as an incentive. They explain to the hunting team that they will be well compensated at the end of the hunt in addition to what they have already received if they work hard and do their very best. Even if they spend no more than they had planned to originally, they believe this method to be an effective stimulus that makes the team want to work harder. This may be of particular importance with the skinner who often gets little attention, even though the fate of your trophies rests in their hands. My thought is that this theory is hard to prove as you will never know how hard the hunting team would have worked for you otherwise but perhaps that is not a concern if you spent no more on your tip by

doing it this way. But there are definitely risks, such as a member of your hunting team, with cash in hand, may decide to take an impromptu vacation which has been known to happen.

This tip has nothing to do with tipping

Here is my tip to you, which has nothing to do with tipping! Your behavior has more to do with the outcome of your hunt than your tip. You should know that the outcome of your hunt is highly dependent upon the performance of your entire hunting team and that the effort they put forth from one hunt to another can be drastically different depending on how they "feel" about the hunter as a person. It's not always about money, just being nice goes a long way too. How important it is that the P.H. and hunting team perceive you positively, for whatever reason, is not something that you will ever hear discussed, but it is really a factor that can play a huge role in how hard the hunting team works for you and how successful your hunt is.

From the moment you arrive it is important to go out of your way to have warm and friendly interactions with the staff... and I mean all of them. Remember they work together, live together and are often related to each other, if you are disrespectful to one person they will all know about it in short order. Not to say that you shouldn't complain if there is something that you're unhappy about, but I suggest you take it to the P.H. or lodge manager and let them deal with it.

Preferred form of payment for tipping

A tip should be given in cash or can be given with traveler's cheques. If a voucher system is used by the hunting outfitter, you may wish to ask the outfitter if it matters if that cash is in local currency or US\$. You may be surprised to hear that many prefer US\$, which should make it easier for you in terms of knowing what you are giving and not needing to exchange currency, however some still prefer local currency as it is hassle for some workers to exchange money depending on the country.

When it is okay to give an item as your tip instead of cash?

It is always very generous for hunters to bring "extras" (such as clothes, knives, cigarettes, candy, even perfume or chocolates for the lady of the house), however these items should not be considered a tip. If you wish to offer an item in lieu of a cash tip the choice should be that of the recipient, for example you might propose leaving behind a pair of binoculars or a nice hunting knife instead of a cash tip, if the person agrees great, but if they prefer cash, you should be prepared to leave the tip in that form. I do believe that those types of "extras", given before or shared throughout the hunt, can buy you a lot of good graces; these small gestures are very well received and just a nice thing to do.

How to make sure your tip gets where you intend it to?

You should make an effort to hand your tip or voucher directly to the person it is for. In this way you can help to insure that your wishes are being respected. It is fine if you wish to put your tip into an envelope or give a group tip to be divided evenly, or as you see fit, for the lodge/camp staff to the house manager if you are more comfortable or if it is too time consuming.

Factors to consider when tipping

- Satisfaction with hunting safari
- Success of hunting safari
- Country where hunt takes place
- Price of hunt
- Number of days of hunt
- Type of hunting safari (plains game, dangerous game or combination of both)
- Number of hunters with PH (1x1, 2x1, etc.)
- Number of non-hunting observers

You may not have as much contact with the lodge/camp personnel as you do with your hunting team but they are still an important component of your whole hunting safari experience. These people should also be taken into consideration when tipping as they care for your day to day needs behind the scenes. The hunting and camp staff are a complete team, each doing their part to make you hunt great and stay enjoyable, however some hunters may be inclined only to tip those who they have had the most contact with (ie. PH, trackers, driver) but it is really a team effort in every way.

Typical personnel to tip

- Professional Hunter
- Tracker(s)
- Driver
- Skinner
- Cook
- Servers
- Maids
- Laundress

Additional personnel you may need to tip

(all of these personnel may not be a part of your hunting safari)

- Meet and greet
- Lodge/camp manager
- Porter(s)
- Game scout/game guards (they expect to be tipped even though they are government employees)
- Tour guide

Who is it normal to tip and why?

A general guideline for me as to who should receive a tip goes back to something I mentioned earlier: the purpose of a tip is to reward and encourage good service. That being said, I believe anyone directly providing service to you should be tipped, as outlined in the list above. This general rule will help you to clarify when or if an outfitter is asking you to tip personnel that should be salaried workers. If someone is driving, cooking cleaning for me or otherwise involved directly in the hunting they should be tipped, however if they maintain the vehicles, garden, pool or other property they should be considered non service employees that the hunting outfitter should pay.

Asking your hunting outfitter for guidelines

You may wish to ask your hunting outfitter for some guidelines regarding who and how much to tip, however be prepared for a less than clear response as many PHs and hunting outfitters are uncomfortable providing advice regarding this subject. Always remember that any suggestion is merely a point of reference and not what you should tip, ultimately the decision is yours.

Tipping guidelines to be wary of

Something that I would be very wary of is an outfitter who supplies a detailed and excessively lengthy list of employees who should be tipped and how much. This list may include non service employees and in some cases add up to an unreasonable sum of money, not within the guidelines that we discuss below. It may be hard to know if all of those employees actually exist or it may be a sign that some or all of these employees may not be receiving any salary from the outfitter and their only income is being given to them by you and other hunters. It is hard to know where these unethical practices are occurring so it is important to use your best instincts, if an outfitter seems too pushy or they mandate tipping in any fashion, I would avoid hunting with them.

There are some outfitters who, in an effort to avoid inequality or jealousy among camp staff,

believe that all tips, including those of the hunting team and camp staff, should be pooled and divided evenly or as they decide, and I am not a proponent of that. I believe there is a hierarchy among workers and I would never hunt with an outfitter who would dictate how my tip should be allocated.

The only way to prevent getting caught up in these types of situations is to ask the right questions BEFORE you book; ask if they have any type of tipping requirements or pool tips. If they say we ASK that you tip a certain way, you're probably still okay as many outfitters do have some guidelines in place and for good reasons, (which I will outline below) but if they have strict or inflexible rules or requirements ask to see them before booking and use your best judgment.

What tipping guidelines are normal and why

Most guidelines concerning tipping have arisen out of necessity and are in place to help the hunting outfitter avoid known problems. These problems can range from workers accumulating too much cash through a long hunting season in the bush and the risks associated with having that cash lost or stolen from them. Some workers, with cash in hand, have been known to disappear half way through the hunting season on an unplanned "vacation" for a few weeks, not so good for the next guy who comes to hunt. Another issue is that alcohol problems are rampant in Africa and it is not uncommon for a worker to binge drink given a pocket full of cash.

Why some hunting outfitters use vouchers

The above mentioned scenarios are a few reasons why hunting outfitters may use a voucher system and ask that you comply during the active part of the hunting season. A voucher may not seem as satisfying to give to a great tracker for a job well done, but in the long run it may be what is in his best interests as well as the hunting outfitters. I personally really like to give someone their tip in cash, but I understand and am willing to give them a voucher as long as I am able to write the amount that I am leaving them and give it to them directly so they know how much I appreciated their hard work, skill and effort. And also for the simple fact that I know that they can keep tabs on what they are owed at the end of the hunting season.

How much to tip on a plains game hunt

There is a lot of advice and theories out there regarding how much to tip, which often creates more confusion than actually helping you get a better grasp on a fuzzy subject. I will share with you my method for how I decide how much of a tip to leave and knowing from the other side of the equation how much people really do leave. This method really works for all hunting safaris from a bargain plains game hunting package all the way up to a big five hunting safari.

I base my tip for the Professional Hunter on the total cost of the hunt, daily rate and trophy fees combined, excluding tax. Using that figure, I multiply it by:

For professional hunter:

- 5% for an average tip
- 6% for a better than average tip
- 7% for a very good tip
- 8% plus for a very generous tip

I believe that this method works well because it figures in the cost level of the hunt, the number of species you take and allows for you to express your appreciation by giving you the ability to choose the percentage based upon your overall satisfaction.

As for the rest of the hunting team and lodge/camp staff I break it down as follows:

For a typical hunting safari:

Tracker: from \$5 to \$10 per person/day
Driver: from \$5 to \$10 per day
Skinner: from \$5 to \$10 per person/day
Lodge/camp staff: \$3 to \$5 per person/day

Typical personnel for a basic hunting safari:

Hunting team will usually consist of one to two trackers, one driver who may also double as a tracker, one skinner.

Lodge staff will usually consist of one cook, one server, one to two maids, one laundress. The more high end the lodge the more personnel you can expect.

For a big five or concession camp hunting safari:

Tracker: from \$8 to \$13 per person/day
Driver: from \$5 (average) to \$10 (generous) per day
Skinner: from \$5 (average) to \$10 (generous) per person/day
Porter: from \$5 (average) to \$10 (generous) per person/day
Lodge/camp staff: \$3 (average) to \$7 (generous) per person/day

Typical personnel for a big five or concession camp hunting safari:

Hunting team will usually consist of two trackers, one driver who may also work as a third tracker, one porter who may also work as a third tracker, one skinner.

Camp staff will usually consist of one to two cooks, two servers, two maids, two laundress. The more high end the lodge the more personnel you can expect.

Additional personnel you may need to tip

(all of these personnel may not be a part of your hunting safari)

- Meet and greet: a tip should be considered for a service outside of your hunting outfitter
- Lodge/camp manager
- Game scout/game guard: \$10 per person/day, some hunters give incentives
- Tour guide

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