

# African Safari Dream Hunt Guide

By: Craig Plowman

## Step 1 – Research Phase

The first step is to determine what you would like to hunt on your Safari. Most Safari Companies offer dozens of animal species to hunt while on Safari, but some animals are only available in certain areas or the trophy quality is better if that is important to you. I watched as many hunting videos and African hunting shows on TV as I could in order to become familiar with the many different species of animals Africa offers.

The next step is choosing a Professional Hunter (PH) to book your Safari. The best way to initiate your search is to ask your friends, work colleagues and acquaintances if they have ever been to Africa on a hunting safari since a personal recommendation is still the best. If this does not yield at least two leads, there are usually African Safari Guides at most outdoor shows that provide a great opportunity for you to talk directly to the PH and inquire about accommodations, food, daily routine, non-hunting companions, daily fees, trophy fees, where they are in Africa, etc. Also, some PH's only do Rifle OR Archery while some do both. Make sure the PH offers what you want before you book.

Africa hunting is usually done using one of the following methods:

Option 1: You pay a daily rate plus trophy fees for anything you shoot.

Option 2: You purchase a "package" that includes a certain number of hunting days and/or animals.

Each option has its advantages and disadvantages. Option 1 offers the most freedom for you to choose what to shoot since you pay only for those animals. Packages are offered at a discount rate, but usually contain at least one animal that is of little interest to the hunter and there is no guarantee you will get all the animals in the package even though success rates usually approach 100%. By the way, like most hunting guides in the US, if you draw blood on an animal, it is considered "harvested" and you will have to pay the trophy fee even if the animal is not recovered.

The final step in the planning phase is Taxidermy. Most people think there are two options available, but in reality, there are three.

Option 1 is have your trophies mounted in South Africa. This is usually the cheapest way to go since overhead and other costs are much less (25% on average) in South Africa. The horns on the larger animals are removable to reduce shipping costs. There is at least one Taxidermist (Africa's Best Taxidermy) that uses fiberglass instead of foam which is about 25% lighter, further reducing the shipping cost.

Option 2 is commonly referred to as “dip and ship”. The hides are dipped in a solution that kills any bugs or parasites that may be on the hide and makes them legal to import into the United States.

Option 3 is rare and most people do not know about it. You can have the hides tanned in South Africa and shipped to the USA. Since the hides are tanned, the shipped is cheaper compared to being dipped since the weight is quite a bit less. Be sure your USA taxidermist agrees to this before you decide to choose this option.

I also recommend to my clients to look into having items made from the hide. Since the typical mounts only go back to the shoulder, the entire “back skin” is unused. A lot of African animals are elk sized and consequently, this “back skin” is quite large. A lot of my clients get area rugs (zebra is awesome) made from the “back skins”, but the “back skins” can also be used for Gun Cases, Bow Cases, Ammo Bags, Belts and a whole host of other items limited only by your imagination. Since labor rates are much less in Africa, these items can be made at very reasonable rates and will offer a lasting reminder of your Safari. By the way, Area Rugs in the shape of the African Continent are truly awesome.

## **Step 2 – Booking your Trip to Africa**

This phase starts with you and your Safari Company agreeing on the dates of your hunt. Most Safari Companies in South Africa can accommodate a large number of hunters at any given time and working around your schedule is the norm rather than the exception. Also, the hunting “season” runs from March to November, so there is lots of flexibility when picking your dates. The most frequent question I get is “what is the best time to go”? My answer to this is the months of March/April or Sept/Oct since the weather is awesome (Around 80 during the day and 60 at night) and the airfare is less which gives me more money to spend on animals. Plains game hunting is a lot like hunting Antelope out west, they live on the open veldt (prairie) and are always on the move and getting within rifle range is possible at any time. This is not like whitetail or elk hunting in the USA when hunting during the pre-rut and rut improves ones odds dramatically.

Before booking your flight, there are a few facts you need to consider. First, Africa is at least a 16 hour trip from any US city. That means you need to allow at least two days for travel. For example, if you leave Atlanta on Monday PM, you will arrive in Johannesburg on Tuesday PM (Six Hour Time Difference). Obviously, the same holds true for your trip home. It should be noted that this assumes you are being picked up in Johannesburg and not catching another flight to some other location, which might require another day. Talk to your PH or booking agent and have them confirm your travel dates before booking. It is also a good idea to forward your itinerary to your PH as soon as possible to allow time for changes if required.

One thing I tell my clients is to be flexible with the travel dates as you can sometimes save a lot of money by traveling on certain days. In Johannesburg, there are Hotels connected to the airport that change about \$100 per night, so if you can save more than that and travel a day ahead of time, you will

be money and time ahead. I know everyone going cannot wait to get there and get hunting, but a nice relaxing night in a hotel provides a good transition to the six hour time difference.

Since Africa is a long flight from anywhere, Delta offers “Economy Comfort” seats that have more leg room and the seat reclines further, which is a real plus on flights of this duration and worth the extra money.

After you have booked your flight, the next step for rifle hunters is to decide if you are taking your gun(s) or renting one from the PH. Most PH’s have guns to rent for a nominal fee and saves you the work required to bring yours. However, most people like to bring their own guns and there are import permit forms you are required to fill out and submit for approval. This document can be filled out upon arrival in South Africa, but after flying for most of the previous 24 hours, this task is best completed prior to leaving. I have used a company called Rifle Permits exclusively and Henry and his staff will guide you through the process. On their web site, Rifle Permits ([www.riflepermits.com](http://www.riflepermits.com)) have the forms you will need and instructions on how to fill them out. They also have a checklist of items you will need to submit with your application. I recommend using FedX to send the documents to Rifle Permits even though it costs about \$100. Mail in South Africa is not nearly as reliable as it is in the USA.

Bow hunters do not need to fill out any paper work at this time although they have to go to Security upon arrival to claim their bow. Usually the only thing Security does is make you open your bow case so that they can verify you are not importing a firearm.

### **Step 3 – Traveling to Africa**

At this time, most airlines are requiring you to lock your gun and ammunition in separate lockable containers during the flight. This changes frequently and varies by airline, so check with the airline before you leave. A tip I tell my clients is to use combination locks so you do not have to worry about losing the keys. For ammunition, I use one of the many hard plastic ammo boxes on the market that are the size of a metal 50 Cal Ammo cans and accommodate a lock. This box also comes in handy while on Safari to carry your binoculars and camera while riding in the Land Cruiser.

Assuming you are flying into Johannesburg, you will be guided through customs and immigration and then on to baggage claim. After you get your bags, you need to proceed to Security if you brought a firearm or Bow with you. To find Security, proceed out to the “courtyard” area and bear to the right. The security office is in the corner. A word of caution, there will be lots of people trying to “help” you and I always decline them all no matter how pushy they are. This is especially true if you are being picked up by your PH or their representative.

If you have firearms and have used Rifle Permits, Henry or one of His staff will have a sign with your name on it when you enter the “courtyard” and will escort you to security. The Rifle Permits Agent will

talk to the South African Security Officers for you and all you have to do is open the gun case and sign the importation papers once the serial number has been verified. Upon completion of the paperwork, you are free to leave.

A word of caution, do not put anything of value in your checked luggage with the exception of your ammunition which is in a locked box. Your binoculars, camera, etc must go into your carry-on luggage and never leave your sight. I have had clients lose equipment because they did not heed this advice. The other thing you need to put in your carry-on luggage is enough clothes to hunt for a day or so along with hunting shoes (or boots) just in case your checked-in luggage gets lost. You can always borrow a rifle and ammunition for a few days while your bags are being located, but clothes and boots are nearly impossible.

#### **Step 4 – Safari Life**

Since the only flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg arrives in the late afternoon and it takes time to get through customs and immigration, it is almost assured that you will arrive in camp after dark or the next day. In either case, the first order of business is to verify your gun(s) is signed in. After the gun has been verified and a light breakfast consumed, you are ready to start hunting.

The first morning we like to take our clients for a ride around the concession and introduce them to Africa and the animals that inhabit area. This is also a good opportunity for the client to experience riding in the Land Cruiser and spotting game. This is always exciting for the clients because until you ride around for a few hours and see hundreds if not thousands of animals, it is hard to believe it is possible.

Around noon, it is time to return to camp for lunch and some rest before the evening hunt. I have found the food to be delicious especially if it is wild game. Most outfitters have bottled water available for the clients to drink so there are no issues with the local water supply causing problems.

The evening hunt lasts until just before the sun goes down and then it is back to camp. A lot of African PH's stop well before dark to avoid having to track a wounded animal with artificial lights like we do here in the USA. There are lots of "things" walking and crawling in the African night that you need to avoid. Also, since the primary quarry is plains game, getting all the animals on your trophy list is usually done with time to spare on most safaris, so hunting every second is not required.

Most PH's hunt from the Land Rover to cover as much ground as possible and the height of the vantage point is an asset when spotting animals. Usually a short stalk is employed after game is spotted, but sometimes shots are taken from right by the truck. This makes Africa a great place for hunters that have a difficult time walking long distances or climbing mountains.

After the hunting is over for the day, a long standing tradition in Africa is to sit around a camp fire and recount the day's sights, sounds and adventures with your fellow hunters. This is a great experience for all and adds a tremendous amount to the "African Experience".

This routine is repeated for each day of the Safari unless a hunting or sightseeing side trip has been planned. Non hunting companions are usually eager to tag along with the hunter because there is always something new to see and experience and you are not setting for hours without seeing game.

A good camera is essential to capturing the beauty of Africa and will add to your enjoyment of the trip when you recount your experiences to friends and family in the years to come.

### **Step 5 – Upon Returning Home**

Once you return home, you need to turn your attention to the Taxidermist and decide how you want your animals mounted. Most of the time, this process can take one year to complete, which is a good since it spreads out the costs to the next year.

In terms of expenses, plan on \$200-\$300 per animal to have them “dipped and shipped” to the USA. If you are having the mounts completed in Africa, the shipping is about \$200-\$300 per animal. The mounting costs run from \$300-\$500 for small (deer size) animals to \$500-\$700 for large (elk size) animals.

The final task will be figuring out the dates for your next Safari. I have never talked to anyone that went and did not want to go back (I started planning my next trip after the first day on Safari). My first trip to Africa was in April of 2009 and it took me three years to get back (Sept 2012). The second time was really special to me since I shared the experience with a good friend and spent a week in Zimbabwe hunting Cape Buffalo and Plains Game. I have been asked by many of my first time clients if there was anything I regretted not doing on my first trip and after careful consideration, I figured out what that was...On my second trip, I never missed a glorious African sunrise, no matter how long the stories lasted the previous night!!!

If anyone has any specific questions or is interested in going to Africa, I can be reached at (248) 830-2310.

Hope to see you in Africa and make some fond memories.

Craig Plowman

Trophies Africa USA

The next page contains bonus info that I provide my clients.

**A few Safari Facts/Tips:**

- 1) Most hunters fly through Atlanta GA to Johannesburg. Flight is 16 Hours from Atlanta and costs about \$1500. Economy comfort is well worth the expense.**
- 2) If you are taking a Rifle, preregistration costs about \$200 and makes taking a firearm easy.**
- 3) We have guns to rent for a nominal fee if you do not wish to bring your own.**
- 4) March/April (Africa's Fall) and Sept/Oct (Africa's Spring) is a great times to go. Weather is great and airfare is less expensive.**
- 5) In South Africa, all our concessions are south of Johannesburg and are Malaria Free. No shots are required, but ask your doctor to be sure.**
- 6) Laundry is done daily, so no need to bring a ton of clothes. We recommend three sets of hunting clothes and a medium to heavy coat depending on the time of year.**
- 7) If you are bow hunting, Bows should at least be a 60 pound draw weight with above average weight arrows and broad heads.**
- 8) If you are rifle hunting, any caliber from .270 on up will work fine, just use quality ammunition with premium bullets. For dangerous game, .375 H&H is MINIMUM.**
- 9) The Lockable Hard Plastic "Ammo Cans" work great to transport your ammunition in on the airplane and protect your binoculars and camera while in the safari vehicle.**
- 10) Quality optics are worth their weight in gold while on Safari, so bring the best you can afford.**
- 11) Taxidermy can be done in South Africa or the capes "dipped and shipped" to a taxidermist in the USA. Prices are generally cheaper in South Africa, but the choice is up to you.**
- 12) Research the animals available and send your PH a "Trophy List" at least a one month before your safari. This will help the PH plan your activities while you are on Safari since not all animals are available in all hunting concessions.**
- 13) In general, extra animals can be taken at any time during the Safari for the current Trophy Fees.**
- 14) Since Safari's are booked 9-12 months in advance, rates and Trophy Fees can change, so request a current price sheet just prior to your Safari.**
- 15) Take a journal with you to record your thoughts while they are fresh in your mind. Safari days "blend" together especially after you return.**
- 16) Trust your Profession Hunter....you are going to see new sights, experience new activities and eat new things. Please come with a open mind and above all, have fun and take in all the wonderful sights, sounds and aroma's Africa has to offer.**