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HUNTING

Bighorn sheep taken on Navajo Nation



Turkey harvested at Inn of the Mountain Gods

SOVEREIGN HUNT

Indigenous tribes offer tags and guided hunts to non-Natives

BY KIT BERNARDI

Long before the first Europeans leveled guns at elk, bear, bobcat, deer, sheep or moose in North America, Indigenous people hunted these animals to survive.

Today, non-Native Americans who gain access to hunting on tribal lands may not only harvest trophy-size animals, but have the opportunity to learn about Native American hunting culture and traditions.

The Inn of the Mountain Gods Resort & Casino on the Mescalero Apache Reser-

vation in southern New Mexico annually hosts as many as 800 non-Native hunters seeking bull and cow elk, black bear and wild turkey. The residential elk herd numbering around 5,500 roams the reservation's 463,000 acres. A \$24,000 five-day bull elk hunt includes housing, all meals, the Tribal member guide and animal processing. The previous year's hunting clients get first rights to claim the next season's coveted tags.

Herman Saenz, the resort's big game

hunts manager, says that guest hunters benefit because the reservation has its own elk herd and issues fewer hunting permits than the state. "Regularly, our hunters harvest bull elk averaging 350-inch racks, and have about a 90% success rate during rut in September," he says.

Randy Roesler, a wealth manager from Wisconsin, waited six years to get his first Inn of the Mountain Gods bull elk tag. Now he hunts there up to four times a year. "Before hunting with tribal guides, I'd never experienced the deep respect shown to the animal while it is alive and after it's gone," he says.

No state licenses are required to hunt or fish on tribal land, but tribal permits and hunting tags issued by the tribe's fish and wildlife department are necessary. On many reservations, non-Native and non-Tribal member hunters must hire a Tribal member guide. They know the terrain, wildlife behavior and the reservation's borders, which is important because many reservations encompass ceded land.

Joey Thomas is fish and game director on the remote, mountainous 289,820-acre Shoshone-Paiute Duck Valley Indian Reservation straddling the Idaho and Nevada state line. Each year, the reservation's fish, wildlife and parks department hosts 40 tribal-guided, \$4,000-a-tag antelope hunts, and 10 guided, five-day bull elk hunts for \$25,000 a tag for non-members.

"Many of our member guides grew up here hunting with their grandfathers, fathers and uncles, and now work with the department to manage migratory populations of antelope, elk and mule deer, so they possess deep ancestral knowledge of this rugged land, wildlife behavior and time-honored hunting traditions," Thomas says.

The reservation, says Habitat Enhancement Project Manager Chris Cleveland, offers "an authentic free-range hunting experience whereby hunters participate in the calling and stalking of the animal, and if they are interested, discuss with guides aspects of our culture and the reservation's history."

The 1,525,000-acre Blackfeet Indian reservation in northwestern Montana offers tribal member-guided hunts and sells tags via lottery and auction. In 2026, the starting bid for a Rocky Mountain



Elk harvested on Shoshone-Paiute Duck Valley Indian Reservation

"Before hunting with tribal guides, I'd never experienced the deep respect shown to the animal while it is alive and after it's gone."

RANDY ROESLER,
WEALTH MANAGER FROM WISCONSIN

bighorn sheep was \$35,000; a trophy moose \$14,000; a trophy elk \$12,000.

Blackfeet Nation ceded the land that now comprises the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest encompassing the 130,000-acre Badger Two Medicine wilderness in 1895. But the Blackfeet people retained hunting and fishing rights in the abundant wildlife corridor, which is also open to hunters with Montana state hunting licenses.

Alger Swingley, a Blackfeet elder, owns Blackfeet Outfitters, which offers hunts in

the Badger Two Medicine area. Five-day hunts averaging \$5,000 are led by Blackfeet tribal member guides who are certified and bonded by the state. Hunters purchase their own licenses.

Hunt packages include guide fees, food, horses and the gear required for backcountry hunting. State-issued tag fees are more plentiful than those from the reservation and generally cost less, Swingley says.

Duane Hemstreet has been a hunting guide on the 27,000-square-mile Navajo Nation for 25 years. He and business partner Jay Hoyungwa, of Jay's Trophy Hunts, lead "spot and stalk" hunts on foot for desert bighorn sheep, elk, antelope and deer in various sectors of the reservation's land stretched across parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah.

Hemstreet says it's the guide's responsibility to find the game, so they do a good deal of advance scouting "and take video of animals to show clients to help prepare them for success, because trophy hunting is a game of inches."

JAY'S TROPHY HUNTS; INN OF THE MOUNTAIN GODS; SHOSHONE-PAIUTE DUCK VALLEY INDIAN RESERVATION