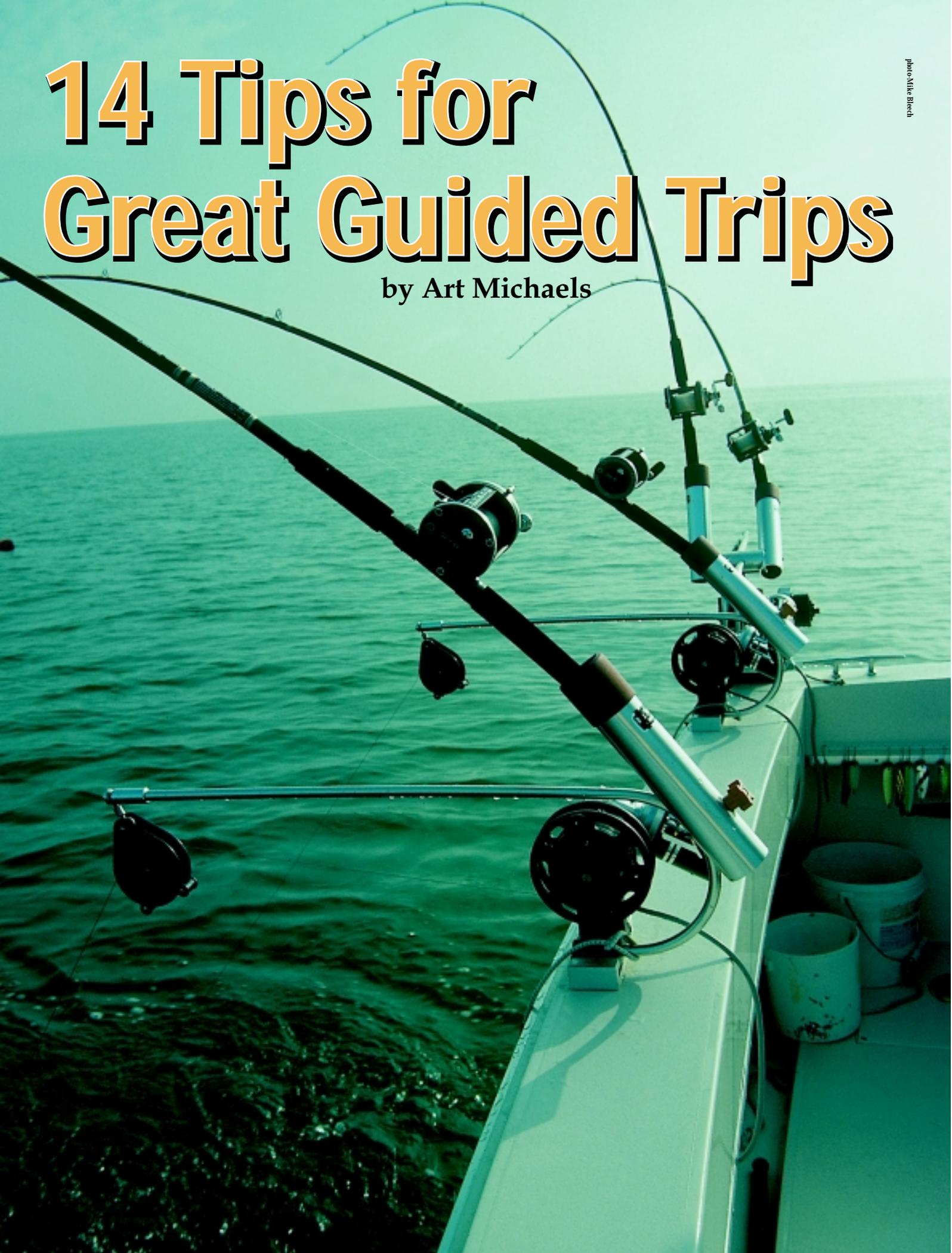


# 14 Tips for Great Guided Trips

by Art Michaels

photo: Mike Bleech



From one end of Pennsylvania to the other, chartered and guided fishing trips can take you to a wealth of great fishing.

Charterboat fishing and guided trips are the kinds of sport we all want because experienced captains and guides thrive on putting their customers onto terrific fishing.

For these reasons, novice anglers, and those who've never before fished, should grab the opportunity of guided fishing trips or charterboat excursions. Even more experienced anglers sometimes fish new territory and for new species first with a guide or charter captain. A chartered trip lets new anglers taste the sport, and experienced anglers save time and money by learning from experts on new waterways for a specific fish before venturing out on their own.

Charterboats are available for going after Lake Erie's lake trout, steelhead, smallmouth bass, walleyes and perch, and guides can help you latch onto Raystown Lake striped bass. You can take a guided fishing trip on Pennsylvania's rivers for everything from Allegheny River muskies and Ohio River sauger to Susquehanna River smallmouths and Delaware River shad. You can find an experienced guide or charterboat captain for just about any kind of fishing in Pennsylvania.

Let these ideas help you make the most of your money, have fun with friends and family, and avoid charterboat and guided fishing trip pitfalls.

1. Divide the costs among friends. Trips are expensive because captains need to make them profitable. Costs for charterboat captains include boat maintenance, fuel, insurance, tackle, bait and equipment. The profit margin is slim.

However, most charterboat regulars know that when you divide the price of a trip among several friends, the cost becomes tolerable, and even attractive. After all, you're paying the captain to get you into fish as quickly as possible, and that kind of success and know-how are worth a reasonable fee to most anglers. Chartered and guided trips also provide you with food for the table and a lifetime of memories.

2. If you're a first-timer, book a charter with just a friend or two. You'll get more personal attention from the captain and mate this way. Most Pennsylvania charterboats on Lake Erie, for example, accommodate a maximum of six passengers. Charterboats accommodate passengers according to the capacity of the boat and, on Lake Erie and all federally navigable waters, the kind of U.S. Coast Guard license the captain possesses.

3. To charter a boat, look for recommendations from bait and tackle shops,



and in periodicals that have advertising. Also check advertisements in the 2002 *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws* for charters and guided fishing opportunities. For guide and charterboat leads, also check the links on the

Commission's web site, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).

Furthermore, charterboat captains and fishing guides can apply for official recognition from the PA Fish & Boat Commission. Registration with the Commission is voluntary, so not all charterboats and guides are listed. Still, officially recognized charterboat captains and guides pay an annual fee, and the Commission reviews their businesses. This Commission approval best ensures that your charterboat captain is properly licensed, and that the boat has all required safety equipment.



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Official recognition also implies a charterboat or guide business's credibility, stability and longevity.

In addition, officially recognized charterboat captains are the only entities permitted to fillet fish aboard their boats. Regulations require that fish with size limits and seasons may not be filleted until arrival at the place of consumption. This provision is a terrific convenience for anglers chartering a boat.

Check the list of registered charterboats and fishing guides on the Commission's web site at [http://sites.state.pa.us/PA\\_Exec/Fish\\_Boat/chboat.htm](http://sites.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Fish_Boat/chboat.htm).

4. When you contact captains in the

areas you plan to fish, ask for their brochures and price lists, and scan their web sites. Ask for references. Begin your search for a captain at least three or four months before you intend to fish—earlier if you want to latch onto the choicest dates,



determined by predictable runs and fish concentrations. Ask the captain to explain his policy on bringing your own tackle (if you want to do that), and on rough weather. In bad weather, charters most often offer a refund or a rain date.

5. When you decide on a captain, consult your fishing partners and select a date. The captain will help you select a date based on what you want to fish for, how you intend to fish, and which dates the captain has available. You will probably be required to send a deposit to hold the date.

6. You will need a fishing license. In Chesapeake Bay, for instance, you don't need a fishing license because a properly licensed captain has paid for a "boat" license. This means that everyone aboard the charterboat is automatically licensed. In Pennsylvania, though, charter or not, all anglers aged 16 and over need a license to fish.

The only exception to the fishing license requirement occurs on two days in 2002—June 1 and September 28, Pennsylvania's Fish-for-Free Days. All other size and creel limits still apply on these days.

7. After you've chosen a date and sent the deposit, consider the trip details. First, for a Lake Erie offshore trip you will likely leave the dock around first light and return about eight hours later. Half-day charters run about four or five hours.

Making yourself comfortable with everything you need can help make the trip pleasant. Bring snacks and drinks, but go easy on both for about 12 hours before you board. Eating and drinking too much can lead to your getting seasick. Bring a small cooler with sandwiches, snacks and a beverage kept cold with ice. Some charterboat captions do not permit alcohol aboard their boats.

The captain and the mate, if there is one on your charter, will tell you exactly how best to fish. In most cases, the boat provides bait and tackle. All you do is arrive on time, ready to fish.

8. Do what's necessary to prevent seasickness. If you are prone to seasickness, consult your doctor about obtaining a prescription or over-the-counter remedy.

9. In addition to food, bring along a daypack in which you carry a change of clothes. Sweaty trips and spills of bait and food can make a change of clothes welcome.

10. Board the boat rested. If you're

scheduled to leave the dock during the wee hours of the morning, make arrangements to sleep before you board the boat, even for a few hours. A well-rested angler can best enjoy a charter. Know your limits and requirements. You're ahead of the

game if you board rested.

You'll want to bring a cooler and gallon-sized plastic freezer bags if you plan to keep fish, but leave the cooler in your vehicle. You'll want to stock the cooler with ice as soon as you head home. Plan to keep only the fish you intend to consume. Release everything else. Discuss your intentions on keeping or releasing fish with the captain before you start fishing.

11. Even in summer, you might want to arrive at the dock in long pants and a long-sleeved shirt. At the ramp or dock, mosquitoes always seem to be 10 times larger than anything you've ever seen elsewhere.

A cool air temperature and early morning breeze over the water in some places can require the long sleeves and a light jacket or windbreaker. Dress in layers, and as the day warms, adjust accordingly. Pack a rainsuit, too. Even under clear skies, rough water can mean a wet boat ride. You can cram all this extra clothing into a daypack.

12. Bring your camera! Photographs of anglers and their catches while you're still offshore or on the water are the best way to remember your trip. A VCR or digital record of your trip might also be fun.

13. Waterway breezes can mask the effects of full sun, but you'll burn just the same and suffer greatly later. Prepare for sun exposure by wearing a hat, by covering up and by applying sunscreen.

14. Consider the mate. The mate assists the captain in piloting the boat and attends to the fishing details so that you and your party spend time catching fish and enjoying yourselves. Be prepared to tip the mate 15 to 20 percent of the cost of the charter, especially if you noticed how well the mate did his job. Good mates work very hard. They deserve your special consideration. Mates often work only for tips. You generally don't tip the captain, but do so if the captain has no mate on your charter trip.

If you've been on some chartered or guided trips, you probably have created a set of do's and don'ts for your excursions, like those listed here. In the meantime, pass this article along to a friend who's new to fishing. Pennsylvania offers widely varied fishing opportunities every angler—and every angler-to-be—should enjoy. ☐

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## Shad Fishing, Delaware River

