

CHOOSING A HUT TRIP:

The 10th Mountain Hut System covers over 400 miles of trail with 16 huts providing a variety of routes and huts to consider when choosing a hut trip. Here are a few questions to ask yourself, your family or friends and of course the PG staff. It is our goal to provide as much information as possible about Backcountry Skiing and the hut experience. The answers to these questions may help you decide on the type of trip that will meet your expectations and goals for a successful and safe backcountry hut experience.

What time of the season is best?

A Colorado winter may start as early as November with great touring and skiing even before Thanksgiving, but it can also be marginal into December. Typically the routes into the huts are snow covered enough to provide good access. The high elevations of most huts will help insure adequate snow for early season trips. Often the huts are not full giving the experience an additional feeling of solitude.

How many days?

Most of our hut trips range from 3 to 5 days. We also provide a shorter 2 day trip and certain trips, i.e., Vail to Aspen usually run 6 days. Our 3 day trips are most often designed to utilize one hut with good skiing and touring on the "layover" day. Some 4 day trips are designed for those skiers looking to maximize touring and turns while utilizing one hut as a Base Lodge. Other 4 day trips are designed as a hut to hut tour, spending 2 nights at one hut and 1 night at a second hut. The 5 and 6 day tours usually include layover days spending nights at 2 or 3 huts.

Should I go to one hut?

The advantages of going to one hut can be looked at in many ways. For most huts the tour is moderate compared to the rigors of hut to hut. The opportunity to explore the area near the hut means you can drop the bigger pack and travel light. Whether touring or looking for powder turns, having the advantage of minimal weight lightens the load physically and mentally. There are plenty of choices for day tours from each hut and 3 or 4 days will still leave many areas of un-touched powder to explore.

Should I consider a hut to hut route?

The challenges and rigors of a hut to hut tour can be invigorating and gratifying. Packing up, hitting the trail and moving through the backcountry to a new hut each day requires a certain amount of stamina. Your skills and participation in the experience can bring out your strengths and challenge your weaknesses. The leadership of our guides contributes not only to the safety of the tour but also a cooperative atmosphere of teamwork and friendship to the experience. The routes between huts are less traveled and the rewards of a day spent on the trail making your way through a winter environment to the next refuge is both inspiring, beautiful, and sometimes hard work. "Layover days" are typically included and offer a day of touring and the chance to relax in a high mountain alpine setting.

What are the skills needed to have a safe and enjoyable experience?

Although many of us may perceive a backcountry hut trip as an opportunity to ski untracked powder, this is not where most of our time is spent. Certainly these opportunities are plentiful but time on the trail, moving from hut to hut, takes up a majority of our time and energy. Many of the basic skills of skiing are the most important factors. Snowplow, kick turns, step turns and efficient touring techniques are needed to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience. Making turns is frosting on the “backcountry cake” and is only part of the hut experience.

What type of backcountry gear do I need?

There is a wide selection of ski/boot/binding choices available. The spectrum ranges from Backcountry XC gear to Free-heel Telemark gear to Alpine Touring (AT) gear. The choice comes down to personal preference, experience and route selection. All of these choices have their advantages and drawbacks. Gear selection should be based on comfort, weight, ease of operation and most importantly your reasons for choosing a backcountry hut trip. If the joys of “kick & glide” associated with XC skiing are important then your choice should be XC or Free-heel Telemark gear. If your experience is more from an alpine / ski area background then AT gear may be the best option where you can enjoy the freedom of a free heel for climbing and then lock your heel down for alpine style turns. For snowboarders we recommend a “split board” for efficient backcountry travel. Whatever your gear choice may be it is important to know the gear you will be using. Our “pre-trip” orientation day provides some additional terrain skiing instruction and practice prior to hitting the trail.

As You consider the various options involved for yourself or your group, Paragon Guides is available to help guide you through the design of a backcountry hut trip that will meet your highest expectations.