I've Been Diving for 22 Years—These Are the 8 Best Reef-safe Sunscreens I've Tried, From $11 at Amazon

Photo credit: Courtesy of Amazon
Travel + Leisure Editor: Sarah Tuttle-Singer

Advertisement
Travel + Leisure

I was 15 the first time I got a scuba tank. The terrifying idea of being upset underwater, underwater breathing, underwater anything, was quickly overshadowed by the sheer joy of being able to see the ocean floor and swim with the fish. Since then, I've been diving in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Hawaii, and I've learned that good sunscreening and good diving go hand in hand. Not only is it important to protect your skin from the sun, it's also important to protect the reefs you're diving on.

Although most reefs don't allow swimmers to touch the coral, sunscreen chemicals can leach into the surrounding water and damage. Coral can die, bleach, and become more susceptible to disease. Fish can also be affected, and sunscreen chemicals can even cause deformities in young fish. Fortunately, there are plenty of reef-safe options that offer protection and don't damage the environment.

Finding a good sunscreen that works for you and that doesn't leave you looking like a ghost can be a challenge, but it's worth it. I've found that I need to reapply every 2 hours (more if I'm sweating), and I need a sunscreen that doesn't sting my eyes or leave a greasy residue. Fortunately, there are plenty of options that meet my needs and don't cost a fortune.

Further, I don't want to be dealing with a sunscreen that's too thick to apply or that requires a lot of rubbing in. I want something that goes on easily and quickly, so I can get back to enjoying the water. The sunscreens I've tried all meet these criteria, and they're all reef-safe.

RELATED: Dry Sunscreen Alternatives to Use Instead, Plus a Dermatologist's Favorite Sunscreen

Thinkbaby Mineral Sunscreen for Sensitive Skin SPF, $11

Shop Now

Coral Safe

Thinkbaby's Mineral Sun SPF is the one reef-safe sunscreen I've found that doesn't sting my eyes. It's also fragrance-free, so it doesn't smell like anything or irritate my sensitive skin. It's also water-resistant for up to 80 minutes and contains only 5 ingredients, so it's easy to pronounce and doesn't leave a greasy residue. It's also gentle on the skin, so it's a great option for people with sensitive skin. The only downside is that it can be difficult to rub in, and it may leave a slight white cast on some skin tones. But overall, I think it's a great option for those looking for a gentle, reef-safe sunscreen.

Sun Bum, Mineral Sunscreen SPF, $9

Shop Now

Coral Safe

Sun Bum's classic mineral SPF is a lotion, so it isn't as easy to apply as a spray or stick, but it's still a great option. It's water-resistant for up to 80 minutes and contains only 5 ingredients, so it's easy to pronounce and doesn't leave a greasy residue. It's also gentle on the skin, so it's a great option for people with sensitive skin. The only downside is that it can be difficult to rub in, and it may leave a slight white cast on some skin tones. But overall, I think it's a great option for those looking for a gentle, reef-safe sunscreen.

Sun Bum, Mineral Sunscreen Stick SPF, $9

Shop Now

Coral Safe

Sun Bum's mineral stick SPF is a great option for those who don't want to deal with a lotion or spray. It's easy to apply and doesn't leave a greasy residue. It's also water-resistant for up to 80 minutes and contains only 5 ingredients, so it's easy to pronounce and doesn't leave a greasy residue. It's also gentle on the skin, so it's a great option for people with sensitive skin. The only downside is that it can be difficult to rub in, and it may leave a slight white cast on some skin tones. But overall, I think it's a great option for those looking for a gentle, reef-safe sunscreen.

Kokua Sun, Lotion SPF, 30

Shop Now

Coral Safe

Kokua Sun's lotion is a great option for those who want a lotion that