



CORAL  
REEF ALLIANCE



Photo by Shaun Wolfe

# Become a Reef-Safe Traveler

Your guide to enjoying an ocean-friendly vacation

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## *To my fellow travelers,*

It's no wonder why millions of visitors are attracted to coral reef destinations each year. Coral reefs are some of the most vibrant and awe-inspiring ecosystems on the planet—and they're often accompanied by crystal clear blue waters and white sand beaches.

Researchers have estimated that tourism to coral reefs contributes over US\$36 billion to the global economy each year. This revenue is vital for the local communities that depend on coral reefs for food and income.

But coral reefs are also some of the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Local threats like overfishing, poor water quality, and unsustainable tourism lead to unhealthy coral reef ecosystems that can't provide the benefits communities rely upon. And the impacts of global climate change—like warming ocean temperatures—threaten coral reef ecosystems everywhere. The combination of local stressors and global change is particularly devastating to reefs—for example, polluted reefs are more likely to bleach than reefs in clean, clear water.

At the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL), we believe there is hope for coral reefs. Our research shows that if we reduce these local threats and keep coral reefs healthy in strategic areas around the world, then corals can adapt to the effects of climate change.

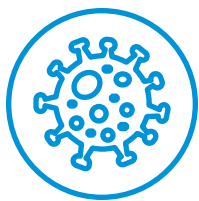
By becoming a more sustainable traveler and reducing your impact on the local environments and communities you visit, you can do your part to help keep coral reefs healthy and build a more secure future for the people who depend upon them.

The next few pages outline some simple practices you can adopt to ensure you have a reef-safe trip. There is a lot of information in this guide, so don't let that overwhelm you. You can start by picking just one or two of these guidelines to follow, adding more as you go. And the deeper you go, you might even find your trip becomes more fulfilling and memorable!

Happy traveling,

**Dr. Madhavi Colton**

Executive Director



# Traveling During COVID-19

*With COVID-19 a prominent concern in many parts of the world, including the United States, we ask all readers to be mindful and considerate of local communities, and avoid unnecessary exposure. Many populations are still vulnerable to widespread outbreaks, and many locations don't yet have access to vaccines.*

*There's no question that the reduction in tourism that came with COVID-19 devastated local economies. But now there is an opportunity to restart tourism in a more sustainable way and build back better. You can do your part to support these initiatives by following the easy steps outlined in this guide.*

*CORAL recommends following all Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local guidelines while planning a trip and when traveling.*



Organizations like the Roatán Marine Park rely on tourism dollars to fund critical coral reef conservation programs. In lieu of travel, consider making a donation to help them stay afloat during this critical time.

## Get the shot(s)

Many communities still do not have access to vaccines—you can help keep them healthy by making sure you are fully vaccinated before traveling.

## Follow all CDC guidelines and local regulations

Help keep fellow travelers and local communities healthy by following all CDC guidelines and local restrictions and requirements. If you are feeling unwell or if you have been exposed to COVID-19 in the ten days before traveling, stay home.

## Purchase trip cancellation insurance

Prepare ahead of time in case you need to make last-minute cancellations due to exposure or illness—insurance can help make sure you don't lose a significant investment should the need to cancel arise.

## Wear a mask and remain six feet apart

Wearing a mask and maintaining physical distance is the safest and easiest way to ensure you avoid bringing or contracting COVID-19 during your visit.

## Support local businesses safely

When tourism shut down, many local businesses were devastated by the drop in revenue. Help local economies rebuild by spending your money where it is needed most.

## Be mindful

Many coral reef communities have seen their lives and their communities completely change due to COVID-19—they've suffered economically, emotionally, and mentally. Please be considerate, patient, and generous as communities work toward a path of health, safety, and recovery.



# Choosing a Hotel

## Look for sustainability

Choose a hotel that clearly outlines their sustainability policy on their website and openly talks about reducing their impact on the environment. Some questions to ask:

- How do they treat their wastewater?
- Do they recycle their gently used water and use it for landscaping?
- Do they landscape with native plants?

## Give back

Stay at a locally owned or operated hotel, or at least one that supports local communities by hiring local staff, using local suppliers, and giving back to local communities—it will help support the people who depend on the reef and it will make your experience more unique.

## Avoid all-inclusives

With all-inclusive resorts, economic benefits don't always trickle down to local communities. Choose to stay somewhere that supports local businesses.

## Opt for education

More and more hotels are including educational programming into their guest experience. Take advantage of these opportunities to learn about the local environment and culture.

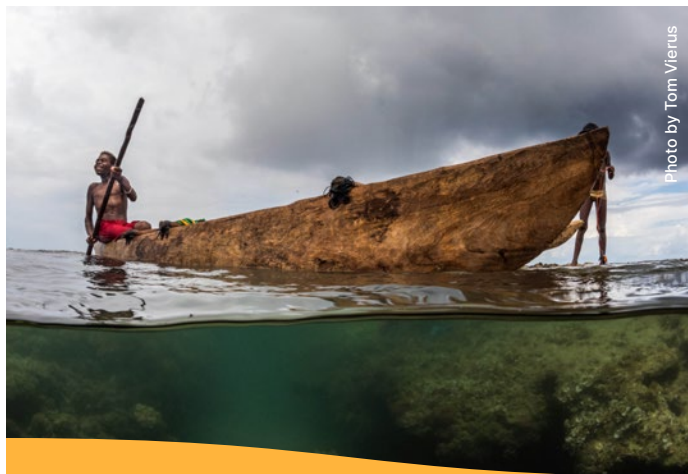


Photo by Tom Vieras

More than 500 million people around the world depend on coral reefs for food, income, and coastal protection. You can help support them by protecting their reefs and ensuring your tourism dollars go where they are needed most.



# During Your Stay



A 2019 study found at least 100 pieces of microplastic in the guts of every coral examined. It also showed corals prefer consuming microplastics over natural food sources. Plastics can interfere with their natural food capturing systems and lead to increased rates of disease.

## Heading to Hawai'i?

[Plan a trip that gives back](#) and explores opportunities for *voluntourism* with this guide from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority.

VISIT WEBSITE

## Conserve

Shut off the lights when you leave your room, turn off the heat and AC when it's not needed, and walk/bike as much as possible to reduce your carbon footprint.

## Reuse

Reuse items like towels and sheets to help conserve resources like energy and water.

## Limit waste

Bring your own reusable items to avoid single-use plastics, like complimentary plastic water bottles and travel toiletries, that will create unnecessary waste. Many hotels will fill your reusable water bottle with filtered water.

## Use water wisely

When you use less water, less runoff and wastewater will end up in the ocean. Do what you can to conserve by taking shorter showers and shutting the water off while washing hands and brushing teeth.

## Avoid microplastics

Microplastics are in many creams, makeups, and exfoliators—they can easily enter the ocean and harm coral reefs. Only pack and use cosmetics that you know are free of microplastics, or even better, consider taking a break from your workday routine and embrace your natural vacation beauty!





# Shopping and Dining

## Support local

Look for locally owned restaurants, tour operators, and gift shops to help give back to the local community and support sustainability initiatives.

## Avoid creating unnecessary waste

Many countries with coral reefs, particularly island nations, struggle to adequately manage waste. Avoid producing extra waste by packing reusable water bottles, bringing your own toiletries in reusable containers, and using your own bags at stores.

## Eat sustainably

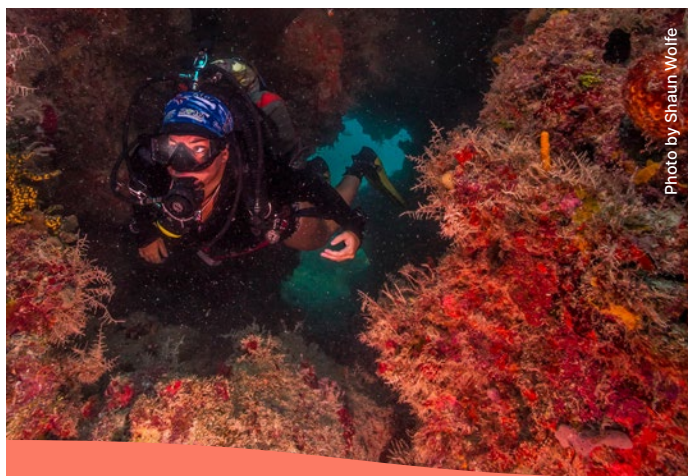
Eat local seafood that has been sustainably caught. Visit [seafoodwatch.org](https://seafoodwatch.org) and download their consumer guide or app prior to your trip. When in doubt, ask your server or the chef. If you have access to a kitchen, visit a local fish market and support a local fisher who uses sustainable practices.

## Avoid coral souvenirs

Don't buy jewelry, household goods, or other items made from animals that once lived in the ocean—including shells. Harvesting these species can cause significant habitat destruction and reduce populations. Instead, opt for a product made with sustainable resources that supports a local artist or small business.

## Give the gift of a donation

Instead of bringing home a purchased souvenir, consider making a donation to a local organization in honor of a friend or family member. Some organizations can send tribute cards—but if not, consider making your own and giving that as a souvenir along with a picture.



The U.S. is the world's largest consumer of coral jewelry. Commercial harvesting of red and pink corals for jewelry has led to drastic changes on the reef—it has reduced coral populations, led to a decrease in genetic diversity, affected reproduction rates, and has resulted in smaller corals.



# Exploring

## Adventure local

Choose locally owned tour operators who provide jobs for local communities and participate in sustainability initiatives. Having a tour guide who is from the area you are visiting will also lead to a more authentic and educational experience.

## Do your research

Learn about local rules and regulations that are meant to protect natural resources and encourage your fellow travelers to abide by them.

## Volunteer

Find local volunteer opportunities that help protect the environment and support local communities. Be sure to vet these opportunities thoroughly—many opportunities will say they are environmentally friendly, but further research may uncover unsustainable practices.

## Become a citizen scientist

Find a local citizen science program to participate in through an organization, foundation, hotel, or national park. An online search for “coral reef citizen science” will bring up numerous opportunities!

## Boat responsibly

Choose boat operators who use moorings (rather than anchoring on the reef) and stow trash properly. Avoid companies that feed wildlife.

## Pay fees

Support conservation efforts by making donations and paying all user fees—these often provide vital revenue to keep conservation programs afloat.

## Clean up

Join an organized beach cleanup, or volunteer to pick up trash on your own when you're out and about. Always use proper waste receptacles to dispose of your waste.

## Take only memories

Never take rocks, shells, sand, leaves, etc. Avoid taking anything out of the water, unless it is recent trash that belongs in a trash bin.



## Traveling to Maui soon?

Visit [coral.org/maui](https://coral.org/maui) to see if your trip coincides with one of our volunteer planting days and come help us protect the reef!

## Headed to the Bay Islands in Honduras?

Visit [gobluebayislands.com](https://gobluebayislands.com) for a list of reef-friendly businesses and experiences to enhance your trip and check out the [Bay Islands Responsible Seafood Guide](#).

DOWNLOAD GUIDE





# Diving and Snorkeling



Coral reefs contribute US\$36 billion in economic value to the world each year—and US\$19 billion of that comes from in-water activities like diving and snorkeling. When you support locally owned and operated dive shops that are working to protect their reef, your money will go where it's needed most.

## Don't touch

Never touch a reef or wildlife, and maintain a comfortable distance from the reef at all times. Swim in a horizontal position with your arms by your side to avoid accidentally touching or kicking the reef.

## Secure your equipment

Make sure your equipment is properly secured to avoid inadvertently damaging the reef. Adjust it before you enter the water to avoid accidentally hitting or kicking the reef.

## Maintain neutral buoyancy

Keep yourself off the reef and avoid unnecessary contact by maintaining a proper buoyancy.

## Stand on sand

If you have to stand up, stand up on sand, not on a reef. Coral reefs are living animals, and standing on them can kill them.

## Be safe

When in doubt, don't go out. Avoid snorkeling if you are not a strong swimmer, and be sure to always carry proper flotation devices to avoid standing on or damaging the reef.

## Plan your entry

Carefully select your entry and exit sites to avoid standing on the reef, and always use proper surface markers to let boaters and others know of your whereabouts.

## Mind your manners

When you encounter wildlife, remember that you are a visitor in their home. Do not touch, chase, harass, or feed marine life. Feeding wildlife can interfere with their natural behaviors and survival instincts.

## Watch your fins

Practice responsible finning techniques to avoid kicking coral or stirring up sediment. If you are not an experienced swimmer, avoid using fins altogether.

## Take only memories

Shells, broken pieces of coral, and wildlife all play an important role in maintaining a healthy coral reef, and removing them can disrupt that ecosystem. Instead, opt for photos and memories to bring back home as souvenirs.



# Sunscreen

## Choose reef-safe products

Look for sunscreens that DO NOT contain oxybenzone, octinoxate, or octocrylene. These chemicals are known to harm coral reefs when they enter the water and pose a threat to human health.

## Opt for minerals

Choose non-nano mineral-based sunscreens like zinc oxide or titanium oxide, and avoid spray-on sunscreens. Look for the “marine safe” logo to avoid harmful ingredients.

## Cover up

Avoid using sunscreen altogether by covering up with a hat and long-sleeved shirt or rashguard.

## Watch the packaging

Choose products that use sustainable packaging made out of reusable, recycled, and/or compostable materials.



Chemicals that are harmful to the reef like oxybenzone can also be found in hairspray and other cosmetics, so it's a good idea to rinse off—or even better, avoid these products altogether—before entering the ocean.



# Everyday Actions

## Take fewer, longer trips

Consider taking one longer trip each year rather than more frequent, smaller getaways. That will help reduce your overall carbon footprint—a key step to protecting coral reefs.

## Buy carbon offsets

Air travel and cruise travel have huge carbon footprints. Our emissions are a key contributor to climate change, which threatens coral reefs through effects like warming ocean temperatures. Reducing the amount of time you spend on planes and on cruises can go a long way. If you must fly, consider buying carbon offsets.



Photo by Dave Hoefler

## How do carbon offsets work?

Read [this great guide](#) by The New York Times.

[READ GUIDE](#)

## Become an advocate for the environment

Use your time at home to advocate for environmental policies and reef-safe legislation and environmental protection policies. Write letters, sign petitions, organize your community, and call your representatives to advocate for single-use plastic bans, reef-safe sunscreen legislation, reducing carbon emissions, and more.

## Consume consciously

Be mindful of your own consumer habits and how they contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Limit unnecessary purchases and avoid products with excessive packaging. When possible, opt for used items—consider joining a local [Buy Nothing group](#) on Facebook to reduce and reuse.





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## About the Coral Reef Alliance

The Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) is an environmental NGO that is on a mission to save the world's coral reefs. We work collaboratively with local communities to reduce direct threats to reefs in ways that provide lasting benefits to people and wildlife. We're also actively expanding the scientific understanding of how coral reefs adapt to climate change—spoiler alert, it involves keeping them healthy—and we're applying this information to give reefs the best chance to thrive for generations to come. Learn more at [coral.org](http://coral.org).

## Coral Reef Alliance

1.888.CORAL.REEF





[info@coral.org](mailto:info@coral.org)

[coral.org](http://coral.org)

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