

Expert tips for winter skin care on tropical vacations

As winter sets in, many Long Islanders seek to escape the frigid temperatures by heading to warmer tropical destinations. The transition from a cold climate to a hot, sunny one can have a significant impact on the skin.

By Christy Hinko | February 24, 2025

We spoke with [Dr. Navin Arora](#), a board-certified dermatologist and founder of Borealis Dermatology about essential tips for maintaining healthy skin during these dramatic shifts in climate.

With more than a decade of experience as a U.S. Army physician, [Arora](#) has treated patients from various ethnic backgrounds in regions with diverse climates, making him well-equipped to offer skin care advice for vacationing in tropical locales.

Protecting your skin

One of the most important aspects of skin care when traveling to tropical destinations is sun protection. UV exposure in these regions can be up to 40 percent higher than in northern climates during the winter months.

“What many travelers are unaware of is that their unexposed winter skin is extremely vulnerable to intense tropical UV radiation,” he said. “Protecting one’s skin and using proper skin care approaches are not merely about immediate comfort, but needed for long-term dermatological health.”

Skin, especially for those who live in colder regions, may not have the natural defenses developed through gradual sun exposure. Sudden prolonged exposure to intense sun can lead to severe burns, which not only cause immediate discomfort but can also increase the risk of developing melanoma in the long run.

Sun protection strategies

To effectively protect your skin while on vacation, a multi-layered approach is best.

“For optimal protection, use a brand name sunscreen with a minimum SPF 50 that provides broad-spectrum protection against both UVA and UVB rays,” he said. “Clothing choices like wide-brimmed hats, UV-blocking sunglasses and lightweight, long-sleeved garments can offer an extra layer of defense.”

While sunscreen is essential, seeking shade and avoiding prolonged sun exposure, particularly during the peak hours of 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. is key.

“Strategic clothing choices and shade can reduce the amount of UV radiation your skin absorbs,” he said.



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Pre-vacation preparation

Skin care should begin long before travelers step foot on a plane.

“Gentle exfoliation, starting a few weeks before your trip, will remove dead skin cells and make moisturizers and sunscreens more effective,” he said. “Hydration is also key. Increased water intake and using richer moisturizers can help the skin retain moisture and improve resilience against environmental changes.”

It’s also a good idea to purchase your preferred skin care products before leaving home, as prices at tourist destinations can be inflated. Placing these products in your checked luggage can prevent the hassle of TSA screenings and ensure you have access to the items you need.

Post-beach skin care

After a day in the sun, it’s essential to take steps to restore and repair the skin. Excessive sun exposure, salt water, pool chemicals and rough sand can all contribute to skin damage. Lightweight, fast-absorbing moisturizers to soothe the skin and support recovery are ideal. Aloe vera is also an excellent natural remedy for reducing inflammation.

“Products that contain ceramides and hyaluronic acid are highly effective in rehydrating and repairing the skin after sun exposure,” Arora said. “Avoid petroleum-based products, as they can trap heat and worsen skin stress.”

When to see a doctor

In cases of severe sunburn, travelers should not delay in seeking medical attention.

“If you experience blistering, persistent pain or systemic symptoms like fever or chills, you should see a doctor immediately,” he said. “These could indicate more severe sunburns and sometimes patients require oral steroids for treatment. Once second-degree burns and blisters appear, it’s important to treat the condition like a burn.”

Sunburns can lead to secondary infections if the skin becomes oozing or swollen.

“If you notice an area of skin becoming infected, with signs like increased redness, pus or swelling, you should consult a dermatologist,” he said.

Debunking common myths

Many travelers mistakenly believe that only fair-skinned individuals need to worry about sun exposure. However, Arora is quick to debunk this myth.

“Skin cancer can develop in all skin types, including those with darker skin; I have treated patients of all ethnic backgrounds, including Japanese, Chinese and Thai, for skin cancers caused by chronic sun exposure,” he said. “Sun exposure doesn’t just increase the risk of cancer. It also contributes to premature aging, wrinkles and sun spots, which affect everyone, regardless of skin tone.”

Arora’s top tips for vacation skin care

- **Be mindful of your skin’s current state**

The skin you have in the winter isn’t as resilient as it will be in the summer, so be extra cautious. Start slow and build up your tolerance to the sun.

- **Wear protective clothing**

Cover up your chest, shoulders and back with sun-protective clothing. A tank top won’t provide sufficient protection.

- **Reapply sunscreen regularly**

Make sure to reapply sunscreen every two hours and use a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or 50 for full-day protection.

- **Stay in the shade during peak sun hours**

Avoid direct sun exposure from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. whenever possible.

By following these guidelines, travelers can safeguard their skin from the intense tropical sun and enjoy their vacations without compromising their long-term dermatological health.

For more personalized advice, Arora and his team at Borealis Dermatology offer consultations at their offices in Garden City, Bellerose and Syosset. For more information or to schedule an appointment, visit BorealisDerm.com or call 516-246-8800.