

# Seaworthy Sandals for Salty Señoritas



Sport sandals from Keen and Columbia topped the test field in comfort and grip—wet or dry. From left, above: Keen Venice H2, Keen Whisper, and Columbia Kaweah.

## A look at functional footwear for those with active, amphibious lifestyles.

It's challenging to remember a world without sport sandals, but the performance sandal is a somewhat recent invention, having only been around 25 years. Sandals have grown from simple pieces of leather in Biblical times to high-performance, water-resistant footwear with toe protection, reinforced bedding, and heel bindings. Today, sandal construction often includes drainage systems, all-terrain traction, and anti-microbial applications that retard the growth of bacteria and fungus.

These delightful technological advances come with a price: The average price of the women's sandals we tested this go-round was about \$82, with several ringing in at \$100.

### WHAT WE TESTED

For this review of women's sailing sandals, we set out to find a shoe that was comfortable wet or dry, one that didn't absorb water, provided traction and support, and is built to resist the odors typically associated with boat shoes. We looked at eight designs from four makers: Teva, Keen Footwear, Columbia Sportswear, and Sperry Top-Sider.

Sperry is synonymous with boating shoes, while Columbia is a prominent retailer of outdoor shoes and clothes. Teva, more or less, invented the sport sandal, and Keen turned the amphibious, hybrid

shoe market into a lifestyle.

Five of the sandals were closed-toe, which we prefer because open-toe sandals increase the wearer's risk of tripping as a sheet or deck hardware can easily get caught between the toes and the shoe sole. All of the sandals had straps across the heel and a supportive, reinforced sole.

Although the difference between what is a shoe and what is a sandal shrinks every time a new model emerges, *Practical Sailor* jumped into the sandal test differentiating sandals from sailing shoes with a clear definition of sandals: "We know them when we see them."

Testers weighed construction quality, test performance, features, and price. Find out how we evaluated odor resistance and traction in "How We Tested" on page 27. Men in the market for new sailing sandals can expect that the men's versions of these designs will have the same performance as far as grip and construction.

Testers spent some time decoding the shoe-industry lingo and found that most of today's performance sandals use a blended polyurethane/EVA material in construction. For help deciphering the vocabulary, see "How We Tested."

### TEVA ITUNDA

In 1984, a young Grand Canyon river guide revolutionized the footwear industry when he created the world's first sport sandal and the Teva brand.

The women's Itunda sport sandal borders on "shoe" with its enclosed toe protection and sturdy frame. The sandal features a quick-drying, breathable synthetic and NuFoam upper, and Teva's patent-pending drainage system in the topsole and midsole. A series of drainage ports with mesh screens allow water to escape directly through the bottom of the shoe while preventing rocks or debris from entering. These ports also allow air to flow through for ventilation and comfort.

The sandal has adjustments on the forefoot and instep closure and blended polyurethane/EVA in the outsole. The bottom features Teva's Spider Rubber, a non-marking rubber designed for good traction on wet or dry terrain.

Testers found the Itunda to be well-made and comfortable. Rated Excellent overall, it was a top-scorer in the grip tests. Testers actually quit testing before the shoe slipped in the wet teak grip test, as the testing angle grew dangerously steep and the shoe was still holding steady.

The Itunda retails for \$100 and comes in four colors.



## Gauging Grip, Fit, and Funk-fighting Ability

We followed a similar testing protocol and rating guidelines for the women's sailing sandal as we did for the men's (PS, June 2007) and women's (PS, July 2007) boat shoe tests. We evaluated each shoe on comfort, construction, foot protection, traction, and water retention. To assess comfort, we had a group of female testers wear each pair of sandals for an extended period of time and walk close to a mile in each pair, and then rate the sandal on comfort. We then averaged the testers' ratings.

The grip ratings were determined by using a traction-testing device based on inclined teak and nonskid fiberglass panels. We started each pair at an inclined angle of 20 degrees and progressed to greater inclines (30, 35, 40 degrees) to find out when each would lose traction with a tester wearing the sandals. We repeated the process with fresh water streaming down the surface (via a hose). For an overall grip rating, we averaged the results from the four tests.

We also wet the sandals with salt water and put them in a black plastic bag for a week to assess their resistance to odor and bacterial growth and stains.

The sandals were all well-made, drained easily, didn't retain water, and dried easily.

To gain a better understanding of shoe construction, we took a look at industry lingo—specifically in the footbed construction. (We got a little help from the folks at Cool Runnings, [www.coolrunning.com](http://www.coolrunning.com).)

Many of the shoes we tested used a blended polyurethane/EVA material in construction. Running shoes are usually made with these foams, which are relatively lightweight, shock absorbent, flexible, and highly durable.

EVA is a copolymer or cross-linked foam made of ethylene and vinyl acetate. It is made up of thousands of foam cells that contain air or gas. When you compress (walk on) EVA foam, the gas gets pushed out and then sucked back in. Repeated impacts result in the EVA losing some resilience. To compensate, shoemakers use a compression-molded EVA midsole. This helps the EVA last longer and also provides structural integrity to the midsole.

Polyurethane can be heavier and denser. It is excellent foam, but it tends to have less "bounce" or rebound than EVA.

Today's best activewear shoes are often made with a combination of polyurethane and compression-molded EVA, drawing the benefits from both materials into one midsole.



PS's homemade grip testing device allowed sandals to be tested on wet and dry surfaces.

**Bottom line:** This shoe-like sandal brags of a lot of fancy technology and lives up to its claims. Comfortable and versatile, the Itunda shared top ratings in comfort and grip. Typical of the Teva brand, it is not as flashy as some of the Keens and Columbias, but it definitely gets a recommendation.



Teva Tirra

which apparently made all the difference, as the Tirra didn't hold as well in the grip tests.

The open-toe Tirra sandals, which are offered in seven colors and retail for \$70, offer multiple adjustment options for a secure, custom fit for different types of feet. However, more than one tester found that the straps, which fit high on the ankle for better support, rub along the bones. The sandals rated a Good in the grip test.

Teva products are warranted to provide normal wear and be free from defective materials or faulty manufacturing for one year from the date of purchase. Any products beyond one year will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

**Bottom line:** This sandal trades some of its performance and protection for looks—a balance each sailor has to weigh. The Tirra performed respectably, but testers couldn't get the fit right.

### KEEN VENICE H2

Keen, with its signature black toe bumper, launched a line of hybrid sandals in 2003 that found a ready market in the sailing world.

The Venice H2—as well as the other two Keen models we tested—have compression-molded EVA midsoles and footbeds built around the overall shape of the foot with special emphasis on the toe.

The Venice also has washable, polyester webbing uppers that can be adjusted with an elastic cord and plastic toggle lacing system for a comfortable and secure fit. The design uses environmentally friendly, antimicrobial technology that helps prevent odor, staining, and deterioration.

Its open strapping system allows for plenty of ventilation, and its grippy,



Keen Venice H2



AS VALUE GUIDE		WOMEN'S SANDALS FOR SAILING							
MAKER / MODEL	PRICE	RATINGS				GRIP TEST*			
		COMFORT	ODOR TEST	FOOT PROTECTION	GRIP	DRY TEAK	WET TEAK	DRY NONSKID	WET NONSKID
COLUMBIA KAWAEH \$	\$75	Good Plus	Good	Open toe, soft sole	Good Plus	35	45	35	35
COLUMBIA KAWAEH FLIP	\$60	Fair	Good	Open toe, soft sole	Good Plus	35	45	35	35
KEEN HYDRO GUIDE	\$100	Good	Excellent	Closed toe, hard sole	Good Plus	40	40	35	35
KEEN VENICE H2 ★	\$95	Excellent	Good	Closed toe, hard sole	Excellent	40	45	40	35
KEEN WHISPER ↗	\$85	Good Plus	Good	Closed toe, hard sole	Excellent	40	45	40	35
SPERRY WAVE RUNNER	\$69	Good	Fair	Closed toe, soft sole	Fair	40	40	30	20
TEVA TIRRA	\$70	Good	Excellent	Open toe, hard sole	Good	35	40	40	40
TEVA ITUNDA ↗	\$100	Good	Excellent	Closed toe, hard sole	Excellent	40	45	40	40

★ Best Choice ↗ Recommended \$ Budget Buy \* Highest angle at which the shoe was able to maintain traction.

non-marking outsole uses multi-directional lugs with razor siping for excellent traction. Testers found this well-constructed sandal to be the most comfortable in the field, and grip test ratings were second only to the Teva Itunda. The Venice H2 retails for \$95.

**Bottom line:** Rated Excellent in comfort, the well-made Venice H2 gets our Best Choice rating. These are a bit pricier than some we tested, but the shoes are cute and comfortable, wet or dry; they offer great traction, and come in (count 'em!) 15 colors.

### KEEN WHISPER

The Whisper sandals we tested were ironically a loud nectarine orange. Like the other Keens, they have an EVA midsole, washable polyester webbing uppers, and antimicrobial features to help prevent odors.

A quick-draw elastic cord lacing system adjusts the webbing to a comfortable and secure fit, even around the back of the heel. The non-marking rubber outsole allowed an Excellent grip, but testers did note that sizable pebbles could get stuck

in the tread—something to think about if you plan to wear them off and on a boat with fiberglass decks. The Whisper was a bit more narrow than the other Keens, so with

its multiple adjustment options, it would be a good bet for those with narrow to medium-width feet.

The Whisper comes in eight colors and retails for \$85.

**Bottom line:** The Whisper is a quality-made, comfortable, and attractive sandal that scores high in performance. It gets our recommendation.

### KEEN HYDRO GUIDE

The Hydro Guide we tested was a men's size 6, and the fit was a bit off for the testers with narrow feet. However, female testers with wider, flat feet found the shoe quite comfortable. The sandal's adjustable front strap is one continuous length of polyester webbing, so it can be easily and infinitely adjusted using the plastic slide buckle. A Velcro heel strap also allows customized adjustment.

The sandal felt and looked chunkier than others tested. It also featured an EVA midsole; non-marking, sticky, siped tread; and screened drain ports in the midsole and outsole.

The Keen-termed Aqua Stop tread didn't perform as well as the other Keens in grip tests, and the Hydro Guide earned a Fair plus for overall grip. It comes in one color and retails for \$100.

**Bottom line:** Designed



Keen Hydro Guide

for men, the Hydro Guide is a heavy-duty sandal with a less-dainty look than the other shoes tested.

A quality, tough shoe, the Hydro Guide didn't perform quite as well as its siblings in grip tests. This would be a good option for women with wide feet.

### COLUMBIA KAWAEH

Established in 1938, Columbia is an adventure clothing and shoe giant well-known for quality gear.

The Kaweah features a perforated neoprene upper, reinforced heel, and comfortable heel straps. The easy-on, easy-off elastic cord lacing system makes the sandals easy to adjust. Neither the straps nor the shoe body absorb water. Testers found the Kaweah comfortable, and it scored a Good Plus overall in the grip tests. Not as heavy-duty as the Keens and Tevas, the Columbia is lighter (a size 7 is 8.2 ounces compared to the Keen Venice H2's 13.4

ounces), and has open toes. The Kaweah comes in three colors, whole sizes only, and sells for about \$75.

**Bottom line:** While the sandals would be less appropriate for hiking than the Keens or Tevas, the Kaweah fits the bill for an



Keen Whisper

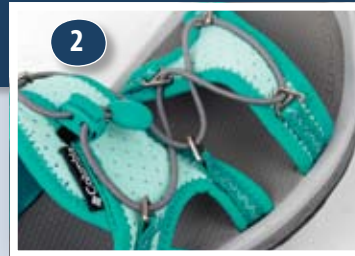
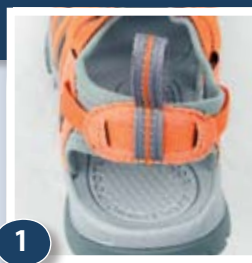


Columbia Kaweah

## Finer Points of Footwear

All of the women's sandals we tested are well made and are more substantial than your run-of-the-mill flip-flop. Utilizing the latest in footwear technology, the sandal makers incorporated unique details that their shoes apart from the pack:

1. Like the Keen Whisper pictured, most of the test sandals featured a heel tab for easier donning.
2. The Columbia Kaweah was among the sandals that used a stretchy-cord lace with a plastic toggle for quick fit adjusting.
3. Mesh drainage ports in the Keen Hydro Guide's sole allow for ventilation while keeping rocks out.
4. The Hydro Guide was the only sandal without a pull-on tab, but its Velcro heel strap made donning and adjusting quick and easy.
5. The Teva Itunda was the only sandal with a clip closure.



amphibious sailing sandal. Removing some bells and whistles—and toe protection—seems to lower the price, and we gave the Kaweah our Budget Buy pick.

### COLUMBIA KAWEAH FLIP

A thong-style sandal, the Kaweah Flip has a reinforced Techlite heel. The open-toe sandal claims to balance cushioning, stability, and support. A soft Techlite EVA band around the heel enhances security, and the shoe's internal design provides support and rigidity to protect feet. While the band around the back of the heel is comfortable and provides support, it also jams the front toe strap into the space between the wearer's toes. The sandals are not adjustable, but they do seem to loosen up with wear. With no webbing and an open toe, the Flip was the lightest shoe tested. It rated a respectable Good Plus in the grip test.

The Kaweah Flip comes in three colors and retails for \$60.

**Bottom line:** The least expensive sandal tested, the Flip is attractive, well-made, and performed well, but it's not testers' top pick for sailing.



many years of excellent products, testers were surprised by the lack of traction the Sperry Wave Runner showed in grip tests.

A Mary Jane-style sandal with an elastic heel strap and a Velcro front strap, the Wave Runner was comfortable, well-made, and one of the most attractive shoes in our test field. It has a petite fit that would be good for those with narrow feet.

The Wave Runner didn't offer much for ankle support, however, the outsole wraps around the front and side of the shoe a bit for added toe protection.

The Wave Runner is quick-drying but not totally waterproof: It's made with low water-absorption materials and waterproof leather. Mesh panels and drainage ports help keep the water from pooling in the EVA footbed.

The Sperry was the least grippy in testing and also had the worst mildew odor following the stink test. It comes in four colors and retails for \$69.

**Bottom line:** One of the more comfortable and attractive shoes tested, the Wave Runner struggled in the grip test, especially on nonskid.



### SPERRY WAVE RUNNER

Sperry Top-Siders are synonymous with sailing shoes. Given the company's history and

### CONCLUSION

Testers were able to quantitatively compare construction quality, performance, and price. The Tevas and Keens were more durable and

heavy-duty than the Columbias and the Sperry, but the price was also higher. Although a sailor may not need something quite as sturdy as the Tevas and Keens, if you plan to use them off the boat for hiking or even long walks to and from the anchorage, these are your best bet for long-term support.

The well-made Keen Venice H2 and the Teva Itunda rated the highest in performance, and both have the best foot protection, a feature that can't be ignored when maneuvering wet decks around cleats, rigging, and deck gear. Both also were extremely comfortable for long-term wear—wet or dry—and their construction allows an adjustable fit that we believe most would find comfortable. Testers gave Keen's Venice H2 the Best Choice nod and recommended the Itunda. The lighter, less-expensive Columbia Kaweah earned our Budget Buy pick. ▲

### CONTACTS

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