



FINNISH FORESTS

Finland is a country that lives off its forests – culturally, socially, and economically.



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1 KEY POINTS AND MAIN MESSAGES

- Forests are a central part of the Finnish culture and identity. Thanks to every person's right -- the right to enjoy nature regardless of land ownership -- and an extensive network of national parks, such activities as hiking, fishing, and berry and mushroom picking are popular pastimes and available to everyone. More than 80% of Finns say forests are important or very important to them personally.
- Forests have always played an important part in the Finnish economy. For much of the 20th century, the paper industry had a central role, with paper and forest products accounting for 75–90% of Finland's exports. Still today, their share of exports is almost 20%. Other forest-based branches of business include forest technology, such natural products as wild berries and mushrooms, and tourism.
- The main objectives for forest-based business and forest conservation are specified in Finland's National Forest Strategy. One of the objectives of the strategy is to have forests in active, ecologically, economically, socially, and culturally sustainable, and diverse use.
- The forest strategy emphasizes the goals of conservation and biodiversity and the use of forests as carbon sinks and reservoirs. While opinions regarding forest use vary, the strategy process provides a constructive forum for dialogue, balancing different interests and co-operation between different actors.
- Finland's relationship with forests has an impact that reaches beyond its borders. Finnish universities and research institutes have an active role in international forest-related research, and Finnish forest technology is used around the world. Sustainable forestry has also long been one of the focus areas of Finland's development cooperation.
- Finnish forest-related research and technology are today a source of significant new innovations. The traditional forest industry continues to introduce products made of ecologically sustainable paper, packaging, and wood while the new bioeconomy sector is making breakthroughs in areas such as wood-based biochemicals, medicinal products, and textiles.



2 HOW TO PORTRAY FINLAND?

Position Finland as a country that has a strong relationship with its forests – culturally, socially, and economically.

Highlight Finland’s leading role in forest-related scientific research and Finnish forest technology which is used worldwide.

Profile Finland as a global leader in forest-related bioeconomy and innovations such as wood-based biochemicals, medicinal products, and textiles.

3 ELEVATOR PITCH

Finland is the most forested country in Europe with three-quarters of its land area covered by forests. Forests have always played a central role in Finnish everyday life.

Most Finns regularly spend time in a forest – hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, picking wild berries and mushrooms, or just relaxing at their vacation homes and summer cottages. A fifth of Finnish households are also owners of forest land.

The close relationship with forests is reflected in Finnish culture. Forests have inspired much of Finnish art, design, and architecture.

Wood and paper industries played a central role in Finland’s industrialization in the 19th and 20th centuries. Later, Finland also became an exporter of forest and paper technology. Still today, forest-related products and services make up almost a fifth of the country’s exports. At the same time, the forest industry is increasingly focusing on the bioeconomy and such new wood-based products as biochemicals, medicinal products, and textiles.

Finns have long taken a sustainable, science-based approach to the use of forests and forest management. 12.6% of Finland’s forests are protected or under restricted use, more than in any country in Europe.



To find a balance between sometimes conflicting environmental, economic and social goals, Finnish authorities have adopted a National Forest Strategy that aims to find a sustainable combination of utilization and protection, and to preserve healthy and diverse forests for future generations. The strategy emphasizes the need to protect biodiversity and fight climate change.

Forest-related scientific research has a long history in Finland. In addition to more sustainable forest management, new technologies, and new wood and paper products, research has contributed to innovations in bioeconomy and new wood-based products such as biochemicals, medicines, and textiles.

Finland continues to be a country that lives off its forests – culturally, socially, and economically.

4 BACKGROUND

If you have ever traveled in Finland, you will have seen forests. Lots of forests.

Forests cover three-quarters of Finland's land area. Measured by the proportional share of forest land, Finland is **the most forested country in Europe**. There are 23 million hectares of forest in the country – more than four hectares or some 15 000 trees for each Finn. In the past 30 years, the volume of trees growing in Finland's forests has almost doubled since it was first recorded in the 1920s. Finnish forests are dominated by evergreen trees: roughly 50% of Finnish forests are pine dominant and some 30% spruce dominant.

Forests also play a significant role in the Finnish identity. Most Finns have a personal connection to the countryside and forests, and **more than 80% say that forests are important to them personally**. Half of the Finnish population lives within a few minutes' walk from a forest and **two out of three Finns spend time in a forest on a weekly basis**. Thanks to **every person's right** – the right to enjoy nature regardless of land ownership – and an extensive network of national parks, outdoor activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, fishing, and berry and mushroom picking are popular pastimes and available to everyone.



Even the largest cities have extensive forest areas, such as the 1000-hectare Helsinki Central Park which is just minutes away from the center of the country's capital and despite its name, resembles more wilderness than a manicured park one usually sees in a major city. Finns, a nation of some 5.5 million people, also own more than half a million vacation homes or summer cottages, most of which are in or near a forest, and where an estimated two million Finns regularly spend time. And since two-thirds of all forests are privately owned, **almost a fifth of all Finnish households are also owners of forest land.**

Finnish literature, visual arts, and music are also inspired by forests. World-renowned Finnish **design and architecture derive not just their inspiration but also much of their materials from forests.** The Finnish language is full of words and expressions referring to forests and nature. Even many of the most common Finnish surnames have their origins in the forest.

“Finland lives off its forests”, goes an old Finnish saying – and forests have indeed always played a **central role in the Finnish economy.** As early as the 17th century, Finland became an exporter of wood tar, an important waterproofing material of wooden boats and ships. The first phase of industrialization in Finland started with the introduction of sawmills during the second half of the 19th century. Paper mills soon followed, and for much of the 20th century, the paper industry was vital for Finland, particularly as a source of export earnings. At their most dominant, paper and forest products accounted for more than 90% of Finland's exports. The economic importance of forests was further emphasized in the aftermath of the Second World War as Finland became an exporter of forest-related technologies such as paper machines.

Still today, paper and carton are Finland's most important export products and **forest-related products account for almost a fifth of the country's exports.** 97% of all cardboard and 94% of paper produced in Finland is exported. While its share of Finland's GDP is no longer as large as during the last century, the forest sector continues to be vitally important in many parts of the country.

Finland's relationship with forests also has an impact beyond the country's borders. **Finland is a leader in forest-related scientific research** and active in international co-operation in the field. Finnish forest technology is used worldwide. Forest research and management techniques are focus areas on Finland's development cooperation in several African countries.



Given Finland's close relationship with forests, it's no surprise that **Finns have long taken the conservation and protection of forests seriously**. As early as in the mid-1800s, concerns were raised about disappearing forests, and the first Forest Act was passed into law in 1886 to promote the natural regeneration of forests. First national parks were established in 1938 and there are currently 41 of them, representing different types of Finnish landscapes and forests. Altogether, **almost three million hectares of Finland's forests are protected or under restricted use**. In total it represents 12.6% of the forest area, which is more than in any country in Europe. However, only some 5% of Finnish forests are classified as primeval, meaning that they have attained great age without significant disturbance from humans.

Forest-based industries have also understood the importance of taking a responsible, science-based approach to forest management and the use of forests as a resource. A government agency focused on the scientific study of forests and their use, Institute for Forest Research, was founded in 1917. Its work is now continued by the **Natural Resources Institute Finland**. National forest inventories also date back to the 1920s.

In the 1900s, the rising economic importance of the forest industries was also a strong incentive for forest owners to practice reforestation. Now, **some 90% of all trees growing in Finnish forests have been planted**. In the past decades, the volume of wood harvested has been clearly below the amount forests have grown.

In its modern form, **sustainable forest management** comprises the dimensions of **ecological, economic, social, and cultural sustainability**. Actions to secure ecological sustainability include for example programs to **protect forest biodiversity** in Southern Finland, the most densely populated part of the country, as well as programs to **boost the restoration, management and protection of different kinds of habitats**, including the remaining primeval or old-growth forests. Ecological sustainability also focuses on the role forests play in the fight against climate change as **carbon sinks**, that is, the amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide sequestered in forests.

Economic sustainability aims **at protecting the viability, productivity, and profitability of forests**. Actions towards this end focus on new, sustainable products and processes in the traditional forest industries as well as on the move towards bioeconomy.



Social and cultural sustainability means that people continue to have access to the benefits derived from forests. Of particular importance is ensuring that Finns of the future can continue to **enjoy forests recreationally according to the principle of every person's right.**

Much like in many other forested countries, Finnish views on forest management have become increasingly varied in recent years. With raising awareness of climate change, risks to biodiversity, and other global and local environmental threats, some have started to question whether economic goals are still overriding environmental and cultural values in the Finnish approach to forests. Some of the most **controversial questions** center around the annual felling volumes and calculations concerning the number of carbon sinks in Finnish forests. These differences of opinions have become more divisive as Finland has made a commitment to reach carbon neutrality by 2035. In recent years, the sink effect of Finland's forests has corresponded to 30–50% of Finland's total greenhouse gas emissions annually.

The use of forests has been planned on a national level since the 1940s and 1950s. In 2015 the Finnish government adopted a comprehensive **National Forest Strategy** in order to provide a forum for constructive dialogue, find a balance between different interests and promote co-operation between different actors. The strategy is updated regularly, and currently a process is underway to prepare a strategy that extends to 2035 and is also aligned with the EU Forest and Biodiversity Strategies as well as the EU Sustainability Taxonomy.

The new strategy increasingly addresses questions of biodiversity and the role of forests in climate change mitigation and adaptation. A variety of stakeholders, forest administration, research and education, forest owners, forest industry, energy sector, environmental organizations, as well as youth and leisure-time organizations and regional representatives, are included in the process of formulating and implementing the strategy.

New approaches are also employed to utilize forests in ways that support sustainable development. New, more sustainable paper, packaging, and wood products are continuously developed, and at the same time, the forest industry increasingly turns its focus on the bioeconomy and such new wood-based products as biochemicals, medicinal products, and textiles. Opportunities in the field are based on a deep understanding of the entire bioproduct value chain, world-class



experimental research, integration of cross-disciplinary sciences, and open cooperation between traditional forest-industry companies and innovative new start-ups.

Thanks to new technologies, wood is once again becoming an increasingly used material in construction, not just in single-family homes but also in larger buildings. **In 2022, 31% of all public buildings being built in Finland have wooden constructions**, and according to the National Wood Building Program, their share could reach 45% in 2035. Wood construction is also a way to fight climate change as it contributes to the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered as carbon is embodied in building materials for decades, even centuries, instead of being emitted into the atmosphere.

Some of the changes in approaches to forests are as much cultural as economic. **Ecotourism** attracts a growing number of domestic and international travelers looking to enjoy the great outdoors without upsetting its natural balance. **Wild berries and mushrooms** from Finnish forests are increasingly finding their way to not just Finnish dinner tables but to some of the finest restaurants in the world.

Concerns have been raised over whether Finns are slowly becoming alienated from their forest-centric history and culture because of urbanization. But even though Finns' relationship with forests is evolving, it seems to remain as strong as it ever was. According to a study conducted in 2021, **most Finnish teenagers consider forests important**, experience a positive relationship with the forest, and are concerned about changes in forests and particularly in their local environment.

As new ways to utilize forests responsibly are being discovered, new generations of Finns – from cities and countryside alike – learn to find peace and inspiration in forests. **And as the country continues to be covered by forests, Finns continue to live off and with them.**



5 FACTS AND STATS

Finland is the most forested country in Europe.

- Forests cover almost 80% of Finland's land area.
- There are 23 million hectares of forest and an estimated 78 billion trees in Finland, more than 4 hectares and some 15 000 trees for each Finn.
- The majority of forests are of the Boreal or Taiga type, dominated by ever-green trees. Roughly 50% of Finnish forests are pine dominant and some 30% spruce dominant.
- Some 5% of Finnish forests, comprising 2.9% of Finland's land area, are classified as primeval, meaning that they have attained great age without significant disturbance from humans.

Forests are literally and figuratively close to Finns.

- Half of the 5.5 million Finns live within 200 meters, that is, a few minutes' walk, of a forest.
- Two-thirds of Finns report spending time in a forest every week.
- Almost 20% of Finnish households are owners of forest land.

Forests are Finland's most important natural resource.

- A total of 20.3 million hectares of forests is available for wood production, of which 61% is privately owned.
- The total annual growth of Finnish forests is 103.5 million cubic meters. In 2021, 76 million cubic meters of round wood were harvested, 87% of which was used by the forest industry.
- Almost three million hectares of forests are protected or under restricted use, representing 12.6% of Finland's forest area, the highest share in Europe.

Forests have played a central role in the Finnish economy.



- Wood tar was Finland's first large-scale export product in the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Finland's industrialization was led by sawmills in the 19th and paper mills in the 20th century. In the 1920s, forest products accounted for more than 90% of Finland's exports, and their share was roughly 75% until the 1960s.
- In 2020, forest products made up 18% of Finland's exports in value. Paper and cardboard were still Finland's most important export products. In 2020, 97% of all cardboard products and 94% of paper products were exported.
- In 2020, the forest industry accounted for 2%, and the whole forest sector for 3.7% of Finland's GDP.

The protection of forests is based on scientific research.

- The volume of growing stock and the state of forests have been monitored in Finland since the 1920s.
- In 2020, the growing stock volume in Finland's forests amounted to 2.5 billion cubic meters, 1.7 times the volume recorded in the 1920s.
- The first national parks were established in 1938. There are currently 41 national parks.
- Finland's forests act as carbon sinks and sequester 30–50% of Finland's total greenhouse gas emissions annually.