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Come Fry With Me: The Airline Turning Restaurant Grease Into Aviation Fuel

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When [Finnair](#) flight AY5 touched down in New York this week, passengers might have thought they smelled the delicious aroma of bacon as the Airbus A330 wheels screeched on the tarmac at [JFK](#).

That's because the flight from [Helsinki](#) was powered by biofuel, part of which is made of grease and fat, recycled from restaurant kitchens.

In reality, there are no cooking smells. "That's a popular question" says Kati Ihamäki, Vice President of Sustainable Development at Finnair. But "from a passenger or even pilot's point of view, you would never know the difference" she explains.



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A Finnair Airbus A330 like the one which used biofuels for a flight to JFK this week / Credit: Finnair

But this Finnair flight had a political as well as environmental message – the Finnish flag carrier made a point to use biofuel on the day the [United Nations Climate Summit](#) got underway. "We wanted to send a message to the UN and show that biofuel is a serious and credible alternative that can concretely reduce greenhouse gas emissions." says Ihamäki.



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Like every other airline, the majority of Finnair's environmental impact comes from aircraft emissions, so using a more sustainable biofuel – which is partly made with cooking oil recycled from restaurants – can significantly reduce their carbon footprint.

“Technological means, including biofuel but also new fleet investments, are the most effective means to improve fuel efficiency... and therefore reduce emissions” says Ihamäki. Those fuel bills are Finnair's single largest cost item.



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Although the biofuel itself reduces greenhouse gasses, it is also produced sustainably. Finnair and its partners [SkyNRG](#) and [Statoil Aviation](#), ensure that cultivation of the biofuel source doesn't compete with food production or damage biodiversity. That makes biofuel about twice as expensive as regular aviation fuel and in an era of contracting bottom lines for airlines all over the world, it's not yet an affordable alternative. “The cost of biofuel won't always be two times regular jet fuel” says Ihamäki, explaining that “flights like this help develop and stimulate supply chains”.

With most of Finnair's carbon footprint up in the air, that's where the airline is concentrating its efforts to reduce emissions. Recently, the airline was the global launch customer for the new [Airbus A321 with 'Sharklet' wing tips](#), which reduces emissions up to 5% over the regular A321. Finnair's new [A350 XWB](#) will reduce emissions even further compared with the existing A340 and offer 25% fuel efficiency savings. As an airline that emphasises its extensive Asia route network, squeezing every drop of fuel efficiency from each aircraft is paramount.



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Finnair's new fuel efficient A321 with 'Sharklet' wing tips / Credit: Finnair

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For passengers, those environmental savings are noticed on board as well. During in-flight service, the recently introduced [Marimekko](#) tableware – a Finnish design classic – is about 15% lighter than the previous tableware. The airline is also able to recycle or reuse, as energy waste, 100% of all cabin waste: the crumpled napkin, half a sandwich or the soda can you leave behind for the flight attendant to pick up. “This prevents the cabin waste stream from going to landfill and generating methane, another greenhouse gas” explains Ihamäki.

And when it’s time to land, about 45% of Finnair landings into Helsinki Airport use the slow-glide “continuous descent landing” method which cuts emissions and also saves on fuel costs.

From take off to landing, the Finnish airline is positioning itself as a leader in the big business of environmentally-friendly aviation.



100% of cabin waste on board is recycled or reused / Credit: Finnair

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