

How Ethical Are Birkenstocks?

By [Julia McAlpine](#) May 8, 2017 [Fashion](#)

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The chunky sandals that once prompted many a turned-up nose in the fashion community are now more than just comfortable kicks. Spotted on the Parisian runways back in 2012, [the Birkenstock](#) has graduated from a hippie necessity to a chic statement shoe in recent times.

These German sandals have been around for more than two centuries, and are now paired with everything from shorts to maxi skirts by fashion bloggers all over the world. But how ethical are these buckled slip-ons? We break the Birk down, issue by issue. Let's take a look!

Environmental Impact: **It's a Start**



Not too shabby, we say. Birkenstocks are crafted from environmentally friendly cork and rubber with the use of solvent-free adhesives. The company has also made efforts to promote sustainability through its award winning retail store design and packaging. Birkenstock has begun to focus on decreasing energy consumption and reducing carbon emissions, but it seems that some of its proposed processes are yet to be implemented. While these efforts are wonderful, precise targets and clear reports would improve the company's score in this category.

Labour Conditions: **Good**

Good on you, Birkenstock! These ergonomically designed sandals are exclusively manufactured in Germany – a country that upholds strong labour rights laws. While that fact is cause for celebration, we'd love to know more about the labour conditions of Birkenstock's fabric supply chain. Are these ethics consistent in the steps leading up to manufacturing?

Animal Welfare: It's a Start



No angora? Tick. No wool? Tick. No fur? Tick! Birkenstocks has steered clear of these animal-derived fabrics, but of course, the shoes are lined with a soft suede leather and some of the straps are made of leather as well. The company hasn't specified from where the leather is sourced, making it difficult to conclude whether this portion of the production process is achieved ethically.

If you're curious about Birkenstocks but can't get behind leather (ethically acquired or not), not to worry! Birkenstock has developed its own leather alternative material called Birko-Flor, which is made of acrylic and polyamide felt fibers, and has a patent finish. Birko-Flor Birkenstocks are available in everything from classic black or white to metallic or prints.

Overall Rating: Good ●●●○

Birkenstock's overall rating of **'Good'** is based on Rank a Brand, Shop Ethical and Good On You's research. There's certainly room for improvement – especially in the categories of environmental impact and animal welfare – but Birkenstock has demonstrated that it's ethically minded and continues to step up its game. With a little more transparency, the company could be on its way to a 'Great'!

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Are you a die-hard Birkenstocks fan? Or are you still unsure if cork is your thing? If you do decide to invest in a pair, you'll get your money's worth – these European sandals will last you ages! Plus, you might even get mistaken for your favourite fashion blogger.

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Images via [Birkenstock Australia](#) and [BirkenstockStore Nederland](#)

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Author

Julia McAlpine

Julia McAlpine is a freelance copywriter and editor born in sunny California and based in equally sunny Sydney. She can't pass a bookstore without browsing, and drinks far more coffee than the recommended daily intake. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram as @inkandmoon.