

Is Your Indian Essential Oil What the Label Says?



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Not always, and the brand is not the guarantee. Many Indian essential oil brands buy oil from wholesalers and relabel it, and India imported more "other" essential oils than it exported in 2023 and 2024, so the oil in an Indian drum may have been distilled elsewhere. Lavandin sold as lavender is the best-known swap. Check each batch with a GC-MS matched to the drum, test the first lot yourself and ask where each oil was distilled.

The Short Version

- Many Indian brands relabel oil bought from wholesalers, so quality follows the batch, not the brand.
- India imported US\$143.3m of other essential oils in 2024 and exported US\$132.8m (UN Comtrade, our query).
- Lavandin sold as lavender is the swap Indian users flag. A drop test can't catch it.
- Ask which oils the supplier distills, which it buys in, and the country of distillation for each batch.
- Keep a batch file: GC-MS matched to the drum, your own test of the first lot, and a sealed counter-sample.

Often it is, but you can't take the label's word for it, or the brand's. Many Indian essential oil brands buy oil from wholesalers and put their own label on it, so two bottles from the same brand can come from different sources. The protection is at the batch level - a lab report matched to the drum you're buying, your own test on the first lot, and a straight answer to where each oil was distilled.

India also imports a lot of the oil it sells. In 2024 it imported US\$143.3 million of essential oils outside the mint and citrus lines (HS 330129) and exported

US\$132.8 million, and in 2023 the gap was wider (UN Comtrade, our query, 18 October 2026). That's not a scandal. Trading and blending oils is ordinary business. But it means "from India" on an offer sheet and "distilled in India" aren't the same claim. Our [essential oils page](#) covers what India grows, the GC-MS markers and REACH, so this page sticks to substitution and how to check for it. The caveat - our forum evidence is mostly Indian consumers, not bulk importers, and nobody publishes adulteration rates.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 **India is a net importer of "other" essential oils.** HS 330129: imports US\$143.3m and 4,759 t in 2024 against exports of US\$132.8m and 3,395 t. In 2023, imports US\$163.1m against exports of US\$129.0m. Indonesia (US\$55.4m), Madagascar (US\$19.8m), France, China and Australia were the largest 2024 sources. (*UN Comtrade, our query, 18 October 2026*)
- 02 **"Most brands buy from wholesalers, and they just believe them."** Indian users also say "some brands sell Lavandin EO in the name of Lavender." (*Our review of Indian skincare forum threads, 2023*)
- 03 **US buyers discount Indian lab paperwork on botanicals.** One said of heavy-metal certificates from Indian or Chinese labs that "it's probably wise to move the decimal point one place to the right". (*Our review of US supplement forum threads, 2020 · Reported, dated*)

What we don't know yet

- ☐ How much of India's imported oil is re-exported as is, blended or used at home. Trade data doesn't say.

1. Why Can't You Trust the Brand?

Because, for many oils, the brand didn't make it. An Indian user in a 2023 skincare thread put it simply: "most brands buy from wholesalers, and they just believe them" ([r/IndianSkincareAddicts, April 2023](#)). The brand trusts its wholesaler, the wholesaler trusts its source, and nobody in the chain has necessarily tested the drum.

That's a normal way to run a range. A trader who offers forty oils is useful precisely because no single distiller makes forty. It just moves the question. Instead of "is this a good brand?", ask "where did this batch come from, and who tested it?" Quality follows the batch. A brand's lavender and its peppermint can come from different suppliers and deserve different levels of trust. Our [manufacturer vs trading company](#) comparison shows how to work with each kind of seller.

2. Is the Oil Even Indian?

Not always, and the trade data says why. India imported more HS 330129 oil than it exported in both 2023 and 2024, by value and by weight (our Comtrade query above). Indonesia was the largest source by far, then Madagascar, France, China and Australia. The data doesn't say where it goes next. Our reading is that some feeds India's own perfume, incense and cosmetics trades, and some ends up in export drums.

So ask for the country of distillation on each batch, not just the country of shipment. It matters for three reasons. Your label may make an origin claim. Your customs entry may claim a trade-agreement rate, and goods merely re-exported from India can't get an Indian certificate of origin, as our [certificate of origin guide](#) explains. And the oil's chemistry varies by where and when it was grown, so the right GC-MS ranges depend on the true origin.

3. Which Swaps Should You Test For?

Start with the ones our evidence names.

- **Lavandin sold as lavender.** The swap Indian users flag ([r/IndianSkincareAddicts, April 2023](#)). The point this page adds is why the home tests fail. In the same thread an entry-level Indian lavender passed a drop test, which tells you nothing, because lavandin is a pure essential oil too and leaves no residue either. Only the composition separates them.
- **"Mysore" sandalwood.** A name that has largely left the trade, bought on paperwork and a santalol result. The [essential oils page](#) has the detail.
- **Anything sold as "pure" at a price that doesn't fit the crop.** That's a reason to test, not proof of a problem.

The GC-MS markers for each oil, lavender's camphor tell included, are on our [essential oils page](#), and the same "name is not provenance" problem for attars is on [is Kannauj attar really natural?](#)

4. What Should a Batch File Hold?

Build one for every lot, and don't release payment until it's complete.

1. **The supplier's GC-MS for this batch**, with the batch number matching the drum label and the invoice, and a test date after the oil was bulked.
2. **The country and, where possible, the distiller**, for this batch, in writing.
3. **Your own test of the first lot** from any new supplier, at a lab you choose, on a sample drawn from the actual drums. After that, test every few lots and whenever the supplier changes source.
4. **A sealed counter-sample** from each drum, kept until the stock is sold.

5. **The paperwork your market needs**, safety data sheet, IFRA certificate for fragrance use and, in the EU, the REACH position (all on the [essential oils page](#)).

Why insist on your own test? Because a supplier's report describes what was tested, not necessarily what was shipped, and US buyers of Indian botanicals already behave that way. One said of Indian and Chinese heavy-metal certificates, "it's probably wise to move the decimal point one place to the right" ([r/Nootropics, March 2020](#)). That's harsh, and dated, and the same thread said trust comes from a long relationship plus spot checks rather than blanket distrust. That's the right balance. Test hard at the start, then test less as the batches keep matching.

If you'd like someone to visit the distillery or trader, draw samples from the drums and send them to your lab before the oil ships, [SourcingSync](#) does that work in India.

Questions Buyers Ask

Is it a red flag if my supplier doesn't distil the oil? 

No. Traders are normal and useful for ranges. Ask where each batch came from and test it.

Can a drop or paper test tell me if lavender is real? 

Why does India import essential oils? 

How often should I test? 