

How Sea Freight Gets From Asia to You by Route, Transshipment Hub and Transit Time

[SourcingFrom](#)

Updated 28 Sept 2026 15 min read

How a container moves from an Asian factory to your port, how to read a carrier schedule, and why the quoted transit time so often slips. India is the worked example, based on our read of public schedules for 84 India lanes, with knitwear to Melbourne and carpets to Rotterdam worked through.

The Short Version

- Ask how many ships and where the box changes before you ask how many days.
- Every India to Australia and New Zealand routing we read was transshipped, at Singapore, Port Klang, Colombo or Tanjung Pelepas.
- Plan on the top of the carrier's range, plus inland days at each end and a week for clearance.
- Most last-minute rollovers out of India come from paperwork such as a late VGM, so put cut-offs in the PO.
- Name the Indian port the feeder loads at, not the hub that appears on US bills of lading.

In September 2026 an Indian freight forwarder posted about a box that should have taken 36 days. It was going from Nhava Sheva to Melbourne, and after the ship sailed the routing changed to Nhava Sheva, then Hong Kong, then Port Klang, then Melbourne. The transit became "almost 55 days" ([a forwarder on LinkedIn, Sep 2026](#)). Nobody lied to that importer. The quote was simply a number for one routing, and the box took another.



This guide follows a container from an Asian factory to your port, shows you how to read a carrier schedule, and explains why the number on the quote so often isn't the number on the calendar. India is the worked example, because we read the public schedules for 84 India lanes and counted what they show. One honest caveat - routings change weekly, so every day count here is dated, and the ones in the dated section at the end will move first.

1. The Five Moves Your Container Makes

A container makes five moves between the factory and your port. Only two of them are on the carrier's schedule, and the other three are where most surprises live.

The first is the inland leg. Goods go from the factory to a container freight station or an inland container depot (ICD), get stuffed and customs-cleared, then travel to the port by road or rail. In India this leg is long.

Ludhiana knitwear sits about 1,100 km in a straight line from Mundra, Jaipur handicrafts about 770 km, and Tiruppur hosiery 172 km from Cochin (our great-circle calculations from official cluster and port lists, Sep 2026, so the road is longer). Most boxes still go by truck, and only about 11.7% of containers at Nhava Sheva arrived by rail in August 2026 ([JNPA performance data](#), our calculation).

Then comes the port of loading, which is the port you name in an FOB term and the one the bill of lading should show. From there the box goes onto either a mainline ship that sails to your region, or a feeder, a smaller ship that carries it to a hub. From a south Indian port the first ship is very often a feeder.

The hub is where a box waits for its second ship. In the India schedules we read, the hubs were Colombo, Singapore, Port Klang, Tanjung Pelepas, Salalah, Jeddah, Tanger Med and Algeciras, plus Indian ports acting as relays for each other (Mundra, Nhava Sheva and Cochin). Last comes the discharge port, which isn't always the place on your booking, and then your own inland leg.

So when the Melbourne box went wrong, it went wrong at move four. The Indian leg and the port were fine. The hub changed.

2. Direct or Transshipped Is the Question That Sets Your Transit

A direct service is one ship from your port of loading to your discharge port. A transshipped routing is two or more ships with a hub in between, and the hub is where transit times stop being predictable. The second ship has its own schedule, and your box either makes the connection or waits for the next one.

Some lanes are always transshipped, whatever the sales call says. Every schedule we read for India to Australia transships, on all three carriers, at Singapore, Port Klang, Colombo or Tanjung Pelepas. One carrier prints it plainly: "cargo feedered to Australia via Port Kelang or Singapore". India to New Zealand is the same, and the NZ service schedule we printed on 25 September 2026 marks every Indian call "TRANSHIPPED Via Port Kelang". India to the US West Coast transshipped in every routing we saw, at 45 to 58 days median.

Other lanes do have a real direct option. On one carrier's public schedule, Nhava Sheva to Rotterdam is a single service at a 33-day median, Mundra to New York a single service at 30 days, and Nhava Sheva to Khor Fakkan a single service at 6 days.

Here's what should change your planning - the same lane can have two very different answers. On one carrier's routings, Nhava Sheva to Auckland showed a median of 66 days with a range of 51 to 80. On another carrier's Port Klang relay the same lane is 30 to 32 days, and nobody sails direct. The difference is the hub and how often the connection runs. Even the Indian port matters here, because on the first carrier Sydney is 31 days from Nhava Sheva and 48 from Pipavav, since Pipavav cargo relays through Cochin or Mundra before it even reaches the hub (carrier estimates, read 23 September 2026). Forwarders on the Oceania lanes say the time in August and September 2026 was lost at Singapore, Colombo and Port Klang, not at the Indian port (an Indian forwarder on LinkedIn, Aug 2026).



Lane	Routing	Transit seen
India to Australia	Always transshipped	Nhava Sheva to Sydney 25 to 33 days over seven sailings
India to New Zealand	Always transshipped	Auckland 30 to 32 days on a Port Klang relay, 51 to 80 on another carrier
India to US West Coast	Always transshipped	45 to 58 days median
Nhava Sheva to Rotterdam	Single service	33-day median
Mundra to New York	Single service	30 days
Nhava Sheva to Khor Fakkan	Single service	6 days

So skip "how many days" as the first question on any quote. Ask "how many ships, and where does my box change?"

3. How to Read a Carrier Schedule

A carrier schedule, whether it's a web tool or a printed PDF, gives you the same fields. You get the port of loading and its estimated time of departure (ETD), the discharge port and its estimated arrival (ETA), the vessel and voyage, a service code, the transit days, and whether there's a transshipment. Near the ETD sit the cut-offs, which are the deadlines for the cargo, the shipping instructions and the verified gross mass (VGM) declaration.

Before you trust it, know what it isn't. It's port to port, with nothing before the ship and nothing after it. It's an estimate, and the carrier says so. The public schedule we read describes its dates as estimates that are "subject to change without prior notice and are not guaranteed" (Hapag-Lloyd schedule wording, read 23 September 2026). The printed NZ schedule says "ALL DATES ARE ACCURATE AT THE TIME OF PRINTING AND ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE".

Read the range, not one sailing. Over six weeks, Nhava Sheva to Sydney ran 25 to 33 days across seven sailings, and Nhava Sheva to Fremantle ran 15 to 52. If your forwarder quotes the fastest sailing in the list then you've been handed a best case, and we'd push back on that every time.

The schedule also won't tell you the canal. No schedule we read says Suez or Cape, so a long transit to Europe might be a Cape routing, a long rotation or a slow relay, and the day count can't tell you which. "No sailing found" means that carrier in that window, not that nobody serves the lane. And a hub on the schedule is a port call, not a promise about how long the box sits there.

So ask your forwarder, in writing, for what a schedule can't give you – the first vessel and the second, the hub, the cargo, document and VGM cut-offs, and the free time at destination.

4. Why the Quoted Transit Time Isn't the Real One

Quotes slip for six reasons, and only one of them is a slow ship. The Melbourne box hit one of them. Most first-time importers hit two or three at once.

The commonest is reading port to port as door to door. Add the inland leg at origin, the days between gate-in and sailing, and customs plus biosecurity at your end. Then there's the tail. The schedule shows a spread, a booking lands on one sailing, and the slow sailings do exist.

Next is the roll. Forwarders working Indian ports say most last-minute rollovers come from paperwork, a late VGM or a wrong export manifest, not from a full ship (three practitioner voices on forums and LinkedIn, 2026). That's the one delay your supplier controls, so it belongs in your PO. On top of that, congestion at Nhava Sheva in mid-2026 was adding 3 to 9 days between port and freight station ([an Indian forwarder's trade advisory, Jul 2026](#)).

Then the missed connection at the hub, where the next ship on that service is often a week later. This is how a 30-day Auckland lane becomes a 60-day one.

Then the reroute after sailing, which is our Melbourne box. Services also move between Suez and the Cape at short notice. One carrier's India to US East Coast loop went back through Suez in August 2026, with about 7 days saved westbound and 14 eastbound, and the same [carrier advisory](#) keeps contingency plans to go back round the Cape "should the security situation change" (9 July 2026). When Gulf routes shut in March 2026, boxes were

dropped at Nhava Sheva and the cargo owners were billed storage, demurrage and war-risk charges before any reroute was offered (three voices on forums and LinkedIn, 2026).

Last is the late booking. Buyers used to China find that Indian sea bookings confirm slowly and that lines release rates only days before sailing (two voices in one forum thread, 2026). If you've planned your calendar on China booking speed then the first slip happens before anything is loaded.

Our planning rule is simple. Take the top of the carrier's range, not the median. Add the inland days your forwarder will commit to at each end, then add a week for clearance. A single number with no date, no range and no routing isn't a transit time. It is a guess.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

powered by [Kirnova](#) - the intelligence company

- 01 **India to Australia and New Zealand always transships.** Every routing we read, across three carriers, changed ships at Singapore, Port Klang, Colombo or Tanjung Pelepas, and the NZ schedule marks every Indian call as transhipped. Ask for the hub before the day count. (*ANL KIX southbound schedule, 25 Sep 2026, and our read of 84 India lanes on public carrier schedules, 23 to 25 Sep 2026.*)
 - 02 **The hub, not the carrier, sets the Auckland transit.** The same lane read 51 to 80 days on one carrier's routings and 30 to 32 on another's Port Klang relay. (*Our read of public carrier schedules, 23 Sep 2026.*)
 - 03 **"Colombo" on a US bill of lading hides an Indian feeder port.** 35% of India-origin knit T-shirt shipments and 47% of knit babywear to the US show Colombo as the port of lading, because the records name where the mother vessel loaded. Name the Indian port in your PO. (*Our count of US sea bills of lading via ImportYeti, 2015 to Sep 2026, US imports only.*)
-

04 Rollovers out of India are mostly paperwork. Forwarders say a late VGM or a wrong export manifest causes most last-minute rolls, which makes document cut-offs a supplier obligation you can write down. (*[r/freightforwarding, 2026, an Indian forwarder on LinkedIn, Jul 2026.](#)*)

05 When a route closes after sailing, the cargo owner pays by default. Gulf-bound boxes dropped at Nhava Sheva in March 2026 were billed storage and war-risk charges before any reroute. (*[r/logistics, 2026, an Indian exporter on LinkedIn, May 2026.](#)*)

What we don't know yet

- ☐ How often transshipped India boxes miss their hub connection. No carrier publishes it, and we won't estimate it.
- ☐ Which canal a given sailing uses, before it sails. Only the carrier's advisories say, service by service.

5. Name the Right Port of Loading

Your Incoterm carries a place name, and the place decides who pays for which leg. FOB names a port, and the seller's job ends when the goods are on board there. FCA names any place, and for an inland cluster that can be the ICD, so the rail leg and port handling sit inside one booking you control. The rules live on those two pages. What we add here is which port to write.

Name the port the feeder loads at, not the hub. US customs records name the foreign port where the mother vessel took the box, which is why Colombo shows up so often on Indian knitwear (point 3 in the box above). Tiruppur isn't trucking T-shirts to Sri Lanka. The feeder from Tuticorin, Cochin or Chennai just doesn't appear in the American data. If you copy "Colombo" from a bill of lading into an Indian PO then you've named a port your supplier can't deliver to.

Some products do have a gateway habit. In the same US records, 86% of hand-knotted carpet shipments loaded at Nhava Sheva, and 55% of both

wooden furniture and ceramic tile shipments loaded at Mundra. Those are strong defaults for a first PO, with the caveat that they describe US-bound cargo only.

The gateway changes the transit as much as the carrier does. On one carrier's schedule, Chennai beats Nhava Sheva to Rotterdam (25 days against 33) and to London Gateway (28 against 41). Nhava Sheva is the only Indian port with a single-service call at Khor Fakkan, Fujairah and Sohar, which makes it the UAE gateway. Mundra beats Nhava Sheva to New York and Savannah on the same direct service, and Pipavav is the slowest Gujarat option for Australia (carrier estimates, 23 September 2026).

Inland, name the ICD for a full container. For LCL it may not work, because a consolidation box often can't be stuffed at the ICD and the cargo trucks to the port anyway (one forwarder on a forum, 2026). Get your forwarder to confirm the stuffing point before you write the term.

One more check – the arrival date decides which duty rate applies at most borders, and a slower gateway can push you across a rate-change date. How that works is on [FTA duty phase-downs](#), and the duty itself is on [working out the real import duty](#).

6. Two Worked Lanes, Knitwear to Melbourne and Carpets to Rotterdam

Back to Melbourne, this time planned properly. Tiruppur has no container terminal of its own in the official lists we read. The nearest rail terminal is ICD Irugur in Coimbatore district, and the nearest gateways are Cochin at 172 km and Tuticorin at 278 km in a straight line. Say the forwarder feeders from Cochin. On one carrier's schedule, Cochin to Melbourne is a 35-day median with a range of 28 to 45, every sailing transshipped. Written properly, the transit line in your plan reads "28 to 45 days port to port via a Southeast Asian hub, plus the inland and clearance days the forwarder commits to".

That plan survives a 55-day reroute far better than a promise of 36. Australia's border checks, including biosecurity holds after customs has cleared, are on the [Australia page](#).

Carpets to Rotterdam work differently. The eastern UP carpet belt is 624 to 664 km from Kolkata and 1,207 to 1,377 km from the western ports in a straight line, and no official source says which way the carpets go. The US records answer it for US-bound cargo, with 86% loading at Nhava Sheva. From there, Rotterdam is a 33-day median on a single service. The schedule doesn't say Suez or Cape, so the PO says "FOB Nhava Sheva" and the freight booking says which canal.



The inland leg is changing too. The Western Dedicated Freight Corridor was completed on 31 March 2026 ([DFCCIL](#)) and JNPA ran its first long-haul double-stack train on 21 August 2026, so "Mundra is closer for the north" no longer settles the gateway on its own. What the EU checks on arrival is on the [EU page](#).

7. What to Put in Writing Before the Goods Leave

Most of the damage on this page happens because nothing was written down. Here's the short list we'd want on file for every first order –

- the vessel, the voyage and the hub, not just a day count
- the top of the range as your planning date, with the date the quote was given
- the document and VGM cut-offs as a supplier obligation in the PO
- who pays if the route closes after sailing, if you buy on CIF or DAP
- for a Gulf quote naming Jebel Ali, where the ship actually stops and whether the truck leg is inside the quoted days

Who should hold the booking matters as well. When the supplier's forwarder holds it, you're a stranger to the agent at your end, and an unpaid balance between two agents can hold your container. That choice is covered on the India export guide, and how the bill of lading ties to payment is on payment methods. Wooden pallets and crates bring their own border rules, which are on ISPM 15.

Ready to act

Need hands-on help?

Booking the freight in your own name, with the vessel, the hub and the cut-offs agreed before the goods leave the factory, is the part most first-time importers hand to someone else. If you'd rather have it run for you then SourcingSync does exactly that.

Talk to SourcingSync ↗

8. Current Routing as of 25 Sep 2026

We update this section in place. Everything above it stays true when it changes.

Red Sea and Suez (India to Europe and the US East Coast). Carriers are returning to Suez service by service. One carrier's India to US East Coast loop went back through Suez from August 2026, about 7 days faster westbound and 14 eastbound, with a new eastbound call at Jeddah and a plan to revert if security changes ([carrier advisory, 9 Jul 2026](#)). Nhava Sheva to Savannah is now 28 days, which the port authority says is 10 to 14 days faster than the Cape ([Georgia Ports Authority, 22 Sep 2026](#)). The Joint Maritime Information Center's view on 13 August was that "the threat to shipping remains substantial" ([Lloyd's List Intelligence, 13 Aug 2026](#)). Ask which routing your sailing uses.

Strait of Hormuz (the Gulf). Effectively closed to routine commercial transits. The monitor we read counted 1 commercial transit on 20 September against about 85 a day before the crisis (IMF PortWatch data relayed by a third-party monitor, because PortWatch served no readable page on 25 September, so this is Reported). Jebel Ali bookings discharge outside the Gulf at Khor Fakkan, Sohar or Fujairah, or at Jeddah, and finish by truck. Nhava Sheva to Khor Fakkan is 6 days on a single service, and to "Jebel Ali" about 11. UAE forwarders describe a bonded truck corridor of a few hours and a gate-in backlog at Jebel Ali of 4 to 7 days ([a UAE forwarder on LinkedIn, Mar 2026](#)). The [UAE page](#) has the current picture.

Australia and New Zealand. No chokepoint, always transshipped. Expect 25 to 36 days port to port to the Australian east coast on a good connection, with a tail past 50. Auckland is 30 to 32 days on a Port Klang relay and much longer on other routings (carrier schedules, 23 to 25 Sep 2026).

US West Coast. No chokepoint, always transshipped, at a 45 to 58 day median from Indian ports. That's longer than the East Coast from western

India.

UK. On the network we read, Felixstowe had almost no India sailings in a six-week window, so expect London Gateway or Southampton. From Chennai, London Gateway was 28 days, and from Nhava Sheva 41 (one carrier, 23 Sep 2026). What happens at the border is on the [UK page](#).

FAQ

Is a direct service always faster than a transshipped one? ^

Usually, not always. A direct service removes the hub risk, which is the biggest cause of slippage, but it doesn't guarantee the shortest count. A good relay to Auckland at 30 days beats every other routing we saw, because there is no direct call.

Can I choose the transshipment hub? v

Why does my India to Australia quote change every week? v

Should I ask whether my ship goes through Suez or round the Cape? v

9. Next Steps

- Pick your destination page for the border rules: [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), [UK](#), [UAE](#), [EU](#), [US](#).
- Write the term with the right place: [FOB](#) at the loading port or [FCA](#) at the inland depot.
- Put the routing, the range and the date into the [landed-cost calculator](#) so the freight line carries the same caveats as the quote.

- See which Indian port serves which cluster on Locations, and how an order runs end to end in how to source from India.
- Related reading: Mundra or Nhava Sheva?, why south Indian cargo ships via Colombo and how long shipping from India to Australia takes.

The forwarder's Melbourne post ended on customer complaints. Yours doesn't have to, if the plan said 45 days and the box took 45.