

Why Your Tiruppur Shipment Says Colombo

Yash Khatri

Founder, SourcingFrom

Updated 12 Oct 2026 6 min read

Much South Indian cargo shows Colombo as its port of loading because it travels on a feeder ship from Tuticorin, Cochin or Chennai and joins the ocean vessel in Sri Lanka. North and west Indian cargo mostly sails direct from Nhava Sheva or Mundra. The relay does not change origin, but it affects your Incoterm risk, your trade agreement paperwork and your transit time.

Key takeaways

- Colombo is the recorded port of loading for 47.4% of India-origin US sea shipments of knit babywear and 34.6% of knit T-shirts.
- Under FOB Tuticorin, risk passes to you at the Indian feeder port, so your insurance should start there.
- A routine Colombo relay does not change the country of origin, but check the direct transport proof your agreement wants.
- For the US east coast the west Indian ports are quicker. For Europe the South Indian relay can win.
- Ask for the feeder vessel name, the hub and a bill of lading showing the Indian port of loading.

You bought T-shirts from Tamil Nadu, and the shipping record says they left from Sri Lanka. Relax, nobody swapped your factory. This post explains why so much South Indian cargo "loads" at Colombo, what the north and west of India do instead, and the three places it actually touches your money.



I'll lean on two things we built ourselves – a count of US import records for 21 Indian product lines, and our map of which Indian clusters use which ports. One caveat. The shipment-level numbers come from US records, because the US is the only big market that publishes them. The routing logic applies just as much if you're in Melbourne or Manchester.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

powered by Kirnova – the intelligence company

- 01 Colombo is the recorded port of loading for 47.4% of India-origin US sea shipments of knit babywear, 35.2% of sweaters, 34.6% of knit T-shirts, 32.4% of woven babywear and 28.4% of pepper and chilli. For north and west Indian lines (carpets, tiles, furniture, brass, imitation jewellery) it's 3.4% or less. (Our read of US bill-of-lading records as published by ImportYeti, 23 Sep 2026 · Verified count)**
-

02 **Chennai doesn't appear at all** as a port of loading for Indian T-shirts, knit babywear, bed linen, bags or leather shoes in those records, and Cochin shows up in only one line (ginger, turmeric and other spices, 2.9%). *(Same records · Verified count)*

03 **All 8 Tamil Nadu and Kerala makers we read had Colombo as their top port of loading**, at 28% to 76% of their US bills. Tuticorin was the only Tamil Nadu port that appeared directly. *(Same records · Verified count, route reading Indicative)*

What we don't know yet

- ❑ The Indian port each Colombo box actually started from. US records name the port where the ocean ship took the box, not the feeder port before it.
- ❑ Equivalent figures for cargo to Australia, the UK, the EU or the UAE, which don't publish shipment records.

1. The Short Answer: Feeder Ships

The big ships that cross to America and Europe don't call at every Indian port. Many South Indian boxes start on a small feeder vessel from Tuticorin, Cochin or Chennai, cross to Colombo in a day or two, and get lifted onto the ocean-going "mother" vessel there. US customs records the foreign port where the box boarded the ship that arrived in the US. So Colombo goes on the record and the Indian port quietly drops off it (our analysis of US bill-of-lading records).



That's why Chennai, a busy port with a whole leather and electronics belt behind it, is invisible in US data for T-shirts, babywear, bed linen, bags and shoes. The port isn't idle. The records are just looking at the second ship. We tell that story from the port's side on [Chennai port](#), so I won't repeat it here.

Colombo isn't the only relay either. Salalah in Oman shows up as the port of loading on 14.4% of Indian knit babywear and 10.4% of leather shoes bound for the US (same records). Same idea, different hub.

2. The North And West Don't Do This

Flip to the other side of India and the pattern disappears. Hand-knotted carpets from the Bhadohi belt load at Nhava Sheva on 85.7% of US shipments. Ceramic tiles from Morbi load at Mundra on 55.3%, and furniture, mostly Jodhpur, at Mundra on 54.6% (US bill-of-lading records, our count). For those lines Colombo is 3.4% or less.

The reason is simple geography. Nhava Sheva and Mundra get direct mainline calls to the US and Europe. On the carrier schedule we read in September 2026, Mundra to New York was 30 days and Mundra to Savannah 36, both on a single ship. Tuticorin to Savannah was a median of 50.5 days, every sailing through a hub (one carrier's public schedule, departures from 24 Sep 2026, Indicative).

So the same "India" on your purchase order can mean a direct sailing or a relay, depending on which coast your maker sits on. That's worth knowing before you compare two quotes. Our [sea freight routes](#) guide has the full lane-by-lane picture.

3. Where It Touches Your Money: The Incoterm

Here's the bit people miss. If your supplier quotes FOB Tuticorin, risk passes to you when the goods are loaded on the feeder at Tuticorin, not at Colombo. Anything that happens on the feeder, in the Colombo yard, or during a missed connection is on your side of the line, and on your cargo insurance (see [FOB](#)).



That isn't a reason to avoid FOB. It's a reason to make sure your insurance starts at the Indian port, and that your forwarder tells you the hub before you book. A box sitting a week in Colombo waiting for a mother vessel is still your box.

Do you buy CIF or DAP instead? Then the seller carries more of that leg, and the hub becomes their problem until the point your term says otherwise. Either way, ask which hub before you sign.

4. Where It Touches Your Paperwork

The good news first. A relay at Colombo doesn't change the country of origin. Your T-shirts were made in India, the certificate of origin says India, and a few days in a Sri Lankan port doesn't make them Sri Lankan.

The part to check is your trade agreement's transport rule. Most preferential deals want goods shipped directly, or through a third country without any processing beyond unloading and reloading. A routine Colombo relay normally fits inside that, but the proof your customs wants (a through bill of lading, sometimes a hub document) varies by agreement. Check this with your customs broker before the first shipment, not after it's held. Our [certificate of origin](#) guide covers the paperwork side.

And ask for a bill of lading that shows the Indian port of loading. If your documents and the arrival record disagree, it's much easier to explain with the feeder leg on paper.

5. Where It Touches Your Calendar

Every relay adds a connection that can slip. Through August and September 2026 the hubs at Colombo, Singapore and Port Klang were congested, which is why quotes on transshipped lanes moved week to week (carrier advisories, as summarised on [sea freight routes](#)). The Indian leg is usually the stable part. The wait is at the hub.

It isn't always slower, mind you. For Europe the South Indian relay can win. On the same carrier, Chennai to Rotterdam was a median of 25 days and Tuticorin 30, against 33 from Nhava Sheva (one carrier's public schedule, September 2026, Indicative). For the US east coast the west Indian ports are quicker. So the question isn't "is Colombo bad?" It's "which hub, and how long does my box usually sit there?"

Lane (one carrier, September 2026, Indicative)	Median days	Routing
Mundra to New York	30	Direct
Mundra to Savannah	36	Direct
Tuticorin to Savannah	50.5	Via a hub
Chennai to Rotterdam	25	Varies by sailing
Tuticorin to Rotterdam	30	Varies by sailing
Nhava Sheva to Rotterdam	33	Varies by sailing

If you're juggling feeder bookings, hub dwell and a supplier 300 km inland, [SourcingSync](#) can run the freight side and keep the paperwork straight for you.

6. Tiruppur, Specifically

Our cluster map lists Tiruppur's likely gateways as Cochin, Tuticorin and Chennai, from distance and rail links ([Tiruppur knitwear cluster](#)). The US records can't settle the order, because a Cochin or Chennai feeder would also show up as Colombo. What they do show is that Tuticorin is the only Tamil Nadu port that appears directly, and that forwarders registered in Tuticorin are among the ten largest named T-shirt shippers (US bill-of-lading records, our count). Our port-side notes are on [Tuticorin port](#).

So when your Tiruppur maker says "we ship from Tuticorin" and your US record says Colombo, both are telling the truth. Ask for the feeder vessel name and the hub on the booking, and you'll never be confused by it again.

Related reading: [Mundra or Nhava Sheva, how long shipping from India to Australia takes](#) and [choosing a freight forwarder](#).

Colombo on the paperwork is just South India's normal commute to the ocean. Know your hub, start your insurance at the Indian port, and the Sri Lankan stopover stops being a mystery.