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How long does it take to ship from China?

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6–8 minutes



It can take anything from a few days to well over a month to ship goods from China to destinations around the world. It ultimately comes down to cost and the transportation methods available to the destination.

In this article, we compare lead times for the following transportation alternatives:

- Air express

- Air economy
- Air ePackets
- Railway freight
- Sea freight

Further, we also answer some of the most common questions about delivery times and how to minimize delays at the end of the article.

COVID-19 Update

This article was originally published in late 2018. In other words, well before COVID-19 and its economic windfall wreaked havoc on supply chains. Freight rates skyrocketed in late 2020 as a result of demand exceeding the available container capacity.

This trend has then continued well into 2021 and has even gotten worse as a result of outbreaks reducing port capacity and personnel availability. This is not only resulting in higher freight rates – but also having a severe impact on freight times when importing products from China.

The problem is not that vessels are all of a sudden moving slower, but the delays in booking and loading cargo. In the past, cargo could be loaded on a ship or plane within the same week. These days, it's not rare that it takes 2 or even 3 weeks.

Delays also affect air express and parcel deliveries but to a lesser extent.



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- Best Regards, Ivan Mallocci

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Sea freight lead times

Shipping by sea is the slowest method to transport goods from China to destinations around the world. Yet it's also the most cost-effective.

This is an overview of the port-to-port delivery time from Hong Kong, to destinations in the US, Europe, and the Asia Pacific.

- Hong Kong – Los Angeles, USA: 20 days
- Hong Kong – New York, USA: 32 days
- Hong Kong – Felixstowe, UK: 29 days
- Hong Kong – Hamburg, Germany: 30 days
- Hong Kong – Singapore: 5 days
- Hong Kong – Sydney, Australia: 12 days

It takes about a month for cargo to reach destinations in Western Europe or the US East Coast. That said, you need to add at least another 7 days, sometimes more, to account for the time it takes to load and unload the cargo in both ports.

Airfreight lead times

In terms of volume, air freight only makes up a fraction of the goods transported internationally. In terms of value, however, it's around 30% of the total.

This is explained by one thing; speed to market. [FedEx, DHL, TNT, and other air freight companies](#) can deliver a parcel or box from anywhere in China to destinations worldwide, in only a few days. That said, speed comes at a cost.

Airfreight can be up to ten times more expensive per shipped unit, compared to sea freight. But, you don't necessarily have to book

express air freight. If you can wait a few more days, economy air freight might be a better option.

- Express Air Freight: 3 – 4 days
- Economy Air Freight: 7 – 12 days

ePacket Delivery Time

Some Chinese suppliers also [offer ePacket deliveries](#). While these may be phased out in the future, ePacket delivery allows companies to ship small parcels for next to nothing. But, with a delivery time between 2 to 4 weeks. This is the method used by most dropshippers in China.

Fulfillment Centers

Ecommerce companies are increasingly utilizing fulfillment centers in Hong Kong and Mainland China to deliver products to international customers. Rather than first shipping the cargo to your country, its transported to nearby Hong Kong and made available for global fulfillment within a matter of days.

Most fulfillment centers can offer both express and economy air freight. ePacket delivery can also be offered by some fulfillment centers in Hong Kong, which is [further detailed in this article](#).

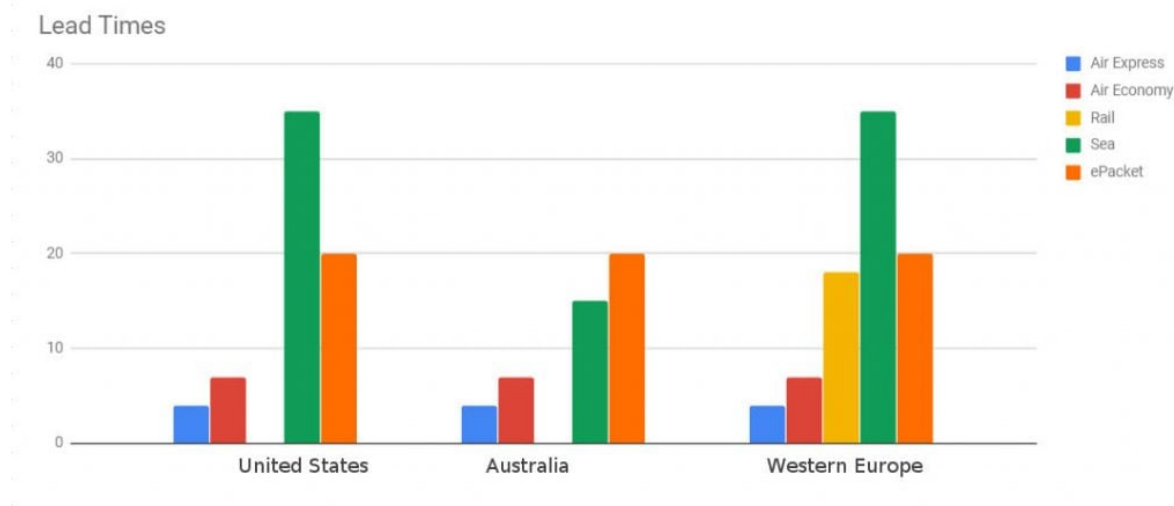
Railway freight lead times

[Railway freight has risen from obscurity](#) to an attractive complement to sea and air freight, on the China-Europe route. Railway freight is in between sea and air freight, in terms of cost and transportation time.

This is an overview of railway freight lead times [from Yiwu, Zhejiang](#), to various destinations in Europe:

- Yiwu – Berlin: 17 days
- Yiwu – London: 18 days
- Yiwu – Madrid: 21 days

Lead Time Comparison



Questions & Answer

How can I speed up the delivery time from China?

Air express is the fastest method to transport goods from your Chinese supplier. Yet, it's also the most expensive mode of transportation. Railway freight is a fast and alternative option for European companies. For US and Australian businesses, air economy freight is the only way to move goods fast and relatively cheaply.

We've also noted that many of our customers apply a mix of sea and air freight, to enjoy the benefits of speed and low costs. This

can be achieved by dividing the shipment into one smaller lot, delivered by air economy, and the bulk delivered by sea freight.

As such, you can start selling your products only a week after the production is completed, while you don't need to waste money on expensive air freight.

Can some freight forwarders offer faster freight options?

Freight forwarders can generally arrange air express delivery. That said, there are no freight companies that arrange to ship on faster vessels or arrange priority customs clearance.

At best you can find that some freight forwarders are more responsive than others, and thereby reduce the overall lead time.

Are some ports in China faster to ship from than others?

Shipping from Hong Kong to Hamburg is faster than Tianjin to Hamburg, simply due to geography. That being said, I am not aware of any differences in terms of lead times between different ports in China. The best practice is generally to ship your cargo from a nearby seaport.

Why is sea freight so slow?

Container ships traversing the oceans are obviously slower than aircraft. Furthermore, loading and unloading containers is also a time-consuming process that adds to the overall delivery time.

Is railway freight faster than sea freight?

Sea freight normally takes 35 days from China to Western Europe, when accounting for the additional time it takes to load and unload the cargo in both the port of loading and the port of destination.

Railway freight on the same route only takes 18 to 20 days, which is considerable [given that the cost is comparable to sea freight](#).