

Container shipping from Asia to the US just got more expensive

Freightos cites frontloading ahead of Lunar New Year

[Stuart Chirls](#)

Friday, January 10, 2025



Container vessels operated by Maersk and other carriers loading at the Port of Yantian, China.
(Photo: Shutterstock)

Frontloading by shippers ahead of Lunar New Year helped boost container rates on trans-Pacific services to the United States as 2025 got underway.

“Transpacific container rates climbed sharply to start the year on GRIs [general rate increases] supported by pre-Lunar New Year demand,” wrote Judah Levine, head of research, in a weekly update for analyst Freightos.

The Freightos Baltic Index found Asia-U.S. West Coast prices increased 23% to \$5,929 per forty-foot equivalent unit for the week ended Jan. 3.

Asia-U.S. East Coast rates were up 13% to \$6,934 per FEU.

Levine noted that the trans-Pacific rate analysis was unrelated to the labor situation on the U.S. East Coast. The Freightos update was released prior to the announcement Wednesday of [a tentative contract agreement](#) between the International Longshoremen’s Association and the United States Maritime Alliance. The pact covers 25,000 dockworkers in container operations at 14 Eastern Seaboard and Gulf Coast ports and maritime centers.

“West Coast prices are already 20% higher than their Lunar New Year peak last year and East Coast rates 3% higher,” Levine wrote. “Volumes are likely already stronger than usual on some frontloading ahead of expected tariff hikes. Though some carriers are considering an additional GRI mid-month, there is skepticism that another increase attempt would succeed so close to the holiday period.”

Factories in Asia close for several weeks for the Lunar New Year celebration, which begins Jan. 29.

Rates for containers moving from Asia to Europe and the Mediterranean saw moderate gains after significant increases in November and into early December, wrote Levine, as Lunar New Year demand started earlier than usual due to longer lead times from Red Sea diversions.

Asia-North Europe prices increased 8% to \$5,558 per FEU, and Asia-Mediterranean rates gained 3% to \$5,630.

“The pre-holiday rush, as well as some bad weather, is already leading to increased congestion and equipment shortages in China – with delays of up to four days in Shanghai, Qingdao and Ningbo – and in the Philippines and Vietnam as well.

“Labor shortages and strikes in some areas are also leading to congestion and delays at European hubs like Hamburg and Rotterdam as well as ports in Spain and Italy. These factors could cause additional upward pressure on rates leading up to Lunar New Year.”

The planned multi-day strikes are expected to have varying effects on port, rail and airport services.

Levine predicts rates out of Asia should ease as seasonal demand decreases later in February and into March.

“For Asia-Europe trade, prices may fall back to the \$3,000-\$4,000/FEU Red Sea-adjusted floor reached last March and again in October, though for the transpacific continued frontloading ahead of expected tariffs could keep rates from easing as significantly,” he noted.

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