

China Rejects Giant Shipment of Chilean Cherries That Got Stranded at Sea



Maersk Saltoro (Hafen Hamburg / Dietmar Hasenpusch)

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The worst fears of Chile's cherry growers have come to pass: Chinese customs authorities have rejected a huge shipment that got stranded at sea when the *Maersk Saltoro* broke down in the Pacific. About \$60-130 million worth of cherries were stuck on board the vessel, and some or all of them will have to be thrown away.

Maersk Saltoro, a sister ship of the *Dali*, was chartered to Maersk and was deployed on the seasonal "Cherry Express" run from Chile to China. Cherries sell well during China's Lunar New Year celebrations, and the special-purpose boxship rotation handled about 17,000 containers of Chilean fruit this year.

Unfortunately, about 1,300 of those containers were aboard *Maersk Saltoro*. The boxship broke down in the Pacific in January, about 500 nautical miles off Pohnpei.

Maersk Saltoro drifted for three weeks, and only resumed her transit after a team of technicians came out by tugboat to join her and make repairs. The breakdown delayed the arrival of the cherry cargo until after the lucrative Lunar New Year sales window: She arrived in port 28 days late, long after peak seasonal pricing had subsided.

The shipment's value now appears to be much reduced: Although the cargo stayed refrigerated throughout the voyage, a substantial share was in spoiled condition on arrival. Chinese customs initially rejected the entire shipment and ordered it destroyed or re-exported, but the Chilean Cherry Committee has been in talks with customs officials in order to [optimize](#) the quantity slated for disposal.

Chinese customs officials will inspect every container, and all those marked as inedible will be taken to a designated disposal site, according to FreshPlaza.

Maersk Saltoro previously drew attention last year when U.S. officials boarded it in Baltimore to conduct an inspection. The vessel is a sister ship to the *Dali*, the boxship that lost power and destroyed Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge.