How do our goods get to the shops?

Understanding global ocean trade and its impact on the world.
Did you know your bedroom contains things from all over the world?

How do teenagers in Los Angeles wear Ugg boots made in Australia, students in London receive iPods from China for their birthdays, or kids in Rotterdam eat Ecuadorian bananas for lunch?
So how does that work?

- Container shipping is the main way to transport goods around the world – it enables global trade.

- Everything from door handles and strawberries, to make-up and computers, have seen the inside of a container. Without container shipping connecting the world we would not have the variety of goods we have today!
Container shipping is different from conventional shipping because it uses ‘containers’ of various sizes – 20 foot (6.09 m), 40 foot (12.18 m), 45 foot (13.7 m), 48 foot (14.6 m), and 53 foot (16.15 m) – to load, transport, and unload goods.

Container shipping is a highly efficient method of transporting goods. The container has made it possible for large ships to be designed to transport huge quantities of material, increasing global trade dramatically.

Container ports are specially designed to load and unload the containers quickly and efficiently. This makes the import and export of goods affordable for manufacturers and traders.

Before the invention of container shipping, goods were unpacked and loaded onto the ships at the port, taking up much more time, manpower and money.
What can container ships carry?
Facts about containers ....

A single container can hold 24,914 tin cans.

- Container capacity is measured in twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU). This is the size of the standard 20-foot long (6.09 m) container.
- Another standard size is the forty-foot (12.18 m) container (i.e. two TEUs). A forty-foot equivalent unit (FEU) can be loaded with about 20 tons of cargo.
In addition to standard containers, there are also specialized types of equipment:

- Open tops are used for easy load of cargo such as logs, machinery and odd sized goods.

- Flat racks can be used for boats, vehicles, machinery or industrial equipment.

- Open sides may be used for vegetables such as onions and potatoes.

- Tank containers transport many types of liquids such as chemicals, wine and vegetable oil.
How can container ships keep our food fresh?

Have you ever wondered how you can eat lamb from New Zealand or sea food from Norway?

• Special reefer containers exist that can control temperatures, allowing everything from meat, fruit and vegetables, to dairy products, chemicals and pharmaceuticals to travel across the world.

• Reefers can keep goods frozen at temperatures as low as -60°C. However, they can also preserve goods at warmer temperatures if that is necessary.

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How do they fit the boxes on the ship?

- The containers are stacked on the ship with up to 10 containers stacked on top of each other on deck. Below the deck a ship can stack up to 10 containers on top of each other.

- To make sure that the containers stay in place during the voyage, twist locks are used to connect the containers. A twist lock is a device used for connecting two containers at the corner posts through an interlocking mechanism.

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What are the advantages of container shipping?

- It allows us to meet the needs of the world’s growing population by importing and exporting goods.
- It provides consumers with more choice.
- It lets us experience goods from entirely different cultures.
- It helps modern industries such as electronics and clothing to flourish.
- It connects countries, peoples and markets.
- It boosts economies and increases employment.

To give you an example: China has become one of the main suppliers to the world and handles more containers than any other nation.
Why don’t we just transport goods by airplane – isn’t that faster?

Container shipping is the most efficient way to transport large volumes of goods across the world.

While airplanes are faster, container ships can carry more goods in one trip. It would take hundreds of airplanes to carry all the goods that can fit on just one large container ship.

Transporting goods by container ship is also better for the environment.

It is estimated that on average a container ship emits around 40 times less CO2 than a large freight aircraft and three times less than a heavy truck.

Container shipping is also estimated to be two and a half times more energy efficient than rail and 7 times more so than road.
Few people know very much about container shipping, but the scale of the industry is huge and involves the whole world. The ships themselves are also massive in size.

Big, impressive facts that you might not know...

- The world’s biggest container ships are about 1,300 feet long - that’s nearly 400 meters or the distance around an Olympic running track.

- Many container ships can comfortably carry more than 10,000 containers.

- Container ships have the capacity to carry several warehouses-worth of goods.
How did container shipping start?

For as long as people have been sailing the oceans they have been trading with other countries. The great empires of the world, from the Egyptians to the British Empire, were all built on ocean trade.

- As far back as 1792, boxes similar to modern containers emerged in England and these were transported with horse and wagon and later moved via rail.

- The U.S. government used containers during the Second World War.

- Modern container shipping begun in 1956, when Malcolm McLean, a trucking entrepreneur from North Carolina, U.S., bought a steamship company with the idea of transporting entire truck trailers with their cargo still inside.

- Various companies in the U.S. began to adopt containerisation. In 1966, the vessel Fairland owned by Sea-Land sailed from the U.S. to Rotterdam in the Netherlands with 256 containers. This was the first international voyage of a container ship.

- During the 1970s container shipping expanded dramatically and ports were established in every continent in the world. This was the beginning of the expansion that made container shipping the backbone of global trade.
You probably do not realise the incredible journey your clothes have been on – even the t-shirt you wear has been on a global adventure.

The cotton is grown in Africa...

... loaded into containers and transported to factories in China, where it is spun, woven and made into a variety of t-shirts.
... containers full of t-shirts are then shipped to Europe and the U.S., where they are placed in shops for consumers to buy.
Now you know how your favorite things are transported to stores all over the world!

The next time you buy something, take a look at the label to see where it is produced and imagine the incredible journey it has made around the world.
Want to learn more about the shipping industry?

Check out www.worldshipping.org to read all about global ocean trade!