

1,400,000,000 Tons of Cargo! Ningbo Zhoushan Port Tops Global Rankings for 17th Straight Year

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By sustaining record volumes amid slowing trade and geopolitical uncertainty, the Ningbo Zhoushan Port is redefining what scale, resilience and connectivity mean in global shipping.

At a moment when global maritime trade is losing momentum and supply chains are under constant strain from geopolitical shocks and shifting trade policies, one port on China's eastern seaboard has continued to defy gravity.

In 2025, the Ningbo Zhoushan Port handled more than 1.4 billion metric tons of cargo, a figure that possibly positions it to remain the world's busiest port by total cargo throughput for the 17th consecutive year. No other port group in the world has crossed the one-billion-ton threshold, let alone sustained it.

The numbers only tell part of the story. In 2025, the port handled more than 43 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers, crossing the 40 million mark for the first time and securing its position as the world's third largest container port. These figures highlight not just the sheer volume of goods passing through, but also the port's and, by extension, the city's and nation's growing central role in sustaining the global economy.

"1.4 billion tons is a milestone," said a senior port official. "But more importantly, it reflects the depth of integration between this port and global trade, and the resilience of that integration under pressure."

A Port Built on Strategy

Ningbo Zhoushan Port's sustained dominance is not the result of a single boom year, but of long-term planning and heavy investment in infrastructure, logistics and connectivity.

Under a development blueprint described as "one port, two cores and twenty zones," the port has accelerated the construction of five container terminal clusters each capable of handling 10 million TEUs annually, alongside three bulk cargo terminal clusters designed for throughput exceeding 100 million tons each.

By 2025, this strategy was bearing visible fruit. The Chuanshan and



Ningbo Zhoushan Port Chuanshan Terminal. Photo by Du Juan

Meishan container terminals, the world's only pair of "twin" 10-million-TEU terminals operating within the same port, were running at full capacity. So too was the Shulanghu ore transhipment terminal, the only facility globally capable of simultaneously berthing and unloading two 400,000-ton ultra-large ore carriers.

Additional projects, including upgrades at the Dapukou container terminal and accelerated construction at Daxie, Fodu and Meishan, have expanded the port's deep water and specialized terminal capacity, laying a solid foundation for sustained growth.

Perhaps the most consequential breakthrough came beneath the waterline.

On December 26, 2025, the Tiaozhounen Channel expansion project entered trial operation, enabling 300,000-ton vessels to pass through a newly upgraded waterway. The completion effectively ushered the port's core area into a "dual-channel" era, increasing ultra-large vessel traffic capacity by more than 50 percent.

The expanded channels now allow the world's largest 200,000-ton container ships to transit around the clock, while 300,000-ton crude oil tankers can enter and leave on tidal windows. The upgrade eased a long-standing bottleneck caused by reliance on a single main channel, significantly boosting efficiency and operational resilience.

A Global Web of Routes

Infrastructure alone does not make a global hub. Connectivity does.

As a key node on the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, Ningbo Zhoushan Port has spent years weaving an ever-denser web of shipping routes and inland logistics links, positioning itself as a critical junction between China's domestic economy and international markets.

By the end of 2025, the port operated 309 container shipping routes, linking more than 700 ports in over 200 countries and regions. Nearly 300 cargo vessels called at the port each day, and its global port connectivity index ranked second worldwide.

Equally transformative has been the expansion of sea-rail intermodal transport, which has extended the port's reach far beyond the coastline. More than 110 sea-rail routes now link the port to 69 prefecture-level cities across 16 province-level divisions, supported by a network of 40 inland dry ports. In 2025 alone, sea-rail volumes exceeded 2 million TEUs, effectively extending China's gateway to the sea deep into the interior.

The port has also pushed forward with institutional opening. Several terminals in the Chuanshan and Meishan port areas were opened to international shipping in 2025, including the full opening of 11 container berths at Chuanshan, adding 3,740 meters of open

shoreline for foreign vessels.

Beyond China's borders, Ningbo Zhoushan Port has accelerated its overseas footprint. Logistics hubs in Germany and Dubai have become anchors for an expanding international service network, while new overseas offices in Singapore and Japan signal ambitions to operate not just as a port, but as a global logistics service provider. Participation in international port and shipping forums has further raised the port's profile, enabling it to export technical and management standards alongside cargo.

Beyond the Numbers

For Ningbo Zhoushan Port, 1.4 billion tons marks both a culmination and a new beginning.

The figure measures weight, but what it truly reflects is capacity — the capacity of a port to absorb shocks, adapt to uncertainty and continue to anchor global trade flows. In an era when the assumptions of globalization are being tested, the port's rise offers a counterpoint: that scale, when paired with strategy, openness and innovation, can still deliver resilience.

Even as container volumes surged, 2025 tested the port's adaptability in bulk commodities, where demand for iron ore, crude oil and grain softened. The port responded by dynamically reallocating berths and storage resources, ensuring the steady flow of strategic materials vital to China's economy.

At the same time, it expanded higher-value services. The annual volume of blended ore processing exceeded 10 million tons for the first time, reinforcing the port's role as a global hub for bulk commodity logistics rather than a mere transit point.

As global shipping navigates choppy waters, Ningbo Zhoushan Port's experience suggests that the future of ports lies not just in how much they handle, but in how deeply they connect — to hinterlands, to markets, and to the evolving rhythms of the world economy.