

## Amritsar emerges as a hotspot for counterfeit cigarette smuggling

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Amritsar: The holy city of Amritsar is rapidly emerging as a preferred destination for counterfeit cigarette smugglers, who choose to arrive at Amritsar via its International Airport. Counterfeit cigarettes of various Indian as well as international brands command high demand not only in Punjab, but also in neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, said a source.

The back-to-back seizures of more than 225,000 sticks of counterfeit cigarettes — valued at approximately ₹38 lakh — on Nov 17 and 18 at Sri Guru Ram Dass Ji International Airport, have highlighted the extent to which the airport has become a hotspot for smugglers, including leisure travellers returning from Cambodia.

A senior customs official informed that all the cigarettes seized at the airport are manufactured in Cambodia and are routed into India via Kuala Lumpur. "The extraordinarily high profit margins not only attract organised cigarette smugglers, but also tempt leisure travellers visiting Cambodia. Many such travellers, influenced by the potential gains, return with cartons of cigarettes," he said, adding that certain brands of cigarettes fetch over 600% margin.

The source informed that Cambodia has increasingly become a recognised hub for the production and trafficking of illegal, counterfeit cigarettes. Weak regulatory oversight, corruption, and limited enforcement capacity have allowed these illicit operations to flourish. Counterfeit cigarette manufacturing units operate within the country, supplying both domestic markets and international destinations, including parts of the European Union. He also mentioned that cheap counterfeit cigarettes are sold tax-free and without mandated health warnings. The source revealed that arrests in smuggling cases are typically made only when the value of the seized goods exceeds ₹50 lakh. Aware of this threshold, smugglers intentionally transport consignments of lower value to avoid arrest. However, in cases involving smuggled cigarettes, the goods are still confiscated, and legal proceedings are initiated as per law.

A local cigarette shop owner shared that there is extremely high demand for foreign cigarette brands—such as Marlboro—from buyers in Himachal Pradesh. The consistent and growing demand from these regions has contributed to the steady flow of smuggled cigarettes into Amritsar.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/amritsar-emerges-as-a-hotspot-for-counterfeit-cigarette-smuggling/articleshowprint/125444046.cms?val=3728>