MAISON VOISINE

Trade intermediation — tableware and home décor

The Indian market

for tableware and home décor

What changed in 2026, and why French houses should be looking at it now

August 2026

Summary

On 27 January 2026, the European Union and India concluded negotiations on the largest free trade agreement ever signed by either party. Ceramics are explicitly named among the industrial products on which India is removing its high duties.

But the essential point lies elsewhere. Contrary to a widespread belief, Indian taxation has never been a prohibitive obstacle for a French workshop piece. Our calculations show that an item selling for €192 in France is priced today at around €258 in India — a difference of 34%, entirely ordinary for a homeware product on a distant market. Once the agreement enters into force, expected during 2027, that gap will fall to roughly 10%.

What actually stops goods at the Indian border is not fiscal. It is regulatory, and it is poorly understood.

1. The EU–India agreement: the facts

Negotiations were opened in 2007, suspended in 2013, relaunched in 2022, and concluded on 27 January 2026 in New Delhi.

What the agreement provides

— 90% of tariff lines eliminated or reduced between the two parties

— On the Indian side: 86% of tariff lines eliminated, giving coverage of 96.6% of trade once partial liberalisations are included

— €4 billion in annual duty savings for European operators

— An increase in European goods sales to India estimated at +107.6% by 2032 by the European Commission

— Ceramics are named explicitly among the industrial products on which India is removing its high duties

— An intellectual property protection chapter: copyright, trade marks, designs and models, trade secrets

— A separate agreement on geographical indications is being negotiated in parallel

The timetable

The conclusion of negotiations is not entry into force. Legal revision, translation, signature, the consent of the European Parliament and a Council decision are still to come. On the Indian side, ratification is a matter for the executive and does not go through Parliament. The EU chief negotiator points to application in the second quarter of 2027.

For a French house, this means one simple thing: the work of selection, qualification and introduction takes twelve to eighteen months.

Houses that start today will be in place on the day the agreement applies. Those that wait for entry into force will start at that moment, at the same time as everyone else.

2. What entering India really costs

This is the least well understood aspect of the Indian market, and the one that wrongly discourages the greatest number of houses.

The mechanics

The Indian distributor pays three lines when the goods enter the country:

Line	Basis of assessment	Standard rate
Basic Customs Duty (BCD)	CIF value	20% for most household goods
Social Welfare Surcharge	Amount of customs duty	10% of the duty
IGST	CIF + duty + surcharge	18%

The point almost no one makes: IGST is not a cost. An Indian operator registered for GST recovers it in full as an input tax credit, under section 16 of the CGST Act. It is set off against the tax collected on the sale.

The final cost is therefore not the sum of the three lines, but only the first two — around 22% of the CIF value at the standard rate.

What this looks like on a real object

Take a workshop piece with an ex-works price of €80, applying an identical distribution mark-up in France and in India.

	France	India today	India after the agreement
Freight and insurance	—	12%	12%
Customs duty	—	20%	0%
Surcharge	—	10% of the duty	—
VAT / GST	20%	18%	18%
Retail price	**€192**	**€258**	**€212**
Difference vs France	**—**	**+34%**	**+10%**

A 34% difference between two markets 7,000 kilometres apart is a normal difference. It is the order of magnitude the luxury sector has applied between Europe and Asia for twenty years, without it ever having prevented a market from working.

Put another way: of the €178 separating the ex-works price from the Indian retail price, customs duties account for 11%. The rest is freight, value added tax and distribution margin — that is to say, exactly what makes up a French price as well.

CONCLUSION

India is not a market closed off by customs duties. It was not one before the agreement. It will be even less so afterwards.

3. What actually stops goods

A customs duty is a cost: it can be calculated and passed on. An unmet regulatory obligation is a blockage: the goods stay at the port.

Three frameworks apply to tableware and home décor.

The Bureau of Indian Standards Quality Control Orders

India subjects a growing list of products to mandatory certification. A product that is covered can only enter if its manufacturer itself holds a BIS licence — a lengthy, costly procedure that involves an audit of the production site in France. The list is expanding continuously: new obligations covering kitchen utensils and articles were notified in January 2026, with phased application between October 2026 and April 2027.

A category that is not covered today may be covered in eighteen months. This is not something you check once: it is something you monitor.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

Any article intended for food contact falls under the FSSAI. This covers the heart of tableware: plates, glasses, cutlery, dishes, serving pieces. The control points concern the migration of lead and cadmium from glazes and decoration. Two families call for particular attention: lead crystal and porcelain with fired gold or platinum decoration.

The Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules

Every package intended for retail sale must carry a set of mandatory particulars: identification of the operator, country of origin, generic name, net quantity, month and year of manufacture, maximum retail price, unit price, and the contact details of a consumer service reachable in India.

This is the most concrete point, and the most underestimated. A French workshop, however good, has no reason to know how to produce a label that complies with Indian rules — or even to know the retail price at which its piece will be sold in Mumbai.

Country of origin is a mandatory particular. For a French house, this regulatory constraint is also an argument: the word “France” appears on every package, as a matter of legal obligation.

4. Why the Indian distributor is unavoidable

India permits 100% foreign investment in single-brand retail. But above 51% foreign shareholding, the company must source 30% of the value of its purchases of goods within India itself — preferably from SMEs, village industries and craftspeople.

For a French manufactory producing in Limoges, Uzès or Thiers, this condition is structurally impossible to meet. An own-name store is not an option.

> This is not a limitation: it is a clarification. Partnership with a professional Indian distributor is not a provisional step towards something else. It is the market access model, on a lasting basis, and it is protected by the regulation itself.

5. A field with no established French presence

Trade between France and India reached €15.8 billion in 2025. French sales to India amount to €6.6 billion, of which 43.7% is aeronautical and space construction alone. Next come electrical equipment, machinery, chemicals and measuring instruments.

Tableware, ceramics and home décor do not appear in any identifiable heading.

This figure can be read in both directions. There is no structured French business flow in this segment — but it also means that no French house has established a reference price or a dominant narrative. The ground is not contested. It is untouched.

For an Indian professional buyer, a French tableware house is a genuine novelty in their range, and therefore a point of differentiation against their own competitors. For a French manufactory, it is a position that can be built without having to displace anyone.

6. What the Indian market expects from a French house

India is not a market where a European offer can simply be transposed. A few constants, drawn from observation of the market and to be confirmed project by project.

What resonates

— Heritage and family transmission. In a country where lines of craftspeople and long-established merchant houses are a living reality, a manufactory founded in 1802 and run by its eighth generation needs no explanation.

— The individual piece, rather than the service. The complete French table service has no equivalent in use. Pieces sell individually or in short compositions.

— Rich decoration. Gilding, saturated colour and visible handwork are valued — running counter to the current European trend towards neutral tones.

— Visual proof. Photographs of the workshop, the hand, the material justify the price far better than a sales pitch.

What does not resonate

— The phrase “French quality”, claimed by everyone and demonstrable by no one.

— Transposing European table customs.

— A long heritage narrative addressed to the professional buyer. The story is there to sell to the end customer; the buyer wants a piece, a price and a lead time.

A market-specific point of attention

For a significant and socially structuring part of the population, vegetarianism is a strict practice that may involve keeping separate tableware. This is taken into account when composing a range, not afterwards.

7. What Maison Voisine brings

Maison Voisine is a French trade intermediation agency. It connects French manufactories of tableware, ceramics, glassware, cutlery and home décor with international professional buyers.

The principle

The manufactory remains the seller. It sets its price and retains control of its brand and its distribution. Maison Voisine holds no stock, neither buys nor resells, and is remunerated by commission on sales made. No exclusivity is imposed, and there is no cost before a sale.

The actual work

— Identifying and qualifying professional buyers in the target market, with an analysis of their existing range and the segments they do not cover

— Preparing the commercial file: positioning, reference prices, sales arguments adapted to the codes of the market

— Monitoring the applicable framework — mandatory certifications, health requirements, packaging particulars — so that no constraint is discovered after a production run has been committed

— Coordinating the stages between the manufactory and its local partner, from the first conversation through to repeat orders

What Maison Voisine is not

Neither a buyer-reseller, nor a freight forwarder, nor a customs representative. The agency works on a best-efforts basis, alongside the manufactory, never in its place.

8. In practice

India is the first market on which Maison Voisine is working as a priority, for three factual reasons:

— A trade agreement whose effects will unfold from 2027, and a twelve to eighteen month lead time to build a position, which makes acting now necessary.

— A price difference with France of around one third today, set to narrow to roughly one tenth — a level that has never prevented a market from working.

— A segment with no structured French presence, where a place is built rather than contested.

The same principles apply to the other markets the agency works on — United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Canada, Australia — each with its own regulatory framework and price structure.

Sources

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METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The duty rates given are the standard rates applicable to the headings concerned; the exact rate depends on the eight-digit tariff classification and must be verified case by case on Access2Markets. The Indian customs tariff is revised each year in the February Budget.

The compared prices are based on an identical distribution mark-up in France and India and on an assumption of freight and insurance at 12% of the ex-works value. They illustrate an order of magnitude, not a quotation.

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