



Photos by IRENE BARLIAN, photo illustration and graphic design by RON BORRESEN | Times

THE KRATOM TRAIL

Kratom can follow a unique and winding path. From the time leaves are harvested from trees in Southeast Asia to when finished products are sold to consumers, it can make more than a dozen stops along the kratom trail — logging more than 15,000 miles from the rainforests of Borneo to gas stations and smoke shops around Tampa Bay. Though tracking a specific shipment of kratom from starting point to end point is nearly impossible, the Tampa Bay Times was able to determine an approximate supply chain route for O.P.M.S. — one of the most popular kratom brands on the market. Kratom under the O.P.M.S. brand moves around a lot from different locations where it can be treated, refined, made into extracts and packaged.

How kratom is processed and distributed before it arrives in the country

- 1. Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan**
In this region of Indonesia on the island of Borneo, farmers in a collection of villages harvest leaves and stuff them into bags. The demand for kratom in the U.S. is about 4,000 tons a month. Almost all of it originates in Indonesia.
- 2. Pontianak**
Distance: 312 miles
This port city on Borneo is one of the nation's processing hubs for kratom. The dried leaves are sent to be milled and ground into a fine powder. The product is also tested.
- 3. Surabaya**
Distance: 548* miles
Miles so far: 860
Fine kratom powder packed into compact boxes is loaded onto cargo ships at this much larger port city across the Java Sea, where the kratom will depart for its roughly four-week voyage.
- 4. Oakland, Calif.**
Distance: 8,412* miles
Miles so far: 9,272
This U.S. port is the most popular destination for Indonesian kratom. After about 30 days at sea, it arrives. It's hard to pinpoint exactly how much kratom enters the country, as some importers have smuggled it in claiming it was another substance like fertilizer. And which U.S. port gets the second-most kratom shipments? That would be Tampa at 14%.

*estimated miles

How kratom is processed and distributed once it arrives in the United States

5. Marietta, Ga. The product travels 2,579 miles (11,851 miles so far) from Oakland to this Atlanta suburb. The outpost serves as a receiving center or hub for kratom that will become O.P.M.S. products. Batches are kept here while samples are tested in Michigan for heavy metals, contaminants and potency. If the samples test clean, the kratom keeps moving. From here it can take two paths. Raw powder capsules go one way, and kratom that is destined to be made into extracts goes another.

CAPSULES AND POWDER

- 6. Fort Worth, Texas**
Distance: 826 miles
Miles so far: 12,677
Kratom destined for capsules or powder comes to a lab here to be treated for bacterial contaminants.
- 7. Marietta**
Distance: 826 miles
Miles so far: 13,503
After it's sterilized, the kratom returns to the Georgia hub and will shuttle between two nearby locations.
- 8. Alpharetta, Ga.**
Distance: 27 miles
Miles so far: 13,530
Powdered kratom is blended and milled inside another building without any company signage. The kratom goes next to a different Marietta building.
- 9. Marietta**
Distance: 26 miles
Miles so far: 13,556
Capsules are filled and boxed up.
- 10. Marietta**
Distance: 5.4 miles
Miles so far: 13,561
The kratom returns to the Marietta receiving warehouse before being sent to Dallas. Blind bills of lading are used so that the destination can't be traced.
- 11. Dallas**
Distance: 794 miles
Miles so far: 14,355
O.P.M.S. kratom gets its distinctive packaging and labeling at A1 Wholesale.
- 12. Dallas**
Distance: 1.7 miles
Miles so far: 14,357
At 1.7 miles, this is the shortest stop along the kratom trail. Kratom comes here, another A1 Wholesale location, where orders placed through Party Nuts, an online wholesaler, are fulfilled.
- 13. Tampa Bay**
Distance: 1,171 miles
Total miles traveled: 15,528
O.P.M.S. products are sold at smoke shops and gas stations throughout Tampa Bay and around Florida. They have been linked to multiple overdose deaths in the state.

EXTRACTS

- 6. Springfield, Colo.**
Distance: 1,234 miles
Miles so far: 13,085
Powder made into extracts goes to this rural outpost. Workers at Jordan Process heat raw powder multiple times and mix it with chemicals to boost the herb's potency and to purify it. Earlier this year, staff told a regulator they were dealing with a benign plant — not kratom. Just a few months before that, however, they acknowledged handling kratom.
- 7. Marietta**
Distance: 1,234 miles
Miles so far: 14,319
Kratom returns from Colorado to the Marietta receiving center before moving on.
- 8. Alpharetta**
Distance: 27 miles
Miles so far: 14,346
Extract products arrive at the milling center before heading to a different Marietta location.
- 9. Marietta**
Distance: 26 miles
Miles so far: 14,372
Some extract powder is placed into capsules stamped with three-leaf logos. Others are liquefied and mixed with chocolate sauce and food-grade alcohol to give two of the products — O.P.M.S. Black Liquid and O.P.M.S. Gold Liquid — their distinctive flavor. Drums filled with extract are readied for shipping, but workers don't know where it's going exactly.
- 10. Marietta**
Distance: 5.4 miles
Miles so far: 14,377
The kratom returns to the Marietta receiving warehouse before being shipped to Dallas.
- 11. Dallas**
Distance: 794 miles
Miles so far: 15,171
O.P.M.S. extracts are labeled and bottled at A1 Wholesale.
- 12. Dallas**
Distance: 1.7 miles
Miles so far: 15,173
At a nearby warehouse, orders are fulfilled and sent around the country, including Tampa Bay.
- 13. Tampa Bay**
Distance: 1,171 miles
Total miles traveled: 16,344
The O.P.M.S. brand includes roughly a dozen products, ranging from dried leaf powders to potent liquid shots that can be found in numerous locations around Tampa Bay and Florida.

NOTE: It's illegal to possess kratom in Alabama. One trucker carrying O.P.M.S. through the state said he was told the cargo was "vitamins."

Graphic reporting by Hannah Critchfield, Langston Taylor and Irene Barlian
Source: Times research. Miles are approximations based on travel distances using Google Maps. Shipping distances are estimates. Nautical miles traveled were converted to miles.