

Overseas licence crash statistics questions and answers

1. How many international visitors come to New Zealand each year?

New Zealand welcomed approximately 3.7 million international visitors in 2017.

2. Has there been an overall increase in crashes involving overseas drivers in recent times?

The number of crashes involving overseas drivers has remained relatively steady over the last 10 years. At the same time, the number of international visitors coming to New Zealand has increased by about 37 percent.

In 2017 there was an overall increase in visitor arrivals to New Zealand by 7 percent compared to 2016.

3. Do overseas drivers have higher crash rates than local drivers?

Over the last five years (2013-17) the average number of fatal crashes on our roads per year was 284. Of these, an average of 20 fatal crashes per year involved an overseas driver.

It's not known exactly how much driving international visitors do while they are here, which would allow a calculation of crash rates per kilometre driven. However, we do know that over the last five years (2013-17), 6.2 percent of fatal and injury crashes involved an overseas driver (involvement means that while an overseas driver was involved in a crash, they were not necessarily at fault). In 2017, there were 342 fatal crashes in New Zealand, and overseas drivers were involved – but not necessarily at fault – in 23.

4. Are the crash rates the same all over the country?

Generally regions with high tourist numbers and smaller local populations have a greater proportion of crashes involving overseas drivers.

Auckland has by far the highest number of crashes involving overseas drivers but they only make up 5 percent of crashes in the region overall.

In contrast, Westland, Queenstown-Lakes and Southland have overseas drivers involved in between 23–43 percent of all crashes, due to smaller local populations.

5. What countries do the drivers involved in crashes come from?

Over the last five years (2013-17) the six most frequently listed nationalities of drivers involved in fatal and injury crashes in New Zealand were (in order from most to least): China (385), Australia (359), Germany (322), India (269), UK (237) and the USA (230). Combined, these six countries contribute over half (57 percent) of the overseas drivers in crashes. However, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of total visitors to New Zealand come from these countries.

Over the last five years (2013-17), visitor numbers from China have increased by 83 percent, Australia by 21 percent, Germany by 50 percent, India by 98 percent, UK by 30 percent and the USA by 64 percent.

6. Are all the overseas drivers involved in crashes tourists?

No. Of the crashes where visitor status is recorded, the majority are short-term visitors (those staying for less than 12 months), but about 24 percent of the overseas drivers involved in a crash are immigrants or students still legally using a licence from their home country. Drivers from many other nations can drive here for up to a year before having to convert to a New Zealand licence.

7. What types of fatal and injury crashes are overseas drivers most involved in?

Most overseas drivers crash for the same reasons as New Zealand drivers. There are usually multiple factors that contribute to a crash.

During 2013-17, the most common factors for at-fault drivers in crashes were:

- » driver lost control: overseas drivers (33 percent), NZ drivers (28 percent)

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- » failed to give way or stop: overseas drivers (28 percent), NZ drivers (23 percent)
- » did not see another party: overseas drivers (17 percent), NZ drivers (19 percent)
- » inattention or distraction: overseas drivers (16 percent), NZ drivers (22 percent).

About a third (30 percent) of at-fault overseas drivers failed to adjust to New Zealand rules or conditions. 'Failing to adjust' includes such things as driving on the wrong side of the road and not understanding give way rules.

From 2013 to 2017, there has been an increase in the percentage of overseas and New Zealand drivers involved in a crash who failed to keep left. For fatal crashes the percentage that failed to keep left is 37 percent for overseas licence holders (compared to 32 percent for the previous five-year period) and 23 percent of New Zealand drivers (compared to 20 percent for the previous five-year period).

There can be many reasons for being on the wrong side of the road including careless overtaking, inattention and fatigue.

The number of New Zealand at-fault drivers in crashes who fail to keep left is about 13 times the number of overseas licence holders who fail to keep left.

8. What impact is the Visiting Drivers project having?

The Visiting Drivers project is still underway. Some of the key road upgrades under the project are due to be completed at the end of 2019. The government will continue to work closely with project partners on Visiting Drivers initiatives and is monitoring the progress of the project.

While there has been a continued increase in visitor numbers, there has been relatively little change to the overseas driver crash statistics, which is encouraging.

Background to the statistics

- » Source: Overseas drivers in crashes data from Ministry of Transport www.transport.govt.nz/mot-resources/new-road-safety-resources/overseas-driver-crashes
- » This statistical information comes from the Crash Analysis System (CAS). Information is entered into CAS after a police officer has attended a crash and completed a traffic crash report.
- » The system records whether a driver involved in a crash had an overseas licence. It does not capture how long the driver had been in New Zealand at the time of the crash, so these figures may include non-tourist drivers, for example those on valid immigration permits still using their overseas licence.
- » The 'overseas drivers involved in fatal/injury crashes' statistics reflect the number of drivers involved in crashes. Some crashes may involve more than one overseas driver.
- » 'At fault' means the driver was considered to have the primary responsibility for the crash based on the information in the Crash Analysis System and is not necessarily related to the outcome of any subsequent court case. 'Involved' means the driver was involved in a crash but was not necessarily 'at fault'.