

Overseas driver crash statistics: questions and answers

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

More than three million international visitors come to New Zealand each year. Most visit between November and March – 1.8 million arrived between November 2015 and March 2016.

2 Do overseas drivers have higher crash rates than local drivers?

Over the last five years (2011-15) the average number of fatal crashes on our roads per year was 264. Of these, an average of 17 fatal crashes per year involved an overseas driver.

In 2015, New Zealand drivers were involved in 272 fatal crashes and 1721 injury crashes, and overseas drivers in 19 fatal crashes and 101 injury crashes.

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 overseas drivers have been involved in (not necessarily at fault) six percent of fatal and injury crashes on our roads from 2011-15.

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

No. The number of crashes involving overseas drivers has remained relatively steady at between 520 and 680 per year over the last 10 years. At the same time the number of international visitors coming to New Zealand has increased by about 38 percent.

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

Generally regions with high tourist numbers and smaller local populations have greater proportions of crashes involving overseas drivers. Auckland has by far the highest number of crashes involving overseas drivers but they only make up five percent of crashes in the region overall. In contrast, in the Visiting Drivers Project area, between 24-37 percent of all crashes in the Westland, Queenstown-Lakes and Southland districts involve an overseas driver.

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

Over the last five years the six most frequently listed nationalities of drivers involved in fatal and injury crashes in New Zealand were (in order from most to least): Australia (353), Germany (294), China (270), India (248), UK (241), and the USA (185). A large proportion of our visitors come from these countries.

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, but about 23 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 2011-15, the most common factors for at-fault drivers in crashes were:

- » driver lost control: overseas drivers (35 percent), NZ drivers (29 percent)
- » failed to give way or stop: overseas drivers (29 percent), NZ drivers (25 percent)
- » did not see another party: overseas drivers (19 percent), NZ drivers (20 percent)
- » inattention or distraction: overseas drivers (17 percent), NZ drivers (22 percent).

About a third 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.

For more information go to www.saferjourneys.govt.nz/visitingdriversproject

Background to the statistics

- » Source: Overseas drivers in crashes factsheet from Ministry of Transport www.transport.govt.nz/research/crashfacts/overseasdriversincrashes/
- » 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'.