

# What's different about driving in New Zealand?



## Kia ora – Welcome to New Zealand

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There are a few things that you may not be used to when driving in New Zealand. For example:

- **we drive on the left side of the road**
- **we have a unique give way rule at intersections**
- **using a hand-held mobile phone while driving is illegal.**

Make sure you have a safe and enjoyable journey – please read this brochure before starting out.

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NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY  
WAKA KOTAHI



## Keep left



**Always** drive on the **left** side of the road. If you drive on the right side of the road in your own country, please remember to keep left when pulling out onto the road – it's easy to forget where you are!

## Giving way at intersections

*Always use your indicators when turning*



Stop completely then give way to all traffic.



Slow down and be ready to stop and give way to all traffic.



**GIVE WAY**



At an intersection where one vehicle will cross the path of another, and both are waiting on Stop or Give Way signs (or where there are no signs), special give way rules apply.

In general:

- if you're turning, give way to all vehicles that are not turning
- in all other situations, give way to vehicles crossing or coming from your **right**



## No left turn on red

In New Zealand you may not turn left at an intersection when the traffic signals are red.

If turning at traffic signals, give way to pedestrians crossing the road.

## Hand-held mobile phones



Drivers must not use a hand-held mobile phone when driving, unless the device is completely hands-free or mounted securely to the vehicle - and touched infrequently and briefly. Writing, reading or sending text messages on a mobile phone while driving is also illegal.

## Travelling times

It's easy to underestimate travelling times in New Zealand.

Distances may seem short on paper, but New Zealand roads may be narrower than you're used to, cover hilly terrain and vary from motorways (freeways) to unsealed gravel roads.

If you're tired you're much more likely to have a crash. Here are some tips to help you stay alert.

- Get plenty of rest before a long drive.
- Take a break from driving every two hours.
- If possible, share the driving with someone else.
- Avoid large meals and drink plenty of fluid.
- If you begin to feel sleepy, stop and have a short sleep for up to 40 minutes.
- If you're feeling very tired - find a place to stay overnight.

## Driving speeds

Speed limit signs show the maximum speed you can travel. However, at times you may need to drive at a slower speed due to road or weather conditions.

Different speed limits apply throughout New Zealand - look out for the speed limit signs.



On most of New Zealand's main rural roads, the speed limit is 100km/h unless a sign says a lower speed applies. The speed limit is generally 100km/h on motorways.



In urban areas, the speed limit is usually 50km/h unless a sign says otherwise.

## Safety belts



By law, everyone in the vehicle must wear a safety belt or child restraint - whether they're in the front or back.

Children under five years of age must be secured in an approved child restraint.

## Alcohol and drugs

Don't drink or use drugs and then drive - the laws against this are strictly enforced in New Zealand and penalties are severe.

## Driver licence requirements

You must have your valid and current driver licence or international driving permit with you at all times when you're driving. If your overseas licence or permit is not in English, you must carry an accurate English translation issued by:

- an authorised translation provider in New Zealand
- a diplomatic representative at a high commission, embassy or consulate, or
- the authority that issued your overseas licence (an international driving permit may be acceptable as a translation).

If you hold a valid and current overseas driver licence or international driving permit, you can drive for a maximum of 12 months from the date you arrive in New Zealand.

Each time you visit New Zealand, you can drive for a further 12-month period on a valid overseas licence or international driving permit, as long as you stay for no more than a year at a time.

## Overtaking



Most roads in New Zealand have a single lane each way, and some provide passing lanes at regular intervals - these should be used where possible when overtaking. You must not cross a solid yellow line on your side of the centre line to pass a vehicle, as this indicates it's too dangerous to overtake.

## Sharing the road with cyclists

Cyclists have the same rights as drivers on New Zealand roads. Always slow down near cyclists, pass slowly and only when safe, and try to leave a space of 1.5 metres. Indicate in plenty of time and respect cycle lanes.

## One-lane bridges

A number of roads in New Zealand have one-lane bridges where vehicles travelling in one direction must give way to vehicles going in the other direction.

Any of the signs on page 6 show that you are approaching a one-lane bridge. Slow down and check for traffic coming the other way. The smaller red arrow shows which direction has to give way.



These two signs show you must give way to traffic coming the other way across the bridge.



This sign indicates that if no traffic is approaching, you can proceed across the bridge with caution.

## Winter driving



Look out for this slippery surface sign in wet or icy conditions – slow down and avoid braking suddenly.

Snow and ice can make roads even more hazardous, particularly around mountain passes. Rental vehicle companies will often supply chains if you're likely to be driving in these conditions – make sure you know how to fit them before setting out.

## Animals on the road



Watch out for farm animals on the road, particularly in rural areas. When you see them, slow down and do not sound your horn – it may startle them. You may need to stop and let the animals go past or move slowly up behind and follow the farmer's instructions.

## Unsealed (gravel) roads



Avoid unsealed roads if possible. If you need to drive on them, remember they can be very narrow. Reduce your speed to below 40-50km/h, and slow down even further when approaching oncoming traffic as dust could obscure your vision and loose stones could chip your windscreen.

## Parallel parking

In New Zealand, you can be fined or towed away for parallel parking on the wrong side of the road. You may only park in the direction of traffic flow on your side of the road (ie on the left side) unless it is a one-way street.

## Rail crossings

Only half of New Zealand's 1500 public rail crossings are protected by automatic alarms. For example, if red lights are flashing, stop and only proceed once the lights have stopped flashing.

Other crossings are protected by Railway Crossing and Give Way or Stop signs only. When you see a Stop sign at a crossing, stop and only cross the track if there are no trains approaching. When you see a Give

Way sign, slow down and be ready to stop and only cross the track if there are no trains approaching.

