

Hats off to New Zealand Distance Grandparents - the Voice of Knowing

[Helen Ellis](#), M.A.



Distance Grandparents rarely feature in census statistics anywhere - they're an under-the-radar slice of any country's population. The only statistic I have ever gleaned was reported in a 2010 New Zealand government publication titled *Changing* and authored by Anne Kerslake Hendricks from the Families Commission. This report delivered the findings of an extensive survey of New Zealand grandparents. The author, coincidentally a Distance Grandparent, confirmed that 23% of grandparents who were interviewed had grandchildren living overseas. This is very high.

All Distance Grandparent voices are valuable; however, the voices of New Zealand Distance Grandparents offer a particularly broad perspective due to a combination of five barrier/boundary factors they *all* experience. Most Distance Grandparents from other parts of the world do not experience all five barriers.

The factors are:

Location on the globe

There is no arguing New Zealand is a long way from much of the world and you feel isolated when you live here. Sir John Key once stated in a speech that our country is 'the last bus stop on the planet'. When we travel overseas, people we meet often comment how New Zealand is 'such a long way away', while we don't use the same language in reverse.

Exclusive time zone

New Zealand sits almost exclusively in its own time zone. Time zones significantly affect the ease of distance family communication. A time zone map shows another couple of territories also in an exclusive time zone: India and Alaska. The bottom line is that *a//* Distance Grandparents from New Zealand (and India and Alaska) must contend with time zone issues, no matter where their distance family live.

Hemisphere ups and downs

When it is winter in the Southern Hemisphere, it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere. Likewise, the school year starts in February in New Zealand, while for much of the Northern Hemisphere it begins in August/September. The Southern Hemisphere is a calendar-year focused region, while the Northern Hemisphere's summer creates bookends to many employment contracts and educational semesters. These differences cause planning challenges, especially once grandchildren are at school and travel bookings need to focus around school terms. It isn't possible for Northern Hemisphere school-age distance grandchildren to enjoy an extended summer break in New Zealand, as it's school term time.

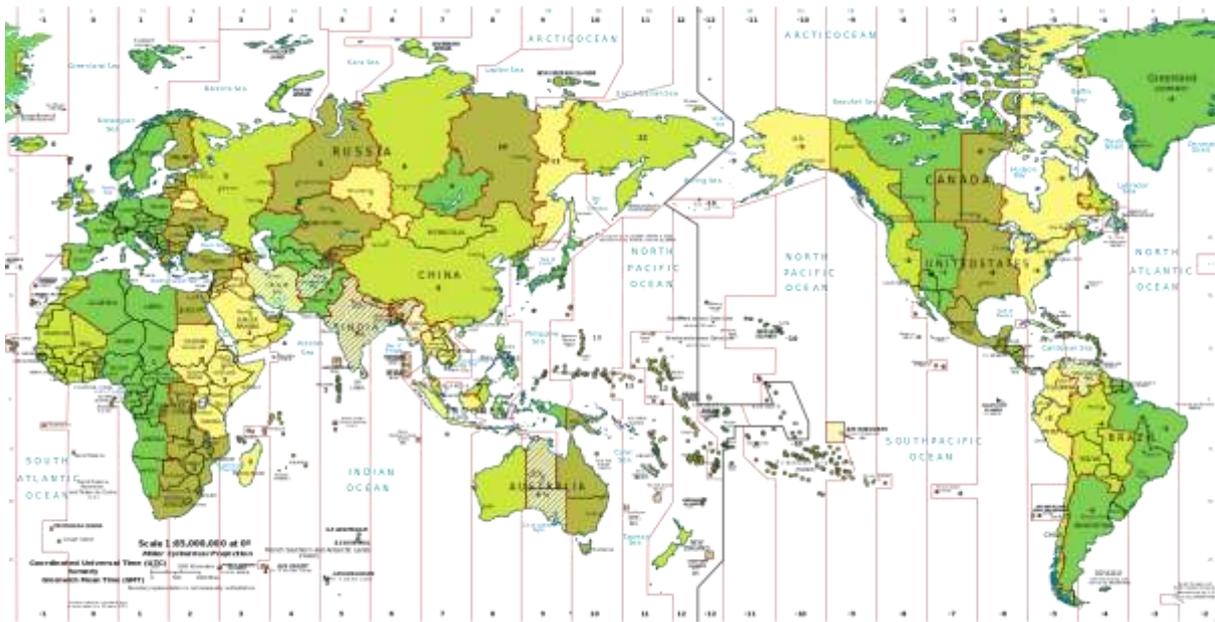
Daylight saving

New Zealand, along with other countries, has the twice-yearly adjustments for daylight saving. This can create for some a six-monthly, flip-flopping communication routine between morning/evening as the time difference changes. Additionally, for a few weeks during the transitional periods of March/April and September/October, when everyone is changing, confusion reigns and one is never sure who is on what time.

International date line

The last and significant geographical factor sits alongside New Zealand's eastern border: the International Date Line. This zigzagging, 180-degree meridian imaginary line was decided upon in 1884 in Washington, D.C., at the International Meridian Conference. Its location was purposely selected due to the area's sparse population. From a Kiwi's perspective, during the few shared daylight hours of countries in the Americas, we are each on a different day of the week. When it is Sunday daytime in New Zealand, it is Saturday daytime in the Americas.

Few other territories or nations experience *a//* five factors, and an awareness of this enables Distance Grandparents from all parts of the globe to compare their lot. Hats off to New Zealand Distance Grandparents who all experience the lot.



Helen Ellis is the founder of DistanceFamilies.com and the author of [Distance Families Book Series](#).

To learn more:

www.distancefamilies.com

[Being a distance grandparent private Facebook group](#)

[Distance Families Facebook](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram @helenellis.author](#)

© Helen Ellis

Image

Wikimedia Commons (2012) 'Standard time zones of the world', <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22694730>