

Topic Page: [International Date Line](#)

Definition: **International Date Line** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Imaginary line that approximately follows the 180° line of longitude. The date is put forward a day when crossing the line going west, and back a day when going east. The IDL was chosen at the International Meridian Conference in 1884.

Summary Article: **international date line**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

imaginary line on the earth's surface, generally following the 180° meridian of longitude, where, by international agreement, travelers change dates. Traveling eastward across the line, one subtracts one calendar day; traveling westward, one adds a day. The date line is necessary to avoid a confusion that would otherwise result. For example, if an airplane were to travel westward with the sun, 24 hr would elapse as it circled the globe, but it would still be the same day for those in the airplane while it would be one day later for those on the ground below them. The same problem would arise if two travelers journeyed in opposite directions to a point on the opposite side of the earth, 180° of longitude distant. The eastward traveler would set his clock ahead 1 hr for each 15° of longitude (see standard time), so that his clock would gain a total of 12 hr; the westward traveler would set his clock back 1 hr for each 15°, resulting in a total loss of 12 hr. The two clocks would therefore differ by 24 hr, or one calendar day. The apparent paradox is resolved by requiring that the traveler crossing the date line change his date, thus bringing the travelers into agreement when they meet. The international date line does not follow the 180° meridian along its entire course but bends eastward around the eastern tip of Siberia, westward around the Aleutian Islands, and eastward again around various island groups in the South Pacific (mostly extremely around Kiribati) to avoid a date change within island nations and territories or between important trade partners.

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