



# International Date Line

The International Meridian Conference in 1884 laid the foundation for our modern time zone system. What we now know as coordinated universal time (UTC) began as Universal Time (UT), created at the conference. Attendees determined that the Prime Meridian, at 0 degrees East longitude in Greenwich, London, would be the reference line from which time zones would be defined. The International Date Line was also drawn at this conference on the opposite side of the Earth, at 180 degrees meridian. Although it was noted that the path of the date line conveniently lay almost entirely across the water, the exact course the date line would take was not specified. In fact, it has never been defined in any international agreement, treaty, or law. As summed up at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by pioneer scientist and surveyor of the American West Coast, George Davidson, "There is *no* International Date Line. The theoretical line is 180° from Greenwich, but the line actually used is the result of agreement among the commercial steamships of the principal maritime countries."

If the date line does not officially exist, and no country is compelled by international law to recognize it, why do you think that for the most part, all countries do?

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