

**It's the Age of Asia When it Comes to Passport Power**

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As the global economy transforms and centers of power shift, Asia's dominance appears to be unflinching. Entering into the final quarter of 2019, Japan and Singapore retain a firm hold on first place on the [Henley Passport Index](#), each with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 190 out of a maximum 227. For most of the index's 14-year history – which is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#) – the top spot has been held by a European country or by the US. However, this shifted dramatically in 2018, with Asian countries now firmly established as world leaders when it comes to both global economic activity and global mobility.

With visa-free/visa-on-arrival scores of 188, Finland, Germany, and South Korea remain in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, while Denmark, Italy, and Luxembourg are in 3<sup>rd</sup> place, with citizens of those countries now able to access 187 destinations worldwide without requiring a visa in advance. With a score of 184, the UK and the US remain in joint 6<sup>th</sup> place – the lowest position either country has held since 2010 and a significant drop from their 1<sup>st</sup>-place ranking in 2014.

While the positions on the index's top 10 have remained relatively stable since the last update in July, there have been some striking shifts further down the ranking. Most dramatically, the UAE has climbed an extraordinary five places over the last three months after gaining visa-free access to a number of African countries, including South Africa, and now sits in 15<sup>th</sup> place, with UAE passport holders able to access 172 destinations without a prior visa. Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan remain at the bottom of the ranking, with visa-free/visa-on-arrival scores of just 29, 27, and 25, respectively.

**Passport power and economic freedom**

[Dr. Christian H. Kaelin](#), Chairman of [Henley & Partners](#) and the creator of the passport index concept, says: “Our ongoing research has shown that when we talk about ‘passport power’, we are discussing more than simply the destinations a holder can travel to without acquiring a visa in advance. Often, there is a strong correlation between visa freedom and other benefits such as business and investment freedom, independence of the judiciary, fiscal health, and property rights.”

Using historic data from the [Henley Passport Index](#) and the [Index of Economic Freedom](#), political science researchers Uğur Altundal and Ömer Zarpli of Syracuse University and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively, found a strongly positive connection between visa freedom and a variety

of indicators of economic freedom, including foreign direct investment inflows, property rights, tax burden, and investment freedom. Altundal and Zarpli observed that “countries that have higher visa scores also rank higher in economic freedom, especially in investment, financial, and business freedom”. One especially striking example of this positive correlation is Singapore, which ranks highest in nearly all economic indicators and holds the top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#).

### **Brexit, the EU, and the wider global implications**

While Brexit is – in theory, at least – only weeks away, the focus is firmly on how it will affect migration policy to and from the UK. As [Madeleine Sumption](#) from The Migration Observatory at Oxford University notes, these questions remain unanswered, even as the deadline looms. “Unlike trade policy, the future of immigration policy in the UK does not depend fundamentally on whether or not the UK leaves the EU with a deal. In either scenario, there will be a ‘transitional period’ until at least December 2020, in which free movement of EU citizens to the UK will continue more or less as it operates today. After that, the UK is expected to introduce a new immigration system. The full details have not yet been announced, but it will make long-term settlement much more difficult for EU citizens. And UK citizens who want to move to EU countries after Brexit will also face more restrictive immigration regimes.”

In terms of Brexit’s potential wider global impact, [Dr. Parag Khanna](#), Founder and Managing Partner of FutureMap, says: “For more than a year, former UK foreign secretary Jeremy Hunt has been saying that Asia would need to be a pillar of the country's post-Brexit global economic policy. If indeed the UK is able to advance more free trade in services with Asian countries, this will require more British citizens to spend time in Asia to generate business across sectors such as finance, advisory, education, and others. At present, however, Asian markets have not prioritized individual free trade agreements with the UK over their current negotiations with the EU.”

### **The UAE, Africa, and shifting foreign policy goals**

While uncertainty over Brexit and its impact has yet to affect the UK’s position on the rankings, foreign policy decisions in other parts of the globe have resulted in some dramatic changes. The UAE’s remarkable upward momentum on the [Henley Passport Index](#) has been attributed to a number of factors, including the nation’s determination to position itself as a prominent player within the Middle East. [Lorraine Charles](#) at Cambridge University’s Centre for Business Research says: “While the UAE may not be able to compete with Saudi Arabia – the regional hegemon – in terms of military strength and economic power, the projection of its soft power is uncontested in the GCC, making the UAE an embodiment of inspiration for other GCC countries.”

Commenting on the number of visa agreements the UAE has recently signed with African countries in particular, [Ryan Cummings](#), Director of Signal Risk, observes that “the UAE's strategy

has been particularly apparent on the African continent, allowing the country to significantly increase its influence in a region of the world that remains key to global economic development”. He further notes that “Sub-Saharan Africa continues to make tentative progress in terms of improving its accessibility by easing visa restrictions, with Namibia and Sierra Leone being the most recent examples of states that have relaxed their visa policies as a means of attracting foreign investment, revenue, and skillsets to augment their economic development goals”.

### **Countries with investment migration programs demonstrate strong progress**

As they have done throughout the index’s history, countries offering [investment migration programs](#) have performed strongly. Moving up from the 16<sup>th</sup>-place position it held last quarter, [Cyprus](#) for instance, now holds 14<sup>th</sup> place, with Cypriot citizens able to access 173 destinations around the world without a visa. [Malta](#) retains its strong 7<sup>th</sup>-place position with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 183, while [Antigua and Barbuda](#) has risen to 28<sup>th</sup> place with a score of 149 after gaining access to Russia.

Commenting on these results, [Dr. Juerg Steffen](#), CEO of [Henley & Partners](#), says: “In terms of the connections between visa freedom and indicators of economic freedom, countries with investment migration programs are among the best examples. Malta, for instance, has one of the strongest passports in the world and is performing exceedingly well in terms of fiscal health. The country expects to post its fourth fiscal surplus in as many years in 2019, making it one of the most financially dynamic countries in the EU. It is also the fastest growing nation in the EU, with an unemployment rate of just 3.8%. These statistics speak for themselves, as does the growing interest in the investment migration industry from investors seeking global mobility and sovereign states looking to strengthen and diversify their economies.”

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### **Notes to editors**

#### **Global headlines for Q4 2019**

- Japan and Singapore hold joint top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#), a position one or both countries has held since the beginning of 2018.
- Finland, Germany, and South Korea continue to hold joint 2<sup>nd</sup> place.
- Denmark, Italy, and Luxembourg remain in 3<sup>rd</sup> place.
- Of the 32 countries that occupy the top 10 positions on the index, 22 of them are EU member states.
- The UAE has climbed an extraordinary 5 places since last quarter (and 46 places over the past decade), and now sits in 15<sup>th</sup> place with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 172.

- Post-Soviet states have also made strong gains over the past ten years. Ukraine and Moldova have both climbed 19 places, while Georgia has climbed 16.
- Afghanistan remains at the bottom of the ranking, in 107<sup>th</sup> place, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of just 25.

### **Regional headlines for Q4 2019**

- In Africa, the Seychelles, Mauritius, and South Africa, respectively, continue to hold the top 3 spots. South Africa has dropped 18 places over the past decade.
- In the Middle East, the UAE is in 1<sup>st</sup> place, Israel is in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and Turkey is in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. The UAE has climbed 46 places over the past decade, while Syria has dropped 23 places.
- In the Caribbean, the top 3 spots are held by Barbados, the Bahamas, and St. Kitts and Nevis, respectively. In the region, the country that has made the strongest gains over the past decade is St. Kitts and Nevis – it has climbed 14 places since 2009.
- In Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine holds 1<sup>st</sup> place, Moldova is in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and Russia is in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Moldova has climbed 19 places since 2009, as has Ukraine.
- In Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, respectively, hold the top 3 spots, while Myanmar, in 95<sup>th</sup> place globally, remains the poorest performer in the region.
- In North Asia, Japan is global and regional leader, with South Korea in 2<sup>nd</sup> place both regionally and globally. Taiwan has made the strongest gains in the region over the past decade, climbing 23 places since 2009. South Korea has climbed 10 places over that period, while North Korea has dropped 17 places.

### **About the 2019 Henley Passport Index**

Including cutting-edge expert commentary and historical data spanning 14 years, the [Henley Passport Index](#) is the original ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa. The ranking is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#), which maintains the world's largest and most accurate database of travel information, and it is enhanced by extensive, ongoing research by the Henley & Partners Research Department.

The [Henley Passport Index](#) is updated in real-time, as and when visa-policy changes come into effect. Along with the [Kälin – Kochenov Quality of Nationality Index](#), it is considered a major reference tool for global citizens and the standard reference for governments in this field.

## **About the Henley Passport Index website**

The [Henley Passport Index website](#) provides up-to-date, printable lists of the countries you can access visa-free, with an e-visa, with a visa on arrival, or with a normal visa. It also allows you to compare the strength of passports and understand how you might improve your travel freedom with alternative citizenship. [Visit the website](#) to view and download the global ranking and find out more about the power of your passport.

## **About Henley & Partners**

Henley & Partners is the global leader in residence and citizenship planning. Each year, hundreds of wealthy individuals and their advisors rely on our expertise and experience in this area. The firm's highly qualified professionals work together as one team in over 30 offices worldwide.

The concept of residence and citizenship planning was created by Henley & Partners in the 1990s. As globalization has expanded, residence and citizenship have become topics of significant interest among the increasing number of internationally mobile entrepreneurs and investors whom we proudly serve every day.

The firm also runs a leading government advisory practice that has raised more than USD 8 billion in foreign direct investment. Trusted by governments, the firm has been involved in strategic consulting and in the design, set-up, and operation of the world's most successful residence and citizenship programs.

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