

Asia Consolidates Its Passport Power

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In a resounding demonstration of Asia's growing power and influence on the world stage, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea now hold joint top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#), with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 189. These latest results consolidate 12 months of Asian dominance, after Japan first climbed to the top spot in February last year.

Following a visa-exemption from Uzbekistan, Germany currently sits alone in 2nd place, with a score of 188. Five countries now share 3rd place on the index – which is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association \(IATA\)](#) – with a score of 187: Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, and Sweden. The UK and the US look increasingly unlikely to regain the top spot they jointly held in 2015, with the UK now sitting in 5th place with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 185, and the US in 6th, with a score of 184. Afghanistan and Iraq remain at the bottom of the ranking with a score of just 30, a position one or both countries have occupied throughout the index's 14-year history.

UAE, Albania, and China Leap Up the Ranking

The UAE continues its upward trajectory and is now just one spot away from entry into the index's top 20. After the recent formalization of a mutual visa-waiver agreement signed with Russia, UAE passport holders are now able to access 165 destinations around the world without a prior visa. This current score marks an extraordinary ascent from the position the UAE held a decade ago, when the country shared joint 61st place with Thailand and Zimbabwe and had a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of just 52.

The UAE's ascent is one of many success stories on the [Henley Passport Index](#). Albania, for instance, has moved up 28 places on the index over the past ten years, with citizens of this once closed-off nation now able to access 116 destinations without a prior visa. China's ascent is less dramatic, but it is a change that experts believe to be far more significant from a geopolitical point of view: the country now sits in 67th spot, having moved up 12 places since 2009.

Commenting on these developments, [Dr. Christian H. Kälin](#), Chairman of [Henley & Partners](#) and the inventor of the Passport Index concept, says: "The Henley Passport Index has always been an important tool for global travelers, but the index reveals more than just the relative strength of the world's passports. Crucially, it is also a lens into the kind of world we are living in, and the kinds of policies states are pursuing. With some notable exceptions, there is a growing acknowledgment that policies of engagement, collaboration, and openness yield the greatest results, for both

individual nations and the global community as a whole. The current strength of Asian passports is emblematic of this progressive shift, and it seems certain that more and more countries will follow suit in order to benefit from global flows of talent and capital.”

Asian Expansion Transforming Tourism and Trade

As well as illustrating the widespread adoption of open visa policies, the latest rankings reflect the transformative effect that Asian development and growth is having on networks of transcontinental cooperation and connectivity. [Dr. Parag Khanna](#), Founder and Managing Partner of FutureMap and author of *The Future Is Asian: Global Order in the Twenty-first Century*, says, “With all Asian countries topping the index, there is a clear momentum behind the region taking center stage in globalization. The steady rise of China through its visa-waiver agreements shows how incremental and reciprocal measures can lead to significant progress in trust and recognition.”

Commenting further on the impact of China’s multi-trillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the largest infrastructure project in history, Dr. Khanna says, “With the Belt and Road Initiative expanding its constellation of member states and cross-border projects, we can fully expect Asian, European, Arab, and African countries to continue to seek more seamless access to each other’s countries. This will benefit both China and all states participating in the rising trade along the new Silk Roads.”

Ryan Cummings, Director of [Signal Risk](#), says that participation in BRI is having an increasing impact in the Middle East. Discussing the recent ratification of the visa-waiver agreement signed between UAE and Russia, Cummings says, “While touted as being a direct outcome of strengthening trade and diplomatic relations between the UAE and Russia, the move may also be a strategic attempt by the former to replicate its success as the main trading, logistics, and financial hub in the Middle East to Asia. This comes amid the UAE’s formalization of a strategic partnership with China, which included a reciprocated visa waiver agreement and which formalized its membership to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. In doing so, the UAE may benefit as being the proverbial bridge linking people, trade, and commodities between Asia and the Middle East, which will only further strengthen the power of the country’s passport.”

The Brexit Effect

While growing passport strength seems inevitable for some countries, uncertainty abounds for others, as protracted Brexit negotiations continue. Last Thursday, EU leaders agreed to a request to delay the Brexit process, with a new conditional deadline set for mid-April. Although the outcome remains unknown, Prof. Dr. Florian Trauner, Research Professor at the Institute for European Studies at the Free University of Brussels, points out that the process has not yet affected the UK’s standing on the [Henley Passport Index](#). “Post-Brexit, it is likely that UK citizens will retain their (short-stay) visa free travel for the Schengen area. If the UK and EU manage to

maintain a close political and trade relationship, the actual impact of Brexit on the travel freedom of British citizens may remain limited. However, the picture may change with regard to long-term mobility given that the free movement rights for UK citizens in the EU (and vice versa) will cease to apply.”

Citizenship-by-Investment Countries Retain Strong Positions

The overall passport strength of countries with [citizenship-by-investment \(CBI\) programs](#) is another of the index’s success stories. [Malta](#), for instance, currently sits in 8th spot, ahead of Australia, Iceland, and New Zealand, and [Montenegro](#), which is due to launch its CBI program in the coming months, has climbed 19 places since 2009 to 43rd place with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 124. [Moldova](#), ranked as one of the highest historical climbers on the Henley Passport Index, jumping 21 places over the past decade, is now in 45th place with holders currently able to travel to 121 global destinations visa-free or with a visa-on-arrival.

[Dr. Juerg Steffen](#), the CEO of [Henley & Partners](#), says: “Citizenship- and residence-by-investment programs are a major source of societal value creation, strengthening and diversifying the economies of sovereign states and enabling governments to drive capital into domestic development projects, create new employment opportunities, encourage further investment, and better the lives of ordinary citizens. These latest results from the [Henley Passport Index](#) make it clear, in addition, why investment migration programs are growing in popularity for wealthy investors and their families. The travel mobility afforded by a second powerful passport is unmatched, and the opportunities it provides are unparalleled.”

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Notes to editors

About the 2019 Henley Passport Index

Boasting 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.

Global headlines for Q2 2019

- Japan, Singapore, and South Korea hold joint top spot on the [Henley Passport Index](#).
- Germany has risen to 2nd place, up from the 3rd place it held with France.
- France remains in 3rd place, a position it now shares with Denmark, Finland, Italy, and Sweden.
- The UK is in 5th place, while the US is in 6th.
- The UK's Brexit process has not yet had a marked effect on the country's standing on the index. Its fall from the 3rd place it held in 2016 is a result of gains made by Asian countries, and not a direct consequence of Brexit.
- There are now 32 countries in the top 10 positions on the [Henley Passport Index](#), with European countries accounting for the majority of these spots.
- Iraq and Afghanistan continue to hold the bottom (104th) spot on the index, with only 30 destinations accessible visa-free or with a visa on arrival.

Regional headlines for Q2 2019

- In Africa, the Seychelles, Mauritius, and South Africa, respectively, continue to hold the top 3 spots. South Africa has dropped 16 spots over the past decade.
- In the Middle East, the UAE is in 1st place, Israel is in 2nd place, and Turkey is in 3rd place.
- In the Caribbean, the top 3 spots are held by Barbados, the Bahamas, and St. Kitts and Nevis, respectively.
- In Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine holds 1st place, Moldova holds 2nd place, and Russia holds 3rd place. Moldova has climbed 21 places since 2009, while Ukraine has climbed 22 places. Georgia, in 4th, has climbed 17 places.
- In Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, respectively, hold the top 3 spots, while Myanmar, in 9th place, remains poorest performer in the region. The country has dropped six places over the past decade, while the Philippines has dropped 11.
- In North Asia, Japan and South Korea are the global and regional leaders. China is the highest regional climber in North Asia over the past decade, having moved 12 spots up the ranking since 2009. North Korea, in 96th place globally, remains the poorest performer in the region. The country has dropped 13 places over the past decade.

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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