

The Japanese Passport Is Now the Strongest in the World, with Singapore and South Korea Not Far Behind

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Japan has overtaken Singapore to claim the top spot on the 2018 [Henley Passport Index](#), having gained visa-free access to Myanmar earlier this month. Japan now enjoys visa-free/visa-on-arrival access to 190 destinations, compared to Singapore's total of 189. Japan and Singapore have been neck and neck on the index since they both climbed to 1st place in February — following a visa-exemption from Uzbekistan — and pushed Germany down to 2nd place for the first time since 2014.

This quarter, Germany has fallen further to 3rd place, which it now shares with South Korea and France. France moved up from 4th to 3rd place last Friday when it gained visa-free access to Uzbekistan, while South Korea moved from 4th to 3rd place on 1 October when it gained visa-free access to Myanmar. Germany, France, and South Korea all have a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 188. Iraq and Afghanistan continue to hold the bottom (106th) spot of the [Henley Passport Index](#), with only 30 destinations accessible to their citizens.

The US and the UK, both with 186 destinations, have also slid down one spot — from 4th to 5th place — with neither having gained access to any new jurisdictions since the start of 2018. With stagnant outbound visa activity compared to Asian high-performers such as Japan, Singapore, and South Korea, it seems increasingly unlikely that the US and the UK will regain the number 1 spot they jointly held in 2015.

Russia received a boost in September when Taiwan announced a visa-waiver for Russian nationals (valid until July 2019), but the country has nonetheless fallen from 46th to 47th place compared to Q3, because of movements higher up in the ranking. The same is true of China: Chinese nationals obtained access to two new jurisdictions (St. Lucia and Myanmar), but the Chinese passport fell two places this quarter, to 71st overall. This is still an impressive 14-place improvement over the position that China held at the start of 2017.

What has been most remarkable in recent years is the UAE's stunning ascent on the [Henley Passport Index](#), from 62nd place in 2006 to 21st place worldwide currently. The UAE now holds the number 1 passport in the Middle East region.

[Dr. Christian H. Kälin](#), Group Chairman of [Henley & Partners](#), commented on these developments: “The Henley Passport Index, which is based on exclusive data from the [International Air Transport Association](#) (IATA), is an important tool for measuring not only the relative strength of the world's passports but also the extraordinary results that states can achieve when they work hand in hand

with their global peers to build a more interconnected and collaborative world. China and the UAE exemplify this kind of progress, with both states among the highest overall climbers compared to 2017, purely as a result of the strong relationships they have built with partner countries around the world.”

The UAE and Russia consolidate their international position

Strengthening its position as the passport-power champion of the Middle East, the UAE signed a visa-waiver with Russia in July, which is due to come into effect in the coming months.

Commenting on the UAE’s latest visa-waiver agreement, Ryan Cummings, Director of [Signal Risk](#), said that it is aimed at “strengthening bilateral relations between the UAE and another global superpower”, following the visa-waiver signed with China earlier this year. Specifically, this latest agreement with Russia will help the UAE “lower its dependence on its hydrocarbon sector and continue its robust economic growth trajectory” by stimulating tourism and trade.

Tim Geschwindt, Analyst at [S-RM Intelligence and Risk Consulting](#), says the agreement also speaks to Russia’s shifting position within the international community: “The country is continuing to seek improved bilateral relations, as well as trade, investments, and tourism ties, with new partners. Russia’s recent decision to grant visa-free travel access to not only Emiratis but also citizens of several other nations speaks to this effort. Russia’s agreement with the UAE in particular is part of a foreign policy push to attract foreign investment into the country, especially from Emirati businesses and businesspeople.”

Kosovo–EU visa-liberalization on the cards

Looking ahead, the most dramatic climb on the [Henley Passport Index](#) might come from Kosovo, which officially met all the criteria for visa-liberalization with the EU in July and is now in discussions with the European Council.

[Prof. Florian Trauner](#), Research Professor at the Institute for European Studies at the Free University of Brussels, commented on this development: “The approval of the European Parliament is a recognition of the hard work done by the Kosovar authorities to fulfill the conditions set by the EU. The discussion within the Council will remain difficult, however. Several member states are reluctant to grant visa-liberalization. Relaxing visa rules may be criticized as being lenient on migration control — a criticism few want to risk in a time when right-wing populist parties are on the rise.”

Citizenship-by-investment countries make strong gains

Countries with [citizenship-by-investment \(CBI\) programs](#) in place all fall within the top 50 of the [Henley Passport Index](#) and are continually rising up the ranking. Newcomer [Moldova](#), for example, which launched its CBI program in the second half of this year, has climbed 20 places

since 2008. Every CBI program country has improved its visa-free/visa-on-arrival score since the start of the year.

“CBI programs offer access to some of the world’s strongest and most promising passports,” says [Dr. Kälin](#), “and the merit of these passports is a reflection of the underlying stability and attractiveness of the countries themselves. The travel freedom that comes with a second passport is significant for individuals, while the economic and societal value that CBI programs generate for host countries can be transformative.”

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Notes to editors

About the 2018 Henley Passport Index

Boasting cutting-edge expert commentary and historical data spanning 13 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 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 [Henley & Partners – 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 Q4 2018

- Japan has overtaken Singapore to claim the top spot on the 2018 Henley Passport Index.
- Germany has fallen to 3rd place, which it now shares with South Korea and France.
- France moves up from 4th to 3rd place.
- The US and the UK have slid down one spot to 5th place.
- The UAE now holds 21st place globally. The country has climbed a remarkable 40 places since 2008.
- Iraq and Afghanistan continue to hold the bottom (106th) spot on the index, with only 30 destinations accessible visa-free or with a visa on arrival.

Regional headlines for Q4 2018

- In Africa, the Seychelles, Mauritius, and South Africa, respectively, hold the top 3 spots. The Seychelles and Mauritius are the only countries in Africa that have shown positive growth over the past decade.
- In the Middle East, the UAE is in 1st place, Turkey is in 2nd place, and Kuwait is in 3rd place.
- In the Caribbean, the top 3 spots are held by Barbados, the Bahamas, and St. Kitts and Nevis, respectively. St. Lucia, Grenada, and Antigua and Barbuda — as well as Dominica, Haiti, and Barbados — all saw an improvement in their scores this quarter.
- In Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Ukraine holds 1st place, Moldova holds 2nd place, and Russia holds 3rd place. Moldova has climbed 20 places since 2008, while Ukraine has climbed 21 places.
- In Southeast Asia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei, respectively, hold the top 3 spots, and all three countries fall within the top 20 globally. Indonesia has climbed seven places compared to Q1 2017 and is the highest regional climber.
- In North Asia, Japan is the global and regional leader, with 190 visa-free/visa-on-arrival destinations. China is the highest regional climber compared to Q1 2017, while North Korea, in 99th place globally, remains the poorest performer in the region.

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 7 billion in foreign direct investment. 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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