

QUARTZ

So You Have Two Passports — Do You Know How to Use Them?

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Traveling with more than one passport in your pocket always comes with a spy thriller novel-like allure. But it's also confusing. After all, a passport isn't just a movie ticket that grants you entry; it establishes your ongoing right to visit, live in, or work in a country. A dual or triple citizen needs to make sure their movements don't peeve the authorities of the countries they visit.

Dominic Volek is a man that knows a lot about passports. He is a managing partner at Henley & Partners, an investment migration firm that advises high-net-worth individuals on the numerous residence and citizenship-by-investment programs around the world. He estimates that up to 80% of the firm's clientele are seeking a second passport in order to get visa-free access to a broader range of countries. (For example, passports from Cyprus and Malta are particularly appealing, as they provide investors with an alternative citizenship or residency in an EU member state, while Grenada and Moldova allow investors visa-free access to the Schengen area.)

However, he says for all the money and red tape clients wade through, the actual logistics of moving through airports once a client gets their second little blue, red, or green book rarely comes up. "What always surprises me is how few of our clients actually ask the question: How do I use this now that I have it? I would say probably only 10% of our clients actually [ask that]."

So, the first question you need to ask yourself when traveling with two passports is simple: Are both of those countries cool with you being a national of somewhere else? If they're not, then traveling with multiple passports is a more high-risk endeavor—one that could get your passport revoked. The good news is that [two thirds](#) of the world's nations already grant this right (high-income nations are more likely to do so) and Volek notes the global trend over the past few years is that more and more countries are seeing the benefit of allowing multiple citizenships.

The second question thing to keep in mind is "the golden rule," as Volek put it: "As long as you're entering and exiting the same country with the same passport, then you're fine." That means the immigration officials of the country you are visiting (or living in) should only know you by one of your passports per trip. He's right, of course, but there are some caveats.

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The first caveat is what you do at the airline desk. An airline cares about one thing and one thing only: Do you have authorization to enter the destination country they are flying you to? If you don't, then they are liable to pay to transport you back to where you came from (which they want to avoid).

Volek illustrated with an example: Let's say you're a South African citizen living in Singapore on a visa that's linked to your South African passport. Let's also say you have a UK passport. If you're flying from Singapore to the UK, you'll need to check in with the airline using with your UK passport. (If you tried to check in with your South African one, you'd be asked for a UK visa). However, once you move past the check-in desk and you come face to face with Singaporean immigration officials, you need to show them your South African passport, which contains the visa which grants you the right to be in that country. When you arrive in the UK, you enter on your UK passport.

The second caveat has to do with that immigration check. Confusingly, despite having relatively hardline stances towards immigration, the UK and the US are two of just a handful of countries in the world that do not have physical immigration checks when you depart. So even if you wanted to flash the same passport you used to enter the country to leave it, no one will directly ask you to (remember, the airline will only ask for the passport that affords you access to the country they are flying you to, not the one that grants you the right to be in the country you're leaving.) This can be [confusing for travelers](#), who may feel they have no proof (in the form of a passport stamp) which shows they didn't overstay a visa.

However, just because some countries don't have "boots on the ground" checks, that doesn't mean officials are not aware you're leaving the country. Airlines share their flight manifests with authorities before they take off—as do operators of sea, ferry, or rail journeys—so even if no one ever asked you to flash your passport, they know you left. A Customs Border Patrol official also confirmed for Quartz that officials know about your second passport; that's why passport applications generally ask you if you possess a passport of another nation. So rest assured: They know you're gone, with both your passports in tow.

In summary, says Volek, are two main scenarios where people need to be cautious about which passport to use. The first is the type that's likely to affect one of his clients: people who have one passport that is much weaker than the other. This traveler needs to make she is traveling on the stronger passport that grants her visa-free access to the country she is visiting.

The other scenario is a question of citizenship and residency. You want to make sure you're entering the country you live and work in on the passport that grants you the right to do that, even if you could theoretically enter visa-free or visa-on-arrival with your alternative passport. (It's worth noting that [US law](#) requires that citizens who are entering or leaving the US "bear a valid United States passport"—even if they don't live or work there anymore. However, a change in the [law that went into effect in 1979](#) eliminated the penalties for this.)

While second scenario may seem like common sense, it would be easy to assume, say, that if you lost your UK passport or it was going to expire two days before a flight, it'd be fine to enter the UK on your US passport (which would allow you visa-free access anyway). However,

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Volek says it's best to avoid that. That said, it's also best practice to always travel with both your passports in your possession.

Despite the lingering perception that traveling with two passports is dodgy, it's not. As long as you're a citizen of two nations that allow it, you've got nothing to hide.