

HK's ranking falls on index of visa-free travel

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Hong Kong's ranking for visa-free access to countries around the world has fallen, according to a study of the visa requirements of more than 180 countries and territories.

Henley & Partners, which bills itself as "a firm specialising in international immigration, consular and citizenship law", researched visa regulations around the globe to update its 2008 rankings, and found Denmark grabbed the top spot.

The Scandinavian country racked

up an index score of 157, signifying its citizens could enter 157 countries and territories visa-free last year, according to a press release.

Finland, Ireland and Portugal tied for second place on 156. Belgium, Germany, Sweden and the United States all slid into third with an index score of 155.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong scored 123 to earn the 22nd position on the list. In 2006, the city sewed up the 13th spot with the lower score of 110, according to the Henley visa restrictions index from that year.

In comparison, the mainland dropped to 79th spot to tie with Laos, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, but its index score rose to 33.

In 2006, the nation tied with several countries, including Vietnam and Ethiopia, for 78th place with a tally of 18.

Citizens who had "the least travel freedom" in 2008 were those of Iran, Pakistan and Somalia, which all tied for 87th position with 25; Iraq, which took 88th place with 23; and Afghanistan, which bottomed out in the 89th slot with 22, the firm said.

"In today's globalised world, visa restrictions play an important role in controlling the movement of foreign nationals across borders," Henley & Partners said in its release.

"Almost all countries now require visas from certain non-nationals who wish to enter their territory.

"Visa requirements are also an expression of the relationships between individual nations, and generally reflect the relations and status of a country within the international community of nations," Henley & Partners said.