

COMMERCE

Passports from Singapore, Germany deemed world's most powerful: Henley & Partners

July 25, 2023



Singapore has overtaken Japan for the index's top spot. Image credit: Henley & Partners

By ZACH JAMES

A Southeast Asian republic is now home to the strongest travel documents according to the latest report from U.K.-based investment migration consultancy Henley & Partners.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

The annual release reveals that Singapore has the most powerful passport in the world, allowing access to 192 of the 227 global destinations without a visa. The United States did not fair as well, tying in eighth place with Lithuania following a 10-year trend of declining flexibility.

"The story is a simple one by more or less standing still, the US has fallen behind," said Greg Lindsay, global strategist and urban tech fellow at Cornell Tech's Jacobs Institute, in a statement.

"While its absolute score has in fact risen over the last decade, the US has been steadily overtaken by rivals such as South Korea, Japan, and Singapore," Mr. Lindsay said. "America's relentless slide down the rankings and [the] unlikelihood of reclaiming the highest position any time soon is a warning to its neighbor Canada and the rest of the Anglosphere as well."

The **2023 Henley Passport Index** covers 199 total passports and 227 destinations, using a mix of research provided by the International Air Transport Authority, open-source online data and in-house findings. Each passport is ranked, receiving a point for every country that allows visa-free travel.

Global standouts

Some passports are gaining substantial points on the index while others remain stagnant or slide.

The U.S. and the U.K. formerly tied for the top spot in 2014 before both began slipping. While the latter has started to regain its footing, jumping into fourth place, marking the first climb in six years, the former does not enjoy the same regain in footing.

According to experts, strict travel rules and a growing concern over issues abroad are to blame.

The new Henley Openness Index ranks all 199 countries and territories worldwide according to the number of nationalities they permit entry to without a prior visa.

Explore the full Openness Index in our latest Global Mobility Report:

<https://t.co/F5WrNatn8k#HenleyPassportIndex> [pic.twitter.com/yvqgHIZZ0i](https://twitter.com/yvqgHIZZ0i)

Henley & Partners (@HenleyPartners) July 21, 2023

"Due to the lack of a demand from inside the U.S. for a change in policy, the extreme political risk for any group or politician who unwittingly facilitates travel by a terrorist, and the fact that tourism has surged post-pandemic anyway, even with a restrictive visa waiver program," said Annie Pforzheimer, former diplomat at the U.S. Department of State and senior non-resident associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in a statement.

"Unfortunately, that status quo, over time, may well contribute to a decline in U.S. soft power if businesses struggle to invite partners to trade shows and meetings, tourists encounter needless application delays and look elsewhere, and open xenophobia erodes the public reputation of the U.S. as a world leader."

Outside of the U.S., "citizenship by investment" programs are gaining popularity. With more than 100 countries and at least 60 percent of the European Union actively participating, this gives affluent populations easy access to another nation's passport.

The report reveals that of all the nations in the world, high net-worth individuals (HNWIs) are flocking to Austria and Malta at the highest rates, ranked in third and fifth place, respectively, on the passport listings.

Henley & Partners found that just 6 percent of countries' passports give their holders visa-free access to 70 percent or more of the global economy, showing that few have much access to the fiscal opportunities presented by strong documents.



Passport rankings of countries hosting citizenship by investment programs

Austria ranks as the most valuable country with a citizenship-by-investment program, slotting in at third place overall. Image courtesy of Henley & Partners

"In general, greater access to the world's economic output is advantageous as it expands the basket of products available to any individual," said Dr. Areef Suleman, director of economic research and statistics at the Islamic Development Bank Institute, in a statement.

"While this is also attainable through international trade, the options available with physical access are far greater, extending to the use of services that are non-exportable such as better-quality education and healthcare."

Asia's highs and lows

Allowing access to nearly 85 percent of the world, Singapore's passport is just ahead of those tied for second place, which includes Germany, Italy and Spain, each making 190 spots accessible.

With the Southeast Asian republic reaching the top spot, the previous world leader, Japan, fell to third place after maintaining its dominance for three years, starting in 2020.

Japan is now tied with South Korea and five other countries in the tertiary position, all of which are deadlocked at 189 destinations. Japan lost access to China, Papua New, Guinea, Ethiopia, Myanmar and Uganda, which in turn cost it the top spot.

As part of permanent COVID-19 restrictions, China is inaccessible to anyone without a visa, but this is expected to change in the relatively near future, according to the experts. The loss of other countries are due to changes in visa verification processes, locking out those without e-visas.

Find out which countries have climbed the highest up the [#HenleyPassportIndex](#) rankings over the past decade, as well as those that have fallen most sharply over that period.

Explore the full ranking and commentary here: <https://t.co/F5WrNatn8k>
pic.twitter.com/G95BcBYmqY

Henley & Partners (@HenleyPartners) [July 19, 2023](#)

However, Japan now offers access to Qatar, leading to only a four-point drop. In the report, especially among the top spots, a low single-digit difference in points is the norm, as the entire top 10 countries are separated by the same number of points in total.

Singapore's triumph comes alongside a recent report that it is the most expensive place for HNWI's to live ([see story](#)). Another portion of the findings shows that the APAC region is the most expensive place overall to inhabit.

Coupling this with the country having the third-highest inflow of wealthy groups ([see story](#)), the country could see even further increases in travel as the affluent community sparks record highs in travel in 2024, spending up to \$1.5 trillion ([see story](#)).

© 2023 Reliance Relocation Services, Inc. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.