

TRAVEL TRENDS

Pandemic upends travel freedom of powerful Singapore and US passports.

Covid shakes up global passport hierarchy

By Travel Weekly Asia | Oct 15, 2020



From visa-free access to 190 destinations worldwide before the pandemic, this number has dropped to under 80 for Singaporeans. Photo Credit: Getty Images/Standart

Covid-19 has caused a dramatic upset to the world's most powerful passports, as border lockdowns continue to shake the global mobility hierarchy that has shaped the travel landscape in the last few decades.

Singaporeans, for instance, enjoyed visa-free access to an unprecedented 190 destinations worldwide in January 2020, earning the envied red passport the second spot on the Henley Passport Index – a ranking of the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.

This number has since dropped to under 80, even as the country gradually eases on restrictions and reopens its borders to selected groups.

The US passport held the sixth spot on the index, Americans freely entering 185 destinations worldwide, but this number dropping to under 75 in pandemic days. With political tensions, criticisms over the government's response of Covid-19 and the upcoming presidential elections, the steady decline of the US passport might also be an indication of its lowered status in the eyes of the international community.

Lower down the index, Russian citizens can now travel to fewer than 50 destinations as opposed to the original 119, while Indian passport holders may currently access fewer than 30 destinations from an original 61.

This general global decline in accessibility to destinations are decidedly more apparent for wealthier democratic countries such the UK, the US, and Western European nations, whose **citizens have taken travel freedom for granted**, said Dr Christian Kaelin, chairman of Henley & Partners and inventor of the passport index concept.

"The pandemic has abruptly changed this, and there's been a shift away from travel freedom being regarded as the prerogative of nationals with once-powerful passports, towards a realisation that it is now a **necessary luxury for those wishing to access first-class education, business opportunities, and quality healthcare for themselves and their families.**"

Should international travel resume without the various pandemic-related travel bans and restrictions in place, Japan continues to take the top spot on the Henley Passport Index, with a visa-free/visa-on-arrival score of 191. Singapore remains in second place with a score of 190, while Germany and South Korea are tied at third place with a score of 189. Overall however, EU member states continue to take the most spots in the index's top 10 listing.

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