



Henley & Partners: Asian passports reign supreme as UK slumps

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Asia dominates the annual powerlist of global passports with the top three slots – unseating European mainstays for the first time, writes Anna Solomon

Japan's passport has claimed the top spot in the global passport 'power' rankings for the third year in a row, followed by Singapore and South Korea in second and third place – making it a clean sweep of the top three by Asian countries for the first time.

Germany, 2018's best-regarded passport, now shares third place with South Korea, according to the report from Henley and Partners' Passport Index – which ranks the world's passports according to destinations that holders are able to visit without a visa. The British and US passports have been on the decline since occupying the top spot in 2015, now coming in joint

eighth. Deemed more advantageous are the Finnish and Italian passports, which share fourth place, and the Danish, Luxembourgian, and Spanish passports, which come in fifth.

The Henley Passport Index reveals fascinating insights about how international mobility is being implemented globally, and with freedom of movement a topic du jour in the run up to Brexit, the Index update could not be timelier.

Dr Parag Khanna, bestselling author and founder and managing partner of FutureMap in Singapore, has urged his audiences to view migration as part of a solution, not the problem. ‘Increasingly, it is accepted that more migration creates more demand, stimulating much needed economic growth,’ Dr Khanna comments. One such success story is Thailand, that’s upswing in the Henley Passport Index comes about as a result of a new wave of foreign talent into the country due to Western investment shifting out of China.

Indeed, the prominence of Asian countries at the top touts the benefits of open-door policies and trade agreements. Countries that are accepting mobility are doing better, according to Dr Christian Kaelin, chairman of Henley & Partners: ‘The latest rankings show that the countries that embrace this reality are thriving, with their citizens enjoying ever-increasing passport power and the array of benefits that come with it.’

This correlation is echoed by political science researchers Uğur Altundal and Ömer Zarpli, who have found a strong relationship between travel freedom and other economic, political, and human liberties.

‘Similar to trade freedom, countries that rank highly in investment freedom generally have stronger passports,’ they write. ‘European states such as Austria, Malta, and Switzerland clearly show that countries with a business-friendly environment tend to score highly when it comes to passport power.’

One potential buck to this trend is the Middle East; although Middle Eastern countries have streamlined visa laws and made strong gains in the Index, the figures may be misleading. Dr Lorraine Charles, research associate at the University of Cambridge’s Centre for Business Research, warns that migration in the Middle East is mainly driven by deepening regional conflicts and forced displacements.

Closer to home, Brexit means that the future of movement between Britain and the EU remains uncertain. If the government goes ahead with the proposed ‘Australian-style’ points-based system, policy will be more liberal towards non-EU citizens, and more restrictive than the current freedom of movement enjoyed by European citizens. EU migration to the UK has already fallen by 59 per cent between 2015 and 2018. As the next few weeks unfurl, will this trend continue, or will policymakers share in some of the enthusiasm for mobility that is coming to characterise Asia?