



Powerful Passports

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The most basic function of your U.S. passport is to allow you to travel to other countries without going through the (sometimes considerable) hassle of obtaining a visa. If you have an American passport, then you are able to travel, visa-less, to 184 different countries and territories—out of a total of 227. Given that American tourists are among the most coveted in the world, you might think that America is the most powerful global passport that a person can possess.

But according to official data from the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the U.S. passport ranks well behind Singapore (192 destinations), Germany, Italy, and Spain (190 destinations each), and Japan, Austria, Finland, France, Luxembourg, South Korea and Sweden (189). The United Kingdom, Denmark, Ireland, and the Netherlands issue passports that allow their citizens to access 188 destinations, and 12 other countries offer access to between 185 and 187 locations. America is tied for 27th place with Lithuania.

The weakest passports, also ranked by the IATA, include Afghanistan (27 visa-less destinations), Iraq (29), Syria (30), and Pakistan (33).

On the other end, a relatively small handful of destinations don't require any visitor to obtain a visa, no matter where they come from—but most of these are exotic tourist destinations: Burundi, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, the Maldives, Micronesia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Samoa, Seychelles, Timor-Leste, and Tuvalu. The most closed countries, which allow no visa-free access for any passport, include Afghanistan, North Korea, Papua New Guinea, and Turkmenistan.

The United States only allows 44 other nationalities to pass through its borders without a visa, which puts it in 78th place in the openness index. The no-visa list includes Taiwan and South Korea but not China or India, all European countries except Romania, Ukraine and Russia, and no African country is included.

The IATA reports that, in the 18 years since it began tracking this information, there has been an overall trend toward greater travel freedom. The average number of destinations that travelers worldwide can access without a visa has nearly doubled since 2006, from 58 to 109. Among the biggest risers: the United Arab Emirates has added 107 visa-free destinations since 2013, and Colombia has added 50.

Sources:

<https://www.cntraveler.com/story/worlds-most-powerful-passports>

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html>

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