



By: *Catriona M. Munro, TA Editor in Chief*

# Hand over your gold!



What is the punishment for assisting illegal entry and harbouring an illegal immigrant in the UK? "You can be fined £45,000 to facilitate illegal entry, and be subject to a prison sentence of up to 5 years if you are caught illegally employing them."

So what nefarious crime do our authorities associate with our tiny Caribbean island friends? I'm using the example of Dominica.

For information, Dominica is a mountainous Caribbean island nation with natural hot springs and tropical rainforests. Morne Trois Pitons National Park is home to the volcanically heated, steam-covered Boiling Lake.

The park also encompasses sulphur vents, the 65m-tall Trafalgar Falls and narrow Titou Gorge. To the west is Dominica's capital, Roseau, with colourful timber houses and botanic gardens.

But the European Commission has somehow established that the government of Dominica, in addition to those of 4 other Caribbean states, has, over the past 8 years, issued 88,000 "golden passports".

Not cocaine trafficking; not a hint of spice smuggling (saffron is so expensive in Europe)?

So how many people actually are passport-wielding, native population of this tiny, doubtless exotic and geographically desirable island?

### Golden passports essentially constitute a trade in citizenship

Golden passports essentially constitute a trade in citizenship. Dominica - since I've decided to pick on it - has a population of 70,000.

The Commission has reported that the real nationals who have shelled out massively for these super passports are generally an influx of various nationalities - astonishingly - Chinese, Russians, Iraqis, Iranians, Syrians and Yemenis.

The Dominican government appears to have and the island appears to have accepted it might have got a bit out of control here, and now wants to tighten controls of the large influx into Dominica.

Dominica itself has reported to have issued 34,500 passports, costing \$100,000 (£82,326) per golden goose.

## Why the Caribbean for visa-free travel?

As usual, everybody blames the EU. In 2015, Brussels granted visa-free travel to a number of Caribbean states, for 90 days per year.

The Commission has now accepted that an overhaul of the situation is due, and expressed concern about the infiltration into Caribbean nations of organised crime, money laundering, tax evasion and general corruption having particularly focused on Dominica's visa-free system jointly with the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, which pulled no punches and made it completely obvious where the finger was pointing.

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And it's at people with absolutely no link with the country - currently, there is no requirement even to own a property on the island. You don't even have to visit!

And the Commission also woke up to the notion that anyone operating in such an environment would not hesitate to make criminal use of any the new identity the glittering "passe partout could offer, let alone Interpol and the question of law enforcement operating" properly.

Visa-free travel is fraught with hassles. The issues of asylum seekers work both ways. Under the super and Yiva Johanson EU Home Affairs Commissioner, reporting that 150,000

citizens of somewhere have made use of countries with low cost visa systems (you again Dominica - your passports span the spectrum), return where they like to claim asylum, which is not considered cricket, even remotely.

As the Prince of Morocco says in The Merchant of Venice:

"All that glisters is not gold".