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PASSPORT ISSUERS
223 COUNTRIES

KNOWN LOST OR STOLEN DOCUMENTS
40 MILLION

Last year, one-third of air travelers went unscanned for stolen passports —Double Crossings

1 Need to fool a border guard? The first step is resembling your documentation. Slip a couple hundred bucks and an appropriately bedraggled photo to a counterfeiter, and he'll hand back a doctored version of a stolen passport. Some crime rings have stockpiles big enough that they simply pull out a legitimate document liberated from someone of roughly your age and likeness.

2 Not all countries are created equal. Criminals look for passports from countries that grant visa-free travel to the most destinations; a Finnish passport that will get you into 173 countries commands a higher price on the black market than a Jamaican one with access to a measly 77.

3 If a passport is reported missing, it's added to Interpol's database of more than 40 million lost or stolen travel documents from 167 countries. Officials can cross-check the data instantly, and if your document's number pops up, the limo meeting you at the airport will have sirens. Good news for under-the-radar travelers: only the US, UK, and UAE routinely check the database.

4 Anti-counterfeiting is a constant cat-and-mouse game between fake and official issuers. Modern passports employ a vast array of technology, including biometric chips, holograms, and UV-fluorescent fibers embedded into the paper.

5 A chain is only as strong as its weakest link: birth certificates, driver's licenses, and other "breeder documents" are relatively easy to forge and can net you a perfectly legitimate state-issued passport.

