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The capital city of St Kitt's Nevis. Courtesy istockphoto.com St Kitts and Nevis citizenship fees may increase depending on the size and age of the family applying. istockphoto

UAE residents pay Dh1.4m for a Caribbean passport

Preeti Kannan

DUBAI // Hundreds of UAE residents are investing up to Dh1.4 million in Caribbean island states in return for citizenship.

The expatriate businessmen from countries such as Syria and Iran are becoming citizens of Dominica and St Kitts and Nevis to overcome restrictions imposed on their home countries.

Citizens of those islands are exempt from visa requirements in as many as 140 countries.

"Caribbean islands have a history of offering their citizenship against donations in government welfare funds," said Imran Farooq, chief executive of Premiers, a consultancy in Dubai that handles about 150 applications a year to St Kitts and Nevis.

"More people are taking citizenships in the Caribbean so if their country is under sanction, they can have options. Once they see the value that they can travel freely to various parts of the world, most of these are legitimate businessmen, they take up this option.

"St Kitts and Nevis has been very popular among Iranians, Russians, Pakistanis, Egyptians, Jordanians and Syrians." In this region, 65 per cent of applicants are Iranians, Mr Badie hopes to have his new passport in six months, but will not live in Dominica.

Alex Woodley, consul general at the newly-opened St Kitts and Nevis consulate in Dubai, said: "Most of our applicants are not just citizens from displaced nations. They are not from one region or country. Participants are from many stable countries.

"There is a significant denial rate. St Kitts and Nevis has a stringent due diligence policy including engaging specialists to check the identity of applicants and make sure no applicant brings disrepute."

A Dubai property firm has sent text messages to residents promising citizenship in St Kitts and Nevis through investments.

"We provide them a vehicle for investment but it is the government who will sign off on whether they can accept it or not," said Munaf Ali, chief executive of Range Developments, developer of the Park Hyatt St Kitts and Nevis.

"We provide this to genuine people who have a good background and aren't involved in any criminal activities. We take an initial deposit of 10 per cent. Once the government approves their application, then we take the full amount. It takes three months from start to finish."

Mr Ali said the ease of visa access made St Kitts and Nevis attractive.

"A citizen wants to become global and have borderless travel. People are becoming richer and would like to travel more. They don't like these barriers to entry. And businessmen would like to have the luxury to travel visa-free."

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POLL

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Yes - it is congested and people push in front all the time

No - People are generally well-mannered on the Metro

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