



# **The SAGE International Encyclopedia of Travel and Tourism Recreation and Leisure**

Contributors: Nuno F. Ribeiro, Carena Van Riper & Benjamin Hickerson

Edited by: Linda L. Lowry

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The definition of leisure and its distinction from free time, recreation, and more important, work is a consideration that only modern societies confront. The same applies to industrialized societies in their early stages of development. Groups of people who have addressed their basic survival needs and have not yet developed complex economic structures are less equipped to engage in leisure activities, and therefore, the nuanced differences between free time, recreation, and leisure play a less prominent role in everyday life.

In these societies, there is limited free time to create opportunities for forming and refining collective identities. Yet as population numbers rise, increases in productivity run parallel to meet the needs of a changing society. Specialized divisions of labor and higher levels of productivity then increase efficiency and enable people to take advantage of opportunities for engaging in leisure, recreation, and tourism.

Time becomes an increasingly scarce commodity, to be bought and sold to the highest bidder; however, in nations such as the United States, the highest bidder, more often than not, tends to be work, not leisure. Thus, the question “When does time become leisure?” makes sense only in an industrialized society. Time (or rather, free time) cannot be equated with leisure in modern societies, but the latter must always include the former.

### Definition of Leisure, Recreation, and Free Time

In modern English, the word *leisure* is derived from the Latin *licere*, “to be permitted,” allowed to engage in an activity. Leisure therefore means the license and freedom to do something. In an ideal leisure pursuit, the individual or group is free to do whatever might be desired without influences or constraints imposed by external factors. Naturally, the definition of leisure does not exhaust itself in its etymology, although this concise description can be expanded to include nonutilitarian free time spent in activities that challenge and better the individual while improving that person’s knowledge of the surrounding world.

*Recreation*, in turn, has its origin in the Latin word *recreare*, meaning “to refresh, to restore [oneself].” In this sense, recreation appears to be contrasted against the idea of work that diminishes the self. How can an individual rest from labors if there are no labors from which to rest? Used in this fashion, leisure and recreation can be considered synonyms. However, if an individual finds restorative qualities in his or her vocation, recreational pursuits could be associated with work. Therefore, the definition of recreation becomes subjectively defined and in accordance with an individual’s state of mind.

Finally, *free time* is time not spent in (a) working (time spent working in specialized production), (b) personal work (maintenance of goods and one’s body, and (c) consumption (time spent consuming goods). It is also time not spent carrying out social, civic, or moral duties and responsibilities, such as fulfilling one’s role as a father or spouse, visiting relatives, attending social gatherings, voting, and so on. In sum, free time is devoid of any obligation and is an integral part of both recreation and leisure.

### Time and Leisure

A number of scholars have postulated that human beings have acquired—through industrialization, specialization of labor, and scientific progress—enormous amounts of free time. The question, they argued, is what to do with it. Indeed, it should not come as a surprise that many authors have devoted their time and effort to this particular subject—that is, how to

avoid boredom given the immense amounts of time available for citizens of economically developed countries. However, this is a false problem. If working hours have decreased for most of the population because of regular increases in productivity, the same cannot be said of free time.

People may work less at their places of employment but spend more time working outside of their jobs than ever before. Philosopher and social critic Bertrand Russell deemed this phenomenon “the social purpose of work”—that is, consumption and normative standards that have reinforced a society that values an overworked lifestyle. This trend has been accompanied by extraordinary rises in productivity that have more than surpassed human beings’ basic needs and have yielded a tremendous array of goods for consumption. Without consumption *en masse*, the economic system would disintegrate. And if one reminds oneself that the act of consumption is not instantaneous (e.g., it takes time to use an electrical drill as well as to maintain and replace it), then it seems that free time and leisure have diminished rather than increased.

### Leisure and Recreation

To survive, then, the industrial machine must wage battle on multiple fronts. On one hand, society must not only produce vast amounts of goods but also inculcate the desire to purchase products, provide the financial means to do so, and ensure there remains time to enjoy these products. This has been made possible by constant increases in the efficiency of production methods over time. On the other hand, human workers have adopted disciplined lifestyles to maintain high levels of efficiency, which takes a toll on various dimensions of health and well-being.

Given that human beings need periods of rest on a regular basis to function at their optimal level, time must be provided for recuperation and recreation. Time for recuperation has been gained at the expense of leisure. Free time that in less industrialized societies would have been allocated to purposeful, *true* leisure, is now used only as a brief respite from work or consumed by additional work, such as a second job. The industrial system greatly benefits from this; a greater quantity of goods tends to be consumed during recreational activities as opposed to leisure activities. Contemplation, for instance, an activity that can be regarded as *true* leisure, involves no material consumption.

Activities such as participating in or watching sports, pursuing hobbies, working on do-it-yourself projects, going on vacation, camping, drinking, volunteerism, or reading, in their present form, can only be regarded as recreation; they are notorious for consuming time and products. Little wonder that activities that demand the most effort (e.g., reading) are either modified to fit these pressures of both time and consumption (e.g., pulp fiction) or abandoned altogether in favor of other forms of entertainment. Human beings now spend considerable amounts of time with recreational activities but devote less and less time to leisure.

*Nuno F. Ribeiro, Carena Van Riper, and Benjamin Hickerson*

**See also** [Leisure Tourism, Serious](#); [Leisure Travel, Sociology of](#); [Sports Tourism](#); [Vacation Days and Impact on Travel](#)

### Further Readings

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