



## TALKING ABOUT HOLIDAYS AND LEISURE TIME

To prepare for IELTS it is useful to consider the topic of holidays and vacations, leisure time, interests and hobbies.

What is the difference between holidays and vacations?

When you have some spare time, what do you do? What do you do in your leisure time? Many people have interests, such as sport, gardening or fashion. Young people play basketball or surf on the internet, while older people might play card games such as bridge.

Hobbies are pleasurable activities which we devote a lot of spare time to, and sometimes even a lot of money. These are special interests. Collecting rare Chinese porcelains can be an extremely costly but very pleasurable hobby.

### IELTS Tip

The topic of holidays and leisure time is important these days and often comes up in IELTS.

Think about public holidays in your country and have something to say about them – their background, their significance, what happens on these days, and how people enjoy them.

Think too about leisure time, and what people do in their spare time. What activities and hobbies are popular, for both men and women.

### Preparing an answer on holidays and leisure

When preparing for the IELTS test, whether for Writing or Speaking, it is helpful to brainstorm a variety of topics and issues – to begin to develop your own ideas, and build up possible responses.

Think of:

- possible topic areas
- possible questions including a range of language functions
- possible answers
- examples and reasons
- grammatical choices
- useful and related vocabulary

### Possible topic areas

Consider the topic of **holidays** and **leisure**. What aspects of this topic might you include? Make a list and then gather some thoughts:

- Holidays – general background
- Public holidays
- Employment and holiday leave
- Vacations
- Leisure time – interests and hobbies



## Holidays – general background

In today's world the pressure to work more and more efficiently is taking a heavy toll. People need to recover and rest, and make the most of their leisure time and any holidays they get.

Holidays are times when we stop work and **enjoy** ourselves. The peoples and cultures of the world have introduced holidays into the working week for **cultural and/or religious reasons**. Governments and employers have introduced holidays into the working week for **health and safety** reasons.

A holiday can be one day or several days, whereas a vacation is usually understood to be a longer period of time – a week or more. Sometimes these two words can be interchanged – they are sometimes synonyms. We can say **summer holidays** or **summer vacation**. Vacation, however is used more in North American English.

Let's consider holidays first – days when we are not required to work, such as the **weekend**, or special **public holidays** instituted by governments in every country, to celebrate the birthday of the king or queen, or perhaps an important war or victory in a war.

Certain religions require believers to attend church, or pray at a mosque, or in a synagogue or temple, at least once a week, otherwise at particularly important **religious festivals** and holy days. It is the idea of **holy day** that gives English the word **holiday**. That is the link – a religious festival requiring believers to stop work and pray, for one or sometimes several days, maybe on Fridays for Muslims and Jews, or Sunday for Christians. Special holy days, such as Christmas and Easter for Christians are times to remember events in the life of Christ. There are also special holidays for Buddhists, when believers in Buddhism remember events in the life of Buddha.

Think about religious holidays in your culture. Be prepared to list possible religious holidays and have something to say about one or two of the most significant of these.

## Public Holidays

Most countries have public holidays – special days in the **calendar** when workers are not required to work but are still paid, such as National Day, or 1st May, or the day to remember those who died in a major war – Remembrance Day, or in Australia, ANZAC Day. Muslim countries have special religious holidays and so do Christian countries – Ramadan, Christmas and Easter. These times are of significant national importance and public holidays are created to enable people to carry out religious observances.

Many countries and cultures celebrate the end of winter and the arrival of spring. China celebrates the Spring Festival, also called Chinese New Year towards the end of the northern winter. In southern Asia, for example in Thailand, this is the Water Festival – new year, or Songkran in Thai, a time of cleaning and washing.

What are these days in your country or culture? Organise your ideas. Be able to identify and list the special holidays in your country or culture. Be prepared to talk about these holidays, their significance and what people usually do.

## Employment and holiday leave

Some countries, such as Japan and the United States of America allow workers less annual holiday leave but grant all people more public holidays. Japan has 15 public holidays every year while the USA has 10 days.



We need to rest, to recover and recuperate; otherwise we can get overworked and then become exhausted. This can lead to undue stress, illness and physical problems.

We call the time when we do not go to work **leave**. **Sick leave** means when we do not go to work because we are too ill to work, and we need to stay home. In developed countries with strong laws protecting workers and their rights, annual recreation leave is stipulated as a basic condition for a worker.

**Annual leave** or **recreation leave** means the amount of holiday time, or holiday leave in a year (per annum), awarded to workers by law, as part of their **conditions of employment**. Most workers in Australia have 4 weeks (20 working days) annual recreation leave. **Study leave** is time given to some employees in some companies for study.

If someone takes a long holiday and is away from work for a few weeks, or after a long Christmas break, it is usual for friends or fellow workers to enquire "How was your holiday – what did you do? Did you go anywhere?"

Some people are happy enough to stay home, perhaps for financial reasons, or just to catch up on rest and housework. So, in answering a question, such as: **Did you go anywhere?** you might hear: **No, I just stayed home for the whole time.**

### Vacations

As people earn more money they are more able to save and then take a long holiday. More and more people are holidaying **overseas**. As a result, the **tourist industry** has been growing steadily for the last 40 years.

In preparing for IELTS think about long holidays or vacations. Where do people go? Are more people taking long holidays these days and are they travelling more? What do people when they are on vacation?

Think about the tourist industry and the effect large numbers of tourists have on the environment – are they damaging tourist destinations? Are tourists a type of pollution? How important is the tourist industry for the economy?

### Leisure Time – Interests and Hobbies

What do you do in your free time? After a week working in an office or factory, the weekend is a time to catch up with friends, or to go out and enjoy yourself, seeing a film, having a meal at a restaurant, going swimming, getting some exercise, or fresh air and sunshine. Leisure time is when we enjoy these activities.

Many of us have interests and hobbies. Some popular interests are sports – football, cricket, tennis, swimming. In Asian countries, such as China and Japan, a popular interest is miniature plants, called **bonsai**. There is a growing interest in cooking in the western world. What special interests might you have? – playing sport with a local club; body building at a local gymnasium (gym); ballroom dancing; playing card games such as bridge, or perhaps chess at a chess club or bridge club.

Do young people have similar interests to older people? Younger people usually enjoy noisy music, crowded bars and clubs and contact sports, whereas older people prefer quieter and calmer venues and activities.



### Hobbies

What are hobbies? Be careful not to confuse habits and hobbies! Hobbies can include collecting stamps, restoring vintage cars, train spotting or bird watching. Some people join clubs to meet other people who also enjoy such specialist interests and activities. Some hobbies can be quite costly.

### Possible questions

Following are possible discussion type questions for Part 3 of the IELTS Speaking Test. These questions require you to use different language functions – explain, describe, compare and so on.

Topic area	Questions	Functions
<b>Holidays</b>	What is the importance or place of holidays in our lives?	Identifying
	What are the public holidays in your country?	Identifying
	What is the significance of these days – just the weekend, or special days for historical reasons?	Explaining
	What happens on special public holidays – are these days, religious or civil occasions?	Describing
	If the day is a national secular holiday, that is, it is not religious, what happens?	Describing
	Is there a parade, such as the Thanksgiving Parade or St Patrick's Day parade in New York?	Describing
	Why do we need holidays? How important are holidays?	Explaining
<b>Vacations</b>	Where do people in your country usually go for a long holiday?	Identifying
	Are more people travelling overseas for their holidays?	Comparing
	Will people travel abroad more in the future?	Speculating
	Can holidays be expensive?	Giving opinion
<b>Leisure time</b>	What do people in your country do in their spare time?	Identifying
	How much should we work, and how much rest should we have?	Giving opinion
	Do men and women have similar or different interests?	Comparing
	What can old people do to remain active?	Suggesting
	Should governments help people to remain active by providing facilities such as parks, playgrounds, public swimming pools, community centres?	Giving opinion
<b>Hobbies</b>	What are some of the common hobbies in your country?	Identifying
	Do men and women have the same hobbies?	Comparing
	Do you think hobbies are important? – Why?	Giving opinion



## The Grammar of Leisure – using **do** and **go**

In English, we use the verb **do** to describe chores or daily duties.

For example:

- do the washing
- do the shopping
- do the housework
- do the gardening
- do some study

Of course we can also say I washed my clothes, I went shopping, I bought some food, I cleaned and tidied the house, I mowed the lawn and weeded the garden, I reviewed my lessons and prepared for the final examinations.

The word **go** is used for some sports and other activities.

For example:

- go swimming
- go surfing
- go hunting
- go sky-diving
- go skating

## The Grammar of Leisure – Infinitives, Participles and Gerunds

When talking about what we do in our spare time certain grammatical structures are useful, and sometimes necessary.

In English sometimes verbs take different forms, not just to indicate tense and number, but also depending on words they follow:

For example:	I like <b>to swim</b>	Verb + Infinitive
	I like <b>swimming</b>	Verb + Participle

The verb use is followed by the infinitive form, for example **to have**. There are many verbs in English which are themselves followed by verbs, but in the **infinitive** form.

When we talk about various sports and activities, we sometimes use the **-ing** form of the verb, the **participle**.

Some verbs can be followed by either the **infinitive form** or the **participle form** of the verb.

Verb + infinitive	Verb + Participle
I used <b>to have</b> a pet. I like <b>to eat</b> ice-cream in summer. I need <b>to do</b> some homework tonight. I want <b>to buy</b> a pair of jeans. I have <b>to prepare</b> for the exams.	I enjoy <b>reading</b> books and <b>listening</b> to jazz. I miss <b>swimming</b> . I can't wait for summer! I regret <b>eating</b> all that chocolate! I feel sick! I hate <b>playing</b> football in the rain. I finished <b>writing</b> the assignment.
Verb + Infinitive or Verb + Participle	
I like <b>to read</b> . I hate <b>to be</b> late. I try <b>to stay</b> fit.	I like <b>reading</b> . I hate <b>being</b> late. Try <b>doing</b> more exercise.



Some **adjectives** are followed by infinitives.

**Adjective + Infinitive**

He was **sad to leave** his family.  
 The plane is **ready to take off**.  
 I'm **happy to meet** you.  
 I'm **pleased to see** you again.  
 He was **glad to receive** a good report.

**Gerunds**

Some participles can also work as **nouns**.

For example: **As a child I used to have a few hobbies – flying pigeons, collecting stamps and football cards.**

The words **flying** and **collecting** act like verbs and nouns at the same time. The participle form of the verb is here called a **gerund** – a noun/verb.

**On the weekends, I catch up on some sleep, do the housework and shopping, the washing – all those household chores.**

Here, the **shopping** and the **washing** are also noun/verbs – verb forms of the word acting as a noun. Such words are called **gerunds** in the grammar of English.

**Verbs which take Gerunds and Infinitives**

**Verbs followed by a Gerund**

We **finished eating** our meal and then went to see a film.

admit	defend	excuse	mind	resent
advise	delay	finish	miss	resist
anticipate	deny	forbid	permit	resume
appreciate	detest	get through	postpone	risk
avoid	discuss	(can't) help	practise	spend (time)
can't help	dislike	have	quit	suggest
complete	enjoy	imagine	recall	tolerate
consider	escape	mention	report	waste (time)

**Verbs followed by an Infinitive**

I **agree to come** to class on time.

agree	decide	hope	prepare	struggle
aim	demand	hurry	pretend	swear
appear	deserve	intend	proceed	tend
arrange	desire	leap	promise	threaten
ask	endeavour	learn	refuse	try
attempt	expect	leave	remember	use
be able	fail	long	resolve	volunteer
beg	forget	mean	say	vow
care	get	need	seem	wait
choose	happen	offer	shoot	want
condescend	have	ought	stop	wish
consent	help	plan	strive	yearn
dare	hesitate			



## Verbs which take Gerunds and Infinitives

<b>Verbs followed by both a Gerund or an Infinitive</b> He <b>continued reading</b> through the night because the book was so interesting. He <b>continued to read</b> through the night because the book was so interesting.				
can afford can't bear begin cease	commence continue dread hate	like loathe love manage	neglect prefer propose	(can't stand) start undertake

<b>Verbs followed by an Object and an Infinitive</b> I <b>advised him to see</b> a doctor.				
advise allow appoint ask authorise beg bring build buy cause challenge	choose command convince dare direct enable encourage expect forbid force get	have help hire instruct invite lead leave let like love motivate	need oblige order pay permit persuade prepare promise remind require select	send teach tell train trust urge want warn wish

<b>Verbs followed by a Preposition, an Object and an Infinitive</b> The pilot <b>waited for the clouds to break</b> before he could land the plane.		
arrange for him to wait for him to love for him to like for him to		

<b>Verbs followed by a Preposition and a Gerund</b> The thief <b>confessed to stealing</b> the money. I don't <b>care about missing</b> the film.			
admit to approve of argue about believe in care about complain about concentrate on	confess to depend on disapprove of discourage from dream about feel like forget about	get through give up go on insist on involved in keep on object to	plan on prevent (someone) from refrain from succeed in talk about think about worry about