



13 Best Retirement Hobbies

A List of Pastimes for Seniors

Retirement can be a shock to the system. The job that once kept you busy at least 40 hours a week is gone, and with it — for some — your sense of purpose. If you don't find fun things to do when you retire, you can find yourself feeling lost, lonely in retirement.

In my book "Master Class: Living Longer, Stronger, and Happier," I recommend that retirees make a "retirement hobbies list" that blends socializing, moving, creating and thinking — building blocks that have been shown to correlate with high scores on standard measures of successful aging and cognitive health.

We surveyed over 1,000 retirees to find out what hobbies for seniors they have taken up in retirement, and we used their recommendations to build this list of top hobbies for retirees. These retirement pastimes are all rich in two or more of the four key dimensions that came out on top in our poll.

Volunteering

One top retirement hobby is volunteering. It's good for the soul, highly social and comes in a thousand forms. Work in a museum, and you'll have daily opportunities to learn something new. Take part in a service role where you can help others. Or volunteer at an arts center where you can have (often free) access to performances. One retiree told us that his hobby is working in a men's prison in California counseling inmates on career development and says he has learned a lot from his students while deepening his commitment to prison reform. Another is a volunteer docent at the National Underground Railway Freedom Center, where she enjoys conveying the important lesson about "how courage, cooperation and perseverance on the part of mostly unsung heroes brought about positive changes." You can even combine your service with an educational learning adventure on a Service Learning program.

Participating in a Book Club

Love to read? Make your reading even more rewarding by joining a book club as one of your hobbies in retirement, and you can deepen your understanding of both books and people. One Road Scholar retiree belongs to four book clubs and is starting a fifth. "I enjoy the reading and the insights, friendships and other viewpoints that come from club discussions," she said. Joining a book club in retirement can also encourage you to read books you otherwise wouldn't read and can open doors to new experiences!

Walking and Hiking

Another idea for the newly retired is walking or hiking. Both pastimes come with fresh air and a quickened pulse, a chance to observe nature and, if you walk with a friend, a dose of the socializing that's so important to healthy aging. Add that all up, and in a 45-minute walk you've helped your brain more than you would by doing a crossword puzzle. One Road Scholar retiree writes that walking takes her back to her childhood: "I grew up in a small town and, when the weather permitted, we would take long walks on Sunday afternoons. It was always a special time to enjoy the beauties of nature and to greet those we would meet along the way. We returned home refreshed, happy and filled with thanksgiving. Although I am now 82 and live alone, I still walk and inwardly feel the same as I did then. A good way to begin my day."

Writing

Erik Erikson, the eminent psychologist who carefully mapped the stages of human life, wrote that the seventh stage is marked by conflict between stagnation and generativity. "Generativity" means leaving something of value to future generations, whether by changing the world or by passing on stories and lessons to one's children and grandchildren. Writing is a great tool for generativity, and many seniors who have written memoirs have jumped into other genres of writing. One writes, "I have written and published a memoir I began as a student in OLLI's Memoir Writing Class. It was an amazing journey that continues. I have discovered that I have a keen writing style and definitely have stories to tell. I have begun my second book, a novel." Other survey respondents write poems and raps for special occasions, historical biographies or performance scripts for local historical societies. One wrote that "when I don't write, I get cranky!"

Photography

Would you like to learn to see in a completely new way? The great photographer Alfred Stieglitz wrote that "in photography there is a reality so subtle it becomes more than reality," and several of the retirees we surveyed made similar observations. One wrote: "Photography has enlarged my 'mental' eye to see beyond the photo. It's a constant learning process." Photography can also give you a way to utilize and develop the artistic side of your brain as you age.

Gardening

Gardening is good for the body, the brain and the soul and a great idea for retirement. It's also a great hobby for seniors to do at home. Add this popular pastime to your retirement hobbies list, and you'll get exercise and, if you grow vegetables, eat more healthfully. One retiree wrote: "I am a biologist by training, and the biology of a garden is always a learning experience," while another writes that "communing in nature enhances the spiritual side of my being."

Birding

I can't add anything to what this Road Scholar writes: "I used to be a fairly strong hiker, but as I got older I started to slow down, not just because I was aging, but because I no longer saw the need to complete a hike in a quick time. I started to notice more and became a birder." Birding is a perfect activity for older

people – you get outside and walk, you can go by yourself or with a group, and you exercise your reflexes in focusing on the bird and your mind in trying to identify the bird.

Foreign Language Study

Another fun thing to do when you retire is to learn a new language! Don't fall for the trap that learning a foreign language is only a young person's game. While youth has some advantages, older people bring something special to the task, namely, focus and a genuine commitment to learning that children often lack. Still don't believe me? Listen to this Road Scholar retiree: "I have gone back to school (I am almost 82 years old), and I am earning a bachelor's degree. I am studying Latin and Greek."

Singing or Playing a Musical Instrument

Another top hobby for retirees: taking music lessons. Like studying a foreign language, this pastime is something seniors are often a little afraid of. But here, too, older people often have a more disciplined approach to practice that young musicians lack. That can be a great advantage and can lead to satisfying progress. One Road Scholar retiree wrote that she has declared music to be the theme of her retirement. "I used to sing in the chorus in high school," she said. "Then I sang and played guitar with a church group in mid-life. Later, I took voice lessons and performed with a community choral group. And currently I play ukulele about once per week. I found this uke group after I was newly retired, and it is now a very important social group for me." Another observed that playing music can forestall dementia.

Painting and Drawing

Do you want an artistic outlet other than music? Why not try fine arts? One Road Scholar senior writes that painting "has been inspirational for me. I especially like *plein air* (outdoor) painting as it combines my love of nature and scenery with the deeply satisfying experience of painting. It becomes a way of both freeing and expanding mind and spirit."

Bicycling

If walking or hiking is too hard on your knees, bicycling may be the best retirement hobby for you. Many seniors say that bicycling rekindles the feelings of freedom they experienced as children cycling everywhere. One Road Scholar retiree writes that 30 years ago he "joined a Wednesday night ride for anyone in our neighborhood who was interested in participating. I still ride today, both locally and on Road Scholar rides, and am always pleased with the number of friends I have made through this activity." Another writes that "bicycling provides a social group, good aerobic exercise, helps me maintain physical abilities (balance, strength), helps me stay mentally alert (watching out for motorists) and allows me to experience outdoors and travel to many places." What more could you ask for?

Genealogy

With abundant Internet resources and the advent of other digital tools, genealogy has perhaps never been more popular, making it one of Road Scholars' top hobbies for retirement. Genealogical detective work is a great pastime for your brain and might even introduce you to distant cousins you otherwise would never have met. One newly retired Road Scholar wrote that research she thought would take three months has taken her on a time-travel trip through history for the last eight years. "I am amazed by my

ancestors and have found out about their lives and written their stories,” she said. “It has changed my life and my knowledge about this country and Europe. Some of my genealogy trips included areas where my ancestors have lived in. It has made the trips come alive with history, and the trips are then so personal and touch me to my core being.”

Online Learning

Mobility issues, travel restrictions, budget or time constraints may make your opportunities for international learning and travel a challenge. But you don't have to leave your front door to continue your journey of lifelong learning in retirement! There are countless online lectures, educational programs and courses designed for seniors that you can take to occupy and expand your mind even when you don't have the ability or budget to learn about the world in person.