

5 Reasons Trading Should Be Allowed on Sundays and Public Holidays

Shôn Ellerton, December 28, 2022

Should businesses be allowed to trade normally on public holidays or on a Sunday? Here are five reasons I believe they should be allowed to.



Each year, we seem to have an introduction of new or renamed public holidays depending on the sentiment of the nation. There's often some controversy over public holidays. This, of course, is expected. You can't please everyone.

In Australia, every year, time and money is wasted over the same debate whether Australia Day should be renamed and moved to another day. The so-called fight against the bad 'ole colonial days. Anzac Day, a day of remembrance for those fighting for the nation, has its detractors based on the peculiar notion that it's glorifying war. Possibly a testament to a generation of people not understanding how freedom is earned. There is the King or Queen's birthday which, understandably, is questioned on two accounts. That we have less in common with the Royal Family as we once had and having to celebrate the birthday of a monarch nowhere close to his actual birthday, which just happens to be in November. Then there are, of course, the major public holidays like Easter, New Year, and Christmas.

For most of us, public holidays are seen as bonus days to have some extra time off. And this, in general, is a good thing. It is a time to have a bit of 'down time' and to replenish and recharge. However, there are some who disagree with the notion that *anyone* should be working on some of our public holidays, especially those holidays which have a religious slant to them. Notably Easter and Christmas.

As for Sunday, I've come across debates, some of which have been quite fierce, whether normal trading hours should be allowed. Most often, those who take the view that Sunday should be treated differently from other days are Christians, representing 45 percent of Australia according to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census](#). 15 percent practice other religions and 40 percent have no religion at all.

Over the years, we have seen a progressive move to make working hours more flexible on public holidays. For example, in South Australia, a recent move was made to make public trading easier by allowing shops to open at 9am on Sundays rather than 11am without an exemption. Rather than the State apply restrictions to businesses as to when they can open or not, it is on the onus of the business and the worker to make their own decisions.

Here, I lay out five reasons why businesses should be allowed to trade on *any* day of the year.

1. We have statutory leave protected under law

Inarguably, the worker of yesteryear had to work many more hours in the week as there were no laws by the state to protect statutory leave. The only day which was observed as a day of rest was that of the religious sabbath, whether it's a Sunday, Saturday or Friday, depending on the religion of the nation. Most first world nations today, particularly those in Western Europe, guarantee the worker ample time off including that from annual, personal and public holiday leave. United States is, somewhat, less generous in this respect. A point of contention and a subject much discussed but somehow, never addressed.

Every worker has the right to claim the allotted leave as statutorily declared. In other words, should someone want to or be asked to work during a public holiday, then it is fair and appropriate for that worker to claim the holiday for another time, usually with additional bonus time. The worker is also legally entitled to decline working on certain public holidays without penalty.

2. It's a free market

For a successful economy to thrive, you need a free market, free speech, and minimal interference from government. There are many businesses who open during public holidays, many of which do so without exemptions in place. It is absurd that in a modern economy, a business could be fined for opening during a

public holiday. This is government intervention and it disrupts enterprise and free trade. For example, being told by the State that you can't sell nails and hammers on Christmas Day is utterly preposterous, yet, one can find such enactments in place as policy depending where one lives. Conversely, on a crowded beach during Christmas Day, an ice cream parlour sells ice creams and this is seemingly okay. So, why is it okay for an ice cream vendor to be allowed to sell ice cream but an ironmonger or a clothes shop not so? Trading hours restrictions vary enormously from state to state, country to country, but in general, no government should be allowed to dictate what businesses should be open on a public holiday.

3. You can get things done on your time off

In Germany, I remember the so-called *Ruhetag*, or translated literally as the 'quiet day'. The day of rest. Often associated with cafés in countryside, they work together to ensure that the customer can get fed *any* day of the week because there will always be a café open somewhere. In other words, one café might be closed Mondays and Tuesday, another Wednesdays and Fridays. You get the general idea. This includes public holidays as well. A time when many are off work and want to be able to shop or dine when they have the time to do so. Is it so bad to have Monday and Tuesday off instead of Saturday and Sunday? For those who choose to work for an establishment that has such a policy, it usually works out very well. No weekend crowds, Sunday closures, or weekend prices.

4. We should be more inclusive of other religions and beliefs

As a family, we *do* celebrate Christmas and Easter. But not everybody does. There are many people who simply do not recognise certain public holidays. Muslims, Jews, pagans, Hindus, indigenous people, and many more. Christmas means diddly squat to them and I'm completely at understanding of this. It is sheer hypocrisy in my opinion to shout out that Australia is founded on Judeo-Christian principles and that not recognising Christmas and Easter is considered a bad thing. Yet, on the very same token, we are crying out for diversity and equality with other cultures in our multicultural nation. If someone opening a shop on Christmas Day or Easter offends someone on religious grounds, then that someone really should take a step back and consider what the nation would be like without the richness of our cultural diversity.

5. Not everyone wants to take time off

Many of those who push the idea that Christmas, Easter, and other public holidays should be considered sacred, also suggest that allowing businesses to work during these times makes it difficult for families to get together.

I don't buy this at all. There are many of us, me included, who do not have family nearby. In a world of increasing globalisation and opportunities abroad, close-knit families are becoming scarcer in terms of geography.

The other issue, of course, is forced time off. Christmas and New Year are a nuisance to many, especially those who are single and have few friends nearby. Christmas and New Year can be a very lonely time for many people, especially those with no families. I understand the need for many businesses to shut down over the period during Christmas and New Year, but they seldom consider alternatives for those who would prefer and could work over that period. This is quite common with younger and single immigrants from other cultures or countries who are often at a loss as what to do during Christmas while their friends are with their families.

In Sum

Many western nations are adopting increasing flexibility on how we treat our public holidays and 'days of rest' like Sunday with respect to trading hours. Their governments are stepping back from enforcing restrictions on trading hours, which is the right thing to do. Taking Australia as an example, there are already [legal entitlements in place](#) with respect to annual, personal and public holiday leave.

Each year, there seem to be more shops and other businesses open during Sundays and public holidays. Those working during these times simply get time off during others. It usually comes down to choice as well. For example, those who work in the emergency services may be required to work at *any* time of the year. Those who work in the entertainment or catering industry will, no doubt, be asked to work during times in which many have their time off. And, of course, night workers, are expected to work at night, a time most of us are not working.

So, to sum things up. Should restrictions be applied on trading hours during Sundays and public holidays? I don't think so.