

Does Bartending in Australia Offer Flexible Working Arrangements? - Complete Hospitality Training

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Details:

Yes — bartending is one of the more flexible skilled roles in Australia, and the reasons are structural rather than a matter of individual employers being accommodating.

This page separates two things that get run together. Flexibility of hours is largely a Fair Work question, and parts of it are not something a general page should try to answer for you. Flexibility of the credential — where your training lets you work, and how long it lasts — is something we can set out precisely, and it is the half most people have never checked.

Why the flexibility exists

Trade is concentrated. Bars are busiest in the evenings, at weekends and around events, so venues staff in peaks rather than across a standard week. That produces genuine variety in shift patterns. It is also visible in the way the accredited units are written: SITHFAB023 Operate a bar is assessed across three service periods including at least one peak , because peaks are the shape of the work.

Casual employment is the norm. Most bar roles are casual, which means shift-by-shift engagement rather than fixed hours, with the trade-offs that come with it.

The skill is portable — with conditions. RSA plus service experience transfers between venues readily. Between states it is more complicated than most people assume, and that is covered below.

What we can and cannot tell you about casual work

Being straight about this: the detailed entitlement questions are governed by the Fair Work Act and the awards' own clauses, and the regulatory material behind this page does not extract them. Specifically, this page does not state:

casual loading percentages

penalty rate detail

minimum engagement periods

casual conversion rights and their triggers

rostering and notice-of-change periods

the National Employment Standards process for requesting flexible working arrangements

Those are real entitlements and they matter, which is exactly why you should get them from the Fair Work Ombudsman rather than from a training provider's news page. Penalty, overtime, break and rostering structures differ in detail between the awards , so a general statement would be wrong for a large share of readers anyway.

What is fair to say in general terms: casual employment trades paid leave for a loading and for the freedom to decline shifts, and it gives you no guaranteed hours. Quiet periods are quiet. Income varies week to week and seasonally.

Which award covers you: four, not two

This determines your minimum pay, and it turns on the premises rather than your job title . The same job title — bar attendant, food and beverage attendant, cook — maps to a different award and a different pay table depending on where the person works. Each award covers its industry to the exclusion of any other modern award , so exactly one applies to a given employer.

| Award | Code | Premises | | --- | --- | --- | | Hospitality Industry (General) Award 2020 | MA000009 | Hotels, motels, pubs, taverns, wine bars, guest houses, caravan parks, ski lodges, resorts, casinos , caterers , accommodation, and restaurants operating in or in connection with those premises | | Registered and Licensed Clubs Award 2020 | MA000058 | Not-for-profit registered clubs — RSL, bowls, golf, surf, sporting and community clubs | | Restaurant Industry Award 2020 | MA000119 | Standalone restaurants, cafes, night clubs , reception centres, roadhouses | | Fast Food Industry Award 2010 | MA000003 | Takeaway, food courts, and food sold mainly to be eaten away from the point of sale |

Two traps worth spelling out, because both are counter-intuitive.

Clubs are not covered by the hospitality award. MA000009 clause 4.4(d)(i) expressly states the award does not cover "clubs registered or recognised under State or Territory legislation". Clubs are the one thing the hospitality award carves out by name. If you work at an RSL, a bowls club or a golf club, your award is MA000058 .

What counts as a club has a two-part test under MA000058 clause 4.3. The venue must be both registered and licensed under a relevant State or Commonwealth liquor, gaming, associations incorporation or corporations statute, and established and operating on a not-for-profit basis for the benefit of members and the community. The not-for-profit limb does the real work: a commercially owned venue calling itself a "club" is not a club for award purposes.

Night clubs are not covered by the clubs award. A night club is a commercial venue, so it falls under the restaurant award, MA000119 . This is the single most counter-intuitive line in the set.

MA000058 clause 4.4 also expressly covers bar attendants and stewards employed in a club on a football ground, cricket ground, golf course or sports ground , which is worth knowing if you pick up sporting-venue bar shifts.

No dollar rates appear on this page, deliberately. Award rates re-set every 1 July, and a stale rate is worse than none. Use the Fair Work Ombudsman's Pay and Conditions Tool with the award code that actually applies to your venue. See superannuation, tax and payslips .

Rosters: which document answers the question

Rostering is the mechanism that makes casual work genuinely plannable rather than merely unpredictable, and it is worth asking about before you accept a role. But the answer is award-specific , not national.

The four awards above each set their own rostering and notice-of-change provisions, and they do not answer the question identically. So there is no single figure this page can give you that would be correct for every reader, and we do not print one. The sequence that does work:

Establish which award covers the venue , using the premises test above.

Read that award's rostering clause in full on the Fair Work Ombudsman's site.

Ask the venue how shifts are allocated in practice, separately from what the award requires as a minimum.

If anyone quotes you a single national notice period for hospitality rosters, ask which clause of which award it comes from. See steps for rostering and time management and working hours, rosters and public holidays .

Classification: where flexibility costs people money

Being classified too low is the most common cause of hospitality underpayment, and it has nothing to do with flexibility — it is just the thing people fail to check.

The headline provision travels with you across most of the industry. Under MA000009 , MA000119 and MA000058 — three of the four awards — a relevant AQF Certificate III or higher, used at work, sets a minimum classification of Level 4. In MA000009 and MA000119 , Level 4 is the reference point for the whole classification structure, reached by an apprenticeship, the appropriate trade test, or an appropriate level of training , which includes that Certificate III. The fast food award MA000003 has no equivalent provision .

That is useful precisely because bar work is mobile. If you move from a pub to an RSL to a standalone restaurant, the qualification floor follows you, even though the award and the pay table change each time.

"Appropriate level of training" has three limbs, and only the first is a qualification. An employee has it if they:

have completed an appropriate training program meeting the training and assessment requirements of a qualification or one or more appropriate units of competency forming part of a training package; or

have been assessed by a qualified skills assessor as having skills at least equivalent; or

as at a specified date, had been doing the work of that classification for at least three months .

That matters for anyone whose career has been built on shifts rather than certificates. Units count, not only whole qualifications, and the third limb recognises time on the job. If you have been doing Level 4 work, say so in those terms.

Three distinctions worth keeping straight, because this is a pay entitlement rather than a courtesy:

MA000009 and MA000119 (both at clause 18.1 , adult rates) require you to make use of the skills and knowledge derived from those Certificate III competencies. It is not automatic on completion.

MA000058 (clause 18.3) omits the words "or higher", and adds that the Fair Work Commission may require you to demonstrate that you utilise the relevant skills.

If it is disputed, the routes differ: MA000009 clause 40 , MA000119 clause 34 , and for MA000058 referral to the Fair Work Commission .

Two other provisions are MA000009 -specific rather than industry-wide, so do not carry them across:

The Introductory level, for untrained new entrants, lasts up to three months under that award, extendable by mutual agreement for up to a further three. Six months is the ceiling

Under clause 13.5 , a junior employee working as a liquor service employee must be paid as an adult at the classification rate for the work performed, not the reduced junior percentage

Beyond the Level 4 floor, each award has its own Schedule A, so if your venue is a club, a night club or a food-court outlet, look the structure up in your award rather than applying the hospitality one.

Training and working at the same time: the traineeship structure

If you want flexibility that includes getting qualified while employed, the traineeship is the arrangement built for it, and it has specific, checkable features rather than being an informal understanding.

A part-time traineeship runs at fewer than 38 ordinary hours per week , with 20% of those hours being approved training . The training is not something you fit in around the job; it is a defined share of the hours.

That training may be delivered wholly on the job , partly on and partly off , or wholly off the job by an RTO. All three are permitted.

The delivery mode changes the applicable hourly rate. Where the approved training is delivered wholly off the job by an RTO, the table rate applies in full to each ordinary hour worked. Where it is delivered wholly on the job, or partly on and partly off, the table rate less 20% applies. So a training plan that says "workplace-based" rather than "wholly off the job" is not a neutral administrative detail — it changes what you are lawfully paid. Ask which it is before signing, and use the Fair Work Pay and Conditions Tool for the figures.

You are entitled to be released from work without loss of pay and without loss of continuity of employment to attend any training and assessment specified in, or associated with, the training contract. That time counts as time worked , except for school-based trainees.

That last point is the one worth remembering. Attending your training is not unpaid time you are giving up shifts for; under the traineeship arrangement it is working time.

If your training is government-subsidised, flexibility has limits

This catches people who assume a funded place moves with them. Under Victoria's Skills First arrangements, subsidised training carries conditions that a fee-for-service enrolment does not.

Physical presence. All training and assessment must be undertaken while the student is physically present in Victoria , or in a listed border-region postcode. There is no general online or interstate concession for funded students.

The one exception is narrow: a student temporarily interstate or overseas for a Practical Placement may be trained online, capped at no more than 50% of total scheduled hours .

Moving interstate part-way through a funded course is a compliance event , not a private arrangement between you and your trainer. Tell the provider before you go.

Volume limits apply to stacking short courses: a maximum of two subsidised programs at the same time , two AQF qualifications per calendar year , and two skill sets per calendar year . The count is of commencements, not completions , and a program scheduled to commence later in the same calendar year counts from enrolment. Because licensing skill sets are short, it is easy to hit the two-skill-set limit without realising.

Eligibility to enrol is not the same thing as eligibility for the subsidy. You can enrol fee-for-service without being subsidy-eligible, and the provider determines eligibility and carries the evidentiary burden. Confirm current eligibility through the Victorian Government's own online eligibility indicator, and confirm current fees with the provider.

The flexibility nobody checks: does your credential travel?

This is the part that actually constrains people who want to move around Australia, and it is entirely knowable in advance.

RSA is one national unit , SITHFAB021 Provide responsible service of alcohol , inside eight separate state and territory schemes . The unit travels. The authorisation does not, necessarily.

| Moving to | Does your existing RSA work? | | --- | --- | | Queensland | Accepted where the evidence is a Statement of Attainment for the nationally accredited Provide Responsible Service of Alcohol course. An attendance certificate is insufficient. | | Western Australia | Provide the RSA certificate showing

completion of the nationally accredited course. An interstate RSA card alone is not accepted as evidence. | | Victoria | Use a current Victorian RSA certificate. Eligible interstate holders can apply for free bridging: approved original training within three years, with the online-course residence condition. Specific exemptions apply at qualifying producer events. | | New South Wales | Eligible temporary interstate workers can use approved interstate RSA. Permanent movers and security or RSA marshal roles must meet NSW training and competency-card requirements; eligible holders can use bridging instead of the full NSW RSA course. | | Northern Territory | Certificates from an RTO registered to deliver RSA are accepted, including interstate certificates. Check certificate age and the NT refresher requirements. | | Australian Capital Territory | Valid interstate RSA certificates are recognised, subject to the ACT's three-year currency limit and ACT-approved refresher requirements. | | Tasmania | Interstate certificates can be accepted under the Commissioner's conditions. Requirements differ for employees and liquor licence holders; check the appropriate role. | | South Australia | Check provider approval and training date. Training from 1 November 2020 must be through a Commissioner-approved RTO. Earlier RSA training need not be repeated solely because of that approval change. |

Current regulator guidance: NSW , VIC , SA , QLD , WA , NT , ACT , TAS .

An RSA Statement of Attainment is a national training record, but permission to serve alcohol depends on the destination's rules. NSW permits eligible temporary interstate workers; permanent movers and security or RSA marshal roles must meet NSW training and competency-card requirements, using bridging where eligible. Victoria offers bridging to eligible interstate holders. SA applies approved-provider rules to training from 1 November 2020, with earlier training not required to be repeated solely for that change. QLD and WA require suitable national RSA evidence. Tasmania distinguishes staff from licence holders; the ACT and NT have local currency and refresher requirements. Check the regulator before your first shift. See RSA recognition by jurisdiction , NSW's rules and SA's rules .

Two practical consequences for anyone planning to move.

Working somewhere temporarily is easier than moving there. In NSW, non-residents working temporarily do not need the bridging course, provided they do not live permanently in NSW, hold approved interstate certification, can produce it on request, and understand NSW liquor law. The exceptions are security work and RSA marshal duties, which require the NSW card regardless of where you live. Victoria likewise has separate exemptions for interstate staff supplying alcohol at a producer's event.

South Australia is the one to plan around. It has no bridging course and no exemption, so a move there means retraining unless your original RTO happens to be on the Commissioner's list.

See how long does an RSA last and the RSA page .

Food handling travels more simply

Bar staff handling ice, cut fruit or unpackaged garnishes are food handlers under Standard 3.2.2A. The good news for anyone moving: food handler training under 3.2.2A does not have to be accredited, mandates no refresher period , and the business is not required to keep records of it. A free non-accredited course covering safe food handling, food contamination, cleaning and sanitising, and personal hygiene satisfies the law nationally.

The accredited unit SITXFSA005 buys portability and proof , and it is a prerequisite to SITHFAB023 , SITHFAB024 and SITHFAB025 — so it is worth having if you intend to build on it. The five-year clock belongs to the separate Food Safety Supervisor certificate, which is a different role with its own state rules. See the food handling course .

If you are on a student visa

Bar work suits student schedules — evening shifts, no clash with daytime classes — but two rule sets apply at once . Your visa condition caps how much you may work while your course is in session; the award governs what you must be paid. Both apply, and breaching the visa condition is your problem rather than your employer's.

Check your grant letter for the current limit. It has changed more than once recently, which is why no figure is printed here. See the visa checklist , how to balance education, work and life , how to apply for a tax file number and setting up a bank account in Australia .

The honest trade-offs

Late nights , which is the real cost. Finishing at 2am changes your sleep and your social life.

Weekends are work , not time off.

Standing for long shifts , and dealing with intoxicated patrons — which is a legal duty rather than an occasional annoyance.

Income varies , particularly seasonally.

The venue's requirements follow you. In Victoria the licensee must keep your RSA certificate on the premises and produce it on request, so a new venue means new paperwork each time.

Against that: real portability between venues, sociable work, and genuine control over your availability as a casual. Your award also sets loadings and penalty provisions for hours worked outside ordinary times — read those in the award that covers your venue rather than assuming a figure, because they are among the provisions that differ most between the four.

What you need first

RSA before you serve alcohol. Several jurisdictions do allow a short grace period — Victoria before you start supplying or within one month of first supplying, Queensland 30 days from starting employment, Western Australia 28 days with a copy to your employer — but most venues want the evidence at hiring, and in NSW the card needs an in-person Service NSW appointment with 100 points of identification.

Then food handling , because it is inexpensive, commonly asked for, and unblocks the bar units.

See the bartending course and five tips to help you secure the best bartender job .

About us

We are Complete Hospitality Training , RTO 3722, CRICOS 04242E. Level 3, 28 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne VIC 3000, and 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. Contact melbourne@cht.edu.au or +61 3 9654 1554 .

We link to the relevant course and regulatory sources in this guide. Check those sources for current requirements, and confirm course availability, delivery, fees and entry requirements with us before enrolling.

Can I choose my shifts?

As a casual you can generally decline shifts. Your availability still has to suit the venue, and consistently declining is the fastest way to stop being offered them.

Do I get leave?

Not as a casual. The loading is paid instead of paid leave. For the current loading percentage and how it applies to you, check the Fair Work Ombudsman rather than any general page.

Can casual become permanent?

There are pathways in the Fair Work system for casuals with a regular pattern of hours, and the rules have changed more than once. This is a question for the Fair Work Ombudsman, and the honest answer here is that we do not state the current triggers.

How much notice of my roster should I get?

That is set by the award covering your venue, and the four awards that can apply to bar work do not answer it identically. Establish which award applies, then read its rostering clause on the Fair Work Ombudsman's site. For the same reason we do not state casual conversion triggers, we do not state a single roster notice period here — there is no figure that is correct across all four.

I work at an RSL. Which award am I under?

MA000058 Registered and Licensed Clubs Award, not the hospitality award. MA000009 expressly excludes clubs registered or recognised under State or Territory legislation. Look up your classification in MA000058, because its Schedule A is its own — though it does carry the same Level 4 qualification floor as the hospitality and restaurant awards.

I work at a night club. Same thing?

No — MA000119 Restaurant Industry Award. A night club is commercial rather than a not-for-profit registered club, so it sits with restaurants and cafes. It carries the Level 4 floor too.

My venue calls itself a club but it is privately owned.

Then it is probably not a club for award purposes. The test under MA000058 clause 4.3 has two limbs, and the second is that the venue is established and operating on a not-for-profit basis for the benefit of members and the community.

I moved from a pub to a golf club doing the same job. Does my pay change?

Possibly, because your award changed from MA000009 to MA000058 and each has its own classification structure and pay table. The job title staying the same does not keep the award the same. What does stay the same is the qualification floor — both awards set a minimum classification of Level 4 for a relevant AQF Certificate III used at work. Check both against the Fair Work Pay and Conditions Tool.

I have never done a qualification but I have years behind a bar. Does that count for anything?

It can. "Appropriate level of training" is defined three ways, and the third is having been doing the work of that classification for at least three months as at a specified date. The second is assessment by a qualified skills assessor as having equivalent skills. Neither requires a certificate. That is also the argument for recognition of prior learning, which is a genuine assessment rather than a waiver.

I move between venues a lot. Does my Certificate III keep counting?

In licensed hospitality, largely yes, and that is the useful part. The Level 4 qualification floor exists in MA000009, MA000119 and MA000058, so it follows you between pubs, standalone restaurants and registered clubs. The exception is fast food, MA000003, which has no equivalent provision.

Can I get qualified while working full shifts?

A traineeship is the arrangement designed for it. A part-time traineeship runs at fewer than 38 ordinary hours a week with 20% of those hours as approved training, and you are entitled to be released from work without loss of pay to attend the training specified in the training contract, with that time counting as time worked. Ask whether the training is delivered wholly off the job or in the workplace, because that changes the applicable rate.

I am on a government-subsidised place and I am thinking of moving interstate. Does that matter?

Yes. Funded training in Victoria must be undertaken while you are physically present in Victoria or in a listed border postcode, and moving interstate part-way through is a compliance event. Tell your provider before you move rather than after.

Can I stack several short courses at once?

Only up to a point on a subsidised basis: a maximum of two subsidised programs at the same time, and two skill sets per calendar year, counted by commencement rather than completion. Licensing skill sets are short, so the limit arrives sooner than people expect. Fee-for-service enrolment is not subject to the subsidy limits.

Is it enough to live on?

With consistent shifts and hours that attract the award's loadings, often. Income varies more than salaried work, and the seasonal dips are real. Check your classification, because that is where the money usually goes missing.

I want to move interstate. What is the catch?

An RSA Statement of Attainment is a national training record, but permission to serve alcohol depends on the destination's rules. NSW permits eligible temporary interstate workers; permanent movers and security or RSA marshal roles must meet NSW training and competency-card requirements, using bridging where eligible. Victoria offers bridging to eligible interstate holders. SA applies approved-provider rules to training from 1 November 2020, with earlier training not required to be repeated solely for that change. QLD and WA require suitable national RSA evidence. Tasmania distinguishes staff from licence holders; the ACT and NT have local currency and refresher requirements. Check the regulator before your first shift. See RSA recognition by jurisdiction ([/rsa/](#)), NSW's rules (<https://www.nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/liquor-and-gaming/training/rsa-bridging>) and SA's rules (<https://www.cbs.sa.gov.au/sections/LGL/RSA-approved-providers>).

Can I keep working while my new state's paperwork goes through?

Depends where. Victoria's bridging course takes about ten working days. In NSW the interim certificate covers a 90-day window while the card is produced, but you need to have started the process. Do not assume you can work on nothing.

Can I work in two venues at once?

Commonly done, and casual engagement makes it practical. Your RSA and food handling belong to you rather than to a venue, so they cover both. Watch the two rosters against each other, note that in Victoria each licensee separately needs a copy of your certificate on the premises, and be aware the two venues may sit under different awards.

Does bar work fit around study?

It is one of the better fits, because the trade is concentrated in the evenings and at weekends. Be realistic about the 2am finishes in an exam period.

I am 19. Will flexibility cost me pay?

Not through the junior rate, at least in a MA000009 venue. Clause 13.5 requires a junior employee working as a liquor service employee to be paid as an adult at the classification rate for the work performed. Check the equivalent provision in your own award if you work at a club.

Does the venue having gaming machines change anything?

It adds a separate requirement with its own deadlines and its own regulator. In Victoria, RSG Module 1 is due within one month of starting and Module 2 within six, both free and government-delivered. Note

also that gaming work in a pub or casino sits under MA000009 while gaming work in an RSL, bowls or sporting club sits under MA000058 — same machines, same units, different award, and both carry the Level 4 qualification floor. See how to get a bar and gaming licence ([/news/how-do-i-get-my-bar-gaming-license/](#)).

Is bartending a long-term career or a stopgap?

It can be either. The structural route onward is bar supervisor, then venue management through SIT40422 Certificate IV in Hospitality and SIT50422 Diploma of Hospitality Management. Units you complete now credit-transfer, and a partial set still produces a Statement of Attainment for what you passed.