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2026 Market Insights & Salary Guide

What Australia's hospitality workforce is really thinking, earning, and planning for the year ahead.

Prepared by Hospoworld Resourcing · A specialist brand of RWR Group

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“BUSINESSES ARE BEING ASKED TO DO MORE WITH LESS WHILE COMPETING HARDER THAN EVER FOR TALENT.”

Anyone who's spent real time in hospitality knows the rhythm of it. Doors open, the floor fills, and you find out very quickly whether the hours of prep behind the scenes were enough. I've been around this industry in one form or another for over three decades recruiting into it, learning from operators who lived and breathed it, and watching the trends come around two and three times under different names. The constant has always been the people. Take the people away and a venue is just a room with chairs in it.
Something is different in 2026, though. The industry is being asked to absorb more change in less time than at any point I can remember.

We've published the Hospoworld Market Insights & Salary Guide for Australia for many years now, and it's by some distance the most thorough version we've put together. The numbers in here come from hospitality professionals, chefs in Melbourne kitchens, venue managers in Brisbane, hotel GMs in Perth, support office leaders in Sydney, and plenty of operators in between. We asked them what they earn, what they want, what would push them out the door, and what would keep them. They told us. Some of what they said is not flattering to our industry.

The thing I want operators to take from this guide isn't a single statistic. It's the pattern underneath. The candidate market is more active than it looks almost two-thirds of our respondents have applied for a role in the last six months, including a meaningful chunk who've gone looking outside hospitality altogether. Pay is the loudest exit driver, but it isn't the only one. Career progression and work-life balance are stacking up right behind it, and over half of candidates have walked out of a recruitment process because of how they were treated. That last one stings, because it's entirely within our control.

I won't pretend this guide solves any of that. What it does do is hand you the numbers honestly. You'll see where you sit on pay. You'll see what your team is actually weighing up. And you'll see the things the best employers in Australian hospitality are quietly getting right while the rest of the field argues about base salary.

Read it once. Then read it with your leadership team. Pick the one finding in here that makes you wince a little, and start there. That's usually the work that pays back the fastest.

The operators who'll still be standing in ten years aren't the ones holding out for the market to calm down. They're moving now.

John Caldwell CEO, RWR Group

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Leading hospitality Recruitment Network

Hospoworld is Australia's specialist hospitality recruitment brand and part of RWR Group, the powerhouse behind a collective of specialist recruitment businesses across Australia and New Zealand. We don't do generalist recruitment. Hospo is what we do, all day, every day.

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WHAT'S DRIVING THE 2026 HOSPITALITY MARKET

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Trend 1

Salary leads, but it's no longer enough.

32% of respondents named salary as their #1 exit trigger, followed by career progression (20%) and work-life balance (13%). Together, those three account for two-thirds of stated movement intent. Operators who fix only one of the three will see attrition continue.

So what?

Build a retention package that addresses pay, progression, and lifestyle in parallel, not sequentially.

Trend 2

The interview experience is a leaky funnel.

51% of candidates have withdrawn from a recruitment process because of how they were treated. That's more than half of the active candidate pool walking away from offers before they're even made.

So what?

Set a 48-hour offer-to-contract standard. Welcome calls, onboarding packs, and structured check-ins at week 2 are now baseline.

WHAT'S DRIVING THE 2026 HOSPITALITY MARKET

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Trend 3

61%

Bonus is the #1 valued benefit.

61% of respondents named 'opportunity to earn bonuses' as the most-valued benefit far ahead of structured training (41%), roster flexibility (32%), free meals (24%), and car allowance (23%). Yet only 44% currently receive a bonus opportunity.

So what?

Closing the bonus gap is one of the cheapest retention plays available.

Trend 4

30%

Flexibility has arrived in hospitality.

51% of respondents named 'all of the above' when asked which flexibility levers mattered. 30% want flexibility on which days they work, 27% want the right to switch off, 20% want flexible start/finish times, and 20% want agreed weekends off.

So what?

The one-way roster era is over. Audit your scheduling against candidate expectations.

Trend 5

68%

Culture is the dominant employer brand signal.

85% of respondents say 'showcases a positive workplace culture' is the most important employer brand attribute followed by 'emphasises career growth opportunities' (68%) and 'competitive benefits and perks' (45%).

So what?

Culture isn't a slogan it's the deciding factor in whether candidates apply.

QUIET ON THE SURFACE. RESTLESS UNDERNEATH.

64%

of hospitality workers have applied for at least one role in the last 6 months and 70% would relocate for the right opportunity.

63%
Not satisfied or neutral on current pay

49%
Working 41+ hour weeks

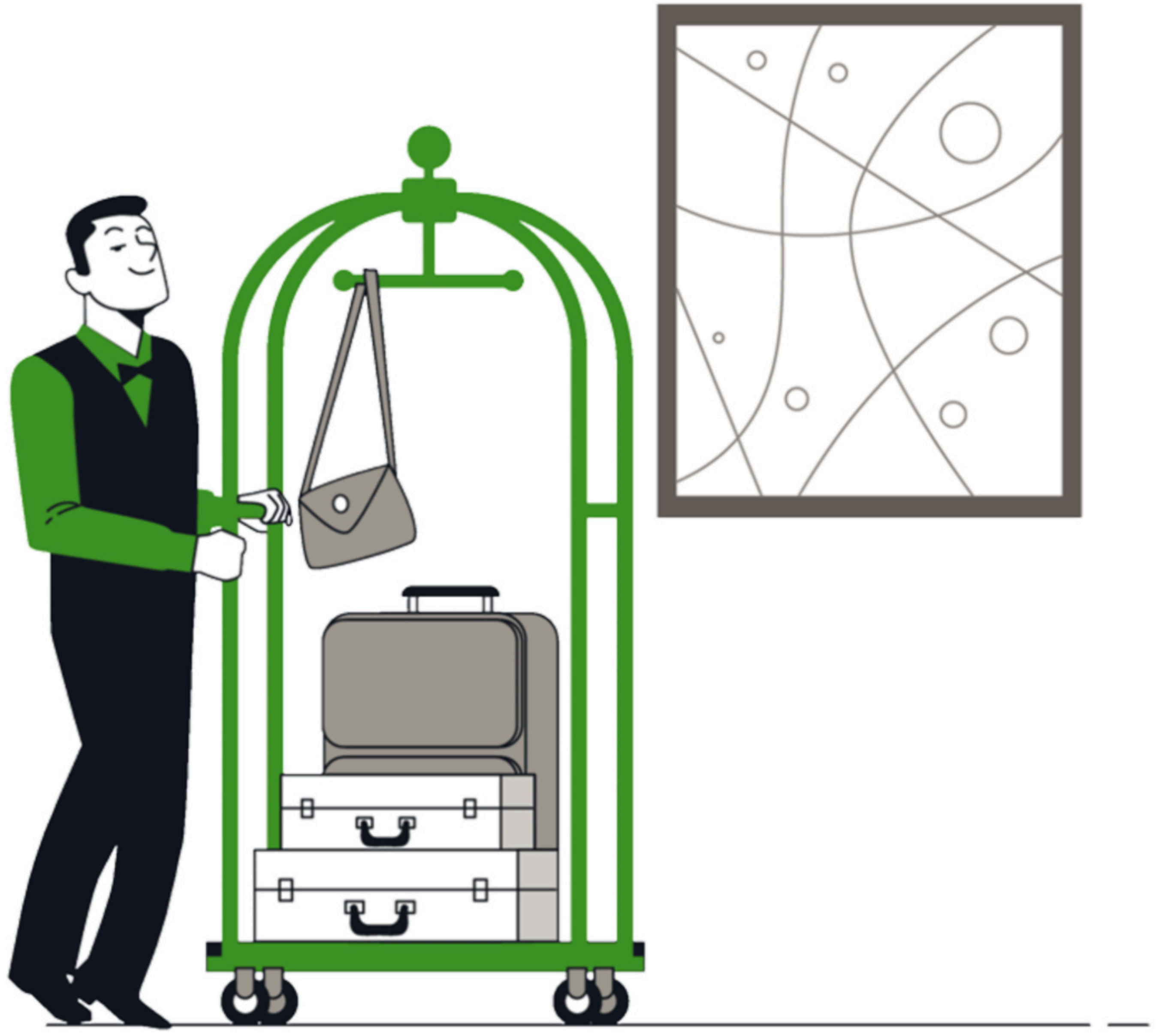
51%
Have withdrawn from a recruitment process due to a bad experience

25%
Are 'struggling' or 'financially strained' under cost-of-living pressure

What this means

The Australian hospitality market is more active than it looks from the operator side. Salary is the leading exit driver but not the only one career progression, culture, and management quality are stacking up to drive movement. Operators who treat retention as a wage problem alone will lose the talent war in 2026.

WHERE THE CANDIDATE MARKET IS REALLY AT



76% would relocate if support was offered. Only 9% would do it without making relocation packages your highest-leverage supply strategy.

Headline stats

64%
Have applied for a new role in the last 6 months

51%
Have withdrawn due to a bad interview experience

16%
Have applied for jobs outside hospitality entirely

70%
Would relocate if support was offered

What Australian hospitality workers actually want

Most-valued benefits

Benefit	#
Bonus potential	1
Structured training & development	2
Roster flexibility (some weekends off)	3
Free meals during shifts	4
Car / car allowance	5
Additional paid days off (mental health, charity)	6
Tip earnings	7
Phone / laptop	8
Wellbeing / mental health benefits	9

Flexibility benefits

Flexibility lever	#
Full Flexibility Stated Package	51%
Flexibility on which days they work	20%
Right to disconnect / switch off	11%
Flexible start /finish times	10%
Agreed rostered weekends off	8%

Top reasons to leave a current role

Reason	#
Salary / Wage	1
Career Progression	2
Work-life Balance	3
Company Culture	4
Management Style	5
Job Satisfaction	6
Flexible Roster	7

THE COUNTER-OFFER TRUTH

63% of respondents are not satisfied or only neutral on their current pay. When candidates engage with a recruiter in this market, they've almost always already asked and been declined or under-delivered.

WHAT OPERATORS NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY IN 2026

61%

01 Bonus is the cheapest retention play.
61% name bonus potential as their #1 valued benefit, but only 44% currently receive one. Closing that gap costs less than a market-rate base salary increase and signals partnership, not transaction.

16%

02 Re-engineer the review cycle.
16% had a performance review with no pay outcome (and another 33% had no review at all). Convert the review into a retention tool set clear uplift triggers, publish progression bands, and never run a review without a decision to communicate.

51%

03 Protect the interview experience.
51% of candidates have withdrawn from a process because of how they were treated. Set a 48-hour offer-to-contract standard. Welcome calls, onboarding packs, and structured check-ins at week 2 are baseline expectations.

70%

04 Use relocation as a supply lever
70% of candidates would relocate but only 9% would do it without support. A transparent relocation package (transport subsidy, temporary accommodation, even 2 weeks paid settling time) unlocks regions of talent that competitors can't reach.

85%

05 Compete on culture, not just budget.
85% say 'Showcases a Positive Workplace Culture' is the most important employer brand signal by far the strongest signal in the survey. Invest in your online presence, your careers page, your social, and your recruitment collateral. Candidates screen you before they apply.

WHERE THE WAGE PRESSURE IS HITTING HARDEST

WHAT'S RISING FASTEST

+6–9%

Executive Chef & Head Chef
YoY. Supply/demand gap is structural expect the pressure to continue through 2026.

+5–8%

Hotel General Manager & F&B Director
YoY. International brands scaling back into AU are pulling senior hotel leadership upward.

+5–7%

Operations & General Management
YoY. Multi-site leaders are the hardest backfills, counter-offers are increasingly common.

+5–8%

Support Office / Executive roles
Group operators centralising functions in Sydney and Melbourne are paying for commercial capability.

WHAT'S HOLDING FLAT

Kitchen Hand / Commis Chef
Largely tracking at or just above modern award rates ($24–$30/hr). Real wage growth is negative once CPI is factored.

Barista & Entry-Level FOH
Modest uplift (+1–3%) driven by award adjustments, not competitive pressure.

Duty Manager / Supervisor
Flat to modest. The step-up from senior FOH often doesn't justify the responsibility a known retention risk

The biggest gap between candidate expectations and employer offers in 2026 is in the Sous Chef → Head Chef transition band, and the Assistant Manager → Venue Manager step. Operators should benchmark these specifically before their next hire.

Salary Guide - Australia

Role	Salary Range
Quick Service	
Supervisor / Shift Manager	$60k - $65k
Assistant Restaurant Manager	$65k - $75k
Restaurant Manager	$75k - $100k
Area Manager	$100k - $175k
National Manager	$150k - $300k+
Casual Dining	
Supervisor	$60k - $75k
Duty Manager	$68k - $80k
Assistant Manager	$70k - $85k
Restaurant General Manager	$80k - $100k
Multi-Site Restaurant Manager	$100k - $150k+
Café	
Barista	$60k - $70k
Supervisor	$60k - $70k
Assistant Manager	$65k - $85k
Café Manager	$70k - $90k

Role	Salary Range
Premium Dining	
Maitre d’	$75k - $90k
Sommelier	$75k - $100k
Assistant Restaurant Manager	$75k - $95k
Restaurant Manager	$90k - $120k
Pubs / Bars / Venues	
Duty Manager	$70k - $80k
Bar Manager	$75k - $90k
Assistant Venue Manager	$80k - $100k
Venue Manager	$85k - $130k
General Manager / Licensee	$110k - $120k+
Group General Manager	$150k+
Chefs	
Commis Chef	$60k - $72k
Chef de Partie	$70k - $80k
Pastry Chef	$70k - $85k
Baker	$75k - $90k
Sous Chef	$75k - $100k
Head Chef	$90k - $130k
Executive Chef (Multi-Outlet)	$110k - $150k+
Kitchen Manager	$75k - $100k

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*Salary figures are base salary only and exclude Superannuation, bonuses, commissions, and other incentives.

Salary Guide - Corporate & Head Office

Role	Salary Range
Franchise Support	
Franchise Operations Support	$90k - $110k
Franchise Operations Manager	$95k - $140k
National Operations Manager	$140k+
National Development Manager	$140k+
National Manager	$150k - $300k+
Marketing	
Marketing Assistant / Coordinator	$65k - $75k
Social Media Manager	$70k - $100k
Marketing Executive	$90k - $120k
Marketing Manager	$130k - $200k
GM / Director of Marketing	$150k - $250k+
Human Resources	
HR / Admin Coordinator	$60k - $75k
Recruitment / Training / OH&S	$90k - $120k
Recruitment Manager	$100k - $150k
HR Advisor	$100k - $120k
HR Business Partner	$120k - $150k
HR Manager	$140k - $200k
GM / Director HR	$250k+
Director of Sales	$120k - $200k

Role	Salary Range
Finance	
Accounts Payable / Receivable	$65k - $80k
Assistant Accountant	$80k - $100k
Accounts Team Leader	$90k - $110k
Payroll Officer	$75k - $100k
Payroll Manager	$130k - $200k
Accountant	$100k - $160k+
Admin	
Reception	$60k - $80k
Customer Service Rep	$60k - $70k
Office Manager	$80k - $100k
Executive Assistant	$100k - $150k+

*Salary figures are base salary only and exclude Superannuation, bonuses, commissions, and other incentives.

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Local Insights - Victoria

Victoria's hospitality industry carried strong momentum into 2026, building on what was a genuinely solid recovery year in 2025. Top-line growth across tourism spend, visitation numbers, and venue expansion was real and visible. Small independents, mid-sized groups, and large multi-site operators all grew their footprint, driven by sustained consumer demand and a visitor economy that finally found its footing again after a prolonged and difficult few years.
But anyone working closely in this industry knows that top-line growth only tells part of the story. Margins are under greater pressure than they have been in years, and operators are feeling it. Rising wages, increasing rents, and the compounding weight of general operating costs are forcing even well-run businesses to take a hard look at how they operate. The response across the market has been consistent: tighter internal processes, a stronger focus on operational excellence, and increased investment in external recruitment partners who can deliver the right people quickly and without wasted time.

Consumer behaviour is shifting too, and it is shifting fast. Spend is increasingly experience-led across every tier of the market. Whether it is a high-volume casual dining venue, or an established premium restaurant, guests are showing up with higher expectations than ever before. The experience matters more than ever, and that is putting real pressure on the quality of leadership across every level of a venue.
Demand for skilled leadership talent has intensified significantly as a result. QSR, fast-casual, and premium dining have been the sharpest points of activity, accounting for 81% of our Victoria placement work across the year. Businesses in these segments are competing hard for the same relatively small pool of proven operators, and the gap between strong leaders and average ones is becoming increasingly costly to ignore.

From a candidate perspective, the businesses attracting and retaining the best people are not necessarily the ones offering the highest base salary. They are the ones who communicate honestly about where the business is at, what the role genuinely involves, and where the opportunity leads over the next two to three years. Candidates at this level have seen enough to know when they are being sold a story.

Looking ahead, a significant wave of QSR expansion is forecast across Victoria in 2026 and 2027. The opportunity is real, but so is the pressure it will create on an already tight talent market. Businesses that invest now in building strong leadership pipelines, rather than waiting until a role is vacant and urgent, will be best placed to scale without losing ground.

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Local Insights - Sydney

Sydney's hospitality industry entered 2026 in a position of genuine strength, underpinned by robust tourism recovery, a thriving events calendar, and continued investment in new venue concepts across the city. From the inner suburbs to the CBD and beyond, operators have been expanding, refurbishing, and in many cases opening new sites to meet a level of consumer appetite that has remained remarkably resilient.

That said, the commercial reality facing Sydney operators is no different to what is being felt across the country. Margin pressure is acute. Labour costs, rising rents in key precincts, and the ongoing weight of energy and supply costs are squeezing profitability at every level of the market. Operators who were riding the post-pandemic wave on volume alone are now having to work considerably harder to protect their bottom line.

Sydney has always been a competitive talent market, and that has not changed. If anything, the competition for proven hospitality leaders has sharpened. The city's density of venues, combined with the diversity of concepts on offer, means that strong candidates have no shortage of options and they know it. Retention has become just as important a conversation as attraction, and businesses that are not actively managing their culture and leadership proposition are feeling the consequences.

Experience-led dining continues to drive the strongest activity across the market. Premium casual, fast-casual, and destination dining concepts are all competing for the same cohort of operationally capable, commercially aware leaders who can run a busy venue and still deliver a guest experience worth talking about.

From a placement perspective, the briefs we are seeing most frequently are for General Managers, Operations Managers, and senior chefs who combine genuine technical ability with the business acumen to drive performance across both revenue and people. These roles are taking longer to fill than they were two years ago, and that reflects both the tightness of the market and the rising expectations on both sides of the table.

Looking ahead, Sydney's pipeline of new venue openings and brand expansions remains strong through 2026 and into 2027. For businesses serious about securing the right leadership ahead of that growth, the time to be in the market is now, not when the fit-out is complete and the pressure is on.

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Local Insights - Queensland

Queensland's hospitality market remains active and, in many parts of the state, genuinely strong. But the story in 2026 is increasingly being written on the coasts. The Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast have surged, driven by population growth, tourism momentum, and a wave of new venue openings that has outpaced the available leadership talent pool. The result is a shortage at the level that matters most, experienced operators and venue leaders who can walk in and deliver from day one.

Recruitment processes have slowed across the state, and that is creating its own set of problems. The roles exist, but the urgency often does not match, and in a market where strong candidates have options, momentum matters. Drawn-out processes, delayed decisions, and too many interview rounds are costing businesses the candidates they actually want. Many operators are simultaneously taking a more conservative approach to headcount, stretching existing teams to manage costs rather than moving decisively on the right hire. It is an understandable position in a margin-pressured environment, but one that carries its own risk when the cost of a vacant leadership role compounds week after week.

The salary conversation has shifted too. The inflation seen a few years ago has largely levelled out, and businesses have pulled back on what they are willing to offer, particularly at the mid-to-senior level. A clear gap has opened between candidate expectations and employer appetite, and navigating that gap is increasingly part of the recruitment conversation. That said, operators will still back the right person. Candidates who bring genuine energy, polish, and commercial initiative continue to attract strong packages, because businesses know what it costs to get that combination wrong.

What has changed most noticeably is candidate behaviour. People are not moving unless everything lines up: the role, the culture, the leadership, and a credible path forward. Candidates at this level are doing their due diligence, talking to people in the industry, and making considered decisions rather than reactive ones. That is precisely where Hospoworld adds real value, engaging passive talent who are not actively looking but who will move when the opportunity is right and the pitch is compelling enough to make them take notice.

The industry is also still losing good people to lifestyle pressures, and Queensland is no exception. Nights, weekends, and holidays take their toll over time, and the hospitality workforce is increasingly vocal about what sustainable looks like for them. Any operator willing to think creatively about roster structures, build genuine balance into a role, and have an honest conversation about what the job actually demands will find it significantly easier to attract and retain the calibre of talent they need to grow.

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Local Insights - ACT

Canberra's hospitality market in 2026 is navigating a more complex set of conditions than most other Australian cities. The ACT has felt the impact of a significant pullback in government and defence activity over the past year, with job advertisements sitting well below pre-COVID levels. That softening in the public sector has a direct flow-on effect for hospitality the corporate lunch trade, the after-work crowd, the conference and events pipeline and operators are feeling it in discretionary spend. Local business owners have been candid about the challenge, with the general sentiment that households are spending more carefully and going out less. At the same time, the ACT Government has committed more than $15 million through the 2025–26 Budget to grow the visitor economy, with targeted investment in aviation access, major events including Enlighten and Floriade, destination marketing, and the revitalisation of Telstra Tower as a tourism landmark. For hospitality operators, that public investment is genuinely meaningful but it doesn't resolve the day-to-day reality of tighter margins and a cautious consumer.

The cost pressures bearing down on Canberra's hospitality businesses are real and accumulating. From July 2026, all ACT hospitality employers are required to contribute into a new Portable Long Service Leave Scheme a levy that applies across every worker on the payroll, including casuals, regardless of venue profitability. Layered on top of rising electricity costs, insurance premiums, and ongoing wage increases, it's a meaningful addition to an already stretched cost base. Against that backdrop, the talent market remains active but uneven. Entry-level and front-of-house roles are filling with reasonable consistency. The harder challenge, as it is across every market in this series, is finding experienced leaders venue managers, senior kitchen operators, and supervisors who can run a team and hold a standard without constant oversight. That cohort remains genuinely scarce, and competition for them is intensifying.

What's worth noting about Canberra, however, is the opportunity sitting inside the difficulty. The current conditions larger applicant pools, slower hiring cycles, and a more considered pace of decision-making are creating a genuine window for businesses willing to take a longer-range view. Canberra's identity is also shifting in ways that work in hospitality's favour. The city has a growing reputation as a genuine food and experience destination, supported by government investment in events and tourism infrastructure, a highly educated resident population with strong dining habits, and a thriving independent venue scene that continues to attract visitors. Businesses that invest in their employer brand, create clear internal development pathways, and move decisively when the right candidate becomes available are best placed to build durable, high-performing teams and to grow with confidence as the city's visitor economy continues to mature.

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Local Insights - Westen Australia

Western Australia's hospitality sector is as active as it's ever been, but that activity comes with a catch the competition for talent is fierce, and it's only intensifying. Demand for staff spans the full breadth of the industry, from entry-level café and bar roles through to senior management positions across restaurants, hotels, and regional venues. Vacancies are plentiful, and they're not filling easily. The underlying challenge is a labour market that was already tight before hospitality's post-pandemic recovery gathered pace. Low unemployment and the enduring pull of the mining and resources sector continue to draw workers toward higher-paying alternatives, and hospitality employers particularly those hiring in kitchen, front-of-house, and management are feeling that pressure acutely. Recruitment and retention have become strategic priorities, not administrative ones.

Meeting that challenge means moving beyond the approaches that worked in a different market. Job boards still have a role, but relying on them alone is no longer a viable strategy when the best candidates aren't actively browsing. Partnering with specialist hospitality recruiters who maintain pre-qualified talent networks and genuine industry relationships gives businesses access to people who would otherwise never see a listing. International talent pipelines are also becoming a practical necessity, particularly for skilled chefs and experienced managers, with visa pathways offering a credible and increasingly well-trodden route to filling capability gaps that the local market simply can't plug on its own. Layering in social media presence, structured employee referral programs, and active engagement with industry networks rounds out a sourcing strategy built for the realities of 2026 rather than the assumptions of five years ago.

Compensation has moved from a baseline expectation to a genuine point of differentiation. Above-award wages are increasingly the starting point for businesses serious about securing and keeping quality people, not the exception. But the employers making the strongest impression are thinking beyond the pay packet. Holistic benefits performance bonuses, staff discounts, wellness initiatives, and meaningful flexibility are resonating with a workforce that has more options and higher expectations than ever before. Equally important is how compensation is communicated. Transparent pay structures and regular salary reviews signal respect and stability, and in a market where candidates are weighing up multiple offers, being known as a business that treats its people fairly and invests in their future is a competitive advantage that no job ad alone can manufacture.

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The Proof

JO

Donna was absolutely amazing and helped me find a job within a week when I had been searching on my own for over a month before. I will always recommend hospoworld to anyone seeking help getting recruited!

KR

Hospoworld were fantastic I would highly recommend for people that need a bit of help getting a job these guys helped me out a lot Allyson was amazing so down to earth and she would always keep in contacted to see how things where going and when something did come up she was straight on to it so a big thank you with how much contact these guys have with there clients is what people need it made me feel a lot better knowing that I had the support and help when I needed it so a big thanks you hospoworld RESOURCING | Powered by People! Division of RWR Group

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