

Bartender

Fast hands, a good memory, and legal responsibility for everyone you serve.

TYPICAL PAY

\$34,340

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$20k to \$74k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Bars, restaurants, hotels, clubs,
events and catering**

How you get there

- 1 Reach the legal age** Now
 Most states let you serve alcohol at 18, and some require 19 or 21 to work behind a bar. Your state's alcohol board sets it.
- 2 Start as a barback or a server** 6 months to 2 years
 The normal way in. You stock, cut fruit, run ice and watch how the bar is run. Bars promote off the floor.
- 3 Get your server permit** A few hours
 About half the states require alcohol server training. It is an online course of a few hours ending in a card. Training for Intervention Procedures is the best known provider.
- 4 Get behind the bar** 1 to 3 years
 Weeknights first, then weekends once you can keep up with the tickets.
- 5 Specialize, or run the bar** 3 to 10 years
 Cocktail bartender, bar manager, beverage director, or your own place.

Pros and cons

- + Money from day one with no tuition
- + Tips paid out the same night
- + Sociable work with people you usually like
- The base wage is \$2.13 an hour in many states
- Nights, weekends and holidays, permanently
- Drunk and difficult customers, sometimes worse

Good to know

\$2.13 has not moved since 1991

The federal cash wage for tipped workers was set at \$2.13 an hour in 1991 and has never been raised since. Everything above it comes from tips, or from a state that refuses to allow the practice.

Eight places pay the full minimum before tips

Alaska, California, Guam, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington do not let an employer count your tips toward the minimum wage. Bartenders there get the state minimum and keep th...

Optional boosts

Classic cocktails, fast and identical every time. Wine knowledge. Speed at volume. Beverage cost control.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Bartenders

US Department of Labor: minimum wages for tipped employees

Training for Intervention Procedures: alcohol server training

Apprenticeship.gov: Registered Apprenticeship, US Department of Labor

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/bartender>



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