

Pastry Chef

Bread, cakes, plated desserts and chocolate. Early mornings, low starting pay, and a craft you can practice anywhere.

TYPICAL PAY

\$37,160

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$28k to \$49k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Restaurants, hotels, retail bakeries,
grocery chains, catering**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Get a job in any kitchen, even dish pit or counter. Bakeries hire teenagers and the smell test for whether you like 4am starts is free.
- 2 Learn the craft** 1 to 4 years
 Either a 1 to 2 year baking and pastry program at a community college or culinary school, or a paid apprenticeship, or straight onto a pastry station under someone good.
- 3 Pastry cook** 2 to 5 years
 Mixing, laminating dough, scaling, finishing plates on service. This is where speed and consistency come from, and it takes years.
- 4 Pastry chef** After 5 or more years
 You run the department: recipes, ordering, costing, scheduling and training the cooks under you.

Pros and cons

- + You can start at 16 with no tuition and no debt
- + A real craft that gets visibly better with practice
- + Kitchens hire everywhere, in every town and country
- Low pay, with a national median around \$37,160
- Hours are brutal: nights, weekends, holidays or 4am starts
- Hot, heavy, repetitive work on a concrete floor

Good to know

The job is growing, quietly

The federal occupation profile flags bakers with a bright outlook, meaning new openings are very likely and the field is expected to grow rapidly. That is unusual for a job with no degree requirement.

The White House has a pastry chef

The executive residence keeps a full-time executive pastry chef on staff, separate from the executive chef. State dinner desserts and the annual gingerbread house are their work.

Optional boosts

Bread specialism. Chocolate and sugar work. Professional certification. Costing and ordering.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Bakers (51-3011.00)

The Culinary Institute of America: degree programs

Apprenticeship.gov: registered apprenticeship in the United States

US Department of Labor: the Fair Labor Standards Act

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/pastry-chef>



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