

2026 NOMINATION INFORMATION BOOKLET

RESTAURANT & CATERING HOSTPLUS AWARDS FOR **EXCELLENCE**





ABOUT THE AWARDS

The Restaurant & Catering Hostplus Awards for Excellence recognise hospitality and dining excellence of restaurants, cafés and caterers across Australia. These awards shine a light on operators in both metropolitan and regional areas, celebrating exceptional food, service and commitment to quality.

Each state will host its own Awards gala dinner - a chance for the industry to come together, celebrate with staff, acknowledge the year's achievements, and connect with peers from across the foodservice community.

WHY ENTER?

Held annually, the awards program recognises restaurants and caterers in a variety of categories in each State and Territory.

Entrants are independently assessed with the winners announced at each State's industry's gala dinner. State category winners automatically become finalists in the National Hostplus Awards for Excellence.

The gala dinners provide an invaluable opportunity for the industry to join together, celebrate and recognise not only their hard work and dedication but also that of their staff and industry colleagues. It is a great opportunity to network and share ideas with your industry peers.

There are a variety of restaurant and catering categories available for nomination to suit all types of businesses. Entrants can enter as many categories as they wish as long as they fit the category definitions.

IMPORTANT DATES

- NOMINATIONS OPEN - 10 FEBRUARY 2026
- NOMINATION CLOSE - 31 MARCH 2026
- JUDGING CLOSES:
 - QLD & NT - 31 May 2026
 - WA - 21 June 2026
 - SA - 12 July 2026
 - ACT - 19 July 2026
 - VIC & TAS - 26 July 2026
 - NSW - 26 July 2026

* Dates are subject to change





RESTAURANT

Award Categories

		QLD & NT		NSW				
RESTAURANT CATEGORIES	ACT	SEQ	NQ & NT	RNSW	SYD	SA	VIC & TAS	WA
ASIAN RESTAURANT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Chinese Restaurant					●	●		
Japanese Restaurant					●		●	
Thai Restaurant		●			●			
CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN RESTAURANT	●		●					●
Contemporary Australian Restaurant - Formal		●		●	●	●	●	
Contemporary Australian Restaurant - Informal		●		●	●	●	●	
EUROPEAN RESTAURANT	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
French Restaurant		●						
Mediterranean Restaurant		●						
INDIAN RESTAURANT	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
ITALIAN RESTAURANT	●		●	●		●	●	●
Italian Restaurant - Formal		●			●			
Italian Restaurant - Informal		●			●			
NEW RESTAURANT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
PREMIUM DINING	●	●		●	●	●	●	
RESTAURANT IN A HOTEL/RESORT	●	●	●	●				
RESTAURANT IN A PUB/CLUB	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
RESTAURANT IN A WINERY				●		●		●
SEAFOOD RESTAURANT		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SPECIALTY RESTAURANT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
STEAK RESTAURANT	●			●		●	●	●
Steak Restaurant - Formal		●			●			
Steak Restaurant - Informal		●			●			
TOURISM RESTAURANT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

CASUAL DINING | CATERING

Award Categories



		QLD & NT		NSW				
CASUAL DINING CATEGORIES	ACT	SEQ	NQ & NT	RNSW	SYD	SA	VIC & TAS	WA
BREAKFAST RESTAURANT	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CAFÉ DINING	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
FAMILY DINING	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
MEXICAN CASUAL DINING		●						
PIZZA RESTAURANT		●		●	●	●	●	●

		QLD & NT		NSW				
CATERING CATEGORIES	ACT	SEQ	NQ & NT	RNSW	SYD	SA	VIC & TAS	WA
EVENT CATEGORIES								
Events Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Event/Convention Centre Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Venue Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wedding Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATEGORIES								
Corporate & Airline Lounge Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Education Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Health & Aged Care Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Industrial Caterer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



RESTAURANT Awards

HOW TO ENTER

- Complete the nomination form online via the R&CA awards website www.rca.asn.au by the close of nominations on the 31 March 2026.
- Select categories. Restaurants can enter as many categories as you wish as long as you meet the category definition except for new restaurants.
- Pay the entry fee per category:
Member restaurants - \$199.00
Non-member restaurants - \$399.00

Nominations are considered entered only once the online nomination form is completed and payment has been processed.

Note: member price is offered to current financial members for the member establishment only.

ENTRY GUIDELINES

- Restaurants can enter as many categories as you wish as long as the restaurant meets the specific category definition and have been open for a minimum of 12 months except for new restaurants.
- New restaurants can only enter the New Restaurant category and must have been in operation no greater than 12 months from the opening of the 2026 nominations (10 February 2026). Entry qualifying period - openings from 11 February 2025 to 10 February 2026.
- Categories will be split into master and sub-categories only if there are sufficient entries. If insufficient entries, the nomination will automatically be placed in the master category.
- States/regions may be merged dependent on the number of entries i.e. QLD/NT with SEQ, NSW with SYD and VIC with TAS.

- Finalists for the 2026 Awards will be notified via email and will be displayed on the R&CA awards website www.rca.asn.au
- The R&CA Awards are open to all member and non-member businesses.
- The Restaurant Awards for Excellence Terms & Conditions of entry can be viewed on the awards website page www.rca.asn.au
- There is no direct entry into the R&CA National Awards for Excellence, State/regional category winners will automatically be entered into the National Awards at no additional entry cost.

JUDGING PROCESS

- The National Chair of Judge is a trained experience independent judge under the National Restaurant & Catering Evaluation System (RACES), who oversees and reviews all entrants.
- Restaurants are assessed on a set of judging criteria which encompasses the overall dining experience.
- Major Awards for Restaurant of the Year and Casual Dining of the Year are determined by the highest scoring points from both the restaurant categories and casual dining categories as outlined in the category definitions on page 6 of this booklet.
- R&CA financial member finalists will receive a judging analysis graph that provides the relative performance of their business against the average and winning result in their entered state category. Those entrants that receive an honourable mention are not able to receive the judging analysis graph as there are no category entrants to compare the judging evaluation.
- Graphs will be distributed for all state/regions in November. Graphs will only be distributed to member restaurants who continue to be financial on the date of the National Awards Gala Dinner 2026.

RESTAURANT

Award Category Definitions



Restaurant categories are for establishments that offer extensive menus designed for multiple courses to be ordered. Restaurant must have sit-down facilities. Categories vary by state/region and will be split into sub-categories dependent on entries. Restaurant category winners qualify for the major award of Restaurant of the Year.

ASIAN RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in cuisine from the Asia region (not covered by an existing category i.e., Indian).

CHINESE RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in Chinese cuisine. Must be 100% Chinese cuisine; otherwise, the Asian category will apply.

JAPANESE RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in Japanese cuisine. Must be 100% Japanese cuisine; otherwise, the Asian category will apply.

THAI RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in Thai cuisine. A high proportion of the menu must be Thai cuisine; otherwise, the Asian category will apply.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN RESTAURANT

Establishments that predominantly offer a menu characterised by fresh seasonal produce and innovative dishes that reflect contemporary trends in Australian cooking.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN - FORMAL

A dining experience aimed at the premium end of the market within this cuisine.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN - INFORMAL

A dining experience provided in an informal and relaxed setting within this cuisine.

EUROPEAN RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in a cuisine from either a country or region in Europe (not covered by an existing category i.e., Italian).

FRENCH RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in traditional or contemporary French cuisine. Must be 100% French cuisine; otherwise, the European category will apply.

MEDITERRANEAN RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in Mediterranean inspired cuisine. Greek restaurants qualify for this category if category is offered in state.

INDIAN RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in traditional or contemporary Indian or Sub-continent cuisine, e.g., Sri-Lankan.

ITALIAN RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in traditional or contemporary Italian cuisine. May be merged with European in some states/regions.

ITALIAN RESTAURANT - FORMAL

A dining experience aimed at the premium end of the market within this cuisine.

ITALIAN RESTAURANT - INFORMAL

A dining experience provided in an informal and relaxed setting within this cuisine.

RESTAURANT

Award Category Definitions



NEW RESTAURANT

This is the only category that a new restaurant is eligible to enter, all cuisine styles qualify. Establishments which have been in operation no greater than 12 months from the opening of the 2026 nominations. Entry qualifying period - openings from 11 February 2025 to 10 February 2026.

PREMIUM DINING

Establishments which provide a high-end dining experience aimed at the premium end of the market, including premium quality dining with exquisite service, wine list and food with specialised staff in both FOH and BOH.

RESTAURANT IN A HOTEL/RESORT

In-house restaurants operating daily in a Hotel, Motel, Resort or Guesthouse.

RESTAURANT IN A PUB/CLUB

In-house restaurants operating within/on the premises of a pub, club or tavern.

RESTAURANT IN A WINERY

Restaurants operating on the premises/site of a winery, cellar door or vineyard.

SEAFOOD RESTAURANT

Establishments that specialise in seafood. A high proportion of the menu must be seafood.

SPECIALITY RESTAURANT

Establishments which clearly specialise in a particular style of cuisine not specifically accommodated by any other listed category, i.e., Middle Eastern, Moroccan, Turkish, Vegan/Vegetarian. Mexican establishments qualify for this category if Mexican is not a category offered.

STEAK RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in premium quality steak and pro-actively market this as a speciality. A high proportion of the menu must be red meat.

STEAK RESTAURANT - FORMAL

A dining experience aimed at the premium end of the market within this cuisine.

STEAK RESTAURANT - INFORMAL

A dining experience provided in an informal and relaxed setting within this cuisine.

TOURISM RESTAURANT

Restaurants offering a tourism experience or service to the tourism industry must be seen in the public eye to be a draw card to the restaurant. It is not just a food award but does recognise a significant contribution to tourism through the provision of food and beverage.

CASUAL DINING

Award Category Definitions



Casual Dining establishments offer affordable light meal menus and are not suitable for menu's designed to order multiple courses. Categories vary by state/region and will be split into sub-categories dependent on entries. Casual Dining category winners qualify for the major award of Casual Dining of the Year.

BREAKFAST RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in the provision of breakfast for at least 5 days per week.

CAFÉ DINING

Establishments providing a relaxed menu of affordable snacks, light meals, and refreshments (non-alcoholic or alcoholic). Must have dine-in facilities and offer continuous service in a casual dining environment. Establishments that provide high tea can enter this category and patisserie/bakeries with sit-down facilities. Must operate for at least 5 days a week and have some table service.

FAMILY DINING

Establishments that cater specifically for family dining and offer menu options suitable for all children's ages.

MEXICAN CASUAL DINING (SEQ ONLY)

Establishments serving Mexican cuisine with a relaxed, fun and inviting atmosphere with sit-down dining facilities and table service.

PIZZA RESTAURANT

Establishments which specialise in pizza. A high proportion of the menu must be pizza. Must have sit-down dining facilities and table service.

MAJOR AWARDS

Major Awards are not eligible for direct entry.

RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

The major award category winner is determined by the highest scoring points from the winners of the restaurant categories.

CASUAL DINING OF THE YEAR

The major award category winner is determined by the highest scoring points from the winners of the casual dining categories.



RESTAURANT

Awards Judging Criteria

Restaurant and Casual Dining establishments are assessed on a variety of judging criteria encompassing the overall dining experience.

SERVICE

RESERVATION/ONLINE PRESENCE

- online/phone booking procedure*
- degree to which it was helpful

RECEPTION

- greeting on arrival
- help to and at the table
- appropriateness of set table
- menu and/or wine list presentation
- promptness of drink service

RESTAURANT PRESENTATION

TABLE

- appropriateness of crockery, cutlery and napery
- appropriateness of glassware and other table items
- quality and presentation of table items
- consistency of table presentations
- overall appearance of tables
- quality of seating

GENERAL

- décor
- atmosphere
- suitable lighting
- comfort generated
- toilet facilities

MENU

- presentation of menu
- appropriateness of menu items
- vegetarian options
- description of menu items
- menu is innovative/original or represents classic treatment of a particular cuisine

FOOD

- quality of food
- food presentation
- taste satisfaction
- degree to which descriptions were met
- temperature
- correct service
- cleared promptly
- representative of a specific market
- range of eating possibilities
- quality of product and execution
- range of food on menu
- range, quality and presentation of desserts*

BEVERAGE

- initial drink delivery
- physical quality of wine list*
- style and range of beverages
- appropriateness of beverages
- relative value in cost of drinks
- beverage service
- beverage care
- extra servicing of wines*
- continued beverage attention
- supply of water and soft drinks
- quality of drinking water
- quality of coffee/tea
- coffee/tea service

OVERALL DINING EXPERIENCE

- food service
- drink service
- staff attitude
- account payment
- attention on leaving
- value for money

* If applicable to category.

HOW TO ENTER

- Complete the nomination form online via the R&CA Awards website www.rca.asn.au by the close of nominations on the 31 March 2026.
- Select state and categories. Caterers can enter as many categories as you wish as long as you meet the category definition and supply the event dates or site details as requested for judging.
- Pay the entry fee per category:
Member Caterers - \$389.00
Non-member Caterers - \$749.00

Nominations are considered entered only once the online nomination form is completed and payment has been processed.

Note: Member price is offered to current financial members for the member caterer only.

- **EVENT CATEGORIES** - Caterers are required to provide 4 event options to be judged, spread over the duration of the judging period. Multiple event options are requested to ensure that a judge is available. The entrant will be assessed on one event per category entered. Different event options are to be provided for each entered category.
- **SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATEGORIES** - Caterers are required to provide site details, including site contact and food service times. Caterers will be judged on one site visit only.

ENTRY GUIDELINES

- Caterers can enter as many categories as you wish as long as the catering business meets the specific category definition.
- Categories will be split into master and sub-categories only if there are sufficient entries. If insufficient entries, the nomination will automatically be placed in the master category.
- States/regions may be merged dependent on the number of entries i.e. QLD/NT with SEQ, NSW with SYD and VIC with TAS.
- Finalists for the 2026 Awards will be notified via email and displayed on the R&CA awards website www.rca.asn.au
- The Catering Awards are open to R&CA members and non-member businesses.
- The 'Catering Entry Terms & Conditions' can be viewed on the R&CA awards website page www.rca.asn.au
- There is no direct entry into the R&CA National Awards for Excellence, state/regional category winners will automatically be entered into the National Awards at no additional entry cost.





CATERING Awards

JUDGING PROCESS

- Caterers are assessed by trained independent judges under the National Restaurant and Catering Evaluation System (RACES). The National Chair of Judge oversees and reviews all entrants.
- Caterers are assessed on either the Events Caterer or Site & Industrial Caterer judging criteria.
- There is no direct entry into the Major Award of Caterer of the Year. The major award is presented to the category winner with the overall highest score.
- Catering category winners from each state/region will automatically move forward to the National Awards for Excellence at no additional entry fee.
- Member finalists will receive a judging analysis graph that provides the relative performance of their business against the average and winning result in their entered state category. Those entrants that receive an honourable mention are not able to receive the judging analysis graph. Graphs are distributed in November to member entrants who are financial at the time of the National Awards.

EVENT CATEGORIES

Entrants are judged on one event only. Caterers are required to provide at least 4 weeks notice for a judge to be confirmed and are required to obtain the approval of the event client for a judge to be in attendance.

- Caterers will be contacted by their assigned judge to confirm the judging date. Copies of the event brief including run sheet, menus, a per head food cost and overall event costing will need to be provided to the judge prior to the judging as this forms part of the judging criteria.
- Judges will observe only during the judging assessment and will be required to sample the food however this is not to be done within the event space. Food tastings must be of the same meal being served to the event guests.

SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATEGORIES

Entrants are judged on one site visit to one nominated site per entry to assess food and service criteria. No events can be judged in the Site & Industrial categories.

- Caterers will be contacted by their assigned judge to confirm a convenient time to visit and assess the site during food service. A per head contracted food cost will need to be provided to the judge prior to judging as this forms part of the judging criteria.
- Judges will be required to sample the food during the judging assessment onsite.
- When judging remote sites, the site is required to cover all additional travel costs incurred by the judge including transfers to and from the airport, airport parking, overnight accommodation and meals. Approval of additional costs will need to be agreed upon prior to judging.

CLOSING DATES FOR JUDGING

Judging of catering events and site visits need to be completed by the close judging in each state.

QUEENSLAND & NORTHERN TERRITORY

31 May 2026

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN

21 June 2026

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN

12 July 2026

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

19 July 2026

VICTORIA & TASMANIA

26 July 2026

NEW SOUTH WALES

26 July 2026

*Dates are subject to change

CATERING

Award Category Definitions



Caterers can enter as many categories as you wish as long as you meet the category definition. Categories may vary by state/region. Sub-categories may be merged into the EVENTS CATERER and SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATERER dependent on entries. Caterer category winners qualify for the major award of Caterer of the Year.

EVENT CATEGORIES

Caterers who provide catering services at events. Entrants will be judged on one event per category entered.

EVENTS CATERER

Caterers involved in the catering and co-ordination of a special event covering the social, corporate, public or government sectors. This includes award gala dinners, party functions, incentive events, major public one-off events, charity events, entertainment, sporting events, product launches, media events. Events held within education facilities qualify to enter this category, including colleges, universities and boarding schools who hold special events such as school formals and gala dinners. Caterer must provide food, beverage and service for the event. Weddings are not permitted to be judged in this category.

EVENT/CONVENTION CENTRE CATERER

Caterers primarily providing catering and venue facilities to customers for a variety of events including family celebrations, conferences and corporate events undertaken at a hotel or purpose-built function or convention centre, owned or leased exclusively by the caterer (such as function centres, convention centres, golf clubs, sailing clubs, regatta centres, hotels and resorts). Catering services are to be provided on the premises or on the surrounds of the premises.

VENUE CATERER

Where the caterer is not solely aligned to a specific venue. Caterers with preferred agreements or contracts to provide catering services at venues such as museums, galleries, performing arts complexes, sports stadia, zoos and boats. The caterer provides services for various corporate and public events including dinners, lunches, charity events, conferences and weddings. Services are to be provided on the premises or the surrounds of the premises. Note: Caterers with multiple sites within one venue will be judged on one nominated event within the venue only.

WEDDING CATERER

Caterers specialising in the wedding market. Caterers based in their own commercial kitchen/s or at a function venue.

MAJOR AWARD

CATERER OF THE YEAR

The major award category winner is determined by the highest scoring points from the winners of the catering categories. Major awards are not eligible for direct entry.

SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATEGORIES

Caterers contracted to provide catering services at single or multiple sites. Entrants will be judged on one site visit per entry. No events can be judged in these categories.

CORPORATE & AIRLINE LOUNGE CATERER

Caterers contracted to provide services at corporate canteens, cafeterias and airline lounges.

EDUCATION CATERER

Caterers contracted to provide services for educational institutions, including tertiary, colleges, universities and boarding schools. Entrants are assessed on canteen, cafeteria or boarding services. No events can be judged in this category.

HEALTH & AGED CARE CATERER

Caterers contracted to provide catering services at hospitals and aged care facilities.

INDUSTRIAL CATERER

Caterers contracted to provide catering services at single or multiple sites that do not fit into other listed Site & Industrial Caterer sub-categories.

EVENT CATERER CATEGORIES

Categories include: Events, Event/Convention Centre, Venue and Wedding Caterer.

Event Caterers are assessed by an R&CA judge on the following criteria encompassing the overall event experience as per the client brief.

OPERATIONS

- staff interaction with guests
- pre-dinner drinks and canapés*
- effectiveness of staff briefing
- flexibility with changes
- event area set-up
- uniform presentation
- atmosphere
- kitchen production and service noise
- cutlery/servingware clean and polished
- glassware, crockery, cutlery and napery

FOOD

- served on appropriate servingware
- temperature
- quality and presentation of food
- consistently presented
- as described and expected from menu description
- visually appealing
- balanced in flavour
- appropriately portioned
- execution of dietary requirements
- value for money

SERVICE - FOOD

- execution of BOH plating
- handling and delivery of food
- FOH service execution
- product knowledge displayed by staff
- execution of food clearing

SERVICE - BEVERAGE

- timing of beverages
- temperature
- beverage service
- appropriate drinkware
- correctly poured beverages and filled drinkware
- product knowledge displayed by staff
- execution of beverage clearing

STAFF

- sufficient staffing
- standards of hygiene - both FOH and BOH
- suitably and consistently attired
- FOH professional standards
- hygienic food handling practices
- organisation of duties
- staff behaviour
- EVENT OUTCOMES
- value for money - overall event costing against delivered product
- professional standards adhered to
- event brief met

* If applicable

JUDGING BRIEFING NOTES FOR ENTRANTS

- Caterers will be contacted by their assigned judge to confirm the event date to be judged.
- Copies of the event brief including run sheet and menus will need to be provided to the allocated judge prior to the event judging.
- A per head food cost and overall event costing must also be provided to the assigned judge prior to judging. This information will be kept confidential.
- Judges will be required to taste the food however this should not be done within the event area. Food tasting must be the same meal being served to event guests.
- Judges are at the event to observe only and are not to participate in the event.



CATERING

Awards Judging Criteria

SITE & INDUSTRIAL CATERER CATEGORIES

Categories include: Corporate & Airline Lounges, Education, Health & Aged Care and Industrial Caterers.

Site & Industrial Caterers are assessed by an R&CA judge on the following criteria.

OPERATIONS

- staff interaction with patrons
- dining/eating area set-up
- kitchen production and service noise
- cleanliness of dining area
- cutlery/servingware clean
- glassware, cutlery, crockery

FOOD

- menu choices
- served on appropriate servingware
- temperature
- appropriateness of food for site
- as described and expected from menu description
- quality of food
- consistently presented
- visually appealing
- balanced in flavour
- appropriately portioned and sufficient
- execution of dietary requirements

SERVICE - FOOD

- execution of BOH plating
- handling and delivery of food
- FOH service execution
- product knowledge displayed by staff
- execution of clearing

SERVICE - BEVERAGE

- beverage service/self-service availability
- temperature
- beverage service maintained
- appropriate drinkware
- variety of beverages
- product knowledge displayed by staff
- clearance and recycling of beverages

STAFF

- sufficient staffing
- standards of hygiene - both FOH and BOH
- suitably and consistently attired
- FOH professional standards
- hygienic food handling practices
- organisation of duties
- staff behaviour

CATERING OUTCOMES

- value for money - contracted food cost against delivered product
- professional standards adhered to
- catering outcomes

JUDGING BRIEFING NOTES FOR ENTRANTS

- Caterers will be contacted by their assigned judge to confirm a convenient time to visit and assess one site.
- A per head contracted food cost must be provided to the assigned judge prior to judging.
- Judges will be required to taste the food during the site assessment.

