

How to choose a bakery

What custom cakes really need in notice and deposit, what allergen promises can and cannot be made, and how to order for an event

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Bakeries are a case where the product is honest and the ordering is not. The cake is either good or it is not. Whether it arrives on the right day, has the right name on it, and is safe for the person with a nut allergy depends entirely on how the order was placed.

What it should cost

Bread and standard pastry are priced per item and there is little to negotiate. Custom cakes are priced per serve, commonly somewhere between about \$6 and \$15 per serving depending on complexity, finish and whether the design is sculpted. A three-tier cake therefore costs what the serving count implies, not what the picture implies.

Delivery is usually charged separately and is often restricted to a local radius. Ask for the delivered price, not the cake price, because that is what you will pay.

Deposits are normal for custom orders and are usually non-refundable once work has started. Ask what the cancellation terms are before paying, particularly in the week before an event.

What the law requires

Bakeries are subject to food safety standards and local council registration, and staff preparing food must have food safety training. This is a baseline rather than a differentiator, but a bakery with no visible registration should prompt a question.

On allergens, the honest position is that a kitchen handling nuts, gluten or dairy cannot guarantee an allergen-free product. They can manage cross-contamination carefully, and a good bakery will tell you the limits of what they can promise rather than simply saying yes.

Under the Australian Consumer Law, goods must be of acceptable quality and fit for the stated purpose. A cake delivered damaged, late or materially different from the agreed design is a problem for the seller to remedy.

Red flags

A promise that a product is completely allergen-free from a kitchen that handles that allergen.

No written confirmation of the design, the date or the deposit.

A price per cake with no serving count attached.

Unwillingness to put the delivery window in writing.

A deposit demanded before any specification exists.

What good looks like

The order is confirmed in writing with the design, date, servings and price.

They state honestly what they cannot guarantee on allergens.

The delivery window is specific rather than "in the morning".

They ask what the occasion is and flag if the design will not survive it.

The cake is boxed for transport in a way that actually protects it.

What to ask

- "How many servings is this cake, and what is the price per serving?"
- "What is the notice period for this design, and what is the deposit?"
- "What are the cancellation terms, and what if the event is postponed?"
- "Is delivery included, and what window would it arrive in?"
- "How do you handle nut, gluten or dairy allergies - what can you promise and what can you not?"
- "What is the cake stored in and how long does it last?"

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