

How to choose a beauty salon

What qualifications actually mean, the hygiene questions worth asking, and why price is the worst way to compare

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Beauty is the one service on this site where the difference between providers is partly about results and largely about safety. Some treatments penetrate the skin, and the person doing them may hold anything from a short course certificate to a health science degree.

What it should cost

Prices vary enormously for the same treatment name, and the gap usually tracks training, product quality and consumables rather than location. A cheap facial and an expensive facial may differ mostly in what is applied and how much time is spent, so compare what the treatment includes rather than the headline number.

Ask whether the price includes a consultation and aftercare, and whether the therapist will recommend a course of treatments. A recommendation of several treatments before any assessment has been done is a sales pattern rather than a treatment plan.

For anything using a machine - laser, IPL, skin needling - ask what device, what training the operator holds for it, and what the patch test and consent process is. This is the category where price-shopping is most likely to cost you.

What the law requires

Beauty therapy is not a single licensed profession in Australia, so requirements depend on the treatment. Anything that penetrates the skin - needling, some laser treatments, injectables - moves into a different regulatory category, and in some cases requires a medical practitioner. Ask directly who will perform the treatment and what their qualification is.

Skin penetration treatments are subject to health regulations covering premises, sterilisation and single-use items, and premises may be inspected. You are entitled to ask how instruments are sterilised and to see the answer demonstrated rather than described.

Patch testing is required for many tinting and chemical treatments and should be done 24 to 48 hours in advance. A salon that will do it on the day is not doing it properly.

Red flags

No patch test for a tint or a chemical treatment.

Instruments taken from a drawer rather than a sterile packet or steriliser.

A laser or needling treatment offered by someone who cannot describe their training for it.

A hard sell on a package before any assessment.

No aftercare advice.

A price dramatically below everyone else for a treatment that requires expensive consumables.

What good looks like

They tell you their qualification without being pressed.

For device treatments, they explain the device and their training specifically.

Instruments are single-use or visibly sterilised in front of you.

A patch test is offered as a matter of course.

They explain what the treatment will and will not achieve, including the recovery time.

What to ask

- "What qualification does the person doing my treatment hold?"
- "For this device, what specific training have you had, and can I see it recorded?"
- "How are your instruments sterilised, and which items are single-use?"
- "Will you patch test me, and when?"
- "What product will you use, and can I see the label?"
- "What does the treatment include - consultation, product, aftercare?"
- "What is the aftercare if something goes wrong?"

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