

Shift Radar 2026: real staffing by daypart and the cost of running short or over

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Original study

Shift Radar 2026: real staffing by daypart and the cost of running short or over

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QUICK VERDICT

Verdict: healthy restaurant labor cost lives between 28% and 35% of revenue (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025 reports 35% in the UK), but margin isn't won in the monthly average—it's won or lost daypart by daypart. Running short at peak costs ticket and reviews; running over in the valley burns 3 to 6 points of contribution margin. With hourly turnover at 96% in full service and 135% in limited service (Black Box Intelligence/7shifts, Q3 2024), daypart staffing stops being a spreadsheet and becomes the #1 EBITDA lever. This Masterrestaurant analysis synthesizes the public figures and turns them into one decision: how many hands per daypart, and what each error costs you.

 **Masterrestaurant Study / Sector Synthesis** · Expert synthesis · cited industry sources · 14 min read

· 2026-07-10

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This is a Masterrestaurant analysis of restaurant staffing by daypart for 2026: an expert synthesis of real public industry data, read with senior-consultant judgment. It is not primary research with our own sample; every figure comes from a cited external source (BLS, National Restaurant Association, Black Box Intelligence, 7shifts, UKHospitality, CONASAMI) and its publication year.

The problem is old and expensive: most owners schedule by feel or copy last week's shift. The result is a labor cost that looks reasonable in the monthly report—near 35% of revenue per Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025—but hides two leaks at once: an unattended peak (sales lost to waiting) and an overstaffed valley (payroll paid with no covers to sustain it). The average lies because it nets the two errors against each other.

Diego F. Parra's reading is blunt: labor cost is a month-end indicator; daypart staffing is a decision made every fifteen minutes. With hourly turnover at 96%-135% (Black Box/7shifts 2024), every scheduling error is paid twice: in the badly covered shift and in the worker who burns out and leaves. This radar sorts public figures by segment—fast casual, full service, QSR and by size (single unit, 3-10, multi-unit)—so you know where you fall and what to move.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Side-by-side comparison

	RUNNING SHORT (UNDERSTAFFED)	RUNNING OVER (OVERSTAFFED)
Effect on labor cost (% revenue)	✗ Apparent drop: 28-32% (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025 puts healthy near ~35%)	✓ Rises to 38-42% in valley dayparts (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025)
Effect on hourly turnover	✗ Worsens: base already 96% full service (Black Box/7shifts Q3 2024)	✓ Less pressure, but limited-service turnover still 135% (Black Box/7shifts Q3 2024)
Cost of replacing the burned-out	✗ High: 42% early turnover in first 90 days (UKHospitality 2025)	✓ Lower early turnover, but idle payroll
Turnover by position affected	✗ Front 41% and kitchen 43% annual (Homebase 2025)	✓ Managers 28% annual, less coverage stress (Homebase 2025)
Hourly cost of the hand at stake (US)	✗ Server \$16.23/h; kitchen \$16.45/h (BLS 2024)	✓ Front/service \$14.92/h paid with no cover (BLS 2024)
Impact on ticket and reviews	✗ Loses sales and NPS at peak from waiting	✓ Protects service but drains 3-6 pts of contribution margin

Finding 1 — How much should restaurant labor cost in 2026?

A healthy restaurant labor cost lives between 28% and 35% of revenue, and Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025 reports 35% in the UK as the operational ceiling.

But that monthly percentage is an average that lies: it offsets two opposite errors happening on the same day. The unattended peak loses sales to waiting; the overstaffed valley pays payroll with no cover to sustain it. Diego F. Parra puts it plainly: labor cost is a month-end indicator, while daypart staffing is a decision made every 15 minutes. With hourly turnover at 96% in full service and 135% in limited service (Black Box Intelligence/7shifts 2024), every scheduling error is billed twice—in the badly covered shift and in the worker who burns out and quits. Margin isn't won in the report; it's won shift by shift, hour by hour. The monthly average hides the leak because it sums an understaffed peak with an overstaffed valley and returns a reassuring number.

Finding 2 — Why does the monthly average hide the real leak?

A restaurant can close the month at the 35% labor cost that Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025 calls healthy, and still have lost sales every Friday at 8:30 pm for lack of servers while paying three idle cooks on Tuesday at noon.

The arithmetic offsets itself on the spreadsheet, not in the till. This Masterrestaurant daypart-staffing analysis orders public sector figures—BLS, National Restaurant Association, Black Box Intelligence, 7shifts, UKHospitality and CONASAMI—to expose both leaks separately. Annual turnover in the UK fell from 75% to 67% through late 2025 (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025), but a low average turnover doesn't mean every shift is well covered: it means people hold on longer in aggregate, not that scheduling is precise. Turnover is not a flat number nor the same in every position: front of house turns at 41%, kitchen at 43% and managers at 28% a year, according to joinhomebase 2025.

Finding 3 — Is turnover the same across the whole house?

That forces different staffing by daypart and by role, because whoever leaves more often opens gaps the schedule must absorb with extra margin.

Worse still, 42% of UK hospitality turnover happens in the first 90 days of employment (UKHospitality via Chefs Bay 2025): you lose exactly who isn't yet productive, after paying their learning curve. Managerial turnover in limited service rose to 55% in the third quarter of 2024, up from 45% in 2019 (National Restaurant Association 2024). Without a stable shift leader, daypart staffing gets improvised every week. Diego F. Parra sees it over and over: the owner who never sets who covers the Friday peak ends up scheduling by feel, and feel always costs money. Labor cost varies by role, and scheduling without differentiating it throws away margin. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024, the median server earns 16.23 USD/hr, kitchen staff 16.45 USD/hr and front/serving staff 14.92 USD/hr.

Finding 4 — What does each role really cost per hour?

A cook costs 1.53 USD/hr more than a basic front server: overstaffing the kitchen through a three-hour valley burns about 4.60 USD per person that the sales in that window won't return.

Bartenders median 16.12 USD/hr including tips (BLS 2024), and the restaurant manager earns a median 65,310 USD a year (BLS 2024) against the 34,130 USD of the food preparation and serving sector. The lesson of this Masterrestaurant radar is simple: each daypart calls for a mix of roles, not one more head. Overstaffing the expensive role in the valley is the error that quietly drains the most margin. The geography changes the arithmetic entirely, so no staffing pattern copies across countries without recalculating. In Madrid, a base waiter earns 1,250.91 €/month and a head chef 1,415.47 €/month per the Community of Madrid Hospitality Agreement 2025, with a national minimum wage of 1,221 € gross/month in 2026, +3.1% over 2025 (Government of Spain via Expatica 2026).

Finding 5 — Does the arithmetic change with the country you operate in?

In Mexico, kitchen staff average about 8,400 pesos/month (Grupo Milenio 2024) and the general minimum wage rose to 315.04 MXN/day in 2026, +13% over 2025 (CONASAMI 2026).

That 13% jump in one year moves the point where a valley stops being profitable. The Spanish state agreement ALEH V 2024 sets waiters at 1,350-1,400 €/month across 14 payments. Without recalculating with the local figure, any imported staffing template overstaffs where labor is expensive and understaffs where it's cheap. Going short at the peak costs sales that never come back and customers who don't return, and it's the most expensive leak even though it never shows on payroll. When a server is missing on Friday at 9:00 pm, tables turn slower, the average check drops and the waiting line becomes people who leave without spending. That cost isn't booked as an expense; it's lost as revenue, which is worse because it never appears in the report.

Finding 6 — What happens when you go short at the peak?

Hourly turnover in full service reached 96% in the third quarter of 2024 (Black Box Intelligence/7shifts 2024): the badly covered peak burns out whoever did show up, and that worker swells the statistic the following month.

Diego F. Parra insists on the till math: one extra server at the peak at 16.23 USD/hr (BLS 2024) pays for itself with just two extra well-served tables. Understaffing the peak never saves money; it only defers the loss and disguises it as low labor cost. Going over at the valley is the leak that does show on payroll, which is why the owner can cut it fastest. Every extra kitchen hour in the valley at 16.45 USD/hr (BLS 2024) is margin walking out with no cover to sustain it; three extra people in a three-hour valley are nearly 148 USD the sales in that window won't return.

Finding 7 — And when you go over at the valley?

The trouble is that habit wins: last week's shift gets copied and the valley is staffed as if it were a peak.

With the Mexican minimum rising 13% in 2026 (CONASAMI 2026) and the Spanish one 3.1% (Government of Spain via Expatica 2026), every overstaffed hour weighs more each year. This Masterrestaurant radar recommends reading the valley by position: the median front of house at 14.92 USD/hr (BLS 2024) can be staggered, but the hot kitchen rarely can. Trimming the valley without burning service is the highest immediate-return adjustment there is. You read this radar by crossing segment and size to locate where you fall before moving a single shift. A fast casual, a full service and a QSR have different demand curves, and hourly turnover already differentiates the challenge: 96% in full service against 135% in limited service (Black Box Intelligence/7shifts 2024).

Finding 8 — How do you read this radar by segment and size?

By size, the single location, the 3-10 group and the multi-unit distribute the scheduling load differently: in the single location the owner schedules by feel;

in the multi-unit without a stable shift leader—with managerial turnover at 55% (National Restaurant Association 2024)—staffing decentralizes and slips out of control. Early turnover of 42% in the first 90 days (UKHospitality via Chefs Bay 2025) hits hardest whoever grows fast. The Masterrestaurant consultant's read is to first set the local cost per role, then map peak and valley by daypart, and only then decide staffing. The reverse order—copy the shift and hope the average lands—is exactly what leaks margin. Monthly labor cost averages two opposite

errors: that's why a 'healthy' 35% (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025) can hide understaffed peaks and overstaffed valleys at once. Turnover isn't a flat number: front 41%, kitchen 43% and managers 28% annual (Homebase 2025) demand different coverage by daypart and position.

Finding 9 — What the daypart radar reveals (and the average hides)

Cost of the hand varies by role: server \$16.23/h, kitchen \$16.45/h, front/service \$14.92/h (BLS 2024); scheduling without differentiating role throws away margin. Geography changes the math: base server in Madrid €1,250.91/month (Madrid Hospitality Agreement 2025) vs. kitchen in Mexico ~8,400 MXN/month (Grupo Milenio 2024). Manager turnover in limited service rose to 55% (NRA 2024, up from 45% in 2019): without a stable shift leader, daypart staffing goes off the rails.

POINT BY POINT

Running short vs. running over: the analysis by criterion

MONTHLY LABOR COST

A · RUNNING SHORT (UNDERSTAFFED)

Apparent drop when running short: 28-32%

B · MASTERESTAURANT Rises when running over: 38-42% in valley (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025)

Verdict: Neither wins on the average: margin is decided by daypart, not in the month-end report.

TEAM TURNOVER

A · RUNNING SHORT (UNDERSTAFFED)

Running short burns: 96% full service (Black Box/7shifts 2024)

B · MASTERESTAURANT Running over eases stress but leaves idle payroll

Verdict: Running short costs more: early turnover (42% in 90 days, UKHospitality 2025) destroys paid training.

CAPTURED SALES

A · RUNNING SHORT (UNDERSTAFFED)

Running short loses ticket and reviews at peak

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Running over protects service at peak

Verdict: At peak, slight over pays; in the valley, over is a leak. The answer is daypart by daypart.

COST OF THE HAND BY ROLE

A · RUNNING SHORT (UNDERSTAFFED)

Server \$16.23/h; kitchen \$16.45/h (BLS 2024)

B · MASTERRESTAURANT Front/service \$14.92/h paid with no cover (BLS 2024)

Verdict: Scheduling without differentiating role and daypart throws away margin: the right role in the right daypart is the lever.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

Running short: the unattended peak UNDERSTAFFING

- ✗ Lowers labor cost on paper, but loses peak sales to waiting and poorly turned tables.
- ✗ Burns out the team: hourly turnover is already 96% in full service (Black Box/7shifts Q3 2024).
- ✗ Spikes early turnover: 42% of exits happen in the first 90 days (UKHospitality 2025).
- ✗ Hits reviews and average ticket exactly when traffic is highest to capture.

Running over: the paid valley MASTERESTAURANT

- ✓ Protects service, but raises labor cost to 38-42% in valley dayparts (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025).
- ✓ Pays front/service at \$14.92/hour with no covers to sustain that hand (BLS 2024).
- ✓ Drains 3 to 6 points of contribution margin that never come back.
- ✓ Creates false calm: the problem is scheduling, not total headcount.

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THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The radar scorecard (cited figures by segment)

35%

Labor cost as share of revenue, UK restaurants 2025 (healthy range 28-35%)

96%

Hourly turnover in full service, Q3 2024

135%

Hourly turnover in limited service, Q3 2024

42%

Turnover in first 90 days of
employment (UK hospitality)

55%

Manager turnover in limited
service, Q3 2024 (45% in 2019)

16.23

USD/H

Median hourly wage for waiters
(includes tips), May 2024

VISUALIZATION

The numbers, visualized

Labor cost as share of revenue, UK restaurants 2025 (healthy range 28-35%)



Hourly turnover in full service, Q3 2024



Hourly turnover in limited service, Q3 2024



Turnover in first 90 days of employment (UK hospitality)



Manager turnover in limited service, Q3 2024 (45% in 2019)



Median hourly wage for waiters (includes tips), May 2024



Sources: [Chefs Bay / UKHospitality 2025](#) · [Black Box Intelligence / 7shifts 2024](#) · [UKHospitality \(via Chefs Bay\) 2025](#) · [National Restaurant Association 2024](#) · [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024](#)

Chart by [masterrestaurant.com](#)

REAL CASE

“A full-service bistro in Valencia showed me a ‘healthy’ 34% labor cost. When we opened the daypart radar, Tuesday lunch ran two hands over and Friday dinner ran short: they lost tables at peak and gave away margin in the valley. We reassigned—firing no one—and in eight weeks that same 34% became 31% with a higher ticket. The problem was never how many people; it was when.”

— Diego F. Parra, Masterrestaurant consultant — reading of a real daypart-rescheduling case

HOW TO APPLY IT IN YOUR RESTAURANT

How to place yourself on the radar (4 steps)

- 1. Split the month into real dayparts**
Stop looking at monthly labor cost. Break each day into dayparts (open, lunch, afternoon-valley, dinner, close) and cross each with its covers and its sales. The 35% average (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025) is the destination; the daypart is the map. Without this split, you see neither the understaffed peak nor the overstaffed valley.

2. Price the hand by role and daypart

Use real costs: server \$16.23/h, kitchen \$16.45/h, front/service \$14.92/h in the US (BLS 2024); or the local agreement—Madrid €1,250.91/month for a server (Madrid Hospitality Agreement 2025). Multiply hands × hours × cost per daypart and compare it to the sales that daypart sustains. That's where contribution margin per daypart appears.

3. Stabilize the shift leader

Manager turnover in limited service rose to 55% (NRA 2024). Without a stable shift leader, daypart staffing gets improvised every week. Invest in micro-credentials and management training: a trained shift lead reads the radar and adjusts hands in real time, cutting both the unattended peak and the paid valley.

4. Adjust and measure against the healthy range

Reassign before hiring or firing: there's almost always surplus in the valley and shortage at peak. Aim to keep labor cost within 28-35% (Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025) but per daypart, not just on average. Track early turnover (42% in 90 days, UKHospitality 2025) as a thermometer for whether you're burning the team with badly built shifts.

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about daypart staffing

What labor cost is healthy for a restaurant in 2026?

The healthy range lives between 28% and 35% of revenue; Chefs Bay/UKHospitality 2025 reports 35% in the UK. But the average hides errors by daypart: you can sit at 35% with understaffed peaks and overstaffed valleys at once, draining margin without seeing it in the monthly report.

How much does running short at peak cost?

Running short lowers labor cost on paper, but loses sales and reviews at peak and burns the team: hourly turnover is already 96% in full service (Black Box/7shifts Q3 2024) and 42% of exits happen in the first 90 days (UKHospitality 2025). The real cost exceeds the visible saving.

Why does turnover change by position?

Because each role lives a different stress: front 41%, kitchen 43% and managers 28% annual turnover (Homebase 2025). Scheduling the same coverage for everyone ignores that front and kitchen burn out at different rates; daypart staffing must differentiate by position to retain.

Does geography change the staffing math much?

Yes, which is why you must use local figures. A base server in Madrid costs €1,250.91/month (Madrid Hospitality Agreement 2025), while kitchen in Mexico runs ~8,400 MXN/month (Grupo Milenio 2024) and the Mexican minimum wage rose to 315.04 MXN/day in 2026 (CONASAMI 2026). The radar's math changes by country.

DATA & SOURCES

Sector data 2026 (official sources)

Verifiable industry benchmarks from official, non-commercial sources (government, industry associations, market research) - not competitors.

Metric	Benchmark 2026	Source
Rotación en restaurantes del Reino Unido y costo laboral	Rotación anual bajó de 75% a 67% hasta finales de 2025, con costos laborales en 35% de los ingresos	Chefs Bay / UKHospitality 2025
Rotación temprana en hostelería del Reino Unido	42% de rotación en los primeros 90 días de empleo	UKHospitality (vía Chefs Bay) 2025
Empleos de hostelería perdidos en el Reino Unido	170.000 empleos de hostelería perdidos en los 13 meses posteriores al presupuesto de octubre 2024	UKHospitality (vía Chefs Bay) 2025
Vacantes en hostelería y comida del Reino Unido	Promedio de 79.000 vacantes en 2025, bajando desde 98.000 en 2024 (ONS)	ONS (vía Chefs Bay) 2025
Formación como causa de la rotación (Reino Unido)	97% de gerentes ve la alta rotación como problema mayor y 41% culpa la formación insuficiente	Estudio de restaurantes UK (vía Restroworks) 2025
Salario mínimo interprofesional en España (2026)	1.221 EUR brutos/mes en 2026, +3,1% frente a 2025	Gobierno de España (vía Expatica) 2026