

Answers to the Top 10 Questions about Obtaining a Liquor Licence in BC



Below are answers to 10 of the most frequently asked questions regarding liquor licensing in British Columbia.

1. What Kind of Licence Do I Need?

There are nine types of liquor licences available in British Columbia. All are issued by the Liquor Control and Licensing Branch in conjunction with local government authorities.

1. [Liquor-Primary Licences](#) for selling liquor by the glass at businesses (pubs, bars, lounges, nightclubs, etc.) where the primary purpose is to sell liquor. Private clubs require a liquor-primary club licence.
2. [Food-Primary Licences](#) for selling liquor by the glass at businesses (restaurants) where the primary purpose is to serve food.
3. [Liquor \(Licensee\) Retail Store Licences](#) for selling liquor by the bottle at retail stores (often called Private Liquor Stores).
4. [Manufacturer's Licences](#) for making liquor at a winery, brewery or distillery (wineries can also apply for an endorsement to their manufacturer's licence to sell wine by the glass, at an on-site winery lounge).
5. [Special Occasion Licences](#) for individuals and groups holding special events, such as community celebrations, weddings or banquets.
6. [Catering Licences](#) for catering companies so they may provide full food and beverage services to their customers at events.
7. [Agent's Licences](#) for independent liquor agents who market products from a variety of liquor manufacturers, and BC liquor manufacturers who want to sell their products off-site.
8. [UBrew/UVin Licences](#) for businesses that sell their customers the ingredients, equipment and advice they need to make their own beer, wine, cider or coolers.
9. [Wine Store Licences](#) for wine stores including winery-operated stores, independent wine stores, VQA stores and tourist wine stores.

In each case there are specific applications and supporting documentation that are required for submission.

2. How Long Will it Take to Get a Liquor Licence?

The amount of time it takes for each kind of licence can vary greatly. The type of liquor licence and the complexity of each individual situation are factors that contribute to the length of time licensing can take. A food-primary licence, for example, will most frequently be issued within 4-6 weeks after all necessary paperwork is received. A bar licence, on the other hand, can take anywhere from 7 months to a year. The best way to ensure your licensing takes the least amount of time possible is to submit the application and supporting documentation correctly and completely.

3. How Can I Qualify for a Licence?

Once again, this will depend on what kind of licence you required. In all cases, the most important information you must be able to provide includes:

- Proof of age (at least 19 years old)
- Canadian residency
- Proof of a "valid interest" in a specific location for the proposed business with at least 12 months commitment. This could be a property title, lease agreement, or similar.
- Your criminal and possibly your driving record. A less-than-perfect record will not necessarily preclude you from consideration.

4. Can a Liquor Licence Be Transferred or Relocated?

Yes. Existing licensing can be transferred to new ownership and relocated to new locations. Currently there is a moratorium on new Licensee Retail Liquor Store Licenses, for example. It is possible to acquire a current Retail Liquor Store license and either take over the ownership or transfer it to a new location or both. There are a number of Regulations that need to be adhered to when transferring or relocating any liquor licence but it is possible.

5. How Often Must I Renew a Licence?

Every licence must be renewed once every year, and the annual fee must be paid. The annual renewal fee is based on the type of licence and the amount of alcohol purchased through that license. Failure to pay on time will result in an extra \$200 fine.

6. Once I Have a Licence, Can I Buy Liquor from Any Distributor I Choose?

No, all licensees must purchase liquor through the Liquor Distribution Branch. Exceptions can be made through written authorization from the General Manager of the Liquor Control and Licensing Branch.

7. Is it Possible to Change from One Licence Type to Another?

Yes. All necessary forms and fees must be paid, and the applicant will need to continue operating within the bounds of the existing licence until the new one is issued.

8. What Happens if Regulations are Contravened or if a Routine Inspection Discovers Problems?

If a licence holder is found to be breaking the terms of his/her licence, there will be penalties. The penalties directly relate to the type of contravention, and the number of contraventions received. This could include fees, temporary suspension, or full cancellation of a liquor licence. Staff can also be held personally liable in certain circumstances in addition to the licensee. There are a number of measures that can be taken to avoid contraventions. We work with our clients to both prevent contraventions and assist them if they do occur.

9. Do I Need a Special Occasion Licence if I Plan to Serve Alcohol at My Private Party?

In general, a licence of this kind is only required if the event is to be held in a public place, or if guests will be charged for their drinks.

10. Can a B&B or Guest House Include Alcohol in Package Deals Without a Licence?

No. Every occasion where a business is selling liquor requires some type of licence.

If all of this seems overly complicated and expensive, don't despair. The hospitality industry in British Columbia is growing and thriving and your business can be a part of that too. Rising Tide Consultants are here to help you cut through the red tape, and cross all of the Ts and dot all of the Is. Whatever your business goals, we can help you make them a reality in the shortest amount of time possible. Contact us today to find out more.

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