

6 TALK OF THE TOWN
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Stoked to share culinary creativity

Juan Rodriguez arrived in New Zealand 10 years ago from Mendoza, Argentina, with the sole idea of working in wineries. These lands captivated him, leading him to extend his stay and explore the country further on his working holiday visa.

Juan began his studies in agronomy in Argentina and worked in wine production there and in California.

In 2014, he came to New Zealand with three friends to work in the North Island for the grape harvest season before moving to Blenheim to continue working in wineries until 2021.

Moving to New Zealand changed his life, he said.

"From having a quiet life in Argentina, and not depriving myself of things, but not of abundance either, suddenly I work four or five months a year and travel the rest.

"It is a privilege that very few people have," he said.

He has explored Asia, Europe, Australia and Latin America — including his beloved Argentina, which he has visited four times since moving here.

"I always had something inside that didn't agree with the standard of life.

"Sometimes, I went on vacation to Patagonia, spent one or two months there, and it was hard for me to return to normal



ORIGINS
DANIELA DIAZ SOTO

life."

In 2021, Juan decided it was time for another change and moved from Blenheim to Wanaka, where he quickly found a job working in the kitchen of the Edgewater Lake Hotel.

He was also able to engage in one of his favourite activities: connecting with the mountains.

At the beginning of last year, during one of his visits to South America and home, the idea of a food truck began to take shape.

The Stoked Local Sandwich food truck started in November. Juan creates different types of sandwiches inspired by his origins and adventures worldwide, and options ranging from meat to vegan.

"The menu reflects my background, roots, travels and present. It's a bit of my story; it's what I want to tell.

"My food truck has a sentimental, moral background; it's not just about selling food.



Flavours of wanderlust... Argentinian immigrant Juan Rodriguez has set up food truck Stoked, in Gordon Rd. PHOTO: MARK KORE COOK

"What I like about cooking is being able to convey what I do, my creativity, from the affection towards the consumer," he said.

Juan's experience as an immigrant from Latin America had shown him the importance of keeping his roots alive and sharing them.

Despite experiencing some discrimination episodes, he chose to respond positively.

"I love cultural difference because cultures are beautiful, but not as a way to differentiate ourselves."

■ The QLDC Welcoming Communities initiative brings

together local government councils and communities to make the places we love more welcoming for everyone and to provide support for newcomers choosing to make the Queenstown Lakes District their home. For more info, visit www.qldc.govt.nz/welcoming-communities.