



Having originally studied a B Com, Jason Powell followed his love for food with a two-year stint in Norway, before returning to the Lowveld to open The Food Fundi.

What's your food background? I always wanted to work in the food industry but did a B Com instead and during that time I was always cooking in our digs. After travelling, I finally joined my brother and sister at Prue Leith in Pretoria to study as a chef. From there I worked at Sprigs, Singita and on Vamizi island in Mozambique, but a big highlight was spending two years in Norway. The lodge I worked at had their own butchery, so I learnt to make everything from bacon and deer sausage to smoked salmon and gravadlax.

What brought you back to South Africa? I came back for a wedding and met Mel (now my wife). After the weekend, I went straight to the airport and back to Norway. We kept in touch for four months until I threw in the towel on the long distance idea and returned in 2010. Back home, I did marketing for a while, but decided to go back to my passion of food and ended up in Nelspruit. A friend from Singita, GT Lundie, asked if I could help him manage his restaurant until I could find premises to start my own business. A few months later, a space opened up in the Nelspruit CBD and The Food Fundi was born.

What's on the menu? Our brownies and cheesecake are unbeatable and we have a great confectionery selection. On the savoury side, we do smoked chicken with spiced pineapple chutney on homemade low-GI bread. We make our own chutneys, relishes and onion marmalade.

What makes The Food Fundi different? Based in the Nelspruit CBD, we're open during office hours, which means we can utilise weekends and evenings for outside catering. We change our menu seasonally and keep things fresh and flavourful.

Favourite South African ingredients? I really enjoy piquanté peppers – being both sweet and sour, they have so much going for them and are really versatile. Although they're not particularly South African, I love avos and mangoes in season and adore South African cheeses.

Biggest lessons you learnt overseas? Most of the places I've worked at have been in very remote areas and often with language barriers, so I learnt about being alone and looking inward. I think all of that has made me stronger and more confident.

Best part about being back? Working for myself is extremely rewarding. Most of my staff were unskilled in the food industry and I have really enjoyed training them. I've also tried to show my staff that food is so much more than something that simply fills the stomach and I hope this comes through in my dishes.

The Food Fundi, Shop HG8, Absa Square, Nelspruit. Call 013-755-1091.

