

# José Andrés

## *More than cooking.*

**STORY:** *Marla Cimini*



José Andrés is a chef who knows what he wants. And right now, what he wants is to smoke a cigar.

“I’ll meet you at Bar Jack,” he says, gesturing towards The Ritz-Carlton Grand Cayman’s pool bar that is filled with guests sipping tropical cocktails in the late afternoon sun. “We can talk over there.”

Andrés is an internationally-recognized culinary master, as well as an activist, author, educator, TV personality, and proprietor of 31 highly-acclaimed restaurants. Famous for his ground-breaking, creative menus and avant-garde gastronomic style, Andrés is hailed as a pioneer of inventive Spanish tapas in the United States.

He is also hailed as a philanthropist. In February 2018, he was named Humanitarian of the Year by the James Beard Foundation for his efforts with his non-profit group, World Central Kitchen, which is dedicated to finding smart solutions to hunger and poverty worldwide. Andrés made waves with World Central Kitchen in Puerto Rico, helping the island recover from Hurricane Maria that battered the Caribbean in the fall of 2017. After the storm’s devastation—leaving many residents without power, fresh water, and other necessities—Andrés and his team quickly mobilized, created an organized system, and served over three million meals (via 23 kitchens) throughout the municipalities. Today, four kitchens

remain open, serving about 8,000 meals per day. His experiences are revealed in his new book, *We Fed an Island: The True Story of Rebuilding Puerto Rico, One Meal at a Time*, which released in early September.



“I get a lot of praise for the work I do. Sometimes it feels like too much,” he says, standing in the shade at the lively outdoor pool bar and puffing on a cigar, enjoying a well-deserved break between festivities at the 2018 Cayman Cookout. “But there are lot of amazing people doing amazing things in every corner of the world, and they should be recognized—and we don’t give them enough thanks.” He mentions the “many selfless people” working in hospitals in areas without power. “There are individuals in the mountains of Haiti right now educating young children to give them a better tomorrow,” continues Andrés. “Those are the people who we don’t shine enough light on. There are hundreds of thousands of people who, without recognition or with very little money and often under difficult circumstances, never stop bringing hope to humanity. And those individuals are the real heroes.”

The importance of seafood sustainability is another cause that is close to Andrés’s heart, and he is extremely passionate when it comes to educating restaurateurs and consumers about the negative

environmental impacts of lionfish. In recent years, the invasive species has been rapidly destroying coral reefs and other sea life throughout the Caribbean and beyond. To add to the crisis, this venomous creature can only be caught by spearfishing. Always up for a challenge, Andrés (who is something of a scuba enthusiast), has personally caught a multitude of lionfish during his visits to the various islands.

To the delight of many, this flaky white fish also makes a delectable meal, and Andrés is a huge proponent of serving it frequently at his restaurants—and encouraging others to do the same.

“If you see lionfish on a menu, always order it. You are helping the planet,” he advises. “It’s causing a major crisis in our oceans and I am committed to raising awareness about it. The more people who know about this dangerous fish, the faster we can triumph over it.” He adds, “I make an excellent paella with lionfish mixed with other seafood, and it is truly fantastic.”