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HOME & AWAY

Andy Andrews' Alabama

The author and speaker finds happiness and inspiration along Alabama's Gulf Coast.

By Anietra Hamper

Listening to best-selling author and speaker Andy Andrews inspires the kind of personal reflection one might get from reading Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* during the holidays. Am I living life to the fullest? Am I a good person? How am I choosing to get through life's challenges?

His words propel thought. Andrews is a master of the obvious and has made a career out of it—changing people's lives with principles they either forgot or did not know they possessed. "My mission is to help people live the lives they would live if they only knew how to do it," he said.

Alabama's Gulf Coast is the place Andrews calls home and the genesis of his life's work and inspiration.

A Turning Point

Before he was a New York Times best-selling author, the Orange Beach, Ala., resident was homeless and living beneath the pier at Alabama's Gulf State Park. At age 19, having lost his mother to cancer and his father in a car accident, Andrews' world cascaded into a dark and angry place. Today, several U.S. presidents, sports teams and international corporations have turned to him for the perspectives he gained during the lowest point in his life.

"I look back at that, and I wouldn't have chosen that in a million years, and yet, that was a time that really shaped everything in the rest of my life," Andrews said.

The pier, where he sold and cleaned fish, gave him purpose during the day and shelter at night. The rest of his hours were spent at the public library, reading biographies of



Andy Andrews
Shelley Patterson

prominent historical figures such as Harry Truman, Anne Frank and Christopher Columbus in a quest to find out if life was just a lottery ticket or a matter of personal choice.

He discovered that their commonalities pushed them beyond adversity and onto greatness. These traits became the precipice of his personal change and the seven principles for his book *The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions That Determine Personal Success*.

The book emphasizes happiness as a choice and becoming a person of action. It is a reference guide and devotional for millions worldwide, from corporate executives to Super Bowl athletes. Andrews' seven principles are highlighted on a wall at The Ohio State University football stadium for players to remember on and off the field.

A Word of Advice

Andrews has written more than two dozen books, which have been translated into several languages. His books *The Noticer* and *The Noticer Returns* are set in Orange Beach and teach readers how to unearth perspective in their lives. "It's important for people to deeply understand principles and how they impact our lives," he said. "The people who are the most successful at what they do understand why."



The beach is the starting point for several outdoor activities, including fishing, an activity Andrews enjoys doing with his family.

Gulf Shores Tourism

It is common to find mentions of local establishments such as Sea-N-Suds restaurant in his books. When Andrews was homeless, Sea-N-Suds workers cooked fish for him for only \$1. He acknowledges the restaurant as much out of gratitude as his love for its oyster sandwiches and crab claws.

Andrews has a warm, personable way of weaving humor into his words. Instead of motivational speaker, he prefers to be called a noticer. He notices simple and obvious things others might overlook, such

as how a worker's poor job performance may not be incompetence but distraction from a broken relationship at home.

"I can't run fast. I can't see great, but I notice things that make a difference for people, companies and for teams," he said.

Fun on Land and Water

Though Andrews travels the world, the Birmingham, Ala., native loves his life in Orange Beach, where he lives with his wife, Polly, and their sons Austin and Adam.

We gathered at Flora-Bama Yacht Club to share a meal of fresh triggerfish I caught while deep-sea fishing in the area. It is one of several restaurants that serve hook-and-cook meals prepared in a variety of ways, including Mediterranean, blackened, grilled or fried. "My

whole family fishes at the pier,” Andrews said.

Visitors can rent fishing equipment at the pier or book a charter. Family-friendly deep-sea fishing trips can be booked through Reel Surprise Charters. Night fishing for trout and redfish with Fishin’ Dixie Inshore Fishing is a fun way to try angling in the bay. And offshore fishing, which can be combined with hunting trips, with Intercoastal Safaris is the ultimate outdoor enthusiasts’ excursion.

The centerpiece of the resort community is the beach. “If you haven’t been to our beach, then you haven’t been to a beach,” said Andrews. “The sand is the color and consistency of sugar. Our beach is crushed quartz. It literally squeaks when you walk in it.”

The beach is central to activities such as ecotours with Sailaway Charters, Segway tours through Gulf State Park with Coastal Segway Adventures, zip lines above the sand dunes at the Gulf Adventure Center and sunset cruises along the coastline with Sail Wild Hearts. When visitors need a break, Andrews recommends perusing the antiques and collectibles at Perdido Beach Trading Co.

While Andrews is a man with a lot of answers, he believes improving one’s life and finding perspective is a lifelong quest. “I’m a dad, a husband, a friend—and I am learning as hard and fast as I can to continue my own journey. There always seems to be another level you can reach.”

Planning Your Trip

To learn more, go to andyandrews.com and gulfshores.com. For trip-planning assistance, visit your local AAA Travel agent or AAA.com/travel.

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Published: Feb 24, 2017