

sculpting cayman

Sculptor Horacio Esteban has said that his work is not only made in Cayman, it *is* Cayman. While that rather cryptic remark

CAYMAN ISLANDS may smack of marketing-ese, it really isn't. Esteban is a rarity in the Cayman Islands—one of few indigenous artists and the first (and currently only) to sculpt Caymanite, a semi-precious stone found only on these islands. His sculptures reflect the Cayman spirit; down-to-earth yet polished, and multifaceted.

"I've adapted the Italian mentality of stone," explained Esteban, "in the many ways Caymanite can be used." That translates into

a variety of works, including fine jewelry cradled in gold, old cedar trunks and tables inlaid with Caymanite, small souvenirs, mosaics, and large alluring sculptures. Prices vary from \$5 pendants to \$10,000 custom pieces.

Esteban's raw materials come from the bluff of Cayman Brac, where he was raised from age four, after his family fled Cuba in 1969. The dense multicolored rock contains bands of white, red, brown, and black formed over millions of years. He chips, chinks, and collects the rock himself. Among his favorite themes is the underwater world—echoing back to his early years as a Brac dive master.

Esteban's studio on the George Town waterfront escaped Hurricane Ivan and, like much of the island, is back in business: Just look for the large sculpture of a baby turtle hatching from an egg. Contact: 345-947-2787, www.esteban-gallery.com. JOANN MILIVOJEVIC



Minding Mauritius

The dodo, a 50-pound flightless bird that lived only on Mauritius, was presumed extinct in 1681, but its likeness, emblazoned on the guest room walls of the newly renovated Oberoi, Mauritius, is a reminder of the island's fragile ecology. Tucked in Turtle Bay on the island's northwest coast, the hotel reflects the island's mix of African, European, and Asian heritage, with sugarcane thatch-roofed pavilions and Buddha-like stone statues scattered over 20 acres. You can bask in one of 73 luxury rooms in good conscience: The conservation-minded hotel imported many building materials to avoid depleting the island's tropical forests. General manager Markus Engel also developed a program called "Touching Senses" to educate guests on Mauritian wildlife and culture.

If you get beyond the beach, check out the nearby capital of Port Louis, a 15-minute drive away. You'll pass Hindu temples and Buddhist shrines on the way to the Marché Central, where you can find fresh fruit, raffia baskets, and other charms. Don't leave without some locally grown saffron or nutmeg, and one of the prized miniature boat models, hand-carved replicas of the islanders' fishing pirogues. Room rates are 800–2,600 euros. Contact: The Oberoi, Mauritius, 800-562-3764, www.oberoihotels.com; order Mauritian spices and other native goods at www.kado-moris.com. B.B.

