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THE TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE JOURNAL

## Uruguay

HOTEL FASANO LAS PIEDRAS

ESTANCIA VIK JOSÉ IGNACIO

PLAYA VIK JOSÉ IGNACIO

HOTEL SOFITEL MONTEVIDEO

CASINO CARASCO AND SPA

FOUR SEASONS RESORT CARMELO



*Hotel Fasano Las Piedras*

## FRENCH POLYNESIA

St. Regis Bora Bora   Four Seasons Resort Bora Bora   Le Taha'a



# ESTANCIA VIK JOSE IGNACIO

*Finally.*

**W**HEN WE FIRST BEGAN printing these pages of ARW in 2009, one of the first properties to contact us requesting our consideration for a review was Estancia Vik. The experience we will

describe on the following pages is as filled with “OMG” as it is regret that it took us this long to get here.

Like Fasano Las Piedras, Estancia Vik was also quite empty during our stay. In fact, ours was the only suite occupied of the 12 on offer.

We happened to make our booking at Estancia Vik prior to the property receiving a request for a wedding buyout that required it to close for two weeks prior to the event. We were offered an exchange for another night at Playa Vik and a day of entertainment at Estancia, but declined since our editorial policy requires an overnight stay to write a proper review.

As our vehicle passed through pastures dotted by wandering cattle, we arrived at the stunning white and crimson façade of Estancia Vik. A smartly clad lady emerged to welcome us and show us to our suite on the opposite end from where construction was occurring.



*After all,  
this is your  
home.*

These ongoing preparations would be mostly inaudible throughout our stay.

Of the 12 suites on offer at Estancia Vik, four are called Master Suites and eight simply Suites. Masters are located on the building's second floor, and offer cornered balconies with impressive pastoral views, increased square footage, and a guaranteed walk-in closet. Suites are all on the ground level, and are themselves more than adequate in terms of space and amenities.

Each of the accommodations has been realized with the assistance of an acclaimed Uruguayan artist. As such, the aesthetics from one to the next are entirely unique. One might have a bathtub carved from ebony, and another might have a bath tiled with boldly contrasting triangles in blacks and whites. The best can only be determined by personal preference. We will mention that there is one suite with sexually charged paintings on display. This is the only option that might yield a regular flow of controversy from unsuspecting occupants. In order to keep things fresh, each artist visits the property regularly to check up on and refine his or her contributions to the décor.

Dining at Estancia Vik is the epitome of informal, but don't let that fool you. Informal in this case is executed with the most formal intent. Though we were the only party in house, the property didn't hiccup for a moment in delivering a most stunning offering for lunch moments after our arrival with two delightful choices available for each course, and wines from the Vik family's own Chilean vineyard. At dinner, we opted for a barbecue service, served in a dedicated dining room for this purpose. A flaming apparatus marks the center of the space with mixed chairs alongside a long wooden table on one side, a bar on the other, and corrugated





PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY ESTANCIA VIK JOSE IGNACIO

## DOS & DON'TS

**DO** go now. This is a rare gem in hospitality, and you shouldn't wait four years like we did.

**DO** inquire about hiring one of the hotel's own Fiat automatics. With only standard shifts available at most rental agencies, Vik Retreats thought to acquire its own fleet for guest use.

**DO** saddle up. The equestrian program is the cornerstone of the Estancia Vik experience, and the staff and horses are ready to accommodate riders of all levels and ages.

**DON'T** be disheartened by the non-beach orientation. In 15 minutes, you can be at the front gate of Playa Vik, a seaside extension of your country home.

**DON'T** wear your most treasured knitwear to the evening barbecue. The smoke and embers waft quite a bit, and your cashmere will surely lend campfire images to your senses for the remainder of the trip.

**DON'T** stress about meal times. This is your home for the days you've chosen to stay here. Though 8-11am is the suggested range for breakfast, no one will bat an eye if you choose to request waffles at 3pm.

metal walls splattered with a mixture of paints surrounding. The following morning began with a lovely spread of fruits, pastries, two types of fresh juice, and cereals with eggs and waffles available upon demand.

An offering of activities is available to tempt guests of Estancia Vik, but perhaps activity is a bit of a misnomer. This experience is all about chilling out.

A small spa, if you could even call it that, has been apportioned out of a nook on the south end of the property. One small treatment room sits adjacent to a sauna and changing area. Services, mostly massages, are available upon request and with proper notice. Just across the way, a blip of a fitness room is furnished with the bare essentials. Up the stairs from there, a swimming pool with adjacent loungers is maintained at a temp that can only be called perfect and with surroundings that can only be called stunning.

The rest of the offering is executed in the fields and pastures that surround. Most obvious is the availability of a most gorgeous equestrian fleet trained for riders of varying abilities. These horses are also at-the-ready for impromptu polo matches for the experienced, or clinics with pros for the curious. Upon demand, the property is keen to realize any idea from a guest's imagination, one of which has been to setup a paintball course for larger groups or one family versus another.

The facilities of sister property Playa Vik, including its beach, swimming pool, and restaurants are open to all guests of Estancia Vik as well. We will discuss Playa Vik in full in the review that follows.

The service philosophy at Estancia Vik reminded us of the very best locations within the portfolio of acclaimed Amanresorts. For instance, individual bills are only presented after meals upon request. When you're finished, just leave the table. After all, this is your home.

We have become accustomed to meeting GMs whose esteem is perhaps a bit inflated. General Manager Agustin Leone is so relaxed that we didn't know he was the guy in charge until several hours after we first met. Subsequently, Agustin's staff looks after guests with the genuine care one might offer to out-of-town friends or family taking up a spare bedroom.

It may have taken us four years to finally get ourselves to Estancia Vik José Ignacio, but one thing is for sure. It won't take that long for us to get ourselves back. ●●●

### Estancia Vik José Ignacio

José Ignacio, Uruguay  
General Manager: Agustin Leone  
[estanciavikjoseignacio.com](http://estanciavikjoseignacio.com)



# PLAYA VIK JOSÉ IGNACIO

*Beachfront complement.*





PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY PLAYA VIK JOSÉ IGNACIO

*It is unquestionably eye catching, like a UFO that has crash-landed on this quiet stretch of sand.*

Sabrina. She would waste no time in getting us registered and settled, including a quick overview of the boutique property's layout and amenities.

Accommodations are classified as Suites or Casas. Four Suites with oceanfront views are located on the second floor of the property's main building. Casas with two or three bedrooms each are located in an L-shaped structure just behind, some offering peek-a-boo ocean views and one premier Casa Mar offering the most direct sea views. Similar to its sister property, each bedroom at Playa Vik has been conceived with a unique design concept inspired by an assortment of Uruguayan contemporary artists.

The tendency of most may be to rush straight to the top of the inventory. However, we found the entry level Suites to be some of the most desirable accommodations on property for sake of their incredible views and generously proportioned walk-in closets. By contrast, what Casas may lack in terms of storage space and—in most cases—view, each has its own private alfresco space furnished with two loungers.

In the case of F&B, Playa Vik hit one homerun after another during our two-night stay. Days begin with a lovely buffet of cold goodies with eggs, waffles, and the like made-to-order. Due to our rather leisurely wake-

**P**LAYA VIK WAS THE SECOND installment from Vik Retreats, a seaside complement to the family's countryside estancia in the humble beach town of José Ignacio. The properties are closely related with a shared "make yourself at home" sensibility, perhaps predictably so since the two are overseen by the same succinctly casual general manager.

As our vehicle entered the gate and descended the steep driveway of Playa Vik, the ultra contemporary façade came into view. It is unquestionably eye catching, like a UFO that has crash-landed on this quiet stretch of sand.

A friendly face appeared to introduce herself as

up times, we were never so hungry by lunchtime, and instead requested impromptu late afternoon snacks on both days. Given the hotel's relatively small size, we were impressed with the delivery of perfect taste, timing, and service for both requests. It's no kind of light snack, but we highly recommend the chivito, a steak sandwich that is a Uruguayan specialty. A smartly conceived cased menu that is perfectly refined but not stuffy in the least is on offer for dinner each evening. We dined in for the first night, and were duly impressed.

Suggested as a "can't miss" by seemingly everyone we've met who's ever been to José Ignacio, we asked for a table at nearby restaurant La Huella for our second night. Though its rustic chic is lauded as the town's best dining spot, we weren't so amazed by cuisine and service that were equally bland. In fact, we would have preferred a second dinner at Playa Vik. If the hotel allowed outside diners, we're sure it would be just as popular as La Huella, or perhaps even more so.

The beach and pool at Playa Vik is quite a magnet in the height of José Ignacio's peak season. Guests of Estancia Vik are welcome to make use of the stunning pool deck that blends perfectly into the seascape or to dine in for lunch, dinner, or cocktails. We happened to be visiting during the shoulder season, but imagine a rather boisterous atmosphere when both properties are full and almost everyone wants to spend the day at the beach.

In terms of wellness, a small fitness room serves a purpose, though the equipment was perhaps a bit too limited for us to really make proper use of it. A couple of spa treatment cabins are available for those who wish to request massage appointments. We suggest giving proper notice since spa is not one of the hotel's main functions.

The standout of the Playa Vik experience is the service. Throughout our stay, we felt as though we were guests of family when interacting with every member of the genuine and proud team of staff. Michelle in the restaurant came to know our preferences almost immediately, and saw that we were always smiling and sated.

We thoroughly enjoyed our stay at Playa Vik, and would consider a return stay. If pressed to make a decision, though, we would likely book into Estancia Vik and make use of the amenities, location, and F&B at Playa



Vik a few times during our stay. For our personal taste, we felt the design and accommodations of Estancia Vik were just a bit more sophisticated. That aside, both are successful properties that complement each other very well. We confidently recommend Playa Vik for those whose priorities call for a beachfront location. ●●●

### Playa Vik José Ignacio

José Ignacio, Uruguay  
General Manager: Agustin Leone  
playavik.com

## DOS & DON'TS

**DO** book well in advance for the South American summer. With only a handful of keys and a consistent roster of regulars, festive season is a particularly difficult get.

**DO** make yourself at home. If you're in the market for an afternoon snack, may we suggest the chivito steak sandwich? It's decadent, and we found a half to be just enough.

**DON'T** skip straight to the top. The entry-level Suites are actually our preferred accommodations on property for sake of ocean views and ample closet space.

**DON'T** raise your expectations too much for a meal at La Huella. You'll make your own conclusions, but we feel they're resting upon their laurels and feel the F&B offerings at Playa Vik are far superior.