

Business Traveller

ASIA-PACIFIC

south american CHIC

Small in size but punching well above its weight in character and style, Uruguay is a well-kept secret poised for the spotlight, writes **Aaron Peasley**



WHERE TO STAY

ESTANCIA VIK

Not your average ranch. Each room in this plush country estate features the work of a different Uruguayan artist. The vast public areas are similarly colourful, including a spray-painted barbecue pit that hosts a traditional Uruguayan *asado*. A stay here offers a luxury take on the gaucho life, including horseback riding and hikes.
www.estanciavikjoseignacio.com

PLAYA VIK

An architectural showstopper, this hotel combines innovative spaces with wonderful food and five-star service. The “sculpture” pavilion houses the best suites, which feature direct beach views. The property’s six grass-roofed *casitas* are ideal for families.
www.vikretreats.com



About a 30-minute drive from downtown Punta, José Ignacio has become the most illustrious place to own property. Amidst the town's architectural pastiche – where local beach huts sit happily beside multimillion-dollar glass villas – is Playa Vik, owned by New York investor Alex Vik and his wife Carrie. Blending an exuberant design with a staggering waterfront location, the hotel, which opened in 2011, is the kind of property that sticks in your mind long after you've checked out.

After successfully establishing Estancia Vik, a grand ranch property some several kilometres inland from José Ignacio, the Viks took a less traditional approach, tapping local architect Carlos Ott. The hotel's central pavilion, known simply as "Sculpture", bears the architect's signature space-age aesthetic. With a pool that cantilevers dramatically over the beach, the Sculpture is the social heart of the hotel and, judging by its popularity during my visit, José Ignacio itself. In an effort to have the hotel feel more like one of their private homes, the Viks installed an enviable collection of contemporary art, including pieces by Anselm Kiefer, James Turrell and architect Zaha Hadid.



Clockwise from top left: the "Sculpture" at Playa Vik; Calle Del Colegio's colourful street corner; Colonia del Sacramento Shop exterior at the Sunday market and Scallops with radicchio cooked "New Andean style" by Francis Mallmann (below)