



Playa Vik José Ignacio Uruguay

For an A-list playground, Uruguay's beach village of José Ignacio is remarkably unassuming: there are no extravagant mansions or glamorous bars; just little whitewashed houses edging a square adorned with nothing showier than a lavender bed. So it took guts for the Norwegian-born hotelier Alex Vik to get Carlos Ott (Uruguay's answer to Norman Foster) to erect an avant-garde beach house on the spot where top chef Francis Mallmann opened the village's first restaurant in 1978. Set above the golden sands of Playa Mansa, six glass-walled and grass-roofed *casas* are daubed with murals or hung with collages and abstract oils. Every bit of furniture – a black-vinyl cupboard plastered with Manga-style cartoons; an easy chair fashioned from scarlet rope; a hull-shaped bathtub of jacaranda wood – is an artwork in itself, and even the simplest bathroom is lined in Gabonese zebrawood. In the titanium-and-glass main building, guests breakfast between a wall of pulsating light by Californian artist James Turrell and a Zaha Hadid moulded-acrylic bench. Lunch late at one of José Ignacio's ramshackle beach bars and then lie by the hotel's black granite pool, cantilevered out towards the beach, its illuminated floor mapping the Southern Hemisphere sky. 00 598 94 605212; www.vikretreats.com. Doubles from US\$500

