



The Hot List 2011

URUGUAY Playa Vik José Ignacio

Norwegian-born financier Alex Vik opened **Estancia Vik**, his first South American hotel, in 2009. And he picked a splendid site in the nearby beach village of José Ignacio for its sister property, Playa Vik, commissioning Carlos Ott, Uruguay's pre-eminent architect, to erect a modern beach house just metres from Playa Mansa. Ott's design contrasts startlingly with the settlement's modest, whitewashed cottages: six two- and three-bedroom casas, walled in glass and roofed with sea grasses, surround a titanium-and-glass Sculpture Building (it contains a Zaha Hadid-designed bench and a wall of light by artist James Turrell) dubbed 'the airport' by locals. The light-filled rooms are decorated with a sparse, Nordic precision, their walls daubed with murals or hung with collages and abstract oils, each item of furniture (a black-vinyl cupboard plastered with manga-style cartoons; an easy chair fashioned from scarlet rope) an artwork in itself. Days are spent lolling among the plovers and oystercatchers on Playa Mansa, cycling to José Ignacio's landmark lighthouse, or swimming in the hotel's cantilevered black-granite pool, with an illuminated floor mapping the sky of the southern hemisphere. Some head to Estancia Vik to ride or take a polo class, returning to Playa Vik's fireside at dusk to dine on alfalfa-fed beef or on the codling and drumfish landed daily by José Ignacio's last remaining fishermen.

When to go A-listers go in January, but there's better value at the end of summer, in February and March.

Room to book The Azul Suite has a privileged ocean view and a wide balcony swept by sea breezes.

Playa Vik José Ignacio: 00 598 94 605212; www.vikretreats.com. Two-bedroom casas from US\$800

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