

Playa Vik, Jose Ignacio, Uruguay



LOCATION: A six-street grid of beachside loveliness, Jose Ignacio is to Buenos Aires what the Hamptons are to New York – but with the wilderness of Wyoming and the style of Saint Tropez. This small, Uruguayan town has somehow retained its laid-back, fishing-village feel, despite hosting millionaires, celebrities and supermodels during the December to March high season. Playa Vik is set on the edge of town, right on the beach.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: Playa Vik looks as if an alien space-ship predominantly fashioned from glass has set itself down on Jose Ignacio's seashore and set up as a boutique hotel. The main building – named Sculpture, which gives you a clue about the curving shape that is more commonly associated with artworks than buildings – is clad in titanium, and the swimming pool cantilevers out over the beach. It was designed by Carlos Ott, Uruguay's most famous architect, for a modern-art-loving, half-Uruguayan, half-Norwegian billionaire, and it's undoubtedly among the most luxurious, most eccentric places I've ever stayed.

THE FACTS: The sculpture building is home to four of the rooms, all of which overlook the pool, and there are six separate, multi-bedroom casas made from stone and glass with green roofs, perfect for families or groups of friends. The whole place is a hymn to modern art, with pieces commissioned specially from some of the world's biggest names. There's a bench and a table designed by Zada Hadid, light art by James Turrell that makes the library look like it's a portal to a different dimension and even the front door is a bronze piece inspired by the Ghiberti Baptistery in Florence. In the neighbouring pavilion there's a games room, gym, spa and a small dining room, although lunch can be served on the long tables in the bar overlooking the pool. Outside there's a sunken fire pit, surrounded not by buttock-bruising benches, but by a 360 degree sofa covered in cushions. No wonder this west-facing spot is the most popular address in town come sundowner-time.

A GOOD BASE FOR: Resting your body while quietly expanding your mind. Staying in a living artwork is quite an experience, and while it in no way impinges on your comfort it means there's always something to look at and ponder about. A wander in Jose Ignacio will reveal boutiques, a range of restaurants, and sister property Estancia Vik offers horse riding just a couple of miles away. (See our review of Estancia Vik).

WOW: Our walls elicited a number of wows. We were in the Caras suite, so the first came when we walked in and saw the face of supermodel Devon Aoki staring down at us, one of the many painted across the wall behind the bed by artist Martin Verges. The bathroom walls are made entirely from wood, as is the bath itself. Bu the biggest wow came when we realized the entire glazed front wall could slide back, allowing the sea breezes to play all around the room.

HOW MUCH: From £309 including breakfast

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