

TheNational

Season of light and colour: Spring holidays



Discover South America's secret of Uruguay
April

Unlike its larger and more popular neighbours Brazil and Argentina, Uruguay, which nestles between the two on South America's Atlantic coast, has never been much more than a blip on the tourist radar. But now, with a swanky new airport just opened in Montevideo and a party scene burgeoning in Punta del Este on the south coast, that blip is beginning to flash a lot more brightly. To get to the upscale heart of Uruguay's tourist revolution, head 40 kilometres north-east of Punta del Este to a quiet fishing town called José Ignacio. Appearances can be deceptive. Behind the sleepy exterior of the village, with its one grocery store, you'll find an array of ultra-stylish hotels and cutting-edge restaurants, including Marismo, a "secret restaurant" on the beach, and celebrity chef Francis Mallmann's wonderful Garzón. The most anticipated new arrival in 2010 is Playa Vik, due to open in March. Along with its sister property Estancia Vik, which opened last year, the hotel promises to be a haven for lovers of art and modern architecture, boasting artwork by Anselm Keifer and furniture by Zaha Hadid. For a village without a nightclub, José Ignacio's celebrity tally is impressively high: Naomi Campbell, Ralph Lauren and Shakira have all been sighted here, soaking up the peace and quiet. Go before the secret gets out.

Playa Vik is set to open in April (www.vikhotels.com; 0034 902 160630) with double rooms from \$300 (Dh1,102). Stay at the Estancia from \$500 (Dh1,836) for a double room, per night.