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VOGUE

travel & lifestyle



Above, a cantilevered pool and works of art are among the pleasures at Playa Vik. Below, the restaurant La Caracola is accessed by rowing boat

Heat seeking

Behind the sleepy exterior of Uruguay's José Ignacio lies a sophisticated town that's attracting global style tribes

José Ignacio, the sleepy spit of rugged coastline 30 minutes south of (but a world away from) the fleshpots of Punta del Este, has become the winter hot-spot for globe-trotters and glamorous bohos. In attitude and appearance, José Ignacio is a surfer town: there are no traffic lights, no cash points, no high-rise buildings and no big-name brands. Yet there's a stealthy sophistication at play here.

Pitched along the coast are the sublime concrete-and-glass holiday homes of Brazil and Argentina's beautiful people (who hop here on the Buquebus ferry from Buenos Aires). Beach-shack *paradores* employ VIP lists to mitigate the Christmas rush, including regulars Mario Testino, Gisele and Shakira. Miami hotel The Setai popped up last year in the form of a temporary bar and restaurant, while laid-back (but rigorously edited) clapboard boutiques have sprung from the sand to sell homewares and hippie fashion at big-city prices. Thankfully, it's still a long, long way from the rampant development of Punta del Este. Discos and neon are banned, hotels can't build above two storeys, and parties have a 2am curfew. And if you avoid the festive period, the only sound in José Ignacio you'll hear are the waves crashing on the beach. Here's *Vogue's* guide:

FASHIONABLE DIGS: Playa Vik José Ignacio (Playavik.com) opened earlier this year. Art by James Turrell, Anselm Kiefer and Zaha Hadid competes for your attention, and a cantilevered pool hangs 32ft above the beach below. The Setai (Setaijoseignacio.com) opens soon, but for a more authentic experience, try Posada Paradiso (Posadaparadiso.com), a

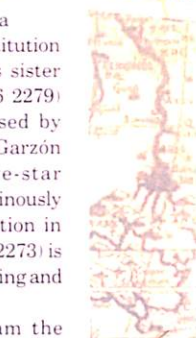
relaxed hippie place, or La Posada del Faro (Posadadelfaro.com), with its South American-chic interiors. Casa Suaya (Casasuaya.com) is a slick boutique hotel with a hint of French flair; Casa Chic (Casachicjoseignacio.com) is an all-white, driftwood abode, which lives up to its name.

SHOPPING: Buy dresses by Soledad Twombly, handmade shoes, Forties furniture, glass, and leather bags at stylish boutique Mutate.

SIP AND SUP: With its billowing white curtains and chill-out tunes, La Huella (Paradorlahuella.com) is an institution for sushi and sundowners. Visit its sister restaurant, La Caracola, (00 598 486 2279) on a nearby private island accessed by rowing boat. Don't miss Hotel El Garzón (Restaurantegarzon.com), a five-star restaurant 45 minutes inland, with heinously expensive rooms. Getting a reservation in high season for Marismo (00 598 486 2273) is a drag, but the candle-lit, barefoot setting and packed tiki bar are worth the effort.

GO GAUCHO: Cowboys still roam the Uruguayan Pampas. Try life in the saddle with horses from Haras Godiva (Harasgodiva.com), or take a picnic to the polo matches held in front of Estancia Vik (Vikretreats.com).

ONLY THE BRAVE (AND BUFF): South American bikinis are tiny. Buy yours at Manga Rosada. But don't surf in them (big waves + little bikini = maximum embarrassment). CS



Left, buy handmade shoes and Forties furniture at Mutate. Right, the all-white Casa Chic. Above right, La Posada del Faro