

HOTEL SPOTLIGHT

Museum Quality

APPRECIATING THE ARTISTRY OF THE VIK HOTELS

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Despite displaying a collection that'd make a Manhattan gallery blush, Vik hotels have purpose greater than the (sometimes shocking) art on their walls. They're not museums, but they are a canvas — for guests and artists alike.

The Vik hotels are not museums. Alex Vik is adamant about this. "Museum," to me, is way too cold," he says, when asked where his hotels lie on the spectrum from lodging to art museum. His vision for Vik, shared by wife and co-founder Carrie, is more interactive, where "you live and enjoy and participate" with the various works — of which there are many.

It's not hard to imagine. At their three hotels in Uruguay, and two others in Chile and Milan, the Viks have painstakingly curated each room to hold intricate, site-specific art. Original paintings hang on walls, while others skip the frames in favor of colorful work painted directly on the interiors, some by local artists, others by international auteurs brought in from around the world. It's a museum-quality collection. But that's not the main objective.

The Viks are clear that the point of their hotels, first and foremost, is to provide a special hospitality experience — a mission that seems obvious, but isn't always so. There are experimental hotels out there that put the priority on the experiment, and not on the nuts and bolts of ensuring guests have a seamless stay. The Vik hotels are most certainly not these. But while the couple agrees on the importance of five-star service, they do have one philosophical difference that reflects the tension between art space and lodging.

Every long-married couple has a recurring lovers' spat. The Viks' is a new one. *How much nudity is too much nudity?*

It comes up. The Viks work closely with hundreds of artists, many of whom create new work especially for their properties. Their process starts with getting to know the local scene, seeking out those who inspire them and who, in turn, are excited about their hotel projects and the prospect of close collaboration. By the nature of the hotel setting, it's a functional art. But for some of the artists, it becomes a blank slate on par with any other, almost like a dedicated gallery space — one that just happens to have a bed and bath and all the requisite amenities of a luxury boutique hotel. Completing one project, artists will sometimes ask for more space, more canvas with which to work.

"The most successful rooms in all of our properties are those rooms where the artist really involves himself in the process and spends time in his space — and you feel it."



Estancia Vik from a distance

Take one of the master suites at [Vik Chile](#), a room called Gabler's Grisaille. The artist, Alvaro Gabler, agreed to work on seven paintings. By the time he had finished some six months later, he had gone much further, wrapped up in the project, considering the perspective of a guest from every corner of the room and enacting what Alex describes as a metaphysical concept "where you cannot distinguish the real paintings from the walls."

On the same floor, a room called the Shogun Suite saw the artist – Takeo Hanazawa – spend long hours meditating before getting to work, a process that left staff confused and a little alarmed. "We got reports he wasn't doing anything... just sitting there," remembers Alex. But by the time he had finished, the room featured "beautiful contemporary versions of a traditional Japanese wall paintings, [and] he was begging us for other space to paint." Today it's one of their most successful rooms.





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Carrie's the conservative of the two. After a certain room at Estancia Vik (the Trujillo Suite) became one of their most controversial – guests either loved it or wouldn't stay in it – she felt she had to reflect. "We went back in to the room, looked at the art, and it's a series of paintings of couples who are naked, and it just for many people was beyond what they could live with. I became much more conscious of that fact and that concern... that we are hotels and we really can't afford to have rooms that people don't want to stay in."

"My point," counters Alex, "is that it's art [and here Carrie affirms his point: "it's art"], and we have hundreds of artists, all kinds of different ideas and expressions, and not everybody's going to like everything." By the same token that a guest might ask for another room with one fewer phallus adorning the walls, plenty of repeat guests request their favorite spaces time and again. Others take another tack – simply buying out all the art for themselves. Regardless of whether it's for sale. "The funny thing is," laughs Carrie, remembering one such occurrence, is that "the artist called Alex and said 'oh, great news, I sold all the art!' And Alex said to him, 'but that's my art... we bought [it].' 'Yeah, yeah, I know but I'll paint new ones for you.'"

They supported him, of course. After all, these are art people. Even if, occasionally, the pitch has just a tad too much nudity. "Letting the artist express themselves and push the envelope in a public forum is a good thing," says Alex, and Carrie again confirms.

"It's what we do."

The Hotels

If it's the art that draws the eye, it's the totality of the stay that makes the Vik Hotels such enduring destinations. "It's always been our idea from when we started to have the experience [feel like] staying in our home," says Carrie, and reviews consistently affirm that success, thanks to the often small-scale friendly service and the homey amenities like, say, ping-pong tables, to go along with the first-rate art, luxuries, and restaurants. Their three hotels in Uruguay make their home in or just outside of the charming, happening beach town of Jose Ignacio, while a vineyard hosts Vik Chile and, in Europe, [Galleria Vik](#) takes its place in a historic property in the heart of Milan.

Read on for more about each specific hotel, and be sure to consult our [pandemic travel guide](#) to make sure you're currently permitted to travel to the countries below – or contact our [Travel Specialists](#) for information about opening dates and availability for any of the Vik properties.

Estancia Vik

Jose Ignacio, Uruguay



Set on a 4,000-acre ranch near the seaside, this was the Viks' first hotel – one of three in Uruguay – and it was meant originally as their own private home. Bursting with ideas on art and architecture, the Viks decided to open a hotel they could share with the world instead. It's a gorgeous setting, the rolling landscape dotted with cattle, sheep, and horses, and the *estancia* building – an homage to the Spanish Colonial style – brings it in with plentiful courtyards and gardens. The more traditional exterior belies an interior full of the Viks' trademark art-driven style. The focus here is on art by local Uruguayan artists, the twelve rooms (including the controversial Trujillo Suite – which has been somewhat scaled back after its initial debut) complementing public-facing work like the lush oil fresco on the ceiling of the central living room by renowned artist Clever Lara.



When it comes to activities, a private polo field, horseback riding, tennis courts, and a game room provide some of the entertainment, while the restaurant offers traditional barbecue, fresh seafood, and a wine cellar to boot – there's also a typical Uruguayan *asado*, complete with "the traditional tin walls and *fogon*, or central open fire." The town of Jose Ignacio (a lively beach town home to two more Vik Hotels) is just a 15-minute drive away. A fitting introduction to the Vik sensibility.

Playa Vik

Jose Ignacio, Uruguay



As Alex Vik likes to say, Uruguay is the only place in the world where you can get on your horse and ride from Jackson Hole to Saint-Tropez. If the vast ranch at Estancia Vik is the American West, then the coastline home to Playa Vik is the French Riviera. A picturesque beachfront hotel that boasts work from James Turrell and Zaha Hadid, its six casas surround the central building – a modernist monument in cantilevered titanium and glass known only as “the Sculpture.” Between the two are 19 suites, some with common living and dining spaces, others with complete fireplaces and fully retractable windows which disappear into the walls, opening the interior to the sea breeze. Common spaces include Parillero’s dining room and terrace for sumptuous seafood barbecues, and a pool decorated with the constellations of the southern hemisphere.



Apropos of the setting, beaches and water sports abound – and if you’re more comfortable on land, jaunts inland to the Estancia are always on offer to indulge in the horsebound activities of the ranch.

Bahia Vik

Jose Ignacio, Uruguay



Like Playa Vik, this one's on the beach. If the Estancia is an ode to the Spanish Colonial style, and Playa Vik is the embodiment of avant-garde design, they see this one as the spot for "contemporary beach living." The hotel's central building, a sleek structure in slate and glass, was already here when the Viks showed up. Where they really got creative was with the eleven free-standing beach bungalows that dot the surrounding dunes. In either, rooms feature indigenous Uruguayan woodwork and smooth slate, a fitting framework for the bold original artwork, vibrantly colored walls, and whimsical bathroom tiles that enliven each space. In one bathroom, there's a tub carved from a boulder, while another features a mini-gallery of Pop Art-style paintings; bungalows have patios that open directly onto the sand.



And should you tire of sunbathing, Bahia Vik has four swimming pools – suitably modern, of course, long and thin, set parallel to the ocean, along with a raised wooden deck that's perfect for a leisurely lunch. Guests have access to the trendy La Susana beach club and restaurant, located next door to the hotel. But in a place as relaxed as this, it's tempting to keep it low-key, joining in the hotel's casual but gourmet asados on the sand, or pedaling to the lighthouse on a borrowed bicycle at sunset. Not at all a bad way to pass the time.

Vik Chile

San Vicente de Tagua Tagua, Chile



We could go on and on about the art and the rooms. But where Vik Chile stands out from the rest of the Vik Hotels, perhaps, is in the wine. The Vik Winery, an imaginatively designed structure by the Viks in collaboration with Chilean architect Smiljan Radic, is visible from the hotel – and of course activities include tours and tastings there, where kids can participate with grape-infused yogurt tastings. Ideally, you'll follow that with an outdoor lunch where organic fruits, vegetables, and herbs are sourced from the garden.

The setting, the "wine paradise" that is the Colchagua Valley, informs every aspect of the winery and hotel. In fact, the Gehry-inspired roof of the main building, developed by Alex and Carrie over nearly three years, seeks to channel the look and feel of the surrounding mountains and the wind that's so important to the topography. Typically creative rooms are divided between this main structure and the newer Puro Vik accommodations, a collection of seven individual glass houses complete with free-standing closets and hardwood floors that extend out to private terraces. Views of the pristine surroundings abound.

And while the spa gets plenty of attention, there's hiking, biking, and horseback riding on offer too, in addition to excursions to the nearby Andes.



Galleria Vik Milano

Milan, Italy



The Viks' first foray outside of South America proves that the philosophy travels well. The largest of the Vik hotels, at 89 rooms, it offers 89 different styles and experiences – so different that Alex and Carrie insist you should come back 89 different times if you really want the full picture. If that sounds ambitious, consider the structure that the Vik Milano calls home, a 19th-century landmark that's second in grandeur perhaps only to the Duomo next door. The Viks themselves put proverbial brush to canvas in decorating the long hallways on various floors of the building, Alex creating an intricate color chart and Carrie a nautical flag display full of nods and hidden messages to the hotel's staff and inspirations. Another corridor features a work only exposed under black light.



Visual appeal is only half the story, though, as the rooms are as luxe as any in Milan. The hotel's main restaurant is similarly high-end and just as full of art as the rest of the hotel. It's a worthy addition to Milan's scene, to be sure – but spare a meal for I Dodici Gatti, the tiny Neapolitan-style pizzeria, tucked up under the building's eaves.