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Checking In: The 7 Best Design Hotels in José Ignacio

Beyond its trendy beaches, José Ignacio is a haven for high design hospitality.

03.27.2020

by Monica Mendal

Welcome to Checking In, our monthly column in which our lifestyle editor-at-large, Monica Mendal, shares the best in hotels and other luxury destinations. Comprising the latest and greatest before everyone else is talking about them, the chic locations you'll discover here belong at the top of your travel bucket list.

South America is well-known for its rustic charms and picturesque coastlines. But what makes Uruguay's most beloved beach town, José Ignacio, so unique extends beyond its bohemian charms: it has become an epicenter for modern design. Known to most as the Montauk of South America, the small beach town has a knack for fusing high and low aesthetics, and has thus attracted an eclectic blend of Argentine, Brazilian, and international travelers. There's no socioeconomic discrimination; the ultra-rich and the young bohemians coexist in harmony as there's something here for everyone.

While the beach town's laid-back comforts are the main draw, José Ignacio taps into a higher-end aspect of South America's barefoot luxury that remains relatively unknown to many travelers. From design to food to service, everything seems to be a notch above average. Below, we've rounded up the 7 best design hotels to stay in José Ignacio.

Bahia Vik



The most sought-after hotel in José Ignacio is Alex and Carrie Vik's Bahia Vik. From the hotel's beachside restaurant, La Susana, to its yoga and wellness studio, The Shack, Bahia Vik has become the center of attraction for José Ignacio's gypset crowd and celebrity clientele. It has also become an epicenter of contemporary design, which immediately draws you in with a colorful ceiling mural by Uruguayan artist Carlos Musso in the main living area. Respectively, each room also echoes Uruguay's artful, bohemian spirit, with no two rooms designed the same. When crowds aren't practicing yoga, dining at La Susana, or posting up by the beach, they can be found lounging at the various pools around the property or enjoying a grilled feast atop the dunes.

Estancia Vik



If you need a break from the beach, head 15 minutes inland from the center of José Ignacio to Estancia Vik for a lesson in restorative isolation. There, you can enjoy activities like kayaking, horseback riding, and other outdoor pursuits. Don't miss the Uruguayan barbecue (even if you're staying at another Vik property, you'll want to make the trip to Estancia Vik for this). The rooms and the spaces themselves are vast and filled with contemporary art in true Vik form. Each has sweeping views of the land, which can also be enjoyed in the mornings at breakfast. Civilization might feel far, but the luxuries of farm life paired with the attentive staff makes you feel like you have everything you need right at your fingertips.

Playa Vik



Unlike Bahia Vik's thatched roofs and beachy bungalows, Playa Vik is a more exclusive and private modernist dream home, containing artwork by James Turrell and Zaha Hadid. The silver titanium main building, designed by Uruguayan architect Carlos Ott, contains the pool (known for its sunset glow up) which sits perched overlooking La Mansa beach. While the sculpture of the main building alone is an architectural triumph, each of Playa Vik's casitas and suites are works of art in themselves, filled with a collection of pieces by local and international artists.