

URUGUAY'S VIKTORY

*Around the bend from glitzy party town Punta del Este lies the quiet, architecture-focused hamlet of **José Ignacio**, where timing is everything.*



With its unspoiled beaches, low-key villas and tucked-away beach bars, José Ignacio's appeal among South Americans was initially based on its contrast with the conspicuous development and nonstop party focus of nearby Punta del Este. Now, though, it's making a global case for itself, thanks in large part to a pair of dramatic art-filled properties by Alex and Carrie Vik. Their inland ranch, **Estancia Vik**, is part villa, part gallery, surrounded by nearly four thousand acres of pastoral countryside, and the newer **Playa Vik** is a gleaming beachside monument in titanium and glass. Both are on the must-see list — the only choice remaining is when to visit.

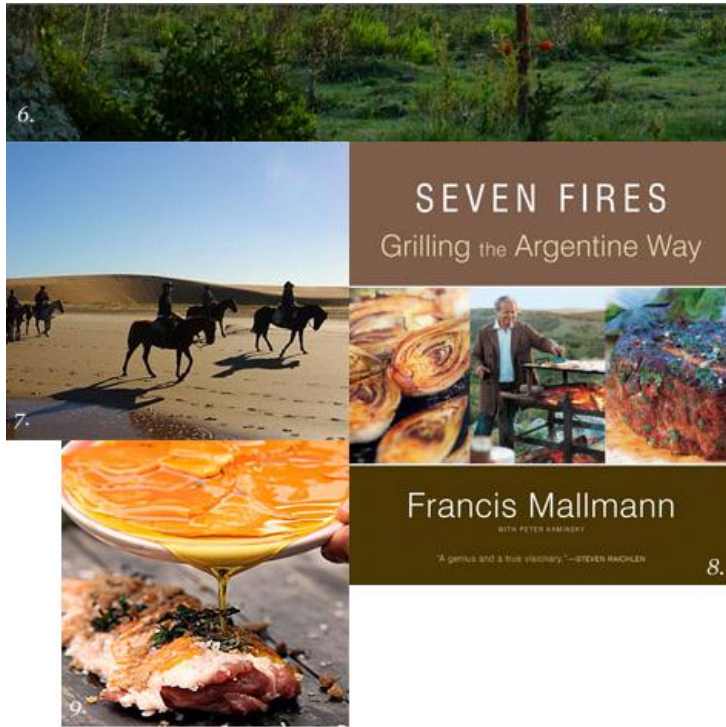
During the Christmas and New Year's season, José Ignacio's crowds swell with the continent's who's-who. By late January, however, the local harmony of quietude returns. The seasonal pendulum is infamous, swinging from a scene of invitation-only champagne parties and pop-up restaurants led by celebrity chefs to a sleepy bird-watcher's delight, where intimate dinners at local hotspots are once again possible and Aegean-style beachside hotels like **La Posada del Faro** regain their breezy serenity. The Vik hotels manage to weather both extremes; their small size, their relative seclusion, and the one-on-one nature of their activities (from polo lessons to al fresco spa treatments) render them impermeable to the scene beyond.

José Ignacio is still a working fishing village, and its quaint forty-block center can be strolled in under half an hour. Local art galleries like **Galería los Caracoles** will prolong the tour, as will beachy boutiques like **Takkai** and **Mutate**, full of colorful caftans and bikinis (the local dress code). And despite the town's two-o'clock curfew, tucked-away supper clubs like **Namm** and **Marismo** convert dinnertime Malbec drinkers into tipsy revelers with DJs, bonfires and legendary caipiroskas. **Parador la Caracola**, a salt-lagoon hideaway accessible only by rowboat, is the reservation to book. A relaxed parrilla lunch with a panoramic view of the village and its much-admired lighthouse often turns into a secluded late-night dance party.



1. Playa Vik at dusk
2. Kite surfing on Lake José Ignacio
3. Mutate's sartorial panache.
4. Beachfront lunchspot Parador la Huella
5. Patricia Miccio of boutique Takkai
6. Estancia Vik's pastoral surroundings
7. Horseback riding on the beaches of José Ignacio
8. Francis Mallmann's latest **cookbook**
9. Argentine beef with Mallmann's extras





Images courtesy of Vik Properties; Laura Moñino; Mutate; Parador la Huella; Takkai; Santiago Solo Molinar/Artisan Books.

Those with discerning palates are in good company as well. Two of South America's top chefs, Francis Mallmann and Jean-Paul Bondoux, claim the Uruguayan peninsula as their summer retreat. The timing of your visit will largely determine the ease with which you book José Ignacio's twenty-odd restaurants, as well as the price you'll end up paying. During both peak and valley season, the intimate, dinner-only **La Olada** is the top romantic option, featuring candlelit garden seating and a daily menu, while the restaurant at **Posada Paradiso** is famous for owner Gonzalo's spanish cuisine. For a bit more of a social scene there's **Butia**, where a host of pretty young things crowd around the poolside bar to nibble on seafood. And serious foodies will be drawn to the culinary mecca of **El Garzon**, created by Argentina's **Francis Mallmann**, offering succulence in the form of magret of duck with Malbec juice or Mallmann's signature dish: the butterfly brotola "infiernillo," a Uruguayan whitefish cooked on a wrought-iron grill.

So whether your tastes favor the athletic approach (kite-surfing lessons with local expert **Laura Moñino**), shopping expeditions in local home design shops like **Sentido**, or fresh catch-of-the-day lunches at beachside hotspot **Parador La Huella**, José Ignacio manages to do the unthinkable, appeasing those who long to be seen and those looking for a place to hide. It's all just a matter of timing.