

128

The Estancia
Vik hotel in
José Ignacio,
Uruguay.

ALTERNATE ROUTES

THE KIDS ARE BACK IN SCHOOL, WORK IS IN FULL SWING, AND THE BEACHES ARE EMPTY.
WHAT BETTER TIME TO GET OUT OF DODGE? **BY GISELA WILLIAMS**



The Doge's Room at Ca Maria Adele hotel in Venice.

an ornate 18-room hotel so gilded and Baroque it's hard to focus your eyes—had rooms available for a relative bargain (palazzovenart.com). So did the serene **Aman** (aman.com) and the stately **Ca Maria Adele**, a small palazzo in which each guest room is lavishly decorated in a distinctly different style (camariaadele.it).

As if having the surreal floating city to yourself is not enough, its cultural calendar is always a draw. Check out Damien Hirst at the Palazzo Grassi, or the "Intuition" exhibition, curated by Axel Vervoordt and Daniela Ferretti, at the Palazzo Fortuny during the Venice Biennale, on through November.

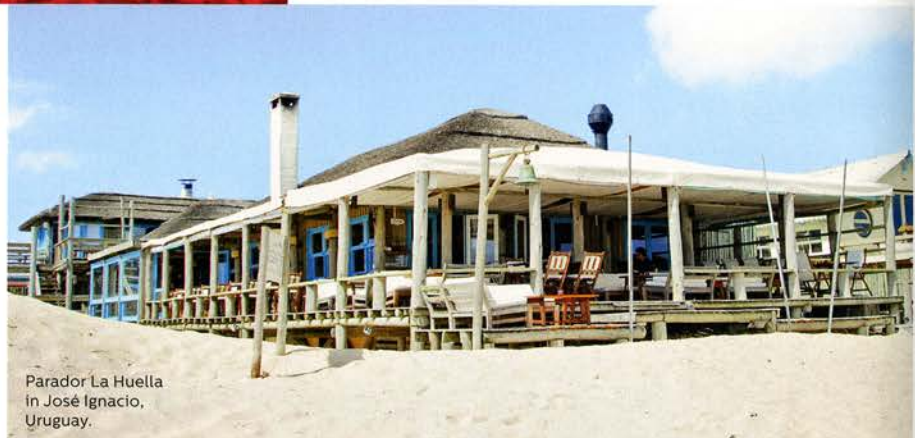
Of course, shoulder season doesn't just mean autumn. My first encounter with its pleasures, in fact, was during the

spring. Four years ago, after a friend's wedding in Argentina, I tacked on a trip to Uruguay. Everyone told me I was crazy to go in March; the beaches of José Ignacio peak during its summer season, between Christmas and New Year's. But I dragged my family there anyway, and we spent our days on the pristine dunes of Brava Beach practically alone. At night, we danced into the perennially sold-out **Parador La Huella**, deservedly one of the most celebrated beach restaurants in the world, and were shown to the table of our choice (paradorlahuella.com).

Nobody knows the Uruguayan resort scene better than Norwegian billionaire Alexander Vik and his wife, Carrie, who own two of the area's most celebrated properties. **Playa Vik**, the futuristic

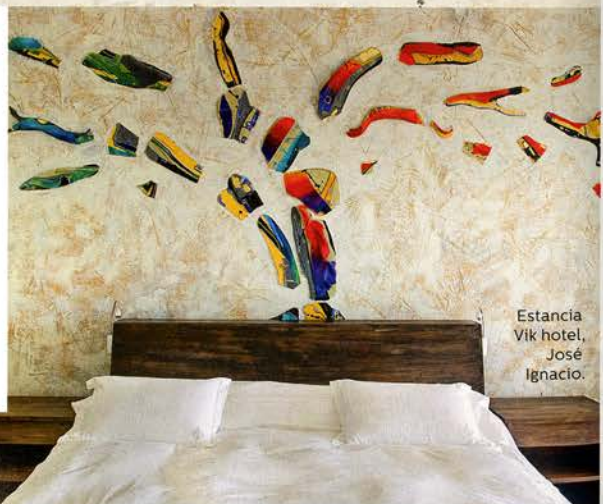
An expat friend of mine, who has lived in Europe for decades, recently returned from a trip to Mykonos raving about the "shoulder season." He loved *not* being there at the fashionable height of summer: no desperate musical chairs on Psarou Beach, no waiting for tables at the island's best restaurants, and available rooms at the most exclusive hotels for considerably less than in August. "Traveling during the shoulder season is like going out on a Thursday night," he enthused.

He's right. Last year, when my husband and I went to Venice in late October, our eyes were opened to a feast of autumnal pleasures—including spectacular seasonal additions to local menus, like delectable *moeche*, or soft-shell crabs. One afternoon, we took a vaporetto to the



Parador La Huella in José Ignacio, Uruguay.

island of Torcello and ate an unforgettable pumpkin-and-truffle pasta dish at the elegant **Locanda Cipriani**, which is still owned by the original famous family (locandacipriani.com). Another evening, we walked into **Al Covo** without making a reservation (ristorantealcovo.com). And the hotel everyone was raving about—the **Palazzo Venart**,



Estancia Vik hotel, José Ignacio.

FROM TOP: ALBERTO SALATA, COURTESY OF CA MARIA ADELE; COURTESY OF ESTANCIA VIK; JOSÉ IGNACIO

ED travels

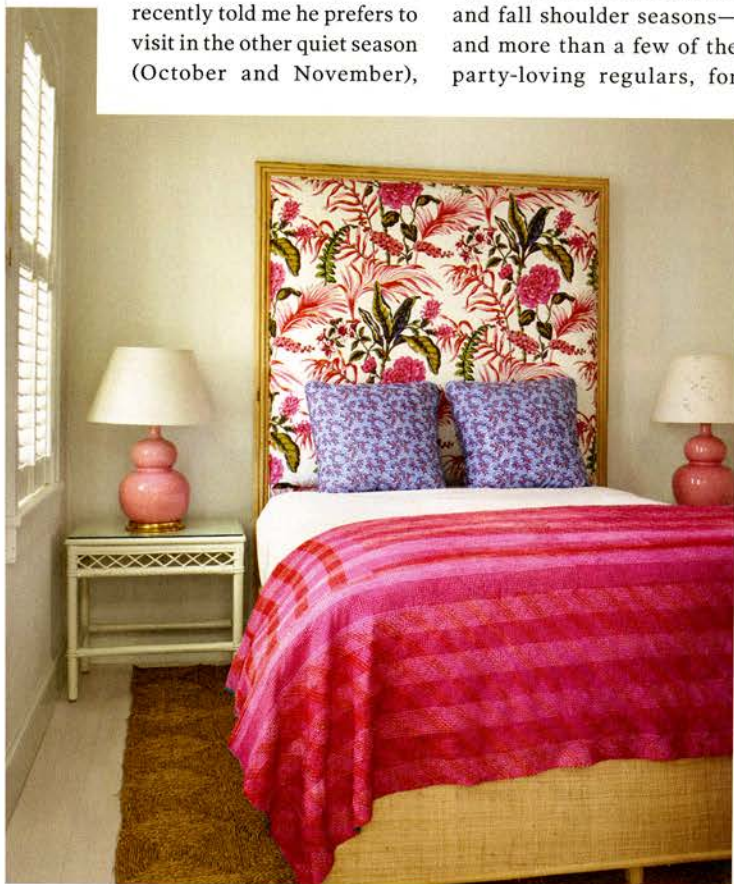
stone-and-glass, 19-suite hotel with its own James Turrell installation, overlooks Playa Mansa—I still can't stop thinking about a bathroom sink there made out of a giant amethyst geode—and **Estancia Vik**, a colonial-style cattle ranch, is filled with contemporary Uruguayan art and giant geode crystals (vikretreats.com). Vik recently told me he prefers to visit in the other quiet season (October and November),

during that heady moment of anticipation before the high-season rush, when the area's **Parador La Caracola** beach club (paradorlacaracola.com) and cultish restaurants—La Olada and Francis Mallmann's *Restaurante Garzon*—are open but not yet jammed with *porteños* from Buenos Aires.

José Ignacio shares spring and fall shoulder seasons—and more than a few of the party-loving regulars, for



Hero Beach Club in Montauk, New York.



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Bahama House on Harbour Island. The hotel's pool. Vineyards in Monsaraz, Portugal.

that matter—with Harbour Island in the Bahamas and St. Barts, the Caribbean's most established society destinations. As a New Englander, I have a soft spot for Harbour Island, where, by day, you'll find old-school WASPs weaving around in golf carts with rum cocktails and shopping for Wiggy Kit caftans at local celeb India Hicks's boho-luxe boutique, the Sugar Mill Trading Co. By night, they'll be dancing barefoot in the sand at Gusty's nightclub.



The newly opened **Bahama House**, a circa-1800 property, is smartly kitted out with rattan furniture by West Palm Beach-based designer Paul Aronson, a chic tiki bar, and a cabinet of underwater wonders filled with remarkable coral and shells. It's closed for the storm season in early fall but highly desirable when it reopens in early November (elevenexperience.com/experiences/hideouts/bahama-house).

In my opinion, St. Barts became too glitzy in the early aughts and lost some of its bohemian charm. But now it's back, with two stunning new properties: At **Le Barthélemy**, the resort conceived by French designer Sybille de Margerie on a quiet cove in the north of the island, even the indoor spaces feel *en plein air* (lebarthelemyhotel.com/en). And then there's **Villa Marie Saint-Barth**, full of impossibly tasteful vibrant colors and details, which was opened last winter by the stylish Sibuetts, the French hoteliers who operate the most charming inns in Provence and the French Alps (saint-barth.villamarie.fr). It closes during autumn but is open in the spring.

When my New York friends start to pack up their summer houses on Labor Day, I happily

