

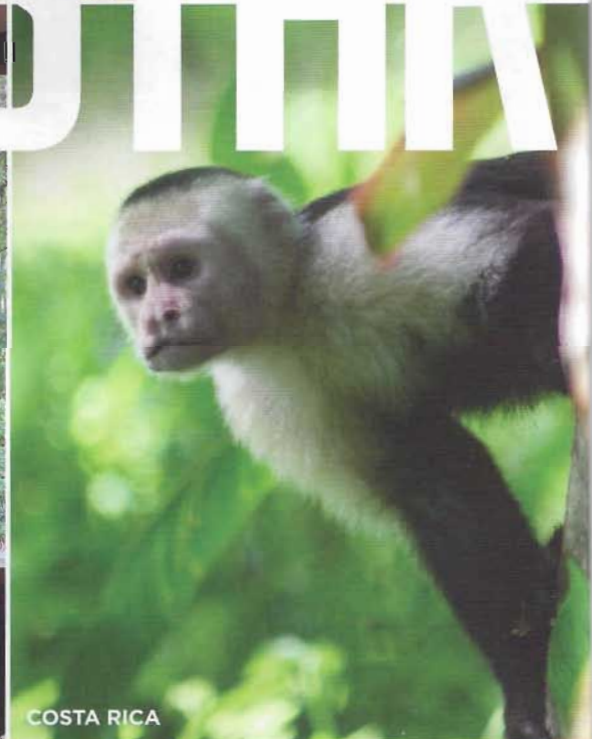


MONGOLIA

# \*STAR



JAPAN



COSTA RICA



CAMBODIA



Graduate School alumni, who comprise roughly 30 percent of Princeton's alumni population, lend more than their expertise as PRINCETON JOURNEYS study leaders — they instill a sense of camaraderie based on a shared enthusiasm for lifelong learning.

# TREATMENT

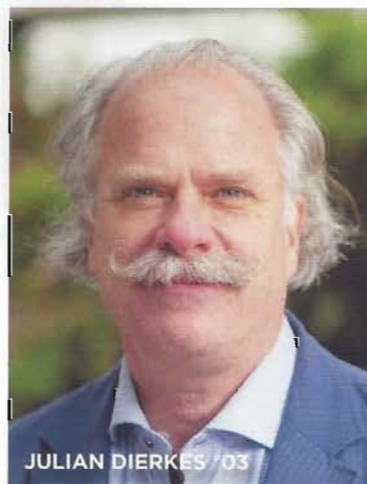
By Patti Zielinski

When Julian Dierkes '03 was invited to lead the "Discover Mongolia" PRINCETON JOURNEYS trip last summer, he placed a call to the U.S. Embassy in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. As an associate professor in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs at the University of British Columbia, Dierkes knew the ambassador from traveling to Mongolia for two decades. "Ambassador Richard Buangan hosted our group for breakfast, where I gave my introductory lecture," says Dierkes. "He spent a lot of time with us."

Dierkes is also considered a "Star." In 2022, the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni undertook an effort with a new hashtag to celebrate the more than 29,000 graduate alumni: #PrincetonStar recognizes the asterisk denoting graduate alumni affiliation and promotes their "Star" status to reflect pride and belonging. Beyond the unparalleled access and expertise that PRINCETON JOURNEYS afford, trips led by "Star" study leaders bring the singular experience of camaraderie with fellow Princetonians.

"These trips give an opportunity for alumni to connect and talk about shared memories of Princeton, even across decades," says Christina Riehl '11, associate professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Princeton. "These alumni — often decades removed from their undergraduate careers — have spent the rest of their lives building on what they learned at Princeton."

Riehl, like other Princeton "Star" study leaders, is honored to extend the Princeton educational experience for alumni through research and travel. Riehl's journey to



JULIAN DIERKES '03



CHRISTINA RIEHL '11

Costa Rica and the Panama Canal in 2023 and her upcoming 2025 exploration of the Galápagos Islands aboard the *National Geographic Endeavour II* are informed by her dissertation focus — the evolution of animal behavior, especially tropical birds — field site expertise and current research on the evolution of breeding behaviors in birds.

"I love passing on my knowledge and enthusiasm of being in a place I enjoy," she says. "The last journey was enriched by my research: I knew a lot about the plants, animals, environment, climate, resources and what had shaped the behaviors of the animals we saw. Plus, I'm a pretty good bird-watcher and nature guide: I could identify species and give context. For example, when we saw male frigate birds inflating their huge balloon-like throat sacs to attract females, I discussed how those crazy conspicuous signals evolved."



Dora Ching '11 made her first journey as a "Star" study leader in 2016. For "Classical China and the Dunhuang Caves," she guided travelers through the cave complex in northwestern China, a site rarely open to the public. "We saw Buddhist cave temples from the fifth and sixth centuries, including one that had unusual architecture and exquisite murals that exemplified the mixing of indigenous Chinese beliefs with Buddhism," says Ching, executive director of the Tang Center for East Asian Art at Princeton and an expert on the art of Dunhuang. She subsequently led Journeys to Vietnam and Cambodia (2018) and Japan (2022). This fall, she will lead "Seeking Happiness: The Kingdom of Bhutan."

Johnson is also eager to dispel myths. "One myth is that Jane Austen was genteel, well-mannered and observant of social conventions; however, she had an impatience with the politeness of social life," she says. "We will trace Austen's development as a person whose feelings about life and manners change over time. Later in her life, she yearns for a wild landscape, frank and open relationships and interactions that are unrestricted, open, less polite — and at times even rude."

In addition to opportunities for immersive learning and engagement, some alumni leaders contribute personal history. Sophal Ear '97, who escaped the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia as an infant and is currently an associate



DORA CHING '11



CLAUDIA JOHNSON '81

Claudia Johnson '81, the Murray Professor of English Literature at Princeton, is excited to share her love for Jane Austen in June 2025 while leading "Jane Austen's England," an immersive experience that will allow travelers to walk in the footsteps of the English novelist on the 250th anniversary of her birth.

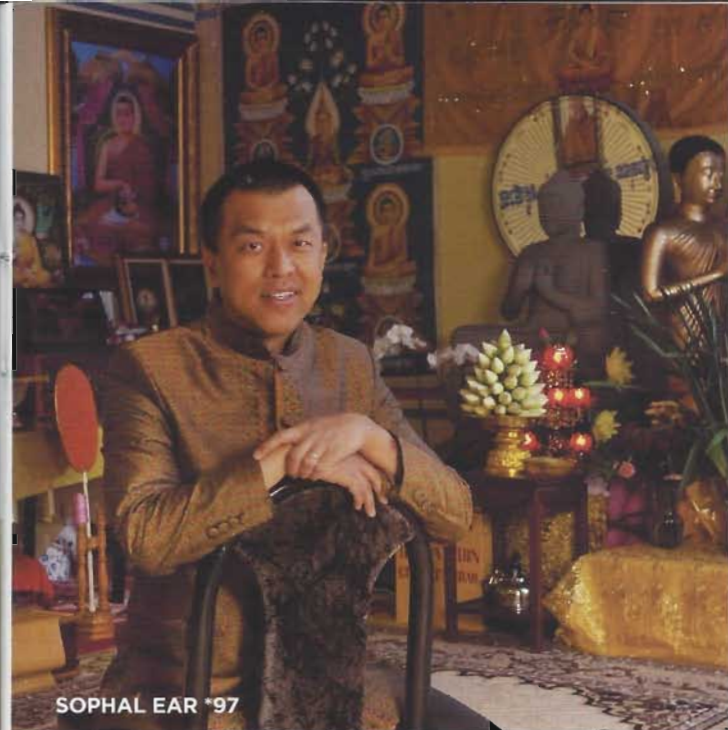
"We feel we know Jane Austen — she is one of the few novelists people call by their first name — but there are a lot of myths," says Johnson, the author of "Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures," "Jane Austen's The Beautiful Cassandra" and "30 Great Myths about Jane Austen." "When alumni see these places with their own eyes, they will understand her novels in new, powerful ways."

The trip will bring visitors to formative locations in Austen's short life, including Lyme Regis, Bath, Chawton House (her brother's manor) and the cottage where she spent the last eight years of her life. "A great question is: With her brother's grand estate just steps away, why did she live in this small cottage in the little village?" Johnson says. "I am looking forward to a discussion about Austen's desire for independence, her wanting a distance between the high society represented by her brother's life and the privacy she experienced in this much more modest, but more agreeable place."

professor at Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University, will blend academic content with personal history in the "Mekong River Cruise" he will lead in 2025. As an expert on Cambodia and Southeast Asia, Ear will offer insights drawn from his research on economic development, public policy, governance and public health in post-conflict societies as well as his lived experiences. "My personal journey informs my deep understanding of resilience and survival in the face of adversity," says Ear, who has dedicated his career to studying and advocating for the region.

Princeton "Star" study leaders bring a signature enthusiasm to the trips. For example, Ching's ongoing interest in Buddhist sites and art has informed all of her PRINCETON JOURNEYS. "There's one group of alumni who have been on all three trips with me," she says. "After the first, they said, 'Whatever trip you do, we're going to have to go on it.'" She especially enjoys curating itineraries for memorable experiences. "When we traveled to the Angkor region in Cambodia, I knew the alumni would want to see major temples, but for perspective, I also wanted them to see two smaller-scale temples farther away that are precursors to Angkor Wat," she says.





SOPHAL EAR '97

MONGOLIA



Traveling with a study leader who is well-versed in the country also provides a gateway for conversation with local people who provide authentic perspectives. As Dierkes led alumni across Mongolia's vast grassland and desert steppe, they encountered the yurt of a nomadic herder. "I knew these people rarely see foreigners, so they have a strong history of hospitality," he says. "We walked up and asked how big the herd was and what their life was like. This could be awkward because you're barging in but they were great and answered questions. Moments like this give travelers insight beyond just checking off the important sites."

The Princeton "Star" study leaders agree. Joining a group of enthusiastic fellow Princeton Tigers who bring diverse perspectives enhances the experience for everyone, including the leaders. "PRINCETON JOURNEYS is not just about travel; it's about becoming part of a community that values lifelong learning and cultural exploration," Ear says. "It is a privilege to guide such a dynamic group and witness the meaningful connections and insights that emerge during these adventures."



JAPAN

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