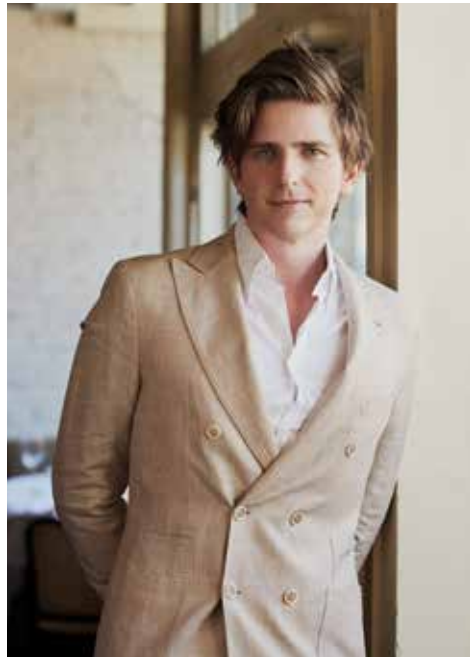


PROFILE } **David Prior**

Australian-born David Prior from his New York base has created an exclusive premium travel club for culturally curious visitors. *By Katrina Holden*



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Can you tell us how PRIOR works and how travellers become members?

We think of it as a modern iteration of the Explorers' Club. Our members are a community of like-minded travellers who seek out experiences that go beyond the typical and really go to the heart of the place. Members submit an application and go through an onboarding process that lets us figure out what their interests are, their motivations for travelling, and their perspective on travel. It's a unique way to make sure all of the trips we plan are really tailored to each individual.

As an Australian and former contributing editor to *Vogue Living* and *Condé Nast Traveler*, how do you weave your strong story-telling skills into the tours that you create for your members?

I think about our experiences in a very editorial way. We try to highlight the best of each place we visit and create a mix of the real with the magical, much like a great feature in a magazine. A really successful trip is one where we're able to achieve that and tell the story of a place. I want people to feel as though they are in their own story.

How does PRIOR differ to other premium travel companies?

We start with a unique point of view, that's clear. We operate on the philosophy that all of our experiences celebrate what is endemic and original to that place. Similarly, we're not operating on the mindset of the existing benchmarks of luxury; in fact it's a word I don't even like because of its tired associations. Our philosophy in terms of the experiences is high road, low road, but never

middle-of-the road.

What sort of travellers align with your philosophies and ideas?

People who are equally entranced by the reality of a place and travelling in a place, and also the romance of it. For example, there's what to see in the here and now in, let's say, Seville, but there's also the 'idea' of Seville that you're wanting to try to find. Orange blossoms in the air, flouncing foot stamping flamenco, briny manzanilla sherry in the hot summer sun, nuns shuffling from convent to convent—these are all things that are the romance and the idea of the place. What we try to do at PRIOR is to make sure the reality and the romance is reconciled. When you find the essence of a place, that's when a travel moment can be really transcendent.

What are some of the most memorable experiences that you have been able to create for your guests?

For the architecture obsessed, we arranged a private visit to the Sagrada Familia, something that's only done twice before privately, once being for George Lucas. We planned a significant birthday amongst a private collection of modern art housed in a 15th century baroque palace in the centre of Rome. We're in the midst of a 12-month family trip around the world. With over 24 countries on the itinerary so far, we're arranging stays at the best penthouse in Sydney on Bondi Beach to a spartan cottage in the Dordogne in France, palaces in Rajasthan to camping outdoors in Chilean Patagonia.

How does PRIOR positively contribute to the communities which your clients visit?

We tend to work with more local and characteristic



© DAVID PRIOR

Our philosophy in terms of the experiences is high road, low road, but never middle-of-the-road.

establishments, rather than multinationals, which often have a bigger impact within their own communities. We support a kind of cabinet of curiosities of cultures, some of the most obscure expressions of culture or under-threat animals or food products. We also donate five per cent of our proceeds to those small organisations in an effort to tangibly support their projects. **In 2020, which destinations are you most excited to be researching?**

Like many people in the travel world I'm excited about Georgia, but I'm even more intrigued by Armenia. I would love to go to Iran but I think that is unlikely. I spent some time in Japan over the past 12 months and I remain excited about it. I recently fell in love with Scotland after having not visited since I was a child – I can see why people are head over heels with it. 🇨🇪

OPPOSITE: David Prior, based in New York; off-the-beaten-track in the Amazon.
TOP RIGHT: PRIOR collage