**Sophie’s Adventures in Da Nang and Hoi An, Vietnam**

**2017 APEC CEO Conference**

**Day 1 – 5th November**

After an interesting journey from Ho Chi Minh to Da Nang; with a failed landing, circling in typhoon weather, with lots of turbulence causing nausea not to mention reflecting on life and death, we finally made it to a very grey Da Nang. The following day, we went sightseeing in Hoi An, which is a wonderful historic town with 15th – 19th century building and since 1999 has been designated an UNESCO World Heritage site, only five minutes from our hotel. We explored the markets and saw the flooding of the neighbouring villages, which was an eye opening as it raised awareness of the impacts of global warming as we saw firsthand the impacts on local businesses, communities and the people. We then went on to explore the tailoring district, which Hoi An is well known for as they make clothes very cheaply and is a good place to get a business suit made. Whilst exploring we stumbled upon a fantastic local restaurant serving bahn mi – they were only $1, (incredibly cheap when compared with Australian prices) and perfect for lunch. We returned to our hotel for a leisurely afternoon and time to get ready for the busy schedule.

In the evening, we met for dinner together in the Palm Garden restaurant, with a selection of buffet items, it was a delicious mix of Western and Vietnamese food, something for everyone. Afterward we joined other youth ambassadors in the hall, where we were introduced to the other delegations and the upcoming schedule for the upcoming days. It began to feel even more exciting when we received our lanyards, as though it felt like the official journey had begun and we were now representing Australia.

**Day 2 – 6th November**

Today was the opening ceremony of the Youth Voices of the Future Conference, held at Da Nang University. We had the opportunity to talk with other delegations and Vietnamese officials at the orientation session. During this time, numerous international media outlets (newspapers, TV stations) who were covering the ceremony, had set up lots of cameras, microphones and were interested in photos and interviews from us. It was such a special experience and I felt very proud to be representing Australia and discussing its economy. It was also interesting to note that the reporters were asking for our opinions on proceedings with the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) as this was a topical news item, they also wanted to hear what were we most interested in seeing whilst in Vietnam. A highlight for me was hearing from the keynote speaker, Dr Noleen Heyzer, a former United Nations Under-Secretary General, who discussed the challenges facing the Asia Pacific Region especially climate change and the long-term impacts on the environment, specifically ecosystems, water security and human health. It was quite ironic to be listening to such a presentation whilst Vietnam was facing its worst typhoon in over ten years and probably some of the locals would be facing issues around clean water and associated health issues. Dr Heyzer linked her topic to a broader discussion on gender equality, economic prosperity and regional integration, which impact greatly on a shared future within the Asia Pacific Region.

After this opening presentation, each economy had the opportunity to speak in front of the other delegates, special guests and the media about their country’s economic endeavours and interests for the future. This was very daunting as we all decided to speak as a group; my heart was pounding in my chest and I was very nervous, but it felt great to have our team stand up and present alongside me, giving me the confidence to try and speak clearly and well-paced to make sure our presentation was well received and understood by everyone. It was a real privilege to have this opportunity not only to participate but to push our personal boundaries, develop our skills and gain a better understanding of our strengths.

**Day 3 – 7th November**

Today, we were given the opportunity to explore the local culture and gain a wider understanding of Vietnam. We left the hotel at 8am for a guided tour of Quan province. We first travelled to the Peace Village Orphanage to participate in an APEC Voices of the Future Welcome to Vietnam ceremony. The Peace Village is a government-funded orphanage as well as an infirmary for children who have suffered from Agent Orange exposure. We watched some traditional dances that the children had prepared for us and then Australia volunteered in showing some nursery rhymes to the children. We sang ‘Old McDonald had a farm’, ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider’ (with hand gestures) and did the Macarena dance with the Canadians, which was hilarious as we were all trying to stay in a sync but it wasn’t possible. Afterward we all danced to ‘What Makes You Beautiful’ with the children, who had prepared some dance moves for us. We did try and follow along, although it was tricky from the back (as I am tall) to see what to do but it was such a wonderful time dancing and having fun all together.

Following the Peace Village, we drove south to the Mural Village of Tam Thanh City. Here, groups of delegates were led by guides and we explored the various painted murals around the village, my favourite was the turtle emerging from the ocean onto the wall of the house. We then had a lovely lunch in Tam Thanh City, with a variety of cultural dishes, afterward we walked to the beach and had a look round the fishing boats that lay nearby. Later, we headed back to Hoi An where we went to a lantern-making class. Here, we spent a few hours learning how to glue and spread material over the frame of a bamboo lantern. I decided to make mine red, yellow and pink, but I needed a little help as I wasn’t pulling the fabric that tightly over the bamboo frame! Once created these lanterns collapsed and were easy to travel with, we could take them home and show our families, which was a lovely idea.

**Day 4 – 8th November**

The Australian delegation along with the other economies had a late start to the day. Typically, we had been leaving the hotel around 8/9am, but today we did not leave until 10.30am and it was glorious to have a sleep-in. We started the day with a visit to Tien Hieu (Hiey 3) Handicrafts and Sculptures, this emporium was great for seeing some of the local Vietnamese handicrafts being made, and for purchasing jade trinkets, pearl jewellery, brass pipes, copper boats and stone carvings. We could freely wander and explore the many treasures, whilst learning more about the different crafts. After this, we went to a large, modern shopping centre for lunch. This was an interesting experience as on the top level of the food courts, there was an ice rink, unfortunately no one was ice skating at the time, but it must be fantastic in winter.

We clambered back on the bus, trying to dodge the rain and headed off to the opening ceremony at the APEC CEO Summit. We listened to three presentations, the first being the official remarks at the opening session of the APEC CEO Summit 2017 by the Chairman, H.E Tran Dai Quang, President of Vietnam. He thanked on behalf of the APEC Economic Leaders all the Asia-Pacific businesses that had over the past three decades supported and contributed to the APEC communities. Furthermore, he outlined the top priorities of the Forum and urged all members to participate in a collaborative manner so that the Summit would further contribute to cooperation and integration of member states.

In Session 2, the APEC Members discussed The Future of Globalisation and referred to the potential threats, environmental and regional threats. Session 3, focussed on The Future of Work and the opportunities of free trade agreements and investments. Both discussions were highly interesting particularly as we were in a country that needed and would benefit from a cooperative approach working with neighbour states. Specific topics; debated were; impacts of the digital age, cross-border e-commerce, internet and digital economy and financial and social inclusion. Both sessions looked towards establishing future development goals such as artificial intelligence and how individuals and communities would be impacted. It was exciting to see and hear first-hand state leaders, who were interested in working together to create a shared vision and future that would impact everyone. It also gave us the opportunity to develop our knowledge and understanding of the current complex global issues facing the APEC members and become aware of the contribution that young people can make.

After the opening session, we went to a Welcome Reception at the Montgomerie Links Golf Course, where dinner and drinks were being served under a marque. This was a fantastic opportunity for us to network with other delegates and business owners and connect with other youth representatives from various economies. During the evening, a variety of traditional Vietnamese presentations were performed, including some dances and singing, all of which were performed by extremely talented artists who created an enthralling spectacle of colour, movement and music. At the end of the evening, we were gifted a beautiful silk scarf, decorated with waves, wheels, and ships to commemorate the start of our journey in the port city of Da Nang.

**Day 5 - 9th November**

On the second conference day, we heard talks about The New Job Creators, which was promoting new jobs with the expanding market of technology and artificial intelligence. Session 5, consisted of a discussion on connecting growth regarding trade and business, it was interesting to hear from Ms Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao who is CEO of VietJet Air, the primary airline in Vietnam. Her ideas of trading, building regional connections and training those to have skills that can be used anywhere, was very insightful. We were lucky enough to the President of the Philippines and it was an honour to see him in person, following this Session 8, discussed The Digital Age and Session 9 topics relating to Made in the World were debated.

**Day 6- 10th November**

The final day of the APEC CEO SUMMIT was the most exciting for me, as we could see numerous world leaders. I was most excited to see President Trump as prior to the Summit, America had pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and were beginning to focus more on bilateral trade. I was also enthused to see Prime Minister Arden, New Zealand’s new female leader, it was very exciting to hear her discuss equality and education. Prime Minister Turnbull, was discussing related topics of equality and improving that in the rural community. This was especially a similar idea when he spoke of the collaboration with Facebook and providing more STEM programs, generating interest in young girls. Although we were only rostered on for a brief time to see each speaker, since there was so many of us, it was very exciting to see a wide variety of talks and how much impact it was generating globally.

Upon returning to the hotel, we were greeted with a beautiful closing ceremony, a wonderful way to signify the end of our journey. We were treated to a variety of musical performances followed by a fantastic dinner. After this, all the youth delegations presented to the audience a bit about their country, we had a Vegemite tasting and then a singing round of Waltzing Matilda, it was a lot of fun and funny to hear the comments regarding the taste of vegemite, one delegate said that it tasted like tar!!! The final delegation Vietnam, did a dance and invited all of us onstage, it was an incredible experience and so exciting to join others in dancing and remembering what an unbelievable experience it was. I found this entire trip to Vietnam very rewarding, not only has it raised my confidence in public speaking, but also in believing that women can achieve anything, with so many interviewers and women in senior roles and a shift to focus on gender equality. It was inspiring to see and reinforced that I should not limit myself and push to strive more, not only for me, but for improving opportunities for others. I would like to thank the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Australia for this remarkable and inspiring experience, and providing me with the incredible opportunity to go to the APEC CEO Summit.