



MEDIA RELEASE

Travellers Choice members savour the mesmerizing Mekong

19 April 2017: **From mounds of tasty tarantulas in a Cambodian market to the sophisticated fare created in celebrity chef Luke Nguyen's Ho Chi Minh cooking school – the 2017 Travellers Choice's Gold Choice Award trip had a unique culinary flavour.**

APT hosted this year's Gold Choice trip - an exclusive famil reserved for Travellers Choice's top 10 agents - with the itinerary based around a seven-night cruise along the Mekong on *AmaLotus*.

Travellers Choice Managing Director Christian Hunter says the voyage allowed agents to get an authentic taste of life along the river, with ox-cart rides past rice fields, small boat excursions to floating villages, and encounters with snake wine and scorpion snacks in rural markets.

"We also toured the Khmer Rouge's Killing Fields and, at the end of the cruise, visited the Viet Cong's tunnels at Cu Chi near Ho Chi Minh, which really brought home how gruesome and grisly a lot of the region's recent history has been," says Hunter. "In that sense, both experiences were fascinating because they really pushed us out of our comfort zones."

The most poignant moment of the trip, however, involved another APT guest – an Australian Vietnam veteran who by a strange twist of fate had won a spot on the voyage at a cruise expo in mid-2016 organised by Travellers Choice member, and Gold Choice Award winner, Ucango Travel & Cruise Centre.

Ucango owner Dave Hulsman, says the man, who had been a Royal Australian Air Force pilot during the war, was extremely anxious about revisiting Vietnam.

"One day we went through a village and the guide took us to a house where the owner had been aligned with the Viet Cong. The local man asked if anyone in the group had been involved in the war, and our Australian friend stepped forward and apologised for his actions during the conflict," says Hulsman. "The Vietnamese man took his hand and

said 'we were both soldiers following orders and we come together now as friends'. They embraced and everyone was crying.

"That night the former pilot said that that five minute encounter had achieved what 40 years of seeing a psychiatrist has been unable to. He said he had finally made peace with himself."

The trip finished with a cooking class at Grain, a restaurant owned by SBS chef Luke Nguyen, who is also a brand ambassador for APT.

"It's very sophisticated, with cameras and TV screens that allow you to follow the instructor's steps," says Hunter. "We felt like we were in a MasterChef episode as we searched the pantry for the right ingredients, then ended the session by enjoying our Vietnamese spring rolls and sesame crusted tuna with some beautiful wine.

"It was a great way to finish an unforgettable trip."

Each year Travellers Choice presents Choice Awards to its top 30 members, based on support for preferred partners. As well as reward trips, winners also benefit from exclusive sales incentives and service grants, which can be used towards any of the network's member services, including the Travellers Choice Cruise Club and local area marketing activities.

For more information on Travellers Choice please visit www.travellerschoice.com.au.

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Photo caption

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Travellers Choice Gold Choice Award winners enjoy a 'Cook & Dine' cooking class at Luke Nguyen's Grain Restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City: (L-R) Chris Petrie (APT), Brian Slater (Maria Slater Travel), Lucy Bellamy (Savenio), Christian Hunter (Travellers Choice), Dave Hulsman (Ucango Travel & Cruise Centre), Grain Cooking School Chef, Leonie Ivey (Windsong Travel), Lesley Shepherd (Select World Travel), Michelle Everson (Jamison Travel), Denis Collins (Discover Travel & Cruise), Tania Allen (Oliver Travel), Scott Ellis (APT).

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