

As the Thalys (the high-speed train which takes you from Rotterdam to Paris in just about the same time it takes for you to check-in and board a flight at any of the larger airports) approached the city of light, we were discussing the upcoming week. We were not quite sure what to expect, although we had both been to AIJA events before (most notably the M&A seminar in Munich in 2007), and therefore suspected that some serious late-night drinking would be involved. As it turned out, we were right on that one...

In our experience, the best thing about all AIJA meetings, including the annual congress, are the social events that fill every evening. It's great to see that within AIJA everyone is happy to get to know everyone else ("Oh, I thought you were someone else, sorry about that, here's my business card, who are you?"), and that it's so easy to get to know about fifty new people anytime you feel like it. And at the annual congress, the question 'what do you do?' actually makes sense (at the M&A convention it just drew weird looks) so there's always something to talk about. It's hard to rank the social events, as they were all well worth participating. The

home hospitality dinner, which offers an excellent way to get to know a few people a bit better while finding out if your local colleagues can serve the same quality dishes as the local restaurants (in both our cases, they could!). The AIJA-code treasure-hunt day out which was another excellent opportunity to walk around and admire Paris while walking by or to sit around drinking a beer and admire Paris walking by. And, for a limited number of lucky participants, the football match between AIJA and a team of Parisian lawyers, which as a courtesy to our hosts, we allowed the French team to win (but only by a slim margin and of course not without a fight). The final gala offered a nice touch of Parisian glamour.

Of course, it wasn't only social stuff: it is good to see the M&A commission doing well, judging from the number of participants and the fact that in less than an hour its members were able to put forward excellent new ideas for upcoming events - showing the significance of the commission meetings at the annual congress. The seminars at the congress offer something for everyone, but thankfully, if you are not interested in the topics or just too hung over to actually be

bothered, no-one will think any less of you - as long as you're back up and running for the evening programme!

From a tourist's point of view: for your next visit to Paris, try the free Velib' bicycles! They make it so much easier to get around without having to go underground, and despite the organising committee strongly advising against using them, you have not lived your life to the fullest until you cross the Place d'Etoile by bike.. Forget skydiving - this is better and cheaper! Also try bringing along an Irish and an Italian, for extra points...

So, what to take away from our first annual congress? A few things spring to mind. AIJA is doing great and is great fun to be a part of, a week of congress is intense up to the point of being too much, and, not unimportantly, don't schedule a flight or train back home early in the morning! We'll always have Paris... but we're still looking forward to Budapest 2009!

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