

My first ever AIJA event – and stories from previous congresses told by colleagues who are members had set my expectations high.

Firstly, the settings of Paris, this vibrant city, offered fantastic surroundings and the welcoming at the Westin hotel in Paris was exceptional, both at the hotel front desk and at the AIJA “command centre”. Instructions, schedules, badges, maps – you name it, the organizing committee had thought of it. Thanks to the badges that we all wore, it was easy to identify and to strike up a conversation with other congress delegates.

After having received the welcoming pack, I was off to my first seminar and I must say that – all in all – the seminars, workshops and other items of the professional program that I attended were very interesting and provided food for thought. It was fantastic to see how the organisers of the different seminars etc had been able to attract professional lecturers and panel members that were right in the middle of where things are actually happening, being able to provide insightful views and providing practical examples from real life. I must also give credit to my fellow delegates, who actively engaged in discussions, posing interesting and sometimes challenging questions, and offering their views on various issues.

During the weekend I, among other things, also attended the M&A workshop, “After the wedding night”, and enjoyed the interactivity that the organisers had arranged, although it would probably have been even better if – at the end – the panel had commented some of the results that our “negotiators” had achieved. Perhaps this was a manifestation of the only real criticism I could raise in respect of the seminar program, which is that the organisers probably sometimes were a bit optimistic about the time designated for their seminars. I believe some of the seminars would have been even better if additional time was allowed for questions and discussions. Also, to my great regret, I never learnt French, which became painfully obvious during some of the seminars, so parts of them very unfortunately lost to me. Access to simultaneous in all of the French speaking seminars would have been very appreciated on my part.

Another feature of AIJA that I find very positive is that you, even as a first timer and a new member of AIJA, are encouraged to take an active part in the different commissions’ work and that you do not have to wait until you become a senior member. It makes you feel welcome. The only thing is that it is just difficult to decide where to be active!

The, of course, as a superb supplement to the professional program, we were offered a wide range of social activities – lunches on the Seine, cocktails, dinners, walks around Paris, not to mention the home hospitality dinner and the gala dinner on Saturday night. These functions offer you additional opportunities to “not just scratch the surface” of your new acquaintances (i.e. exchanging business cards), but actually to talk to them on more than one occasion and to get to know them and their area of profession a little better. It was very exciting meeting people from various backgrounds and cultures, with a common interest in the legal profession.

Finally, something that struck me was how fondly past members speak of their AIJA membership days, describing how things were like when the organisation was not that big and they used to stay at each other’s homes when it was time for an event. I was fortunate enough to be invited to the home of a past AIJA member and his family, to enjoy a lovely dinner, with lively conversation and wonderful company. To my mind, anyone missing out on the home hospitality dinner made a poor choice.

At last, huge thank you to my colleagues who encouraged me to join AIJA. My expectations were indeed fulfilled and exceeded!

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