

IPBA Singapore 2019 - Conference Report

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Participating at the IPBA Annual Conference 2019 has been a great privilege and most memorable experience. My sincere thanks are due to the entire IPBA Scholarship Committee (and in particular Jay LeMoine and Mahesh Rai) and the IPBA Secretariat for their dedication in organizing an unforgettable trip for us Scholars.

It is convenient and most apt to commence on the first day of our Singapore trip. Our pre-conference programme started with a visit to the Supreme Court of Singapore (which consists of the High Court and the Court of Appeal). There, we received a guided tour and sat in on a hearing in a medical negligence case. After that, we had the tremendous privilege of meeting Justice Choong – one of the four justices of appeal and former Attorney-General of Singapore – who took a full hour out of his busy schedule to speak to us about Singapore’s judicial system and share his thoughts on how to best advance as a young lawyer in an increasingly competitive profession. We were then invited to lunchtime talks by the colleagues from Norton Rose Fulbright and Drew & Napier on the practice of law in Singapore, including presentations on the impact of Fintech, data, and cyber technology on Singapore’s newer and more “traditional” legal practice areas. Finally, and after a couple of hours of free time, we were warmly received at the conference venue by Rhonda Lundin and Yukiko Okazaki of the IPBA Secretariat for a quick meeting before the IPBA Welcome Reception and the official start of the conference.

The three days of the conference flew by in the blink of an eye. Two of the three days commenced with a plenary session (the first day by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long and the second day by the Minister for Home Affairs and Law, Mr. K Shanmugan SC), after which the day was filled with concurrent sessions run by the various committees that form part of the IPBA. These sessions allow participants to not only observe topical presentations in the respective subject-matter of interest but also meet some of the most experienced practitioners in the field (including, for my areas of interest, lawyers and arbitrators). Coffee, lunch, and dinner would then feature additional opportunities to continue conversations and meet colleagues. I should highlight at this point that the IPBA community is incredibly welcoming and interested in connecting with – and involving – young lawyers. This had become particularly clear when I attended the Committee Meeting of the International Trade Committee, which actively encouraged Scholars and New Members to contribute to the discussion and planning for next year’s conference – even those, like myself, that had previously not been involved.

The jewel in the crown of attending the IPBA Annual Conference are the many evening events. While not on the official programme, those events are organised by local law firms or IPBA committees and offer a terrific occasion to chat, mingle, and network in a pleasant and engaging environment. Some of this year’s highlights included an event at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, an after-party at CHIJMES (a former convent and school), and a most enjoyable goodbye-karaoke event.

In hindsight, I can easily see how people return year-after-year for the IPBA’s annual conference. I have returned home with much food for thought, one or two business cards, and wonderful memories. The way home from four days of meetings, talks, and conversation inevitably invites for reflection and the ultimate question “where does it go from here?”. The British new wave band Haircut 100 answered that question with the profound and wise “is it down to the lake I fear”, followed by an equally profound, yet irritating “ay, ay, ah, ah, ah, ah”. But the question asked is a good one, and my reply would be a somewhat less poetic: “I should come back next year”.
