

IAG GLOBAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

Claire Hughes, Senior Associate with UK Member Firm Aaron & Partners LLP, recounts her experience of the IAG Exchange Programme, May 2023

My Philly Citizenship by Claire Hughes, Aaron & Partners, UK

IAG Global Exchange between Aaron & Partners LLP (UK) and Miller Shah LLP (USA) - Spring 2023

In May 2023 I packed my bags, said goodbye to my family, double (and triple) checked my case files were up to date and flew across the Pond to Philadelphia, which was to be my temporary home for the next three weeks.

After a competitive application process, I was selected by Aaron & Partners to spend three-once-in-a-lifetime-weeks taking part in the IAG Global Exchange programme, with my hosts, litigation specialists Miller Shah LLP. Hoping to experience the US' work and life culture, widen my knowledge on the implementation of US law, explore Philadelphia and New York, and be a mascot for A&P on the international stage, I returned having had a completely unique personal and professional adventure.

It really would be impossible to recount this experience in all its true glory. From watching baseball's formidable Phillies from the best seats in the stand, running up the iconic Rocky steps, observing depositions, assisting on mediations, travelling to Miller Shah's New York office, having a local's tour around Williamsburg, attending Court, including a rare opportunity to see some of the most well-known US Judges hear Attorneys fight it out to have their state chosen to deal with specific class actions at the Judicial Panel on Multidistrict Litigation, being invited to sit in on strategy meetings, late evening discussions on the legal and social similarities between our jurisdictions, and the food, (the food, the food and coffee!), the grease poling festivities, to the most important aspect for me, the friendships I've forged with Alec, Sam and John of Miller Shah.

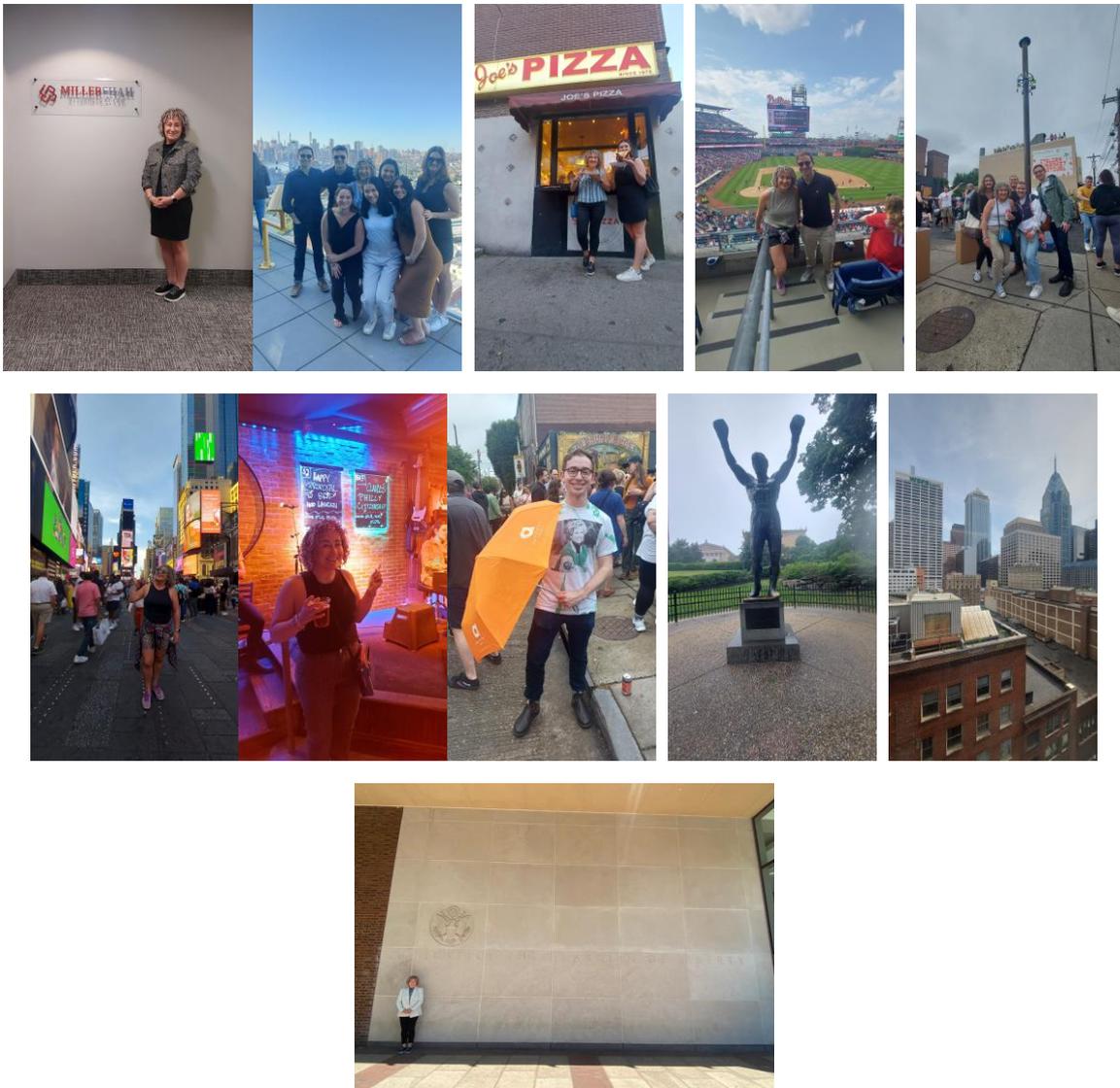
Feeling inspired and grateful to be part of a Firm who is an IAG Global member, enabling me to apply to participate with the exchange, this is a snap-shot of my experience and my top takeaways (personal and professional):

1. The opportunity to take part in the exchange sets A&P apart in the industry. There are not many competitor Firms who can offer me the opportunity to apply for a professional exchange, which lasts three weeks, a period that allowed me to embed with the Miller Shah team, have my own time to travel and explore, with no need to entirely uproot me from my general life, clients, files and responsibilities, unlike many of the secondment opportunities offered by competitor / larger practices.
2. I often work on commercial litigation matters with an international aspect, for example businesses in the UK with US owners or supply chains. This experience has expanded my personal knowledge of the workings of American culture in practice, in the legal industry and beyond, which I will take to enhance the service I provide to relevant clients.
3. Personal and professional opportunities have arisen as a direct result of the exchange. Being trusted to be a mascot for A&P at an IAG Global member firm has naturally resulted in becoming part of the Next Generation project. I have been able to travel, taking part in various Assemblies, meet and become friends with other IAG Global members, receive referrals and refer clients to other members, as well as having more exposure to learn from

and spend time with A&P's Partners from other departments, enhancing A&P's internal relationships.

4. The offer to take part in the exchange is an excellent tool for A&P to publicise, both in terms of recruitment in a competitive solicitor market and to clients for illustration of our international reach and relationships. From a personal perspective I've found it a fantastic talking point with colleagues and clients, who have been interested and eager to learn more about my experience.
5. The friendships forged during the exchange are ones I will never forget. The kindness shown to me by the whole Miller Shah team, ensuring I was welcomed and had everything I needed, and Jim's enthusiasm that I should get as much as possible from the experience. Alec, Sam and others taking whole weekends out to show me around their neighbourhoods, introducing me to family and friends.
6. Philadelphia is a hugely underrated "food-City", not to mention the roof top bars and the live music venues. The people are some of the friendliest I've come across. I'd go back in a flash and intend to, if not just for a La Colombe Americano.
7. The best and most authentic New York Cheese slice is found at Joe's, Brooklyn.

I depart the exchange as a more rounded lawyer, more knowledgeable, experienced, with strong ties to another firm, with a balanced benefit to A&P and myself. The IAG Global exchange is a truly unique opportunity, and has been my highlight of 2023.



Damian Kelly, Associate with Pacific Island Member Firm Pacific Legal Network, shares his experience of the IAG Global Exchange Programme, May 2023

**Trading coolabahs for pines – an Australian lawyer’s exchange story in Poland
IAG Global Exchange between Pacific Legal Network (Pacific Islands) and SDZLEGAL (Poland),
Spring 2023**

Twelve months ago I had never heard of Wrocław (to my ear, it sounds like Vrotz-lav). When I first heard that I had been offered to go on exchange to the city situated in the Polish-heartland I thought I had been mispronouncing Warsaw my entire life. Alongside many realisations I had in my almost one month in the Wrocław, I was entirely wrong.

My exchange was part of an IAG Global program to connect younger lawyers and professionals across international borders. The obvious aim was to share knowledge and develop understanding to better help the delivery of services to clients – but the real goal was to make life-long connections and friendships.

Before I could get to battling with the pronunciation of names, foodstuff, and basic greetings, first my Polish exchange twin, Aleksandra Płudowska was going to make the intimidating 20-something hour journey to Australia. We promised Aleks that once she got to Australia that she was unlikely to meet a shark, a croc or a drop bear, but should be extra careful of jellyfish and sunburn.

Once Aleks was back in Poland, I too was on my way to Wrocław!

The Polish experience

Poland is a modern country, with a lot of history – it’s not a country stuck in history. Wrocław itself is possibly the most aesthetically pleasing city I’ve ever been to, having been a German town and steeped in history with more churches (plus one Synagogue) than there are sabbaths in a year. But, Wrocław is not stuck in history, it is a modern city growing from a booming tech industry (sporting the largest factory in Europe), an international culinary scene (especially Korean – thanks to the nearby LG facility), and growing immigration. The city has almost doubled in the last 18 months just between natural growth and the city opening its doors to Ukrainians seeking safety and opportunity.

Wrocław is a place for business and also young people. At the core of it is a true sense of Polish identity forged in the brickwork of pastel buildings and a desire amongst the locals for something hospitable and cosmopolitan.

Speaking the language

Before getting to Poland, I attempted to learn some key phrases and words so that I could survive. This proved futile, with my broad Australian accent struggling to absorb the cacophony of “d” “z” “k” and “y” sounds peppered throughout Polish words. These are probably the most difficult and rare sounds in the English language, so do not come easily to a native English speaker. Just “dzien dobry” (good morning) and “dziekuyee” (thank you) combined have more of these rare consonants than an average paragraph written in English.

After learning the words “woda” (water), “mleko” (milk) and “chleb” (bread) I determined that I would not die on my jaunt in Poland. But, what of meeting people and engaging in conversation – how was I going to learn anything as a lawyer in Poland if I could barely grasp basic necessities?

Speaking words was not enough either, there are deeply cultural aspects of Polish language and interaction that you don't realise until you are fully surrounded by Poles. For example, formal register is strictly enforced and you must address people by their surname if you are not friends. For an Australian who barely finishes a word without shortening it or adding an “-o” this is anathema. Also, I was warned not to ask people how they are after a greeting. This bit I couldn't comply with as I saw it as an opportunity to learn more about the average professional's weekend life or workload. Turns out – exercise, family and being busy are as common as Polish vodka.

Similarities in difference

On the legal side of things, Poland and many of the Pacific jurisdictions I work in could not be more separated by time, geography and history. Poland is a civil law country with many aspects of law having formerly been acquired by Soviet-era jurisprudence and more recently been aligned with European Union standards. In Poland statute and regulations rule supreme. Meanwhile, Australia and many Pacific island jurisdictions use common law which was received from English colonialism, where judges are lawmakers in their own right.

Difference also exists at a superficial level. Lawyers in Poland do dress different – they don't wear wigs, but they wear gowns with a jabot which is colour-coded to indicate division and respect historical developments in the law. Purple for judges, green for advocates, blue for advisors and red for prosecutors.

Aleks and her colleague, Tomasz, were welcoming enough to invite me to a tribunal hearing concerning a freedom of information application. Although professionals and judicial processes are in another language and defined by different cultural norms, there is an underlying sense of professionalism and desire for equity that drives lawyers in Poland, just as in common law countries.

Conclusion

The three weeks I spent in Poland was an informing experience, that honed my skills as a lawyer and young professional in international settings. I made lifelong connections which are not only useful for providing a different perspective to life, but also a great opportunity for clients looking for assistance in Wrocław, Poland or elsewhere in Europe.

