We finally dropped anchor in a bay opposite the rocky headland on which stood the city of Phaselis, an important Lycian and later Roman port. Eager to pursue our sea-going adventures, we were among the last to board the small launches which took us to the jetty in the bay south of the ancient city, at the foot of Mount Tahtali.

In their day, the three ports of Phaselis formed the most important trading centre in the region: the city was even considered worthy of a visit from the Emperor Hadrian, in whose honour a huge gateway was built at the end of the main street. Our visit included a tour of the ancient theatre, the baths, the forum and the entry to the other two ports.

During our visit, we met — and photographed — Cleopatra, Mark Antony, soldiers, musicians, gladiators, consuls carrying the General Assembly emblem... and this spectacle lasted the whole time we were in Phaselis.

Dispersed over different parts of the city, we enjoyed an open-air lunch and, by the time the dessert arrived, there were a few who had plucked up enough courage to take a dip in the cold waters of the ancient Roman port.

Leaving Phaselis, this time by road, we headed for the free zone in Antalya to see an exhibition of carpets, pottery and jewellery. Sipping our tea, we finally decided — after over an hour's haggling with the seller — to buy a Turkish silk rug, convinced that, in the end, we had found a real bargain.

Our excursion over, we went to the cocktail party given by the United States Delegation: there was general praise for the excellent way our Turkish hosts had organized the social programme.

During the next few days, we attended extremely interesting receptions hosted by the Indian and Pakistani Delegations. In fact, every day there was at least one social event which gave us the opportunity to meet up again after the day's working sessions.

The social events came to an end on Monday, with a reception given by the Argentine Delegation and which, to our minds, was a model of good taste and elegance. Although not on the official programme, there was also the final farewell party given — as every year — by the General Secretariat to thank our Turkish colleagues who had worked directly under the instructions of Mr Dalda, the general co-ordinator. The evening was an informal occasion but nonetheless full of emotion.

Istanbul

The last night in the hotel, once most of the delegates have left, is always a little sad: the bustle in the hotel corridors has died down, reception rooms are virtually empty, and the general silence of the place only adds to the sense of solitude. So much so that we in turn are filled with the urge to pack our cases and move on.

Since our journey back meant stopping over in Istanbul, it was an ideal opportunity to visit what the Chinese over 1,000 years ago named the "City of cities", and to wander through the Byzantium of the Greeks, the Constantinople of the Eastern Roman Empire and the capital of the Ottoman sultans.

Photo: Véronique Castan

Istanbul