

# 25%

*As my freshman year draws to a close, I cannot help but look back fondly upon my first semester at Manipal Institute of Technology. Reliving all my experiences, both the good and the bad, has me awash with a wistful nostalgia, although some may argue that this is simply another form of exam-prep procrastination! Certainly, I did not reminisce about college when I went back home for the holidays in December once the semester was complete, too happy to return to homemade food, my parents, and friends. I now realise the value of those four months, and how the first semester can indeed set the tone for what university life will be like for any first year student.*

July 31<sup>st</sup>. The first day of classes had me nervous and excited, I was completely overwhelmed. As our class filed in, everyone seeking air-conditioned reprieve from the heat wave outside, I discovered that mostly each and everyone of us was the same way: tight-lipped and anxious. However, as the morning progressed, many became friends. It was strange, yet heartening to see bonds forming so easily – I was casually accosted by a group of girls sitting behind me, who then invited me out to the MIT Cafeteria for some *pav bhaji*, which I'd never had till date, as I hadn't lived in India before. They were deeply interested in the experiences I'd had staying abroad, and as I chattered away with them, sharing my thoughts and feelings about college, I found us becoming close. Most, if not all, of my trepidation was put to rest. I had worried that my different background would make it difficult to find friends, but almost everyone I met did not only tolerate diversity, they appreciated and welcomed it.



Friends are perhaps one of the most important parts of college life. They help you get over any homesickness, and take you to hospital if you fall sick (which is inevitable with the delirious change in weather). Most of all, they guarantee that there will always be fun-filled hostel nights (yes, every night's like a sleepover) and that it becomes infinitely easier to while away a lazy afternoon with close company.

Next up on the list was discovering Manipal and what it had to offer. This entailed getting up early on Sundays and heading out to Manipal Lake, where my friends and I waited for dawn to break, bearing several mosquito bites. The golden, peace-filled hour was always worth it though, and the thought of *masala dosa* for breakfast only enhanced our appetites.



We'd also catch the first autos of the day to End Point, a beautifully manicured park with the best views of the Swarna river and the valley below. Scrambling down to the river, we'd walk back to campus, but not before stopping for some Nutella pancakes or Maggi (despite being morning, all was possible),

courtesy of Uncle's Point – a tiny café near the college itself. Evening strolls at End Point were quite picturesque, with boys practicing football on the expansive grassy fields or playing Frisbee in the charmingly trimmed gardens.



To our delight, there were also many beaches we could visit, most notably Kaup (or Kapu) Beach. While we had to take a bus and an auto to get there, dipping our feet in the cool waters (swimming was not permitted in the monsoon months) and the magnificent view of the St Mary's Island from the top of the lighthouse made the short trip a must, especially when faced with the horrors of numerous assignments or the sessional exams. We made sure to leave in good spirits, laughing at each other's tan lines, caked in sun and salt spray from the ocean, and utterly free from the stresses of the past week.

Even the sessional tests had something to offer; the crunch-time bringing friends closer than ever as we shared notes and

re-taught subjects long into the night to each other. There was always the countdown, the build-up of excitement as we wrote each test: *"Two more left; just one more..."* and the acute jubilation after we finished our last exam. We always partied after like the Capulets of old; running light-footed through the heavy rain to a celebratory feast at any one of the fast-food outlets, such as Dollops, a dimly lit, aesthetic restaurant at Tiger Circle. Another favourite turned out to be the bakery E=MmmCake2 on the End Point Road. With its heavenly cupcakes and youthful fervor, it turned out to be a certain treat after exams.



After the week-long sessional break, a privilege only the freshmen enjoy, in which everyone seized their chance to quell feelings of being homesick, many clubs started recruiting the freshers heavily. Kamath Circle swelled with info-desks, each one detailing what the club advertised had to offer. There was

no end to the choices; students could go for either technical (relating branch-wise) or non-technical clubs – whatever took their fancy. It was exciting to choose the clubs to try out for, and despite the recurring feeling of nervousness when sitting for a club interview or the written tests, nothing compared to the feeling of triumph when the recruitment lists came out. Finally, we were a part of something bigger, we had something to offer to the university itself. It was ecstasy to see your hard work pay off; be it seeing your name in print, pulling off a role in a play, or even starting your own successful club!

Overall, there is much to do in Manipal, and much to still discover. There is something for everyone – you are sure to find like-minded people that share your ideals and will work with you to make them come true. MIT allows you to make the most of your years here, however you want them to be. So what are you going to do with your first of four? What will you do with this 25%?