

From Apprehensions to Admiration—My First Year at Manipal

Manipal was familiar territory for me, with my sister graduating from MIT the same year I joined. As I reached Manipal, I assumed I knew plenty about the town already. I was pleasantly surprised, however, as my first year here was not only fresh and invigorating but also a transformative experience like no other.

The first couple of days in Manipal went by in a flurry of activity as I attended the numerous orientation sessions organised for us, and did some last-minute shopping with my parents. Early on, I realised that an umbrella is a valuable possession to be guarded fiercely, having lost two in my very first month here. The classes began after the end of the orientation week with students from all branches mixed up in twenty-four sections. There was a natural awkwardness in the first few classes, but that was soon forgotten as we got to know each other through the icebreaker sessions.



Rumbling clouds and downpours are constants in the odd semesters. (Credits: Rahul Manshani, The Photography Club, Manipal)

The absence of a freshers' party was a vehement complaint among us first-years. The Student Council, however, had something more exciting in store for us—the Talent Night. A few first-year sections assembled in the MV Seminar Hall where everyone got an opportunity to showcase their talents. Never having been shy of speaking in public, I got on stage and decided to deliver a famous speech by Dr A. P. J. Abdul Kalam. While that was all I had planned, my friends persuaded me to sing before I got off the stage. It was the first time I had sung in front of an audience, and that performance is now one of my fondest memories of the first year. The experience of letting loose in front of others kindled a feeling of comfort and camaraderie towards my fellow first-years. A few of my classmates even staged a group dance while the rest of us hooted and cheered in support. These are the people with whom I eventually developed a deep friendship, and whose company I enjoyed as I set out to explore the town of Manipal.

A fascinating thing I observed about Manipal was how the whole

town had become student-oriented. A majority of the population here consists of students, and the place has developed with the university at its heart. It is no wonder that when you google 'Manipal', most links lead to MAHE websites. Having lived a fast-paced life in Delhi NCR, I was captivated by the peace and tranquillity of Manipal. Getting around in Manipal was never a problem. In the rare case where I couldn't walk to my destination, there was almost always a long line of auto-rickshaws waiting to ferry passengers around the town. For travelling to Udupi, or the beautiful beaches nearby, my friends and I chose the local buses because of their reasonable prices and comfort. Manipal never felt lacking in options—from fast-food joints such as McDonald's to fine dining restaurants, and from multiplexes to supermarkets—it has almost everything you would look for in a modern town.



The road leading to Kamath Circle.

While the town of Manipal is pleasing and peaceful, it is the bustling campus of MIT that most students fall in love with. The greenery surrounding the well-trodden path from the

hostels to the academic blocks offered much respite to dreary walks to 8 AM classes in the rain. The imposing structure of the Student Plaza comes alive and turns into the centre of student activity in the evenings. Students mill around the Plaza catching up with their friends, grabbing a bite at Just Bake or a sip at the Juice Centre. There's also almost always an event or publicity work for upcoming events in progress at the Student Plaza. However, the best time to witness MIT in its true glory is, undoubtedly, during TechTatva and Revels.

Tech Tatva, the technical fest of the college, was one of the first instances in the year where we transitioned from being participants in events to volunteers and club members who contributed to the working of the fest. Wearing The MIT Post tag around our necks, my fellow writers and I ran around the campus covering events and at the end of the day, burnt the midnight oil with the staff of The Post to prepare the daily newsletters. The Manipal Conclave, held on the last two days of the fest, proved to be a star-studded event with its excellent speaker line-up featuring popular YouTubers like Jitendra Kumar and Shivankit Singh Parihar, and actors such as Radhika Apte and Jatin Sarna of Sacred Games fame.

Even more vibrant and exciting, however, is the college's cultural fest, Revels, that is organised during the even semester. It was accompanied by another round of covering events, preparing newsletters, and participating in competitions. While the days were filled with an assortment of events and the joy of eating from the food stalls, the Pro-Show performances in the evenings provided a perfect conclusion to each day of the fest. It was only after a long and busy day that I would enter my comforting hostel room.



The Local Train performed during Revels 2019, for the third time in Manipal. (Courtesy: PAV, Revels'19)

Each student's hostel experience is a distinct story in itself. From late-night birthday celebrations to waking each other up on Sunday for the special breakfast, the hostel life has been a journey with countless ups and downs. Small music sessions, a few games of cards, and a game of mini-militia after a long day of classes proved to be our source of relaxation. There were evenings when everyone on the floor would assemble in one room, with their laptops and phones, only to watch an IPL super-over together. Adding to the experience was the beautiful view from my room. Waking up to the scenic beauty of the valley was divine, and it made my first year of hostel life truly breathtaking.



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The valley, as seen from Hostel Block 16.

Despite the comforts of my hostel, however, most of my time was spent in the college library. This wasn't because I was solely fixated on academics, but was rather due to the fact that the well-equipped library gave me a peaceful workspace to finish all my tasks. With multiple study rooms in the building, finding a place in the library is not difficult, unless it's during exams. On the day of an exam, the library is so crowded that at times I had to request my friends to reserve seats for me, provided they managed to get seats for themselves. With the group study room having more desks available than chairs, I've even sat beside the staircase to complete my last-minute revisions.

Looking back to the time I bid adieu to my parents, before the start of the year, I remember my excitement being coupled with apprehensions. Since I had never stayed away from them before, I had no idea what to expect thereon. However, as the year progressed, I realised that my time in Manipal had shaped me into a more responsible adult—one who's capable enough of making his own decisions, instead of depending on

others. Manipal provided me with ample opportunities to build upon my skills and personality and do something new and innovative.



Credits: Harsh Kumar Singh (The Photography Club, Manipal)

As I began writing this article, it dawned on me that despite having lived every moment of these two semesters, my first year of college appears to have passed by like a running train—with the assignments, exams, fests, parties, and outings being different stops on this journey. Continuing on the same track, it is time for me to get onto the next train in line, with fresh energy, added responsibilities and the new role of being the immediate seniors to the new freshers' batch of the college.

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