

An Adventure Into the Winds of Change

For years I have idolized Professor Tolkien. This veneration began with ten words—*“In a hole in the ground, there lived a hobbit.”*

A world of elves, dragons, and wizards. I clearly recall wondering about Bilbo—How could he leave home? How did he find the courage to seek adventure, leaving behind all he had ever known? Last year, I got a taste of what Bilbo might have felt.

Immense anxiety and fear that thrill and excitement dispelled. There’s something exhilarating about venturing out into the unknown—Adrenaline from the thrill and fear as I step out of my comfort zone. Now I look ahead to learn, full of hope for the future. It makes me say, as Bilbo did—*“I’m going on an adventure!”*

As the monsoon sweeps into the university town of Manipal, it brings with it freshers from all over the country and the globe. The Manipal adventure, for most of us, begins at the Student Plaza. With the pillars of a Roman amphitheatre and shops that sell any snack we could possibly crave, it is quite the ‘Fresher’s Favourite.’

Moving uphill, towards the academic blocks and our classes, a familiar sight presents itself. Rainbows of canvas migrate through the downpour as we attempt to get to class completely dry. No one is ever successful, but it’s all a part of the six-month monsoon charm. When I got to class on my first day, apprehension reigned. Having over 70 classmates boggled my mind! It was a tough game of match-the-following with all the names and faces. In the end, however, we grew into a close-knit group of friends—each one different in personality, yet bound by the inexplicable bond of camaraderie.



A food fest at Food Court 1

After our first ever sessional exams, we were introduced to a plethora of technical and non-technical clubs. My admiration for those who joined the former increased tenfold. Clubs are an essential part of life at Manipal—in every sense of the word. Within the first month of coming here, I was made familiar—courtesy of my more adventurous friends—with the names of various night clubs in town.

One of my fondest memories of the first year involves a dramatics club I joined. I was a part of the backstage team for an upcoming event, and we were up till 2 am, designing props. As we walked back to our blocks, sharing lame jokes, and laughing ourselves silly, drunk with exhaustion, I happened to look up at the sky. I was wonder-struck by the clear constellations, those 'patines of gold' against the midnight blue.

Another story unfolded underneath the azure blue sky. Manipal Bird Day found several of us at the paddy fields, in the company of peacocks and egrets. From tiny flowerpeckers shining in the sun to the regal Brahminy kite, I learned a great deal about birdlife. The highlight of this trip was when we spotted a hornbill! All of this had definitely culminated in a desire in me to add birdwatching to my growing list of hobbies.



Early morning bird watching

A reminiscence of my first year is incomplete without a mention of exam time. I often found myself in a friend's room, with two or three others, as we read out important pointers to remember, while our host made us bowls of steaming Maggi or cup noodles. We even helped ourselves to the doorstep deliveries by the numerous messes and cafes on campus, having abandoned all thought of the food at the Food Court. With no professional adult around (we're mere amateurs), a healthy diet was nowhere in sight. Apart from the food, my friends and I took full advantage of Manipal's scenic beauty. At the numerous beaches around, the tumult of my emotions—fueled by

homesickness—was mirrored by the unrest of the Arabian Sea, allowing me to take a step back and contemplate how the same sea connected me to my family in Mumbai.

The beauty of living in Manipal—for me personally—is the innumerable memories created through experiences one is exposed to, in this relatively small place. The Museum of Anatomy and Pathology saw the start of a wonderful friendship. A Malaysian food fest at KMC Greens had the foodie in me dancing in joy. The Pup Café has softened the cold and devout cat-person in me. It has been quite the beginning of a voyage in self-discovery.

Every journey has its bumps and hurdles, especially ones where we set out on the quest for higher education away from home. Friendships blossomed, some shrivelled into a cursory 'hello', and I realised that issues that would have seemed Earth-shattering in school, no longer held the same importance. I suppose, in a way, Manipal has taught me to be more tolerant, and to ignore the minor thorns to tend to a beautiful rose.

There is always an apprehension, a fear of what lies ahead when one leaves from home for the first time in their lives. Coupled with that is a possibility of a culture shock, especially in a country like ours, where we pride ourselves in the unity in our diversity. However, the friendships we make and the bonds we form transcend all societal barriers, making this the beginning of a fantastic journey through college.



Diwali celebrations in the sports ground

I was looking forward to spending three more years of my life there—forging friendships, learning from my seniors, and most importantly, becoming the engineer I had gone there to become. As it turns out, these exclusive experiences will have to be put on hold, as we continue with life as our virtual personas. Four hours of online classes (two subjects a day) seem dull and boring at times. However, the professors are exceptionally accommodating, providing us with all the materials we might need, and assuring us that they will help us through every step of this new journey.

We have had a series of tests via MS Teams—the college's preferred mode for conducting classes. While internet issues abound, all our professors have given us the benefit of the doubt and have allowed us to submit answers through e-mail whenever needed. Adjusting to a new mode of teaching after

years of doing it one way must have been quite a task for them, but they have risen to the challenge.

Sometimes, it might seem tiresome to have to attend classes all alone, with no one to copy notes off when the professor moves on to the next slide a little too quickly. The silly jokes and quiet talks with friends in class provided a momentary respite in a day riddled with subjects requiring intense study and concentration. The temptation to give in to that soul-sucking, entertainment vortex that is social media is all too strong. However, this is our reality now, and we must learn to adapt to this new norm. After all, life goes on.

As I sit in the relative safety of my home, with the COVID-19 pandemic raging around the world, trying to write about the semester and a half I spent at Manipal, I realise how much I actually miss the place. It has and will continue to shape me into a better version of myself, where I dare to step out of my hobbit-hole of comfort and be swept off on an adventure.

Image Credits – Devangshi Debraj