

# Who said office is boring?

From swanky furniture to doodles on walls, office spaces in the city are turning out to be a lot cooler and more colourful. SRINIVASA RAMANUJAM checks out three such workplaces

A good salary and perks are no longer the only prerequisites for someone to take up a job. An attractive workplace that fosters an interactive work environment is fast turning out to be an important factor for job hunters. Which is why offices, be it a huge corporate or a promising start-up, are offering it all – swanky interiors, plush furniture, bright colours and a host of extra-curricular activities that include sport and music. All within the office environment to make work look cooler.

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*Employees at Freshdesk have no designated seating* PHOTO: R. RAGU

## Freshdesk

**No. of employees:** 623  
**Primary work:** Offering software-as-a-service (SaaS), this cloud-based company helps customer support representatives of companies respond to queries through multiple channels  
**The big plus:** Free meals, snazzy furniture, collaborative workspaces, indoor gym, play area



There's a lot of art on the walls at Freshdesk. There are Chennai landmarks here and there, sketches of random characters and a lot of fun material used — you can find carrom coins and balls used as props on the walls.

And then, there's a liberal dose of Rajinikanth; a separate 'Thalaivar' wall is on the cards, as part of the new space that will be occupied by the employees from this week.

"What matters is what you're seeing," explains Ruchi Shah, a freelance designer, who has worked on sprucing up the environment through her art. "You look at the wall and you feel happy. Isn't that what you come to work for anyway?"

Life at Freshdesk seems colourful and happy — despite the odd working hours (for

some) and deadlines. The employees here are a far cry from the ones you usually see at corporates; they're dressed in bright, casual attire and walk around with laptops in tow to work with other teams.

What started out as a small, promising start-up has grown into a 600-plus member company. Growth has also meant expansion of its office space — and thankfully, that's not too far... the office space that begins on Block B continues into Block C of SP Infocity, Perungudi, where it is located.

"But we're still very much a start-up at heart," smiles

Janani Dwarakanath, Corporate Marketing Manager, "When we started out, we could just shout out ideas and plans; now, with 600-plus people, that interactivity might come down."

It is to sort out that very problem that the planners of the new office space in Block C have come up with the idea of what they call 'collab spaces'. Bharath Balasubramaniam, Director of Design, takes us through the new space, explaining the concept of 'work as you move'. "With a laptop and Wi-fi, there is no need for anyone here to sit at a

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designated place," he says. The desking system in place here ensures that employees can move around while working, and use the colourful huddle pods for meetings.

For Preethi S.P., a graduate from SASTRA, Thanjavur, who works as a product consultant with sales (Australia region), the couch next to the support bay is her favourite spot in the office. "We've never had a fixed place here; we can move around and work from anywhere," she says cheerfully. And when she wants to take a break from work, she can join her colleagues at the new real-time gaming area. "Some offices provide video gaming consoles, but what we wanted is for employees to actually sweat it out a bit and indulge in some kind of physical activity," explains Prabakaran Marimuthu, Manager - HR and Admin, "In this area, five-member teams can play indoor cricket or even football." Finally, there are sports beyond table tennis at workplaces.

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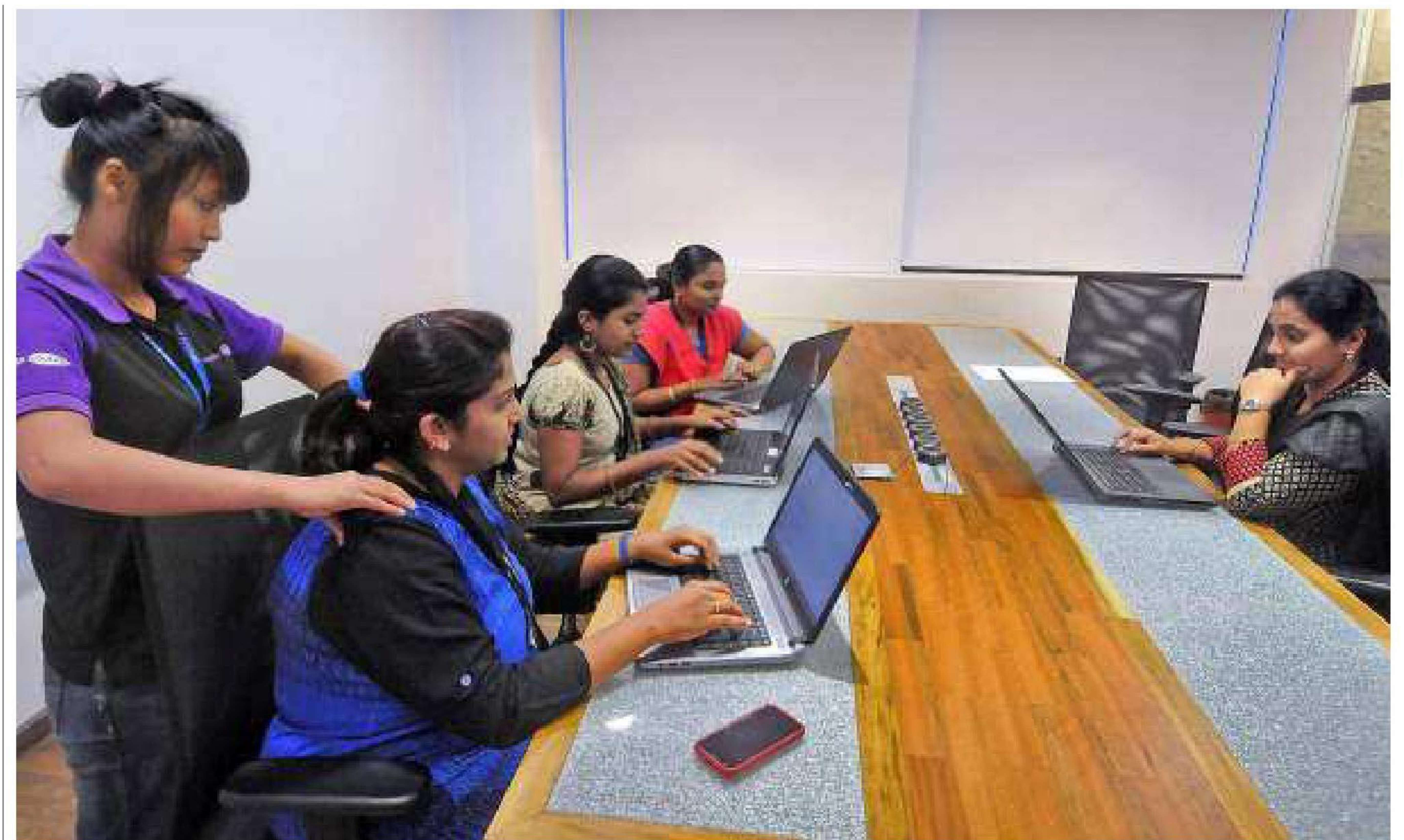
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hand at some extra-curricular activities. Be it learning to play the guitar at the amphitheatre or doing a bit of meditation, TCSiites explore their hidden talents... all within the campus.

Take Krishnakumar R. Bharadwaj, an IT analyst here who doubles up as a SPOC (single point of contact) for guitar classes, for instance. He's trying to play a popular Tamil film song with his mentor guiding him. "I began my career here," he says. For a minute, you're tempted to think he's referring to the company — but it's his guitar association he's talking about.

Also lined up for associates are digital associations; there's iQlass, interactive classrooms that provide a personalised learning experience, Nano videos and exciting Virtual labs. For sports enthusiasts, there is a whole range of facilities to choose from.

A clubhouse with 100 rooms is almost complete; for use by associates and clients. It's swanky, to say the least, and offers a great view of the campus. You can spend an entire day on campus and keep yourself occupied, says an administrative official who shows us around. Clearly, work is anything but boring.



## Ramco Systems

**No. of employees:** 1,600 plus  
**Primary work:** Cloud applications in the area of ERP, HCM and Aviation MRO  
**The big plus:** Chirapsia (head/shoulder massage at the workstation), Coffee with the CEO, Trendy in-house coffee shop (FIKA), Cross-fit training

Mondays are the best days at Ramco Systems.

At least that's what they are trying to communicate to their employees. The cultural theme at this company, located at Taramani, revolves around TGIM — that expands to Thank God It's Monday. An attempt to conceptually motivate employees at the start of the week, all initiatives are driven by this theme. "It makes people think Thank God I'm Back when they get in to work on a Monday morning, after a relaxed weekend," says Virender Aggarwal, CEO.

They call themselves a 20-year-old start-up, and would like their culture to reflect the same. One that tries to break the 'yes sir, no sir' culture. 'Coffee with the CEO' tries to do exactly

**The spine is the busiest place at TCS with hordes of people flocking there to chill and conduct meetings as well**

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PHOTOS: R. RAGU

that. "It breaks hierarchy," he adds, "and encourages anybody to walk up to me for coffee in the morning and discuss anything — either work-related or general stuff."

The colours inside — bright and fresh — and informal workspaces display the company's attitude. Nobody has a designated seat here, and there are no cabins either. Managers sit with teams and employees move around frequently to interact with other teams.

Fancy furniture aside, employees here get a chance to unwind for at least an hour every day, with zumba and cross-fit training. Sinthu Bhairavi G.V., Business Analyst, does exactly that — her week at the office is incomplete without an hour of either cross-fit or yoga. "I spend an hour

every day indulging in some kind of physical activity," she says, "Had I enrolled for a class someplace else, traffic and logistical issues might have cropped up."

Sinthu, who has been with the company for three years, says that the one hour of activity gets her mind off work-related tension. "That way, I'm energised when I get back to work," she adds. If she isn't, there are some healthy snacks over at Cafe TGIM to gorge on. Those who prefer a swankier environment for their coffee and snacks check out FIKA, a tastefully made-up cafe.

For employees from other states — and there are quite a few of them — the special laundry tie-up with Wassup is a boon; they can drop their clothes off in the morning

and pick it up, all fresh and clean, while heading back home.

But the highlight of life at Ramco, at least in recent times, is the Chirapsia — a professional massage for the shoulders and head at your desk. Managers are even encouraged to give a Chirapsia appointment for an employee as a recognition of their hard work. Now, if that's not inviting enough, what is?

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## TCS, Siruseri

**No. of employees:** 30,000  
**Primary work:** Global IT services, consulting and business solutions organisation  
**The big plus:** Clubhouse, Amphitheatre, Jogging track

They call it the central spine. And it's the busiest place inside TCS, Siruseri. Hordes of people gather here at all times of the day; a few of them are chilling out, sipping coffee. Some of them are having an informal meeting at one of the huts by the stream, and others are hurrying up for a meeting in another block, which requires a brisk walk.

Understandably, it's busiest during lunch time, with people waiting for the serpentine queues inside the food courts to subside.

They stare at us, a privileged few of us in a buggy (yes, you require one to check out the

entire facility), casting envious glances at us as they trudge on to their destination. The associates (that's what they call employees) are mostly young — the average age at the company is 28 — and they're all talking. "You can feel the energy here; I tell customers to step out of meetings and visit the central spine. It's a melting pot of people discussing anything from work to personal issues," describes Ravi Viswanathan, President, Growth Markets & Chennai Operations Head.

You feel like you're in college, considering the buzz. "It is actually an extension of college," he laughs, "It's a formal workplace with an informal atmosphere."

That's because of the campus and the various social tools integrated into the workplace. Knome, a popular informal channel, is a platform for people to interact on both professional and personal

levels, and a chance to earn karma points. Much like Facebook and Twitter, having more followers is a sign of your popularity in the campus.

The campus itself is shaped like a mammoth butterfly, with the central spine located in the middle.

There is a lot of work to get done at all times of the day (and sometimes at night) — the company has customers from across the globe — but the trick is to overcome all the biological challenges. It is to break away from the sedentary lifestyle that the company places emphasis on fitness. "We encourage people to take a break from work in the evenings and walk for a while inside the campus," he says.

Some engage in fitness-related activities — the company has a programme called Fit 4 Life that marries wellness, team spirit and social causes — but others try their

