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 pre-requisites 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.

Turn to page 8
TCs, Siruseri
No. of employees: 30,000
Primary work: Global IT services, consulting and business solutions organisation
The big plus: Clubhouse, Amphitheatre, Juggling 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 and they’re 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.

Understandingly, it’s busiest during lunch time, with people waiting for their serpentines 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 as they’re all in transit 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. It’s a slice of outdoor meetings and the central spine. It’s a meeting point of people discussing anything from work to personal issues,” describes Ravin Viswanathan, President, Growth Markets & Chennai Operations Head.

You feel like you’re in college, considering the buzz. “It’s actually an extension of college,” he laughs. “It’s a formal workplace, but an informal atmosphere.”

That’s because of the campus, and the various social tools integrated into the workplace. Krome, 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, during 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, walk, or do some exercise during the day and work 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 hand at some extra-curricular activities.

That’s how the guitar group, the air hockey group, the table tennis group, and the curling group have formed.

Take Kripakumar B. Bharadwaj, an IT analyst here who doubles up as a SPOC (single point of contact) for guitar classes, for instance. He’s been learning the classical 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 thinking about.

And also lined up for associates are digital associations; there’s iGlass, 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 - from the clubhouse with 100 rooms is an absolute must; for use by associates and clients. It’s nearly, 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.

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Ramco Systems
No. of employees: 1600 plus
Primary work: Cloud applications in the area of ERP, HCM and Analytics
The big plus: Chirapias (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 into 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 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 Bhardwaj 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 somewhere 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 Wasup 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 Chirapias — a professional massage for the shoulders and head at your desk. Managers are even encouraged to give a Chirapias appointment for an employee as a recognition of their hard work. Now, that’s not inviting enough, what is?