

ISA celebrates a glamorous formal night

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IIT's Indian Student Association (ISA) organization held its most-awaited annual fall event, The ISA Formal night, on October 23, 2015. The fact that tickets sold out within a record time of two hours indicates how excited students were for this event.

The 99th floor of the Willis tower served as the perfect location to celebrate the important Hindu festival of Navratri, which is a 10-day festival of worship and dance. Zain Shethwala, Vice President of Marketing for ISA, said that even though they encountered difficulties negotiating for the venue, he is glad they could secure it as he received a lot of positive feedback from attendees after the event. In addition, the committee intended to change ISA's image from an organization that just provides good food at its events to one that produces meaningful experiences for the student body of IIT. Previously people would just come to eat and leave; they wanted to provide a backdrop where people would enjoy mingling with one another and expanding their networks.

Students had to take two sets of lifts to get to the elegantly-decorated hall on the 99th floor of the Willis tower. Half of the hall was set up with dinner tables designated

for eating and relaxing while the other half boasted a huge, glittery black dance floor. The venue was decorated in a very simplistic and elegant manner by the student organizers, with flower lights at the center of every table and an Indian flag displayed with pride at four opposite ends of the hall.

Students decked in their best Indian attire started to trickle in by 7 p.m. In an hour, the hall was filled with color and glitter with girls looking gorgeous and glamorous in their lenghas and men looking dashing in their Sherwanis. It was heartwarming to see that a decent number of non-Indian students had not only made the effort to wear the Indian attire, but also looked absolutely gorgeous as they carried themselves with utter grace and beauty. The event witnessed students from China, Korea, Magnolia, Poland, Bulgaria, Chicago, and Mexico, to name a few.

According to Shethwala, the organization was making a conscious effort towards achieving their goal of incorporating students from a diverse range of backgrounds in their organization and events. They marketed this event through the general Facebook group for IIT students as a formal night event where students get to learn about the Indian culture to emphasize that everyone is welcome to join ISA events. In addition, they asked for song recommendations in any

language from everyone to ensure that they could cater to everyone's taste in music.

Upon entering the venue, the organizers checked students in and gave them raffle tickets. Then around 8 o'clock, they started to call out groups of 15 at a time and gave the "lucky" ones an opportunity to go to the sky-deck. About 100 students got free passes to visit the sky deck, a part of which had been cordoned off just for us. For many it was their first time on the sky deck and the mesmerizing view of Chicago provided students with ample opportunity to click some Facebook-profile worthy pictures. This was followed by dinner where international students got to taste the authentic Indian cuisine with a moderate amount of spices that ensured that everyone's taste buds could handle.

The most memorable aspect of this event was a dance performance presented by ISA organizers on a medley of popular Indian songs. The 2 weeks of hard work and time these passionate dancers put into this performance was evident in their euphoric smiles and synchronicity. According to a member of the organizing committee, in previous years they had random people perform to a random playlist of Bollywood songs; however this was the first time that they had a team of passionate dancers willing to put forth a performance.

After the dance performance, the

dance floor was open to everyone. The DJ started with playing Garba, Dandiya, and Bhangra songs before gradually progressing to the much-loved Bollywood music. The DJ's attempt at mixing English beats and Hardwell songs with Bollywood music injected the atmosphere with a lively spirit. Students familiar with the complicated 12-step Garba sequence could be seen teaching the amateur dancers with much patience, pride and encouragement. It was lovely to see everyone present at the event, dancers as well as non-dancers, shaking their leg to Indian music.

Overall, students who have been attending ISA events feel that it is drastically improving with each event. It is becoming bigger and starting to organize events that are more meaningful and beneficial. They had two other events this semester- the career workshop and picnic event that too garnered very positive feedback. Moving forward, the committee hopes to host events that create and extract meaningful value for not just the Indians in IIT but for all nationalities, with the aim to integrate the IIT community further.

The next event that they are currently working on is one where an array of organizations on campus that deal with issues of racial discrimination will clarify common misconceptions.



Photos courtesy of Abha Dalmia and Indian Student Association