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THE WORLD'S BEST

Looking for a bucket list? Here it is – 41 international races that hit the sweetest of sweet spots

RACES 2017

The Big Five Marathon

In Africa the 'Big Five' game are the lion, rhino, buffalo, leopard and elephant – all of which you may see as you make your way across the savannah at this game reserve in South Africa, between Johannesburg and Kruger National Park. Fear not, armed rangers are on hand...

NEXT RACE June 2018 (tbc),
big-five-marathon.com →



Jungfrau Marathon

Just in case you were planning on going all out at this one, we suggest you tweak your plan a tad. The race starts at 500m above sea level and finishes at

2,100m, and the second half is made up of one long, severe incline, so you might consider just trotting along and enjoying the unbelievable majesty of the Swiss Alpine environment.

NEXT RACE September 9, jungfrau-marathon.ch/en



LISBON ECO HALF

The organisers have done an amazing job of hiding the fact this is a race that takes place in the middle of a large, busy city from you. It's 13.1 lovely miles through the Montes Claros – secluded manicured gardens that feature woodland, a lake and an amphitheatre – as well as the grounds of the Tapada da Ajuda, Lisbon's answer to Greenwich Observatory.

NEXT RACE May 2018 (tbc), maratonadelisboa.pt

COGNAC MARATHON

Just running through the Cognac region in France would be enough for us to advise getting a place in this race – it really is a feast for the eyes and the soul – but throw in the chance to pass by distilleries and brandy storehouses, sampling the wares along the way and what you've got is a race that proves (if proof were needed) that the French really do know how to live it up.

NEXT RACE November 11, marathonducognac.net

ITALY COAST TO COAST

Take your carb-loading to a whole new level with this exceedingly lovely race for teams of four. It's a four-day, 343km amble across the middle of Italy, from the Adriatic on the east coast to the Tyrrhenian Sea on the west, passing through Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Umbria and Tuscany. The opportunities for guilt-free pigging-out are almost unlimited, though self-control is advised.

NEXT RACE June 2018 (TBC), ovunquerunning.it

HOOD TO COAST

This monumental event is now 36 years old and it sells out every year, which should not come as a surprise. It began with eight teams but these days it takes the 1,000+ groups of 12 on a 199-mile road trip across Oregon, from Mount Hood down to the coastal town of Seaside, where a finishing party awaits on the beach.

NEXT RACE August 2018 (tbc), hoodtocoastrelay.com

BULLER GORGE HALF MARATHON

We've highlighted the half-marathon distance here but, to be frank, this is such a gorgeous race, we wouldn't be surprised if you decided to tackle the full marathon. It's billed as the most scenic race in New Zealand, and that's saying something.

NEXT RACE February 10, 2018, bullergorgemarathon.co.nz

ROUTE DE VIN

This little-known race is ideal for those trying for a half-marathon PB. Taking you along the lovely Moselle river in Luxembourg, it's flat, wide and overtaking-friendly, plus with a field size of around 1,500, it falls under the heading of 'well-kept secret'.

NEXT RACE September 24, routeduvin.lu

ULTRA TRAIL DU MONT BLANC

This 171km Alpine epic starts and finishes in Chamonix in France and takes you across the borders into Italy and Switzerland in between. The winner will do it in about 20 hours but for mere mortals there's a 46.5-hour time limit.

NEXT RACE August 28–Sept 3, utmbmontblanc.com

Pyongyang Marathon

Leave your Make America Great Again baseball cap at home for this one (or just burn it). The packed Kim Il Sung Stadium (named for the state's leader from

1948-94) is the start and finish for a race that offers international runners an opportunity to get a (limited) glimpse into the strange and secretive world of North Korea's capital city.

NEXT RACE April 8, 2018, pyongyangmarathon.com →



ANGKOR WAT HALF

MARATHON

If you tackle this one make sure you take your phone, your memory bank and your sense of awe. You'll be running through Angkor Archaeological Park, near Siem Reap in Cambodia, a vast complex of ancient temples. In the middle stands Angkor Wat, built in the 12th century as a spiritual home to the Hindu god Vishnu.

NEXT RACE December 3, Cambodia-events.org

COLOMBO MARATHON

Sadly, this is not a race where you run sporting a shabby mac and a squint, but on the upside you do get to absorb 26 miles worth of beautiful rolling landscapes, teeming humanity and tropical temperatures as you leg it round the vibrant, sprawling capital city of Sri Lanka.

NEXT RACE October 8, srilankamarathon.org

KILIMANJARO MARATHON

You get the best of both worlds at this event: the amazing vistas and the incredible welcome afforded by Tanzanian locals who whoop, clap, dance and run sections of this with you for support, and you never have to leave the gentle incline of Kilimanjaro's foothills.

NEXT RACE March 4, 2018, kilimanjaronmarathon.com



Sierra Leone Marathon

Winging through tropical forests and local villages, you'll probably be joined for part of this stunning rural race by some of the very children you'll be helping – the race is run to support the charity Street Child, in case you wanted to add philanthropy to the list of the many reasons to run this one.

NEXT RACE May 27, 2018, sierraleonemarathon.com



ZOOM YAH YAH

MARATHON

'The weather is perfect: no wind, no rain, no sleet, no snow...' boast the organisers of this 26.2 in Minnesota, US. That's because it's run indoors round a track at St Olaf's College. Just 40 runners are allowed to enter and as you get on with the business of completing your 150 laps (changing direction every 30 mins) you'll be roared on by students from the college.

NEXT RACE January 7, 2018, zoomyahyah.com

MOUNT FUJI MARATHON

It's a long way to go for a run but it's well worth it. This is the 70th outing for this tough multiterrain race that takes you round a series of lakes in the foothills of Japan's highest mountain (and, technically, a volcano). Fuji itself always remains in view, watching over you as you tackle 3,000m of ascent. The race also involves a series of check-points, each with a cut-off point. The overall time limit is six hours.

NEXT RACE July 28, fujimountainrace.jp

SEA WHEEZE

Part race, part yoga retreat, part Glastonbury, you can rule out getting a last-minute ticket for this year as this event sells out well in advance. Held in Vancouver, it's a weekend featuring yoga classes, bands playing at sunset, general cavorting and, of course, some running, in the form of an extremely pleasant half marathon, with a course that takes you along the Pacific Ocean coast for more than 11km.

NEXT RACE August 12, seawheeze.com



BAGAN TEMPLE MARATHON

Great beauty and centuries of history come together at this wondrous run. Passing along the remote dusty roads of central Myanmar (Burma) and trying to absorb both the grace of the ancient Bagan temples and the goodwill of the locals is a truly humbling experience and one to be cherished.

NEXT RACE November 25, 2017, bagan-temple-marathon.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALBATROS ADVENTURE MARATHONS, CHRIS PARKES – STREET CHILD, KILIMANJARO MARATHON

MOONLIGHT HALF MARATHON

How's this for a location: the lovely peninsula town of Cavellino Treporti in northeast Italy, with the Venetian lagoon on one side, the Adriatic Sea on the other and stars twinkling in the sky as you run (the race begins at 8pm). Is anyone else singing *Moon River* in their head right now?

NEXT RACE May 2018 (tbc), moonlighthalfmarathon.it

THUNDER DRAGON RUN

It might sound like the name of an early 1990s Nintendo game but this definitely is not one for the kids. You'll be running through the hills of the tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan (known as the Land of the Thunder Dragon), taking in plenty of local sights and sounds as well as passing by some mind-bogglingly beautiful monasteries, temples and shrines. Be prepared for plenty of punchy ups and downs.

NEXT RACE May 2018 (tbc), thunderdragonmarathon.com

ICELAND MIDNIGHT SUN RUN

Evocative night-time views over the river Ellidaar and Lake Raudavatn mean you won't struggle to stay awake for this race, which begins at 9pm. Plus the recovery options afterwards are top-notch. Steam bath, anyone?

NEXT RACE June 2018 (tbc), marathon.is/midnight-run

WAIHEKE TRAILBLAZER

Waiheke, a 35-minute ferry ride from Auckland, New Zealand, is known as the 'fittest island in the world'. Options range from a 3km fun run to a full marathon, with each offering a mix of single track, beach, paddocks and bush. There are some impressive wineries on the island, too...

NEXT RACE December (TBC), runningcalendar.co.nz

AUSTRALIAN RUNNING FESTIVAL

It's fitting that a sporty nation such as Oz should host a whole weekend of running. Canberra is the setting for a range of events, including a 5K, 10K, half, marathon and a 50K ultra, all of which are run around Weston Park and Lake Burley Griffin.

NEXT RACE April 2018 (tbc), runningfestival.com.au

DHIRAAGU ROAD RACE

Those of you who have been looking for a gateway drug to get your partner hooked on running, try this 5K race in the Maldives. Yes, you read that correctly. Fly out, run once round the 2.5km by 1.5km island of Hulhumale, then indulge in the some serious sun-lounger recovery for a week or so. Job done.

NEXT RACE August 11, dmrr.mv →





Rottnest Island Half

'Rotto', as it's known, lies just off the coast of Perth, Australia. This four-lapper will take you around the salt lakes in the middle of the island, and if you can't hear the lone

bagpiper throughout, it means you've probably wandered off course. Using gels? Dispose of them carefully, as they're a health risk to the Quokka, a small wallaby native to the island.
NEXT RACE October 22, wamc.org.au

BAY TO BREAKERS

One of the oldest footraces in the world, this 12km run dates back to 1912 and takes participants through San Francisco from the Bay to the Great Highway, where they can see huge breakers crashing dramatically onto Ocean Beach. The route also features Hayes Hill, and you'll probably be sorry it does, as the gradient reaches 11 per cent. Numbers now stand at 50,000 runners each year, but the race set a Guinness World Record for most participants in 1986, when a staggering 110,000 people turned up.
NEXT RACE May 2018 (tbc), baytobreakers.com

GALAPAGOS MARATHON

We're not sure if Charles Darwin was a runner but if he was he'd have thoroughly approved of this unique opportunity to take part in a spot of high-speed naturalism. Not only is it a wildlife tour like no other, but every single runner gets their own caddy, whose job it is to drive along stopping every two kilometres to hand them drinks, snack or take any layers they want to shed. The generosity works both ways: each international runner has to sponsor a local runner. A truly evolved approach to marathon running.
NEXT RACE October 15, cometogalapagos.com



SARAJEVO HALF MARATHON

This one is a perfect family option because as well as the half marathon there's a relay-half option, a 10K, 5K, 4km fun run, 3km women-only run and a 400m kids' run – all fast, flat and located smack in the middle of one of the most handsome and atmospheric cities in Europe.
NEXT RACE September 17, sarajevomarathon.ba

RAGNAR DEL SOL

Ragnar, a specialist relay race company from the United States, will be hosting its first UK race in September this year and if the event is anything like this beauty we are in for a treat. This epic across Wild West territory (the Arizona desert) begins and ends at sunrise and takes teams on a 200-mile adventure that features, say the organisers, 'towering Saguaro cacti, sunsets that belong in a water colour painting, stars lighting up the sky and team vans festooned with Christmas lights'. Where do we sign?
NEXT RACE February 9-10 2018, runragnar.com

PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY, SARAJEVO HALF MARATHON, ROTTNEST ISLAND HALF, JUNGLE MARATHON

REGGAE MARATHON

Imagine all the things you might want from a Jamaican destination race and this has them: great weather (it starts at 5:30am so you're not boiling in the midday sun), Bob Marley quotes/ lyrics every mile and reggae booming out of the speakers – even Rastas smoking huge reefers at the side of the course. But the real reason you should go is for the pre- and post-race parties, which are a riot of rum punch, Red Stripe, steel drum bands, yoga and massage on the beach, freshly opened coconuts and much more.

NEXT RACE December 3, reggaemarathon.com

MARATHON DU MEDOC

This has been dubbed 'the longest marathon in the world'. Not because it's longer than 26.2 miles but because everyone gets sozzled. Ambling round the vineyards of Bordeaux you'll be met by waiters serving red, white and rosé (in proper glasses!) every mile, as well as unusual race fuel such as oysters, pâté and cheese. The aim is to finish as close to the 6:30 cut-off as you can. Good luck.

NEXT RACE September 9, marathondumedoc.com



EVEREST MARATHON

Unsurprisingly, this is officially the highest marathon in the world. There are perfectly good reasons why the race date is simply 'November': first of all, you need to commit to a trip lasting the best part of a month in order to acclimatise to the conditions; second, the weather dictates on which precise day you'll run the race – nature is in charge here. Once you get going, it's a mostly downhill route with two steep inclines, and while there is some ice and snow to tackle, most of it is on rough single-track.

NEXT RACE November, everestmarathon.org.uk



Jungle Marathon

For 99.9 per cent of us, just reading about this fierce event will be sufficient proximity to it, but for the remaining 0.1%, the chance to run through the Brazilian Amazon is impossible to turn down, even with the possibility of seeing piranha on river crossings, snakes on trails and truly fierce bullet ants almost anywhere. How hot is it? Some competitors have prepared by running on a treadmill in a sauna...

NEXT RACE October 5-14, junglemarathon.uk →

TRANSROCKIES RUN

A six-day odyssey across the Colorado Rockies, in the US, adding up to 120 miles and nearly 7,000m of altitude gain. Expect to see eagles, moose, bears and much more; some of the aid stations are so remote the organisers have to use llamas or pack mules to transport supplies up there.

NEXT RACE August 15-20, transrockies-run.com

VOLCANO MARATHON

Staged in the Atacama Desert in Chile, this is the highest desert marathon in the world, which means you'll be contending with both severe heat and the altitude. And with just 1mm of average rainfall per year you'd better make sure you've got plenty of water with you.

NEXT RACE November 16, volcanomarathon.com

BORNEO MARATHON

Sometimes a race comes along whose beauty defies all superlatives – this is one such event. The winding coastal route along the South China Sea (with views of Mount Kinabalu) really are something to behold. The only small fly in the ointment is that the race starts at [whisper it] 3am.

NEXT RACE May 2018 (TBC), borneomarathon.com

27K FOR FREEDOM

A beautiful homage to Nelson Mandela: you'll start and finish by the statue of Madiba that stands outside Victor Verster Prison, where he spent the final part of his 27-year incarceration. The route also takes in surrounding wine country and finishes in a sports stadium.

NEXT RACE February, 2018, capetownmagazine.com/27-for-freedom-run

Monterey Bay Half Marathon

Formerly known by its much more recognisable moniker of the Big Sur Half, this is simply one of the most breathtaking races you'll ever get to run. The course takes you along the California

coastline, affording magnificent views of the Pacific Ocean.

There's plenty of on-course entertainment, too. And despite the November date the weather remains wonderfully balmy.

NEXT RACE November 12, bigsurhalfmarathon.org

**MAUI OCEANFRONT MARATHON**

Aside from the holiday-of-a-lifetime location, the great thing about this Hawaii event is the restriction on the size of the field. Just 700 runners are allowed to enjoy the beautiful setting (and the chance for a spot of whale watching on the hoof) as part of what is a low-key affair. It's on asphalt roads and there are plenty of places where supporters can cheer you on. You'll need it, as the course is filled with sharp ascents and descents.

NEXT RACE January 14, 2018, mauiocfrontmarathon.com

**MONGOLIA SUNRISE TO SUNSET**

A day in the stunning (and vast) Hovsgol National Park is a day well spent when you consider that you'll be running past moose, yak, camels, bears and other creatures you don't normally see on a wet Saturday in Solihull. You can choose the 42km option or go for the mammoth 100km distance – whichever you choose you must finish while the sun is still in the sky.

NEXT RACE August 2 2017, ms2s.dk

SAFARICOM MARATHON

Like its South African sibling, this marathon in Kenya will give you a) a deep tan and b) a thrilling look at some of the continent's biggest beasts and most beautiful scenery. You'll be so enthralled you won't have time to worry about hitting the wall as you make your way along the savannah plains and river banks; and neither should you worry about any of the inhabitants getting too up close and personal: there are armed rangers stationed throughout, as well as helicopters patrolling above.

NEXT RACE June 2018 (tbc), safaricommarathon.com