

50 Best Races In The World 2015

In the ultimate globetrotter's guide,
RW reveals the best events
on the planet outside the UK

01

Eiger Ultra Trail

▲ Staged in the shadow of the Eiger, this is a beauty of a beast, with 6,700m of ascent over 101km, and a gradient profile that looks like the readout from a Sepp Blatter polygraph. The weekend festival of running also offers a 51km/3,100m Panorama Trail and a 16km/960m Pleasure Trail.
Next race: July 18-19, eigerultratrail.ch

02

Bahamas Marathon

This is, as you might imagine, a pretty laid-back experience. Starting at 6am, you'll get in some decent mileage before the heat gets too oppressive, and as you make your way along the fast, flat course you'll enjoy miles of ocean views and gleaming white sands.
Next race: January 17, 2016, marathonbahamas.com

03

Waiheke Trailblazer

Waiheke, a 35-minute ferry ride from Auckland, New Zealand, is known as the 'fittest island in the world'. Options here range from a 3km fun run all the way to full marathon, with all offering a great mix of single track, beach, grassy paddocks and bush.
Next race: December 12, synergyfit.co.nz

04

Maratón de Quito

At 2,800m above sea level, Quito, the capital of Ecuador, is the highest capital city in the world. The race is a hilly, bumpy affair as befits an event set in a city that's built close to a volcano (Pichincha), but the route gives you a superb tour of the beautiful, historic centre.
Next race: July 31, 2016 (TBC), maratondequito.com



05

City2Surf

In terms of numbers, this is the biggest race on the planet, attracting more than 80,000 runners in recent years. If that's not reason enough to stick it on your to-run list, the course is a belter, starting in Sydney's Hyde Park and winding through city neighbourhoods such as Kings Cross to the waterfronts of Double Bay and Rose Bay, then to the Pacific coast and a finish at Bondi Beach. And the unusual 14km distance means you're pretty much guaranteed a PB.

Next race: August 9, city2surf.com.au

06

Paris Marathon

This is a suitably grand affair, with over 35,000 runners starting on the Champs-Élysées, then following a course beside the Seine and past some of the city's most imposing and best-known sights, including the Place de la Bastille, the Louvre and Place de la Concorde. Plus there's the very Gallic (and, frankly, superb) touch of locals serving wine and cheese to runners in the final miles.

Next race: April 3, 2016, schneiderelectric.parismarathon.com

07

Bagan Temple Marathon

► A voyage through central Myanmar, home to the 2,000 Buddhist temples that remain from the temple-building boom of the 11th-13th centuries, when over 10,000 were erected. Passing through this slice of history is like entering another world – and it's made all the more pleasurable by the locals coming out to offer support.

Next race: November 28, 2015, bagan-temple-marathon.com

08

Star Wars Half Marathon

A short time from now in a country not too far away... you can dress up and run surrounded by Darth Vader, Chewbacca and other characters from the galaxy's best-loved space saga (even the very little lamented Jar Jar Binks). And with the latest in the series opening in December, you may even see some new faces. The 13.1-miler through the Disneyland Resort is huge fun and the medals are, well, out of this world.

Next race: January 17, 2016, rundisney.com/star-wars-half-marathon

09

Mount Everest Marathon

The world's highest 26.2 starts at 5,184m, close to Everest Base Camp, but you do get a net downhill by the finish in Namche Bazaar. The surroundings are as truly epic as you'd expect in the Himalayas and following the tragic events in Nepal this year, you'll be supporting the recovery of the local economy/community through the money you spend and raise via the Everest Marathon Fund.

Next race: Nov 2017 (TBC), everestmarathon.org.uk

10

Marathon du Médoc

RW eyewitness: Andy Dixon, Editor 'If Withnail had been a runner rather than a failed and dissolute actor, this would have been his best-loved race. I had 26 opportunities to drink the 'finest wines available to humanity' in a race that traces a beautiful circuit of over 50 Bordeaux chateaux, with each aid station serving up the region's famous plonk, as well as water. The dilemma was whether to go for an even split (have the same amount of wine throughout) or negative split (neck more in the second half). The organisers encourage you to be as slow as possible to literally drink in the experience, so forget about time, savour some steak, cheese or oysters at the gourmet food stations, enjoy the moment and worry about the gout tomorrow. Oh, and did I mention you also have to do it in fancy dress?' **Next race:** Sept 12, marathondumedoc.com

11

Italy Coast to Coast

This stonker of a team race is a four-day, 343km event that takes teams of up to four from the Adriatic on Italy's east coast to the Tyrrhenian Sea, on the west, passing through Emilia-Romagna, Marche, Umbria and Tuscany.

Next race: May 2016 (TBC), ovunquerunning.it

12

Galapagos Marathon

Along with the wonders on display – you'll see giant tortoises and sea lions – there's a lovely human connection at this small event on San Cristobal Island. All international runners sponsor a local by paying their entrance fee.

Next race: October 18, cometogalapagos.com

13

Barcelona Marathon

This is a showcase for one of Europe's most beautiful cities, with the March date meaning the weather will be ideal, so you can get on with enjoying sights such as Montjuic Park's Magic Fountain and Gaudi's staggering Sagrada Família.

Next race: March 13 2016, zurichmaratobarcelona.com

14

Outback Marathon

Staged on the bush tracks, fire trails, sand dunes and soft red earth of the continent's otherworldly red centre. You'll get a runner's eye view of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and also grab more than one eyeful of the equally impressive domed rock formations of Kata Tjuta.

Next race: July 30, 2016, australianoutbackmarathon.com

15

Mongolia Sunrise to Sunset

Whether you choose the 42km or 100km option, your time limit is the same: complete your course round the stunning Hovsgol National Park in the 18 hours between – you guessed it – sunrise and sunset. You may see moose, bears, yaks, ibex and camels.

Next race: August 5, 2016, ms2s.org

16

The Dipsea Race

America's oldest trail race is a mere 7.4 miles long but so steeped in its own mythology it has to be on every runner's bucket list. The route, taking in glorious California greenery, is stepped and single-file narrow in places, and the unique handicapping system means anyone has a chance of winning.

Next race: June 12, 2016, dipsea.org

17

North Pole Marathon

As adventure marathon experiences go it's quite hard to top being flown to the Geographic North Pole, where you'll run your 26.2 on an ice sheet, with only 6-12 feet of frozen water between you and the immense depths of the Arctic Ocean below.

Next race: April 9, 2016, nparathon.com

18

Catalina Island 10K

Hop over to the beautiful island of Santa Catalina, just off the coast of Los Angeles, and you can take in this fabulous 10K jaunt round the streets of Avalon and cool off by the ornate fountain at the finish.

Next race: March 19, 2016, runcatalina.com



GOOD KARMA
Inner peace
through running



CENTRE OF
ATTENTION
Go deep in
the outback

19 Cruce de los Andes

Crossing 100km of the Andes over three days, in teams of two or solo, is a serious challenge; runners have to deal not only with the altitude but also with very unpredictable weather. The constantly changing, but always epic vistas of mountains, volcanoes, forests, lakes and valleys will certainly help on the route from Chile to Argentina.

Next race: February 14-16, 2016, elcrucecolumbia.com

20

Maui Oceanfront Marathon

Maui is the second largest of the Hawaiian islands, but this is a low-key marathon (among the eminently reasonable advice to runners is to 'Hang loose, you're in Maui') limited to just 600 runners, which generates an intimate and casual feel. Nonetheless, with its beautiful setting, this is a very special event – and you may even spot a whale, though almost certainly not on the course.

Next race: January 17, 2016, mauiocceanfrontmarathon.com

21

Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc

The daddy of Alpine trail races takes in three countries (France, Switzerland and Italy) in 168km around Europe's highest peak. You'll need to amass qualifying points just to get on the start line and commit to over 30 brutal hours in often very unpleasant weather conditions to reach the finish, but your reward is one of running's greatest experiences. And some serious bragging rights.

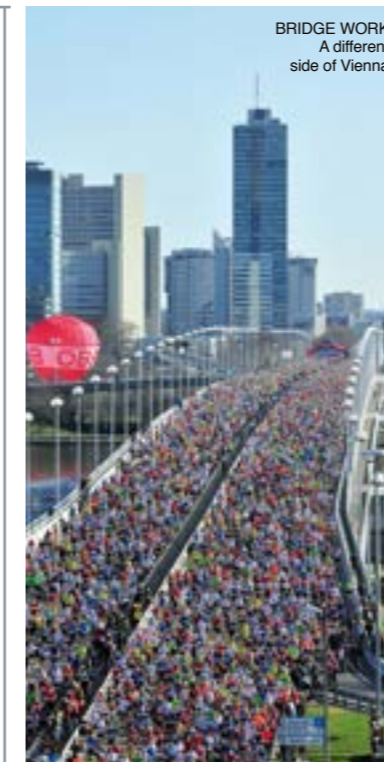
Next race: August 28, ultra-trailmontblanc.com

22

Moscow Marathon

A flat, fast course on closed and, in places, exceptionally wide roads, and a modest field of 7,000 ticks PB-chasers boxes. Runners who are equally interested in the views can tick off several, including the White House, Bolshoi Theatre, former KGB building, Polytechnic Museum, the Kremlin, St Basil's Cathedral and the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. There is also a 10K.

Next Race: September 20, moscowmarathon.orgHent



BRIDGE WORK
A different side of Vienna

23

Vienna City Marathon

▲ A hidden gem among city marathons, the superb course starts among the skyscrapers of the UN complex, crosses the 864m Reichsbrücke bridge over the Danube, then heads through the greenery of Prater Park, past the Opera House and on up Vienna's River Valley to Schönbrunn Castle before returning via some of the city's stellar architecture, including the Town Hall, Burg Theatre and University.

Next race: April 10, 2016, vienna-marathon.com

24

Kilimanjaro Marathon

Now in its 13th year, this race is a slick and very well supported affair. With mighty Kilimanjaro in the background the route takes you from the town of Moshi, Tanzania, through small farms and villages, and past banana and coffee plantations.

Next race: February 28, 2016, kilimanjaramarathon.com

25

French Riviera Marathon

RW eyewitness: Joe Mackie, Deputy Editor 'It's not hard to see what attracted me to this one, and France's second largest 26.2 certainly didn't disappoint. It's a truly beautiful coastal course, starting on the grand Promenade des Anglais in Nice and winding its way along the shapely curves of the Cote d'Azur to finish at the Boulevard de la Croisette in Cannes. This isn't a London or a New York – support is sporadic and there are long sections where the soundtrack is just wind, waves and runner's footfalls. Still, I found that this combined with the constant views out over a twinkling Mediterranean, the masts of yachts bobbing in the marinas and a trot through the timeless beauty of Picasso's former favoured haunt of Antibes (he loved the light here, apparently) made for an aesthetically rich and soulful 'big race' experience. The organisation is impressively slick and clock-watchers may note that the course is both uncrowded and pancake, sea-level flat, bar a modest climb at the Cap d'Antibes and a quad-searing bump lurking cruelly close to the Cannes seafront finish. I was even able to scrape a Champagne-justifying PB to complete what still ranks as one of my all-time favourite race experiences.'

Next race: Nov. 8, marathon06.com

26

The Desert Challenge

A truly awe-inspiring odyssey across the desert of Oman. There are three nonstop options (130K, 200K or 285K) or a six-day stage race (300K), each starting at the Arabian Sea near Muscat and crossing wadis (ravines), mountain trails and the majestic Wahiba Sands desert before returning to the coast.

Next race: January 24-31, 2016, thedesertchallenge.com

28

Antarctic Ice Marathon

Indulge your inner Shackleton with a conquest of the planet's last great wilderness. You'll be running at 80 degrees south, just a few hundred miles from the South Pole in average temperatures of -20C. Don't expect much in the way of crowd support though – not even penguins returning to the coast.

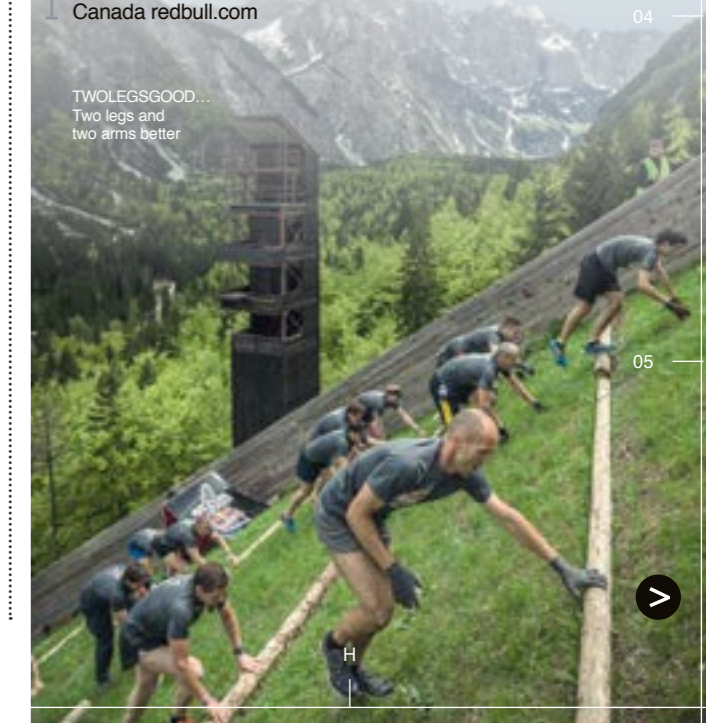
Next race: November 19, 2015, icemarathon.com

27 The Red Bull 400

You may be pleasantly surprised to hear that while the '400' in the name does refer to distance, it's metres, not miles. But the event, to be held in Canada this year, has a serious sting in the tail: it's a sprint up a grass-laid ski-jump slope; the higher you go, the steeper it gets. Great fun and if you can reach the top without resorting to all fours you've got world-class quads.

Next race: July 19, Whistler Olympic Park, Canada redbull.com

TWOLEGSGOOD...
Two legs and two arms better



HIGH AND MIGHTY
Up against it in the Andes

29

Creemore Vertical Challenge

A beautifully brutal trail run in Ontario, Canada. Whether you choose the 25K, 50K or new 75K option it's hot, hilly and painful, but enormous fun. As you near the end you can cross a suspension bridge or tackle the Mad River.

Sounds like an easy choice.

Next race: August 8, ouser.org

30

Melbourne Half Marathon

A gem Down Under, with 12,000 runners starting on Batman Avenue, looping around the city's lake, passing the William Barack Bridge twice and doing a circuit of the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) to finish.

Next race: October 18, melbournemarathon.com.au

31

Inca Trail Marathon

True once-in-a-lifetime stuff – a measured, marshalled and supported 26.2 starting at the Llactapata ruins and following stunning Andean trails through Inca sites to the world's greatest photo-op finish – Macchu Picchu.

Next race: July (TBC) 2016, eriksadventures.com

32

Niagara Falls Marathon

The course spans two countries – it starts in the US city of Buffalo and finishes at the edge of the Falls in Canada. On the way you'll go through the beautiful Niagara Park and twice past the star attraction. Pretty hard to top for 'Wow factor', though we can't begin to imagine how much you'll need the toilet throughout – so much rushing water...

Next race: October 25, 2015, niagarafallsmarathon.com



OCEAN GOING
The end of the road
is a long way away



GO WEST
And keep going
for 100 miles

33

Western States 100

◀ This 100-miler starts in Squaw Valley and takes you through the high trails, mountain passes, canyons and river crossings of California's Sierra Nevada Mountains. Make it to the finish in Auburn in under 30 hours and you get a bronze belt buckle; under 24 and it's silver. It's been going since 1974 and has become one of the great running challenges.

Next race: June 2016 (TBC), wser.org

Photography Two Oceans Race: Chris Hitchcock, Western States 100: Luis Escobar, Volcano Marathon: Mike King/LNP

35

Volcano Marathon

▶ Run 26.2 miles in the Atacama Desert – the driest place on earth and four kilometres above sea level – tackling giant sand dunes and terrain reminiscent of the surface of Mars, while enjoying panoramic views of 10 volcanoes. While there may be snow on the ground at the start of the race, the temperature can reach 30C, so prepare for some fierce heat and hydrate accordingly.

Next race: November 12, volcanomarathon.com



DRY RUN
Racing in what feels
like another world

34

Two Oceans Race

This course, rightly regarded as one of the most picturesque in the world, takes you via Chapman's Peak, Hout Bay and Constantia Nek to showcase Cape Town's beautiful scenery and deliver grandstand views of the two Oceans in question – the Indian and Atlantic. The distance (52km), terrain and gradient profile make this a serious challenge and the atmosphere generated by the 11,000 runners and enthusiastic crowds is something special.

Next race: March 26, 2016, twooceansmarathon.org.za

36-40

The Majors**New York City Marathon**

Starting on Staten Island and finishing in Central Park, this course takes you through all five boroughs and the greatest crowd support on earth. **Next race:** November 1, nyrr.org

Boston Marathon

Steeped in history, a course that blends rural New England with a city finish, and a unique atmosphere that was defiantly underlined after the 2013 bombings. **Next race:** April 18, 2016, baa.org

Berlin Marathon

The scene of 10 world records, but it's more than fast and flat, taking you through Berlin's sights and big crowds, and it starts and finishes near the Brandenburg Gate. **Next race:** Sept 27, bmw-berlin-marathon.com

Tokyo Marathon

The most recently added major immerses you in the exciting 'otherness' of Tokyo's sights and sounds, including the oddly polite applause of the crowds. **Next race:** Feb. 28, 2016, tokyo42195.org

Chicago Marathon

A great course taking in 29 city neighbourhoods, all competing to deliver the best atmosphere. It attracts runners from more than 100 countries. **Next race:** Oct 11, chicagomarathon.com

41

Sao Paulo Marathon

The other 'city that never sleeps' becomes even more frantic at marathon time, when 12,000 runners converge to lap up the adoration of the crowds and take in sights such as the 72m Obelisk monument. **Next race:** May 15, 2016, yescom.com.br

42

Seychelles Eco Friendly Marathon

There are a few reasons to visit the Indian Ocean paradise: palm tree-covered islands, white-sand beaches, spectacular weather and this marathon. The route takes you along the east coast of Seychelles' principal island, Mahé, between forested hillsides and the sapphire ocean. Sound just about OK? **Next race:** February 28, 2016, seychelles-marathon.com

43

Satara Hill Half Marathon

This utterly captivating 13.1-miler will take you from the centre of the Indian city of Satara towards the Kaas Plateau – a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its profusion of wild flowers. The challenging route will also take you past waterfalls and through low cloud. Beautiful, but tough. **Next race:** September 6, satarahillmarathon.com

44

Borneo International Marathon

The route here is spectacular, winding along the coastline of the South China Sea. The other payoff for the brutal 3am start is that you get to see the sun rising behind majestic Mount Kinabalu. **Next race:** May 2016 (TBC), borneomarathon.com

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50

Hood To Coast

RW eyewitness:
Kerry McCarthy,
Commissioning Editor

◀ 'If you only ever do one long-distance relay race, make it this one. It is – and I

choose this word carefully – epic: a 197-mile, 12-person journey from Mount Hood in Oregon to the small town of Seaside on the coast. There's a 36-hour limit and each team member runs three legs of varying length and difficulty (adding up to around 17 miles per person). The wonder of the scenery is almost incidental to the crucial business of (a) making sure the team vans, which travel between checkpoints, are as gaudily decorated as possible, and (b) ensuring you do your share of clocking 'roadkill' (runners you pass). The beach finish will feature tears, smelly team hugs, craft beer and hotdogs, to crown a highlight of your running career.'

Next race:
August 28-29,
hoodtocoastrelay.com

ROAD TRIP
On the way from
Hood to Coast

45

Sea Wheeze Half Marathon

The organisers describe this as a 'yoga.run.party distilled through the wild imaginations of curiosity-drunk rebel scientists.' Translation: in addition to a stunning course – 11km next to the Pacific and the rest showcasing vibrant Vancouver – you get yoga on the beach, a post-race brunch and a Sunset Festival.
Next race: August 20 (TBC), 2016, seawheeze.com

46

Phuket Island Marathon

The strapline for this event is: 'Run Paradise', and the marathon, half and 10.5K options all offer up some gorgeous sights of this Thai island, including rubber and pineapple plantations, waterfalls, sandy coastline and, on the marathon route, Sirinat National Park.
Next race: June 2016 (TBC), phuketmarathon.com

47

Napa Valley to Sonoma Half Marathon

The 7am start means it's too early for a tippie but the route, which takes you through hundreds of acres of Californian vineyards and past the Napa-Sonoma Marshes Wildlife Preserve and Mt Tamalpais, will ensure you're ready for the wine festival awaiting you at the finish.
Next race: July 17, 2016 (TBC), destinationraces.com

48

Jungfrau Marathon

Starting at just over 500m and finishing at 2,100m, the gradient profile of this mountain race can kindly be described as 'punchy'. Still, your inevitable 'personal worst' means more time to savour the beauty of the Swiss Alps. The last kilometre is downhill, which is something to look forward to.
Next race: September 12, 2016, jungfrau-marathon.ch

49

The Big Five Marathon

▼ A 26.2-mile trek through spectacular savannah in one of Africa's 'big five' game reserves offers you the chance to spot elephants, rhino, buffalo, lions and leopards as you pound the dirt. Prepare for total immersion in one of nature's most glorious environments.
Next race: June 25, 2016, big-five-marathon.com

