

# The Most Amazing Race

GO FOR GOLD WITH THESE BUCKET-LIST MARATHONS IN SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST EXOTIC AND ICONIC LOCALES.

by PAUL RUBIO



## Schneider Electric Marathon de Paris, PARIS, FRANCE

**Next race:** April 9, 2017

**Why go:** Welcome to the United Nations of marathons in the world's most gorgeous city. The City of Lights quickly transforms into your marathon muse after a single "on your mark, get set, go!" at the Arc de Triomphe, first heading down the Champs-Élysées toward the Place de la Concorde, past the Louvre, and on to the Place de la Bastille. Soon, you'll be looping around the 12th arrondissement and returning west by way of the Seine, waving at the Notre-Dame, the Musée d'Orsay, and ultimately gawking at the Eiffel Tower right before kilometer 30. In the final stretch, weave through parklands beyond the 16th arrondissement and return to the Arc de Triomphe to cross the finish line. Do it with 57,000

of your closest friends (ranging from several hundred professional runners to thousands of first-timers) representing 145 nationalities.

**Prep/To Know:** Flat terrain makes for a relatively easy run. Uneven pavements can test ankle stability and temperamental early spring weather may translate to a wet and slippery trail.

**Cut-off Time:** 5 hours 40 minutes

**Established:** 1976

**Participants in 2016:** 57,000

**Race record (M):** 2:05:04 (2014) Kenenisa Bekele (Ethiopia)

**Race record (F):** 2:21:04 (2013) Boru Tadese (Ethiopia)

**Info:** [schneiderelectricparismarathon.com](http://schneiderelectricparismarathon.com)

**Price:** €115 (\$123) >



Top, Aurelien Vialatte/ASO; inset, Gautier Demouveau/ASO.





## Great Wall Marathon, HUANGYAGUAN, CHINA

**Next race:** May 20, 2017

**Why go:** Picture this: one of the earth's most striking man-made marvels, the Great Wall of China, transforming into your own jungle gym. That's exactly the case during this annual competition, which begins and ends around a lesser-known section of the Great Wall, southeast of Beijing in Tianjin. You'll run through villages, farmlands, and verdant valleys, but the highlight is surely the many kilometers scaling the stone path of this awe-inspiring fortified monument (and accomplishing 700 meters of steep stairs in each direction ... most of which you will crawl rather than run).

**Prep/To Know:** Unlike your typical road race, expect to summit and descend a total of 5,164 stone steps as part of your 26.2-mile sojourn. Even seasoned marathon participants are encouraged to engage in intense hill and stair training prior to competition due to this atypical terrain.

**Cut-off Time:** 8 hours

**Established:** 1999

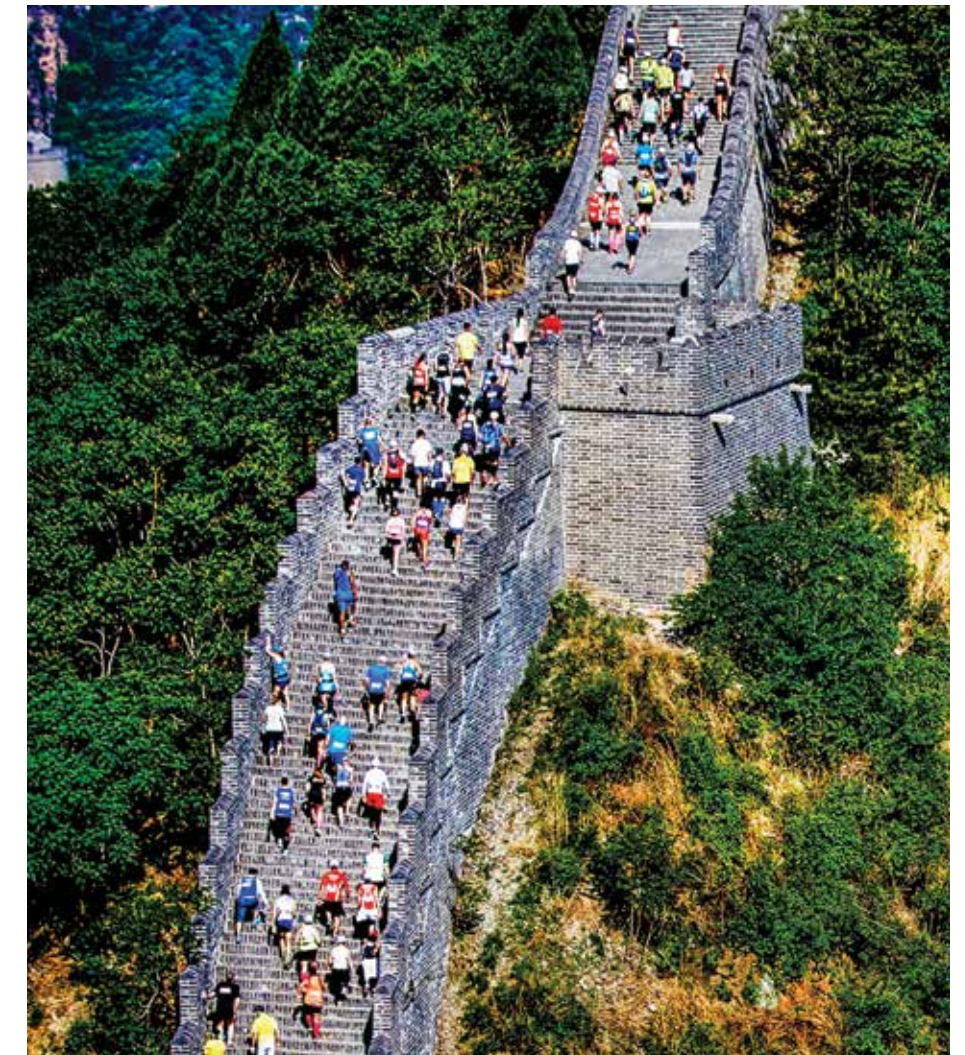
**Participants in 2016:** 2,500 (capped)

**Race record (M):** 3:09:18 (2013) three-way tie between Jorge Maravilla (USA), Dimitris Theodorakakos (Greece), and Olympic competitor Jonathan Wyatt (New Zealand)

**Race record (F):** 3:32:12 (2013) Silvia Serafini (Italy)

**Info:** [great-wall-marathon.com](http://great-wall-marathon.com)

**Price:** For Chinese non-nationals, a complete, inclusive tour package must be purchased, which starts at \$1,350 for a 6-day package.



## Big Sur International Marathon

MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

**Next race:** April 30, 2017

**Why go:** Both marathon devotees and neophytes swear by this highly scenic race, which weaves through redwood forests and multiple state parks along the striking, craggy coastline of Big Sur. The route begins just south of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and finishes in Carmel. A major section of Highway 1 shuts down to create the course's core, with the crossing of the iconic Bixby Creek Bridge as the dramatic halfway point.

**Prep/To Know:** The presence of rolling hills deems the course moderately difficult. However, it's the headwinds and weather that usually present the greatest challenges. Runners should book far in advance as this qualifier for the Boston Marathon is highly coveted and sells out shortly after registration opens (2017 is already sold out).

**Cut-off Time:** 6 hours

**Established:** 1986

**Participants in 2016:** 4,500 (capped)

**Race record (M):** 2:16:39 (1987) Brad Hawthorne (USA)

**Race record (F):** 2:41:34 (1996) Svetlana Vasilyeva (Russia)

**Info:** [bsim.org](http://bsim.org)

**Price:** US citizens \$175; international participants \$200

Top, Sharon Garber; bottom, Robb Hallock; opposite bottom, Truls Tiller.



## Midnight Sun Marathon, TROMSØ, NORWAY

**Next race:** June 17, 2017

**Why go:** When the clock strikes midnight, you'll be in the home stretch of the world's northernmost Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS)-certified marathon. Run through the white night of summer high above the Arctic Circle, dashing by landmarks across the picture-perfect city of Tromsø, Norway. You'll begin crossing the Tromsø Bridge, later passing the Arctic Cathedral, and zigzagging your way through the city center (all while trying not to get distracted by the dimly lit, snow-capped mountains in the distance).

**Prep/To Know:** Routed through paved road and predominantly flat surfaces, this marathon has few elevation challenges. And while running through the night is definitely a major selling point, cooler temperatures and a confused internal time clock can test physical endurance.

**Cut-off Time:** 5 hours 30 minutes

**Established:** 1990

**Participants in 2016:** 1,000 (capped)

**Race record (M):** 2:20:56 (1996) Knut Hegvold (Norway)

**Race record (F):** 2:38:22 (2001) Brynhild Syntnes (Norway)

**Info:** [msm.no](http://msm.no)

**Price:** 1,100 kr (\$125) ▶



## Sparkasse Marthon der 3 Länder, MULTIPLE COUNTRIES, EUROPE

**Next race:** October 8, 2017

**Why go:** Looking to make progress on your country checklist? Why not race through three countries in the course of a single marathon while taking in some spectacular lakeside scenery and weaving through picturesque alpine towns? The course begins at Lindau Island in Bavaria, Germany, a town strewn with stunning medieval architecture (including a 12th-century fairy-tale-esque watchtower) and continues along surrounding Lake Constance. After nearly 6 miles on the trail, cross the border into Austria, and several towns later, arrive in Switzerland at St. Margrethen, whereupon you'll reroute back through Austria, finishing in the city of Bregenz.

**Prep/To Know:** Sixty percent of the course follows a flat, paved road along Lake Constance while the rest is a combination of relatively easy cobblestone streets and firm trails through nature. October drizzle and cooler temperatures can be a factor for some. If you need extra motivation to make it to the very end, note that in true German-Austrian fashion, great beer waits at the finish line.

**Cut-off Time:** 6 hours 15 minutes

**Established:** 2007

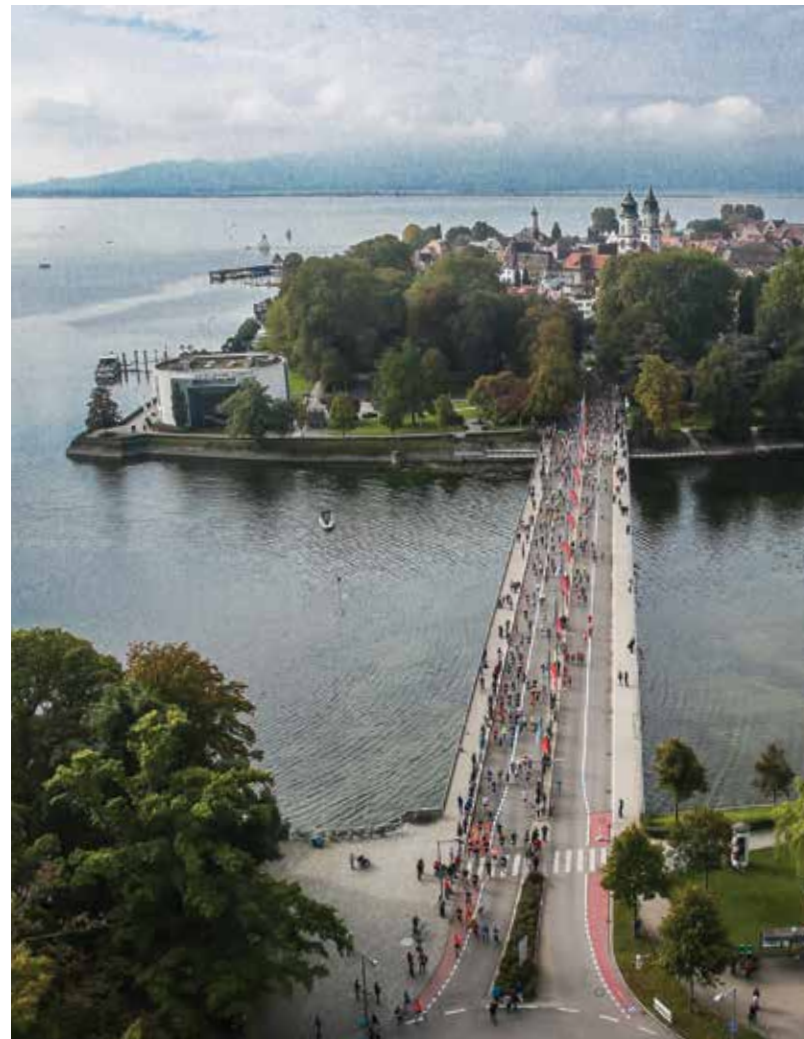
**Participants in 2016:** 8,844

**Race record (M):** 2:11:18 (2011) Marko Kipchumba (Kenya)

**Race record (F):** 2:30:50 (2013) Esther Macharia (Kenya)

**Info:** [sparkasse-3-laender-marathon.at](http://sparkasse-3-laender-marathon.at)

**Price:** €56 (\$60)



## The Australian Outback Marathon ULURU, AUSTRALIA

**Next race:** July 29, 2017

**Why go:** The Australian outback is a quintessential bucket-list destination, and what better way to explore this remote swathe of untouched earth than racing through its red clay grandeur? Inspiration arrives early in the marathon with the impressive Kata Tjuta domed rock formations (the Olgas) coming into view by mile 2. But it's near the last stretch, at mile 23, that the greatest reward is reaped: incredible vistas of the sacred, mammoth Uluru (Ayers Rock).

**Prep/To Know:** The soft red clay, which comprises the marathon's dirt trail through the outback, is a serious calf-killer, so train accordingly. Otherwise, expect a few small dunes but overall flat, relatively easy terrain. Flies can be a nuisance in this part of Australia, but less so during the cooler winter month of July.

**Cut-off Time:** 8 hours

**Established:** 2010

**Participants in 2016:** 191

**Race record (M):** 2:53:45 (2012) Sean Dunleavy (Australia)

**Race record (F):** 03:10:07 (2013) Sharon Ryder (Australia)

**Info:** [australianoutbackmarathon.com](http://australianoutbackmarathon.com)

**Price:** A tour package must be purchased for entry, with prices beginning at 795 AUS (\$600).

Top: Philipp Steurer



## Big Five Marathon, LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA

**Next race:** June 24, 2017

**Why go:** Ditch the predictable Jeep safari and expose yourself to elements of nature, sprinting through prime lion and elephant real estate in South Africa's diverse private game reserve, the Entabeni Safari Conservancy. As the race name suggests, expect to see the big five—lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo—plus other friends of the animal kingdom like giraffes and zebras along a dirt path through the dramatic savannah landscape. Helicopters and armed rangers monitor lurking apex predators, but the paranoia of being chased by a lion is sure to shave quite a few minutes off your race time.

**Prep/To Know:** Don't neglect any leg muscles in your pre-marathon training. Prepare your quads for intense burn on the steep 3 km descent into Yellow Wood Valley (which you later have to ascend), and anticipate powering through calf-intensive sections of deep sand surfaces and later maintain your pace while balancing on pebbled roads. Also of note is that the race takes place in one of South Africa's malaria-free zones.

**Cut-off Time:** 7 hours

**Established:** 2005

**Participants in 2016:** 275 (capped at 300)

**Race record (M):** 3:16:01 (2010) Johannes Oosthuizen (South Africa)

**Race record (F):** 3:45:24 (2016) two-way tie between Anne-

Sophie Eriksen Wendell (Denmark) and Sabine Hvam Pedersen (Denmark). Wendell and Pedersen were also the overall marathon winners in 2016, making history as the first female overall victors.

**Info:** [big-five-marathon.com](http://big-five-marathon.com)

**Price:** A complete, inclusive safari tour package must be purchased, which starts at €1,525 (\$1,635) for a 6-day package. >







## The Boston Marathon, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

**Next race:** April 17, 2017

**Why go:** The world's oldest annual marathon is the Holy Grail of long-distance running competitions. Rain or shine, war or peace, the Boston Marathon has taken place every Patriots' Day (the third Monday in April) since 1897 and attracts the best-of-the-best runners looking to set new records, achieve prestige, and win a cash prize (the fastest male and female each take home \$150,000). For the more amateur competitor, the Boston Marathon is all about (warranted) bragging rights and testing your endurance.

**Prep/To Know:** Unlike marathons commingling competition and leisure, this official sporting event has extremely rigorous qualifications for entry. Age group and gender determine standards. For example, men ages 35–39 must have a previous recorded time under 3:10:00 to qualify. Fastest qualifiers

are granted entry first, and not everybody who qualifies is guaranteed entry. Only the super serious need apply, and registration for the 2017 race is already closed.

**Cut-off Time:** 2 minutes and 9 seconds faster than age-group qualifying time

**Established:** 1897

**Participants in 2016:** 27,491

**Race record (M):** 2:03:02 (2011) Geoffrey Mutai (Kenya). This is also the famed long-distance runner's personal best in his career.

**Race record (F):** 2:18:57 (2014) Rita Jeptoo (Kenya). However, this record was annulled in October 2016, following proceedings regarding a doping violation by Jeptoo. The new record became 2:19:59 (2014) by Buzunesh Deba (Ethiopia).

**Info:** [baa.org](http://baa.org)

**Price:** US citizens \$180; international participants \$240



## Athens Marathon, The Authentic, ATHENS, GREECE

**Next race:** November 12, 2017

**Why go:** Looking to ancient Greece in creating the first modern Olympic Games circa 1896, the 26.2-mile distance from Marathon to Athens—the mythic path taken by Greek messenger Pheidippides to relay news of the Greek military victory against the Persian invasion at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.—was molded into an official game: the “Marathon” race. Nowadays, it's possible to return to the birthplace of marathons and follow this folkloric-cum-historic journey.

**Prep/To Know:** The route from Marathon to Athens spans tough mountainous terrain, with the uphill sections of the course being the most challenging, specifically multiple steep ascents between kilometers 20 and 31 (the most difficult being between kilometers 30 and 31). Expect major spaghetti legs during the downhill trek to the finish, but get that final push once the white marble Panathenaic Stadium, site of the first modern Olympic Games, comes into view. The actual finish line, or shall we say the finish “arch,” lies inside the stadium.

**Cut-off Time:** 8 hours

**Established:** 1982

**Participants in 2016:** 18,000 (capped)

**Race record (M):** 2:10:37 (2014) Felix Kandie (Kenya)

**Race record (F):** 2:26:20 (2010) Rasa Drazdauskaitė (Lithuania)

**Info:** [athensauthenticmarathon.gr](http://athensauthenticmarathon.gr)

**Price:** For non-EU citizens €100 (\$107) ♦



## Ein Gedi Experience/Dead Sea Half Marathon

EIN GEDI, ISRAEL

**Next race:** January 27, 2018

**Why go:** Though it's not a full marathon, this race lures runners thanks to its two most powerful attributes: a wow-factor location and a tenet of camaraderie in one of the world's most hotly contested areas. Near the border of the West Bank and with participants from all over the world, journey through Israel's dramatic desert landscape surrounding the cobalt blue Dead Sea and pass some of the lowest recorded points on the earth.

**Prep/To Know:** On this very flat course, the greatest obstacle is risk of heatstroke from high temperatures (in 2010, three runners were hospitalized after suffering heatstroke). After the race, competitors receive complimentary entry to Ein Gedi Spa near the start/finish line so they can soak weary legs in the healing sulfur pools and rejuvenate in the mineral mud of the Dead Sea.

**Cut-off Time:** 2 hours 45 minutes

**Established:** 1981

**Participants in 2016:** 1,056

**Race record (M):** 1:09:23 (2014) Gabre Nile (Ethiopia)

**Race record (F):** 1:21:32 (2014) Lonah Chemtai Korlima (Kenya)

**Info:** [eingedi-run.co.il](http://eingedi-run.co.il)

**Price:** 160 ILS (\$40)

Top, Fay Foto/Boston. Opposite: Top, Anastasios71/Shutterstock; bottom, Stratos Giannikos/Shutterstock