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Sports Destinations: **WORLD** **MARATHON GUIDE**

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Destination Marathons: U.S. and Canada



The start of the world's oldest annual marathon -- the Boston Marathon, which dates back to 1897 -- in Hopkinton, Mass. (AP Photo/Robert E. Klein)

By **Linda Vessa**
Special to **ESPN Travel**

[MarathonGuide.com](#), an excellent source for race information and runner reviews, lists 384 domestic marathons. All 50 states host at least one.

Here is but a sampling, more than 50 from sea to shining sea, plus Alaska, Hawaii and Canada. Peruse this and go to [MarathonGuide.com](#) for more info -- including their incredibly helpful [race calendars](#) -- to help find the right combo of race and destination for you.

THE CLASSICS
ING New York City Marathon (November)
New York, NY
<http://www.ingnycmarathon.org/>

The course starts in Staten Island, traverses all five boroughs, crosses five

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bridges and finishes with a flourish at Central Park's Tavern on the Green. An entire city turning out to cheer you provides a good distraction from a course that can be deceptively difficult in places. The roar of the crowd waiting ten deep to greet runners as they exit the 59th Street Bridge from Queens and enter Manhattan for the first time ranks right up there with the all-time mass-marathon rushes. Essentially the Super Bowl of marathons, the large international field gives the pre- and post-race festivities a World Cup flavor.

Boston Marathon (April)

Boston, MA

<http://www.bostonmarathon.org>

The Boston Marathon isn't about the scenery, the whistles and bells, the goodie bag or the post-race snacks. Boston is all about bragging rights. Coming up on 111 years, it's the oldest annual marathon and one of the most prestigious races worldwide. While other marathons have lotteries, getting a bib number for Boston requires a tough qualifying time -- but knowing you're in the company of the world's elite runners has propelled many tired legs up Heartbreak Hill.

LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon (October)

Chicago, IL

<http://www.chicagomarathon.com>

This race is renowned for its flat, fast route, phenomenal organization and fabulous spectator support. It's the mega-marathon experience at its best and an ideal choice for a first timer who doesn't mind a lot of company; entry is capped at an intimate 40,000 and crowds along the course typically number over a million. Not up for the race? Consider joining the 26.2 Curb Crew -- with spectators such an integral part of the event, organizers created a club specifically devoted to supporting their efforts.

Big Sur International Marathon (April)

Carmel, CA

<http://www.bsim.org>

No cheering crowds ten deep or curbside clubs to spur them on, runners here on the edge of the continent are inspired by the breathtaking vistas of the Pacific Ocean, the cries of sea lions and the sight of whales breaching in the waves below. They can also expect demanding hills, winding roads through the redwoods, wind, fog, scorching sun and a tuxedo-clad pianist on Bixby Bridge.

Marine Corps Marathon (October)

Washington, DC

<http://www.marinemarathon.com/>

Nicknamed "The People's Marathon," calling this an American classic is almost redundant. No matter your politics, your heart will swell with patriotism as you pass all the notable landmarks of the nation's capital: the White House, Capitol Building, Lincoln Memorial, Smithsonian, Arlington Cemetery and the Pentagon. As you would expect, the race is organized with Marine precision... and toughness -- the course finishes on an uphill!

METROPOLITAN

Adult (18+)

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Los Angeles Marathon (March)

Los Angeles, CA

<http://www.lamarathon.com/>

19,985 pairs of feet crossed the finish line in Los Angeles last year, ranking the Tinseltown race fourth in the U.S and seventh-largest in the world. The event has new organizers -- well-regarded Devine Sports -- and they heard the complaints that strip malls and burger joints make poor running companions. Thus, the race will celebrate its 22nd running with an entirely new course. The first point-to-point route in its history, the 2007 race will begin at Hollywood's Universal Studios. From there it's mostly downhill -- but only in terms of the terrain! Sights for the next 26.2 miles include the Hollywood Bowl, Sunset Boulevard, the Coliseum, Staples Center, Koreatown, Exposition Park and a grand finale through the downtown high-rise district. With a million or more cheering Los Angelinos lining the streets, you'll experience a lot more than fifteen minutes of fame.

The San Francisco Marathon (July)

San Francisco, CA

<http://www.runsfm.com>

The Ferry Building marks both the start and finish, while the journey in between will take you past the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges, AT&T Park, the Embarcadero, Fisherman's Wharf, and the Marina, and through the Presidio, Golden Gate Park, Haight-Ashbury and the Mission District. With the exception (thankfully!) of famously curvy Lombard Street, the route manages to incorporate all of the city's most notable landmarks and neighborhoods. As might be expected, it's a tough, hilly course. The city's mild climate makes it a rare big-time summer race.

Nike Women's Marathon (October)

San Francisco, CA

<http://www.nikemarathon.com>

Another San Francisco marathon option is primarily for women, and benefits the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Attempts to appeal to the ladies include a chocolate mile, a pedi-care station, and a classy San Francisco finish: tuxedo-clad gents handing out the medals. Men have slowly but surely been joining the ranks. The 2005 finishers ratio: 409 males/4279 females. Do the math, guys -- then multiply by 26.2 miles.

Cellcom Green Bay Marathon (May)

Green Bay, WI

<http://www.cellcomgreenbaymarathon.com/>

Brats, beer and Lambeau Field -- in May! The course is flat and fast. A combination of commercial and residential scenery, it also includes a nice interlude along the Fox River Trail. The best is saved for last though, as the final mile takes runners through the tunnel and across the (then-unfrozen) tundra of the Packers home field. But lest you dally too long savoring the spot where Lombardi once tread, there's the lure of cold beer and brats at the finish line.

Note: if your taste in classic football runs more toward college, consider the Finish on the Fifty Marathon in South Bend (June, [Web site](#)), which starts at the College Football Hall of Fame and ends on the 50-yard-line at Notre Dame Stadium.

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Detroit Free Press/Flagstar Bank Marathon (October)

Detroit, MI/Windsor, ON

<http://www.detroitfreepressmarathon.com>

Travel 500 miles to the east and you can end your marathon run on the same field where Super Bowl XL was played. Finishers descending onto Ford Field see their images displayed on the Jumbotron and their names announced over the stadium's loudspeakers. The only domestic marathon to cross international borders twice, runners traverse the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor, Canada then travel an underwater mile through the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel to return to the states. They'll find an equally enthusiastic spectator turnout in both countries. And as it turns out -- this year's race date, October 29, just happens to coincide (you can dream, Tigers fans!) with a potential World Series Game 7.

ING Miami Marathon (January)

Miami and Miami Beach, FL

<http://www.ingmiamimarathon.com/>

1,400 miles to the southeast takes you to the host city of Super Bowl XLI, where the race starts outside the home of the NBA-champion Miami Heat - - American Airlines Arena -- at 6 a.m. to beat the heat. Runners leave the mainland, cross the MacArthur Causeway and set their pace while taking in vistas of sailboats and cruise ships on Biscayne Bay. South Beach means Art Deco, the Versace mansion, then you're back on the continent by mile 11, and go through two of the city's signature neighborhoods -- Coral Gables and Coconut Grove. South Florida is obviously a great winter getaway, and with a big-time sponsor stepping in, look for Miami to make a bigger splash on the marathon map.

Medtronic Twin Cities Marathon (October)

Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN

<http://www.TwinCitiesMarathon.org>

The race that bills itself "The Most Beautiful Urban Marathon in America " is celebrating its silver anniversary this October. A five-star race, Twin Cities consistently appears on many marathon top ten lists. Hills are scarce but lots of vibrant fall colors line a route that runs along lakes and the Mississippi River. Participants find the Cathedral of St. Paul provides that last bit of inspiration to propel them across the finish line to the steps of the state capital.

Grandma's Marathon (June)

Duluth, MN

<http://www.grandmasmarathon.com>

Superbly organized, with super-friendly volunteers and spectators, this race consistently garners rave reviews from beginning to end. Besides ice cream, finishers find another treat waiting: free massages (cue Homer Simpson-style drooling)! In its 31st year, Grandma's has taken on the flavor of a festival, as all of Duluth is geared up for a great time all weekend. Only negative? Expect to pay big-city hotel prices.

Atlanta Marathon (November)

Atlanta, GA

<http://www.atlantatrackclub.org/at03000.htm>

Want to gorge without guilt on Thanksgiving Day? How about working up an appetite for your turkey dinner by running the Atlanta Marathon? The loop route begins downtown near Turner Field. The run is entirely on city streets, with one lane completely dedicated to the race. There are some flat stretches, but also seven significant hills; visions of second helpings of pumpkin-and-pecan pie should help provide the motivation to get past them as quickly as possible. Icing on the cake: the course is the same as the 1996 marathon and finishes under the Olympic rings.

Honolulu Marathon (December)

Honolulu, HI

<http://www.honolulumarathon.org/>

If the Marine Corps Marathon is "The People's Marathon," then Honolulu may well be the "Lost in Translation" race! Because of Japanese sponsorship and high number of Japanese participants -- about two-thirds of the 24,000 finishers (third-largest in the U.S.) -- the majority of signs at the expo were in Japanese and mileage markers were mostly in kilometers. Even the aid stations are stocked with a Japanese energy gel and a sports drink not available stateside.

Adding to the bizarre feel of the event is the 5 a.m. start (i.e., two hours of running in darkness), and the fact that runners sometimes have to navigate around other race "participants" who have stopped dead in their tracks to take pictures. Maybe most lost in translation: 2005 finishers received a lightweight metal keychain instead of the heavy medal. With entry fees ranging from \$95-\$125, that's not a great rate of exchange. A post-race chilled cocktail at the Royal Hawaiian might hit the spot after your hot and humid run, but you'll be hungry, too. Another common complaint was that, unless you were part of a Japanese tour group, the post-race snack provided last year was an apple and two oatmeal cookies.

Portland Marathon (October)

Portland, OR

<http://www.portlandmarathon.org/>

Running has a long legacy in the Pacific Northwest and it continues to grow in popularity. Race entries for 2005 increased 23 percent over 2004. 7000-plus finishers placed Rose City 11th among all marathons nationwide. The race organization is top-notch, spectators are enthusiastic, and the route is lined with great entertainment: rock bands, jazz bands, jug bands, Dixieland bands, and even a mandolin orchestra. Unfortunately the route itself isn't so great, runners' complaints include too many miles of industrial-park scenery.

Chevron Houston Marathon (January)

Houston, TX

<http://www.chevronhoustonmarathon.com>

Celebrating its 35th anniversary in 2007, Houston has it down. Southern hospitality abounds from registration to post-race, goodie bags are well-stocked (as are support stations), and Texas-sizes crowds of enthusiastic spectators line the route. The good news is that the course is pancake-flat and very fast, but be advised, it's almost entirely all concrete.

AT&T Austin Marathon (February)

Austin, TX

<http://www.ataustinmarathon.com/>

Austin is the home of the terrific South by Southwest music and film festival, the city slogan is the "Live Music Capital of the World," and it offers eclectic culture and cuisine. It's a great place to visit but you might not want to run a marathon there. The course, especially the first half, is nondescript and doesn't do justice to the city's best scenery. The Lone Star State's capital deserves better representation. Expect to see changes for 2007 with new sponsorship.

Philadelphia Marathon (November)

Philadelphia, PA

<http://www.philadelphiamarathon.com/>

This marathon route offers runners an opportunity to tour the City of Brotherly Love's best sights. The race starts and finishes at the Philadelphia Museum of Art -- right in front of where Rocky made his mad dash up the steps. The route winds through history, taking runners past Independence Hall, the Betsy Ross House and the Liberty Bell. The highest point of elevation is only 100 feet -- this is a fast, flat and forgiving course. A good first marathon, Boston qualifier... or both. If you're looking for some great local tips on a post-race dining check out Hollyeats.com. Food critic Holly Moore is a Philly native, the city "his chomping grounds." He offers a marathon's worth of culinary suggestions and utilizes the exclusive "Grease Stain Rating System" to critique them.

Virginia Mason Team Medicine Marathon: Seafair (July)

Bellevue, WA

<http://www.seafairmarathon.com>

A new challenger in the Seattle area, the Seafair Marathon (started in 2005) offers the promise of much better weather than is normally seen at the bigger Seattle Marathon (dating to 1970), which is held the Sunday after Thanksgiving. With summer marathons few and far between, Seafair fills a void, and you can't beat the blue skies (knock on wood) in early July. It's a challenging course -- continuous rolling hills become significant climbs in a few places. Outstanding organization already -- with a thumbs up for the cool t-shirt and medal -- and this event is still taking baby steps. This race should only get better with age.

Quebec City Marathon/Les Marathon de Deux Rives (August)

Quebec City, Canada

<http://www.marathonquebec.com>

If the summer marathon season begins in Bellevue in early July, it ends in late August across the continent in Quebec. Considered Canada's premier race, Les Marathon de Deux Rives is also a great vacation destination. Quebec City, one of North America's oldest settlements, offers so many cool sights that runners need to be careful not to wear out their legs sightseeing prior to race day. Quebec is also one of the few places in North America where the markers are in kilometers -- 42 descending down to 1. The course is waterside, which often translates to windy. Be prepared for a challenging but rewarding run.

PARTY TIME

Disney World Marathon (January)

Orlando, FL

http://disneyworldsports.disney.go.com/dwws/en_US/events/marathon/

listing?name=Marathon2005EventListingPage

There may be no marathon on the planet as distinctive as Disney World's. Costumed runners and spectators are a fun part of many marathon scenes, but the Magic Kingdom is the domain of Mickey and Minnie, Donald Duck, Goofy, and here the Disney gang reigns supreme. As you run through all four theme parks you'll encounter seven-foot-tall chipmunks and talking mileage markers. And the Mickey medal is one of the most distinctive anywhere in the marathon universe.

San Diego Rock 'N' Roll Marathon (June)

San Diego, CA

<http://www.rnrmarathon.com>

It's 6:30 a.m. and over 17,000 people are lined up at the edge of San Diego's Balboa Park, ready to Rock 'N' Roll for 26.2 miles. Along the way, there are 26 stages featuring 40-plus live bands to keep the beat going. The original music marathon, the event's exceptional organization draws lots of applause, but thumbs down on the less-than-scenic second half of the course. There are long highway stretches where runners have to contend with a steep embankment. But a very cool finisher's touch: a "heavy medal" multicolored running guitarist.

Country Music Marathon (April)

Nashville, TN

<http://www.cmymarathon.com>

If your taste runs to the twang of country rather than the riffs of rock and roll then Nashville's Country Music Marathon might strike just the right chord. The route takes in Music Row, and residential neighborhoods where the residents stage their own competitions trying to entertain race participants. There's a nice rail-to-trail stretch along the Cumberland River, but prepare for a some blues too -- the overall course is really hilly. In need of some post-race libation to help to ease the pain? Well, the Jack Daniels distillery is just down the road in Lynchville.

Cincinnati Flying Pig (May)

Cincinnati, OH

<http://www.flyingpigmarathon.com/>

If you're thinking, yeah sure, I'll run a marathon when pigs fly, then this is the marathon for you. An ideal first marathon, many marathoners often return because, simply put, the race is a blast. Organization is superb, the course relatively easy, but with enough hills to keep it interesting. All of Cincinnati goes hogwild for the event. Pig garb and gear is in evidence everywhere. And the Winged Swine finishers medal will make you squeal with delight.

New Las Vegas (January)

Las Vegas, NV

<http://www.lvmarathon.com/>

Predawn fireworks at the Mandalay Bay starting line, then you're off and running down the famed Las Vegas Strip. Taking your mind off your feet: the fountains at Bellagio, the volcano at the Mirage, the Fremont Street Experience, too many Elvis impersonators to count, gospel singers, jugglers, clowns, cheerleaders and showgirls. And just in case you run into

Ms. or Mr. Right along the route, you can tie the knot at the world's only run-through wedding chapel

Mardi Gras Marathon (February)

New Orleans, LA

<http://www.mardigrasmarathon.com/>

The Big Easy race route does indeed live up to its nickname: except for one overpass, the entire course is below sea level. Fast and flat runners are treated to a tour of the French Quarter, Esplanade Ridge, Bayou St. John, the Garden District and Audubon Park.

But the real triumph here -- after an effort of marathon proportions -- is that the 2007 race will once again start and finish inside the Superdome.

SCENIC

Mount Desert Island Marathon (October)

Bar Harbor, ME

<http://www.mdimarathon.org>

Set in Acadia National Park, no desert in sight. Just the opposite -- spectacular ocean views, lakes lined by green woods, granite mountaintops, and picturesque fishing villages. One of the most scenic, awe-inspiring and challenging courses in North America. The route traverses 26 mountains -- eight over 1000 feet in elevation. Timed to coincide with the peak of fall colors, plan ahead, participation is limited to 1,000.

Dunkin Donuts Cape Cod Marathon (October)

Falmouth, MA

<http://www.capecodmarathon.com/>

The scenery along the loop route is like a postcard from Cape Cod. Village greens, quaint harbors, sweeping views of Nantucket Sound, the Nobska Lighthouse, Woods Hole, white beaches and the cranberry bogs. When that picture postcard comes to life, runners will discover it also depicts a tough course. Hills are prevalent, especially in the second half, and late October could even mean running in snow flurries.

Kings Market San Juan Island Marathon (June)

Friday Harbor, WA

<http://www.sanjuanislandmarathon.com/>

The San Juan Islands are famous for their spectacular beauty, and the course is a blend of the coastline and countryside scenery. Expect hills and valleys. Spectators are scarce, but lots of supportive volunteers and small-town warmth surrounds the event. The course is mainly a loop on San Juan Island -- keep an eye out for orcas when you pass by Lime Kiln State Park along the water! With a cornucopia of other activities available -- kayaking and biking among the most popular -- plus great restaurants and galleries, this marathon setting doubles as an outstanding vacation destination.

Lake Tahoe Marathon (September)

Lake Tahoe, CA

<http://www.laketahoemarathon.com>

Derived from the mispronunciation of a Washoe Indian word, Tahoe means "Big Water" or "Big Blue." Its depth of 1,645 feet places it second only to Crater Lake as the deepest lake in the U.S., the 10th deepest in the world. The crystalline waters may rank first on earth in terms of purity, a white dinner plate as far as 120 feet below the surface can still be seen clearly. Runners, however, may want to turn their eyes upwards, as the course provides magnificent views of the lake's shoreline, and the granite mountain peaks that surround it. An extremely challenging course in thin air, participants give kudos to the strong race support provided in such a demanding environment.

Crater Lake Rim Runs and Marathon (August)

Klamath Falls, OR

<http://www.craterlakerimruns.com/>

Start with a route that rims a volcano, set a five-mile-wide lake inside, add the fact that it's a seemingly limitless 2000 feet deep, as blue as the sky on a clear Klamath Falls day, and you have one beautiful marathon destination. A feast for the eyes but not for the faint of heart -- or weak in the knees. The high altitude and constant steep climbs make this a difficult and often humbling race, but finishers report a sense of accomplishment almost as overwhelming as the stunning scenery.

Charlottesville Marathon (April)

Charlottesville, VA

<http://www.charlottesvillemarathon.com>

Set in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, this might be the sweetest inland marathon scenery east of the Mississippi. The idyllic route winds through Albemarle County's vineyards, lush green meadows and horse farms. Not so idyllic: the terrain. Continuous hills present a nasty challenge. If they become too much, howling is entirely appropriate -- the race sponsor, Endurance Sports, has dubbed this a "Bad to the Bone" event and their slogan urges runners to "Unleash the wolf within."

Kaiser Permanente Napa Valley Marathon (March)

Napa, CA

<http://www.napavalleymarathon.org>

Close to five million visitors flock to Napa annually, 1,438 of them finished the 2006 Napa Valley Marathon. Set in California's world-famous wine country, the course starts in Calistoga then travels south along the Silverado Trail. Runners are treated to sweeping views of the valley's vineyards (over two hundred wineries are tucked into the landscape). Not an easy race, the route's rolling hills are almost as plentiful as tasting rooms. March weather is usually mild, but this year's participants faced the additional challenge of strong headwinds and driving rain. Organizers say that was only the third such day in the event's 28-year history. Fortunately, race participants had many options available to help drown their sorrows, and the winners are awarded their weight in wine.

Pikes Peak Marathon (August)

Manitou Springs, CO

<http://www.pikespeakmarathon.org/>

It's arguably the country's most scenic marathon -- "America the Beautiful" was written in reaction to the view from the summit of Pikes Peak, after

all. It's also among the most brutal marathons, often listed among the world's toughest races. So grueling, the homepage warns: "this is a relentless uphill grind." The race begins at an elevation of 6,295 feet in Manitou Springs, ascends to the top of Pikes Peak -- 14,110 feet! -- and then turns back to 6,345 feet. To be certain that support will be adequate, the field is limited to 800 and there are entry requirements as well. Runners not meeting cut-off times during the race are sent back down the mountain. This marathon has its own mystique -- many runners say the experience changed their lives. A way to partake in that feeling, without the extreme physical exertion, is to become one of the volunteers, who also say the experience affects them profoundly.

St. George Marathon (October)

St. George, UT

<http://www.StGeorgeMarathon.com>

Some marathons begin with fireworks, St. George starts with bonfires at sunrise, high in the Pine Valley mountains. The route then descends almost 2,600 feet through spectacular red-and-white Navajo sandstone formations, and continues its ever-downward trip through the sand dunes and trails of Snow Canyon State Park. Since its inaugural running in 1970, word of the course's beauty, and potential for posting a personal best -- it's a favorite for those looking for a qualifying time for Boston -- has spread. The race has grown so popular that participants are now limited to 6,200 and chosen by lottery.

Sedona Marathon (February)

Sedona, AZ

<http://www.sedonamarathon.com/>

No gain without pain? Maybe not here. Sedona's stunning red-rock formations are famous the world over for their unique beauty as well as the belief that their energy field has special healing powers. Whether you're a true believer or not, the town's many art galleries and craft boutiques, excellent restaurants and spas make this destination a perfect harmonic convergence of vacation and athletic accomplishment.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Wineglass Marathon (October)

Bath, NY

<http://www.wineglassmarathon.com/>

You'd think it'd be difficult to resist a race with the name "Wineglass," but this year marks the race's silver anniversary, and it still remains one of the best kept marathon secrets. Timed to coincide with the peak of fall colors, this is a charming, Norman Rockwellesque backroads route along the gentle rolling hills of New York State's southern tier. The race begins in Bath and ends in Corning, a city well known for its glassworks. Accordingly, instead of medals, finishers are awarded a unique glass sun-catcher medallion. They also receive a bottle of New York State Brut champagne and a commemorative wineglass to toast their accomplishment.

Bizz Johnson Trail Marathon (October)

Susanville, CA

<http://www.bizzjohnson.com>

The race begins in Westwood, hometown of Paul Bunyan and his blue ox

Babe. A super fast trails-to-rails run, Bizz Johnson follows the route of an old Southern Pacific Railroad line. The trail is firmly packed dirt and gravel, a surface that's easy on the knees, and the Susan River scenery treats the eye to some of the prettiest landscape in northeastern California. Despite the remoteness of the route, there are well-maintained support stations every two miles. Local lodging is easy, or head for the bright lights of Reno, just 85 miles down the road.

Newport Marathon (June)

Newport, OR

<http://www.newportmarathon.org/>

Limiting entries to 750 ensures a laid-back ambience, and many of the local residents enjoy taking a personal role in making runners feel welcome. The course is user-friendly too -- set mostly along the scenic Yaquino Bay in this town on the Oregon Coast. Oyster shooters provide the energy boost at miles 11 and 19, while microbrewed beer and clam chowder are served at the finish line.

Steamboat Marathon (June)

Steamboat Springs, CO

http://www.steamboatcchamber.com/eventdetail.asp?eventName=marathon_06

A challenging run at altitude, the start is at 8,128 feet, and the scenery alone will take your breath away. Be sure to pack a variety of running gear -- weather can vary from snow to blazing heat. Marathon entry is limited to 500 to guarantee great runner support. Steamboat Springs has a small-town feeling but this world-class ski village knows how to make visitors feel comfortable. For instance: post-race, consider soaking those sore muscles in one of the two public hot springs. Their bubbling sound reminded early settlers of a steamboat and inspired the town's name.

Steamtown Marathon (October)

Scranton, PA

<http://www.steamtownmarathon.com>

Travel from the dizzying heights of the Colorado Rockies to northeastern Pennsylvania's Lackawanna River Valley and you'll find the race that can claim title to being among the country's swiftest courses. If you strategize this town-and-country route correctly, you not only won't run out of steam, you're almost certain to set a personal best -- last year's median finishing time, 3:55:28, was the fastest of any U.S. marathon with at least 750 finishers. Support for this race begins long before you leave home -- race organizers maintain a super-helpful web site, complete with training tips from elite runners. A Civil War cannon blast and ringing church bells make the actual start a magical moment.

Heart of America Marathon (September)

Columbia, MO

<http://ctc.coin.org/hoa/>

If Steamboat is among the fastest marathon courses, Heart of America claims to be among the nation's most difficult, a no-frills, bragging-rights, notch-in-the-belt race. In its 47th year, this race is traditionally held on Labor Day weekend. If you run it, be ready to work -- there's a flat stretch along the Missouri River, but the route mostly consists of unrelenting hills; plus, temperatures can get hot and 90-to-100 percent humidity is not

uncommon. At least the \$25.00 entry fee is easy on the wallet.

United States Air Force (USAF) Marathon (September)

Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, OH

<http://www.usafmarathon.com>

Ten years running, the USAF Marathon is setting its own traditions. You get fireworks and a flyover at the starting line, and four-star generals at the finish line, waiting to shake hands and hang a medal around your neck. And that medal is fast becoming a collector's item -- it's a major piece of hardware, featuring a different aircraft each year. The A-10 Thunderbolt Classic II is highlighted for 2006, the U-2 was portrayed in detailed relief in '05. The course is entirely on the Air Force base and is challenging with both steep and rolling hills. Aid stations are every mile, spectators are scarce but pace runners provide company and support. Goodie bags and post-race grub consistently receive five stars.

Deadwood-Mickelson Trail Marathon (June)

Deadwood, SD

<http://www.DeadwoodMickelsonTrailMarathon.com/>

Scenic wilderness on a well-maintained trail, the route takes you through South Dakota's Black Hills, covering the same ground where *Dances with Wolves* was filmed. The race ends in Deadwood, a designated National Historic Landmark. Once upon a time there was gold in them thar hills, and Wyatt Earp, Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane all hung out here. Today, your reward for finishing the Deadwood marathon is a unique medal crafted from Black Hills alabaster.

Run With the Horses Marathon (August)

Green River, WY

http://www.grchamber.com/run_with_the_horses_marathon.htm

If you prefer running with wild horses to dancing with wolves, then this is the marathon for you. The route is on well-maintained dirt roads that cross the Pilot Butte Wild Horse Loop on the top of White Mountain. Locals say the sight of wild horses along the roadsides is more common than not. The course is challenging, starting at 6,800 feet, eventually climbing to 7,000, and doesn't descend again until close to the finish line. The event is a part of a weekend festival with a full slate of activities. The pre-race Cajun shrimp boil and pasta feed is open to the public and there's a River of Fire parade of boats at dark. And horses aren't the only four-legged creatures featured -- there's also a competition for dogs, who are timed on their swiftness retrieving sticks out of the river.

Lewis and Clark Marathon (September)

St. Charles, MO

<http://www.fleetfeetstl.com/lewisandclark.htm>

Lewis and Clark Marathon (September)

Bozeman, MT

<http://www.lewisandclarkmarathon.com>

Siouxland Lewis and Clark Marathon (October)

Sioux City, IA

<http://www.siouxlandmarathon.com/>

Three different marathons following in the footsteps of the Discovery

Expedition. The St. Charles race begins at the Lewis and Clark campsite, travels along the Missouri River valley, and takes in the scenery of Katy Trail National Park.

The Montana marathon is a more rugged race, and at 5000 feet, altitude is a factor. The course surface is a combination of trails, gravel and paved roads. The Bridger Mountains in the distance provide a spectacular setting. Close to the halfway mark, runners will encounter the 1806 expedition campsite.

With well-stocked aid stations every mile, Siouland Lewis and Clark marathoners have it easier than the expedition's participants, although, if you think Iowa is flat, there's a surprise in store for you -- a big surprise. The course has a total ascent of 1,736 feet, and descends 1,731 -- which translates to hilly!

Mayor's Midnight Sun Marathon (June)

Anchorage, AK

<http://www.mayorsmarathon.com>

What better place to experience the summer solstice than Alaska, and it's doubtful any other marathon support staff instructs runners on how to deal with moose (or bears!) along the route. The race surface varies from trail to bike path, runners are treated to a backdrop of the Chugach Mountain Range to the east and Cook Inlet to the west. Now in its 32nd running, it's a first_class experience. The name is a misnomer, though: start time is at 8 a.m.

Mayo Midnight Marathon (June)

Keno, Yukon Territory


<http://www.kenocity.info/marathon.htm>

The start time in Keno is indeed just before the stroke of midnight, 11:45 p.m. Running by the light of the midnight sun is a unique and soul-stirring experience. A non-profit undertaking, hosted by the "Fly-By-Night Race Club," Mayo Midnight has plenty of volunteers along the route, and a home-cooked awards breakfast replaces the traditional pasta dinner.

Linda Vessa has run -- and completed -- the New York City and San Francisco Marathons. She is a tour guide at beautiful AT&T Park in San Francisco, and lives in Santa Cruz.

[Paginated view](#)

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