

THE AMSTERDAM FESTIVAL OF RUNNING

Autumn in Amsterdam

Fiona Bugler travelled to the Amsterdam marathon for a fantastic festival of running on a perfect Autumn day...



“I left the UK, with my husband Mike, on a bright sunny Saturday morning for a mini-break - with a half marathon thrown in. After an uncomplicated, smooth journey (just 50 minutes on the plane), we arrived at Central Station in Amsterdam to perfect marathon weather: a crisp, Autumnal day, sunny but fresh and cool. “We’d been given the heads-up, the Dutch capital isn’t into cars and taxis, so using our marathon discount we bought our tram ticket to cover 48-hours of getting around the city.

Fit city
“The obesity epidemic is notably absent from this healthy city where

being active day to day is part of the culture. The hotel receptionist gave us detailed directions of how to get from one tram stop to another with long, but very enjoyable walks between, marked out on our tourist map.

“And of course there are the bikes: cycling’s a way of life. Lovely old-fashioned bicycles, with big wide handlebars are chained to lamp posts in bulk or they sweep along the cycle paths that seem to intertwine with the pavements and tram tracks, seamlessly. Some bikes are customized, all appear to be adapted for babies or girlfriends to lounge on the back, dressed beautifully, reminiscent of ladies of a previous era, sat side-saddle.

Pre race

“We headed to Expo (a scaled down version of the London Expo with the usual mix of running consumer delights: compression socks, Garmin watches, energy blocks and bars – and pasta parties) on our tram and due to lack of summer mileage we’d decided to swap from marathon to half marathon. Apparently we weren’t alone and lots of people make the last minute switch.

“We had pasta on Saturday at an Italian restaurant packed with runners from across the globe. Around 80 countries are represented at the races,



to get me through the race. I had hoped to run 1:55 and my pre-race training certainly showed that my pace should have been ok but I think the cold, coupled with lacking a lot of longer runs in training affected my finishing time. However, it was a beautiful course with a really supportive crowd.”

with the UK bringing in the most runners - a total of 3,500 are registered. Weary from walking, we opted for a rickshaw bicycle to take us back to our hotel at the end of the night and we soaked up the sights.

A day at the races

“The marathon started at 9.30am, the half at 1.30pm, so we were able to enjoy the atmosphere and be both spectator and runner and spectator again in one day. As we walked through the city, we watched the 8k runners weave through the town, the usual big City-race mix: all ages, shapes and sizes. We carried on through the Vondelpark, a lovely city park, which took in the last three miles of the marathon (and the half that was to follow).

“It never bores me to watch the elegant running gait of lead marathoners and we clapped and whooped in awe as the winner, Wilson Chebet, who ran a super-quick, 2:05 for the 26.2 miles lead five more runners into the stadium in under 2:07.

A perfect race

“We didn’t drink Sangria in the park... but it was a perfect day! The weather was ideal for racing. As the marathon finished the half marathoners began to bite their nails and whip off their tracksuits in preparation for the start.

Around 15,000 runners formed a moving trail that snaked back along the road, beyond the eye could see. But as is always in the case of the small world of running, I met two runners from East Sussex on the start line!

“Fortunately for me I was in the fast orange start, and 10 seconds after the gun went I was over the line. The half had a staggered start, with the runners in different coloured pens (arranged according to predicted finish time) starting off in five-minute intervals.

Getting high

“After a summer of hit and miss training I wasn’t sure where I’d be. I wanted to run sub 1:30, but thought I might only manage seven-minute mile pace. But as soon as I started I knew I was able to run faster and I was going to have a good day – a rare and cherished feeling! The flat course and perfect conditions combined with the feel-good factor meant I ran relaxed and easily.

“After a fast start (20:15 for the first 5k), I settled into an even pace, and started to see the same runners around me, a sign that pacing was on target. An email in my inbox the day after the race revealed my splits for 10k (41:22) (5k in 21:07), and 15k (1:02:22) (5k in 21:00), and my final time of 1:28:30 – a personal best!

As we left the stadium and walked

■ **35,000 runners** took part in the 32nd marathon festival, covering three events (8k, half and marathon).
 ■ **Wilson Chebet** won in 02.05.53 - just nine seconds short of breaking last year’s course record. Lead woman, Tiki Gelana broke the course record, which dated from 2002, finishing in 2.22.08.
 ■ **The tourist bit:** Take a trip on the canals by boat or pedal boat or hire a bike for a real Amsterdam experience. On foot-check out the Red-light District, the majestic Dam, modern shopping in Kalverstraat or browse in the Negen Straatjes district.
 ■ **The route:** The races are all flat. They start and finish in the historic Olympic Stadium, now 80 years old. The half marathon and marathon take you through the city on a sightseeing tour. The marathon shares the half marathon route, but adds in the extra miles by taking runners along the Amstel River, past stately mansions and several windmills.
 ■ **How much to run?** Marathon €55 (incl. Mizuno Running-shirt) Mizuno Half-marathon €22.50 8 km €10
 ■ **For info visit** www.amsterdammarathon.nl

back through the park, we were spectators again. We stopped for a beer and with other onlookers cheered on the last half marathoners – including the very last, a smiling old lady in white sunglasses, who was accompanied by a convoy of siren-blaring police, fire engines, motor-bikes and cheering crowds, giving her a super-star status usually reserved for the front runners.

“As day turned to evening, we mingled with other runners in Rembrandt Square, talking mile splits and personal bests and drinking beer; we strolled by the canal taking in majestic houses, browsed in the Red Light District, and bought souvenirs. For 48 hours we’d been intermittently humming, Lloyd Cole’s “Lost Weekend At A Hotel In Amsterdam.”

It was a lost weekend at a hotel in Amsterdam – but taking part in the running festival made it a lost weekend to remember.”

RACES

FOCUS ON

David Lloyd Redway Runners, Milton Keynes

Big city races are a great excuse to have a weekend away with family and friends and do something really worthwhile. Over 30 members, family and friends from the David Lloyd Redway Runners (www.redwayrunners.com) spent the weekend in Amsterdam, with 22 taking part in the 8k, 13 in the half and four in the marathon. **Martin Lawrence, Chair of David Lloyd Redway Runners**, was delighted to run under four hours.

He’s proud of his club, which has been running since January 2011 and already has 110 members. **Fiona spoke to club member Nicky, 34, from Marston** Time: 2:00:09 for the half “I started running nearly four years ago after having my third child. Since then I have tried to run regularly and fit it around my hectic work and home life. I came down with a cold shortly after arriving in Amsterdam so relied on medicines