

Here's what it's like to run in the annual New York City Marathon

On November 5, some 50,000 runners from around the globe will once again pound the streets of the Big Apple – those who manage to secure an entry, that is.

Fiona Harper

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"Hey folks, you people need to move along, there's no loitering in the Bronx," barks a uniformed officer as we run over the bridge into his neighbourhood. "This ain't like those other boroughs!" he smirks cheekily.

Despite my exhaustion I couldn't help but laugh. We were at the 20-mile mark of the 2022 TCS New York City Marathon, fatigue had set in, and my focus had narrowed to little more than putting one foot in front of the other. In my trance-like state, numbers were all I could concentrate on as I computed how far I'd come. And how far I still had to go.



Runners taking part in the 26.2 mile New York City Marathon. AP

The marathon – the 51st – was a return to capacity after global lockdowns, with more than 50,000 runners from 131 countries taking part, including wheelchair athletes and invited elite runners.

Alongside Berlin, Boston, Chicago, London and Tokyo, New York is a prestigious World Marathon Major. (Sydney is partway through the selection process to become the seventh world major in 2025).

Securing an entry is the first challenge; most non-US residents book through charity partners or a global ballot system. In 2018, there were 105,184 applications for 15,640 ballot spots. The 660 Australian finishers in 2022 include eight runners from Robert de Castella's hugely successful Indigenous Marathon Project.



Every year, thousands of spectators line the streets of Brooklyn to cheer on runners. Alamy

New Yorkers embrace the marathon as one citywide street party with all the sass and attitude they're renowned for. Affection too, enthusiastically cheering on strangers like lifelong friends. Many

spend days preparing signs to hold aloft as runners pass through their 'hood.

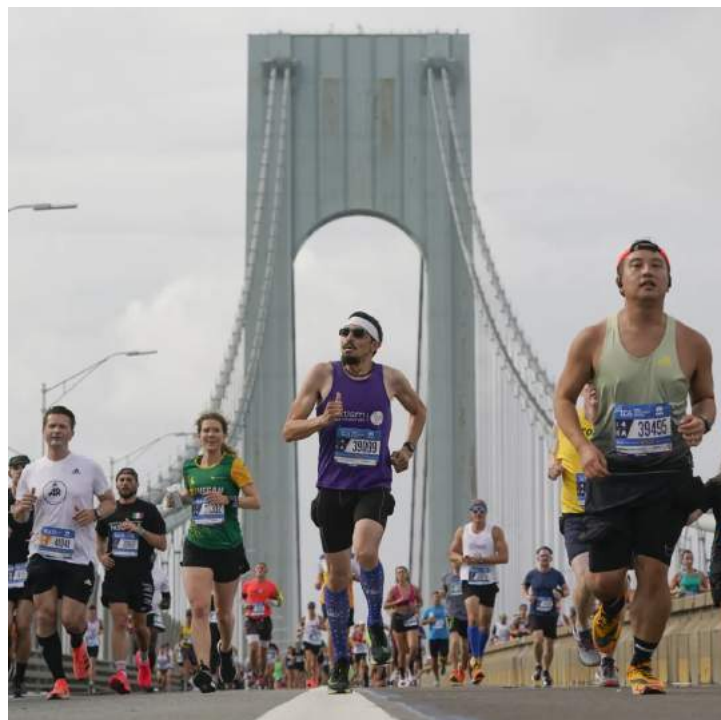
“Due to inflation, you now gotta run 27 miles,” read one. “Can I call an Uber?” or “Where is everyone going?” asked others. A golden retriever sported a sign declaring, “Your dog is proud of you.”

Unofficial estimates put spectator numbers at 2 million-plus. Churches dispatch choirs, schools send their bands, charities set up stalls selling cakes, bagels and hot dogs. Volunteers by the thousands man drink stations. Paramedics are stationed at almost every mile marker. Three days before the race, council workers on the night shift go through more than 200 litres of paint to mark the course in ‘marathon blue’.

So there I was still in the Bronx, and that cop was encouraging us over the final bridge that would take us back to Manhattan and the Central Park finish line. “Manhattan called and wants its runners back!”

By then, it seemed a lifetime since that we’d assembled on Staten Island at the on-ramp to the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge, Manhattan skyscrapers minuscule in the distance, Lady Liberty a small dot on the Hudson River. As the sun rose, ear-splitting cannon fire marked the start of our scenic foot tour of New York’s five boroughs – Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx and Manhattan.

So far, I’d high-fived kids handing out jelly jubes and enthusiastically wiggled my hips to Frank Sinatra’s anthem *New York, New York*. I’d stomped to drumbeats, traded jibes with partygoers hanging off balconies, and paused to catch my breath as Scottish bagpipes wailed.



Runners cross the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge with almost 26 miles to go. AP

It had been a long day already, and I wasn't done yet. The day wouldn't be "done" until I'd crossed five bridges, taken 67,122 steps, and clutched one finisher's medal.

The distance is brutal but achievable for anyone with a modicum of fitness who is prepared to put in the training. A healthy dose of determination and optimism helps too. The evidence was all around me on marathon Sunday. Sweat-soaked bodies of all shapes, sizes, ages and abilities propelled each other forward one step at a time. The oldest finisher was 88-year-old New Yorker Alan Patricof, while Israeli Mosher Lederfien ran the entire race balancing a pineapple on his head, his 12th marathon wearing one.



Moshe Lederfien from Israel runs the entire distance with a pineapple on his head. Alamy

In her book *A Race Like No Other*, author Liz Robbins noted that marathoners push themselves to the edge of insanity and exhaustion, "because when they look back on those 26.2 miles the view is profoundly satisfying. They see where they have been and what they have become."

This unique view of New York is what propelled me across hemispheres, flying some 15,000 kilometres to run 42.2. It was worth every bit of jet lag.



An exhausted (actor) Ashton Kutcher after finishing the 2022 TCS New York City Marathon. Getty

Exhausted and depleted by unseasonal November heat, I left New York with a coveted souvenir embossed with the Statue of Liberty in my luggage. But having been embraced by a city at its pulsating best, I also took a small part of New York in my heart.

“Come back any time. If you love New York, we love you right back,” wrote Matthew Futterman of *The New York Times*.

Runners love you too, New York. And 50,000 will be back on November 5 to do it all again.

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