

New York, Paris, London. Where will you run your marathon? asks ABIGAIL KING

EVERYONE knows that completing a marathon requires preparation. But before you immerse yourself in calculations, training plans and chasing sponsors, don't overlook another important factor – location.

From Honolulu to Hamburg, hosting a marathon has become extremely popular for cities, tourism and local businesses. What does this mean for the amateur runner? A greater likelihood of success by finding the city that works best for you.

New York, Paris, London. Three iconic cities, three different marathons. It's not just about sightseeing – each has its own psychological and physical advantages.

Motivation is one of these. "Once I'd paid the air fare, there was no way I was turning back," said Nick from Newcastle, who ran his first marathon in New York. Held in autumn every year, the Big Apple's place on the calendar carries benefits for Brits who hate to run in the lashing wind, ice and rain.

"I could train during the summer," Nick said. "A friend from my running club had warned me that the summer might be too hot," he added, "but I've never found that to be a problem in the UK."

The ING New York City Marathon is the largest in the world and around 3000 British entrants cross the Atlantic to participate each year. The weekend



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The non route takes in the city's ch as the Arc de Triomphe

Which marathon?

The New York Marathon, the largest in the world, offers a carnival atmosphere



Top marathons ...

- ING New York City Marathon – www.nycmarathon.org/home
- Flora London Marathon – www.london-marathon.co.uk
- Paris International Marathon – www.paris-marathon.com
- Boston Marathon – www.bostonmarathon.org
- Edinburgh Marathon – www.edinburgh-marathon.co.uk
- Berlin Marathon – www.berlin-marathon.com
- Bank of America Chicago Marathon – www.chicagomarathon.com
- Baxter's Loch Ness Marathon – www.lochnessmarathon.com
- ING Amsterdam Marathon – www.amsterdammarathon.nl
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carnival begins with a 3km International Friendship Run for relatives, which starts at the United Nations Headquarters. As dusk falls, everyone celebrates with a pasta party in Central Park.

On the day itself, a convoy of buses take runners to the starting line on Staten Island. From there, athletes notch up the miles by travelling through each of New York's boroughs – Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens and Brooklyn. Bands crowd the streets and gospel choirs belt out inspirational choruses.

High-tech fans can attach chips to their ankles that automatically send signals via email to relatives tracking their progress. That way, supporters know exactly which corner to wait on and when to maximise cheerleader encouragement.

But if all this gadgetry turns you cold, try Paris for old-world charm and a hint of romance. In practical terms, of course, it's cheaper and easier to get to from the UK.

Jeremy, who completed his first marathon in 2:57, notes that Paris has another trick up its well-tailored sleeve. "It's flat. And easier to get into," he said.

Some may argue with that last point. Yet in 2008, almost a third of runners came from outside France. Their hosts wooed them by racing them past the river Seine, the glassy pyramids of the Louvre and, naturally, the shadow of the Eiffel Tower.

This scenic course seduced Tim from

Bristol. "What a fantastic way to see Paris," he said, "running along the Champs Élysées."

Yet running in Paris requires additional preparation. Don't rely on Liberté, Egalité and Fraternité to provide everything. While America thrusts energy gels and drinks on to you at practically every mile, France demonstrates a rather more laissez-faire attitude.

This roughly translates to "sort it out yourself". Tim highly recommends investigating their facilities before you set out. "Unfortunately," he said, "I didn't have any money to buy something to replace the minerals I needed or to drop out and take a tube. I had no phone to call friends to arrange to meet them in any other place than the finish line, as previously arranged. So I had to finish whether I wanted to or not."

Limping over the line shouldn't be part of the dream.

France also requires competitors to produce a medical certificate before entering, which although feeling like a bureaucratic inconvenience, probably saves lives.

When it's all over, spend the next day celebrating with fine wine, crusty baguettes and croissants. Unless you'd rather fish and chips or a pint of ale, in which case, consider the benefits of staying closer to home.

London has obvious benefits. It's cheaper to get to and it eliminates the

worry about jet lag or time off work. But perhaps the greatest advantage is the psychological boost of support on the day – from anyone who knows you and can make it to the Big Smoke.

"My most vivid memory," explains Phil who ran his first marathon in London, "was of my brother near the last bend. He screamed at me and then ran around the crowd ahead and screamed at me again. After I crossed the line, I sat down and cried. Not because of the pain or the joy. I just couldn't help it."

At the finish line, mayhem glitters as volunteers dish out foil blankets and runners sob with relief in the embrace of their families. Charities offer their runners sandwiches and massages and on the way home, public transport throngs with people connected by a common cause.

Running to support a charity has become entwined with marathon culture across the globe. Some find raising money easier when colleagues and neighbours cannot confuse your efforts with a subsidised holiday. Further, local media coverage may mean the London Marathon feels more familiar to them – and you.

Not only does the London course wind through Greenwich before taking in Big Ben and the London Eye, but it also passes at least 40 pubs, each pumping out anthems such as *Eye of the Tiger* and the theme from *Chariots of Fire* to spur you on.