

# Shanghai heads to the finish line of becoming an elite global marathon

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In global cities, marathons are not just races. They are dynamic events that bring diverse people together from around the world, galvanize interest in running and give local economies a shot in the arm.

Shanghai is well on its way to adding its name to the elite group of “major world marathons,” like Boston, London, Berlin, Chicago, New York and Tokyo.

Last year’s Shanghai Marathon featured 38,000 participants, 12 percent of them foreigners. The event is scheduled later this year.

In the run-up to the big event, many of the city’s 16 districts are hosting quarter-, half- or full marathon races this spring to whip up interest and feed a growing number of sports enthusiasts.

The runs are diverse — from the traditional Shanghai Half Marathon to more unique offshoots, like the roller-skate and run event in downtown Huangpu District held on April 4.

“It was a really good course, very well organized,” said Belgian Bart Swings, who participated in the event, which attracted 5,000 participants from 24 countries.

The speed skating gold medalist from the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and world champion speed roller skater added, “It’s lovely to skate in a big city like Shanghai.”

Shanghai is certainly putting its name on the marathon map if registration is anything to go by.

Since its inception in 2015, the Shanghai Half Marathon, held this year on April 21 in the Lujiazui area on the eastern shore of the Huangpu River, has grown from 5,000 to 15,000 runners.

District half marathons are enjoying a similar burst of interest from both locals and foreigners. For the Jing’an Half Marathon, held on March 17, a record 62 percent of runners who participated weren’t locals.

One of them was 64-year-old British expatriate Frank Wood, who moved from London to Shanghai over a decade ago and switched to running from cycling because of heavy street traffic.



Ben Kirkby shows he’s having a fantastic time during the 2022 Shanghai Marathon. — By courtesy of Ben Kirkby



A father pushes his toddler in a race in Shanghai. — IC

Wood now leads a diverse group of expatriate and local runners, organizing regular training sessions and social events every weekend.

“In Shanghai, the government has done a fantastic job of building running tracks and parks along the Huangpu River and Suzhou Creek,” Wood told Shanghai Daily. “It’s a great way to see the city, and honestly, these facilities are better than most in the West.”

enjoy the lively atmosphere. Local businesses thrive on it all.

It’s estimated that China’s 10 million amateur marathon runners create a market in sports-related purchases, valued in the hundreds of billions of yuan.

A report on the industry put the average spend of a runner at 11,000 yuan (US\$1,518). Marathon weekends can boost a local economy by up to 30 percent.

For example, in the southern city of Guilin in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the marathon there generated 183 million yuan in direct economic benefits, and a recent marathon in the city of Wuxi in Jiangsu Province contributed 282 million yuan to the hospitality and tourism sector.

Since its launch in 2003, the Xiamen Marathon in southeastern Fujian Province has transformed the city into a regional hub for the running industry.

Closer to home, a half-marathon race on Shanghai’s Chongming Island increased hotel occupancy, with sites like the Sheraton and local inns reporting no vacancies. Restaurants and other local vendors providing snacks and marathon-themed memorabilia also reported increased sales.

Changning District leverages its women’s marathon to kick off a Sports, Culture and Shopping Week. Runners showing their racing bibs get free entry to exhibitions and discounts on jewelry, appliances, vehicles, phones, movie tickets and coffee.

During the roller-skating and run marathon in Huangpu, 26 market stalls were set up at the finish line, with 19 well-known brands like Under Armour and Omron participating.

Putuo District is home to Shanghai’s longest riverside of Suzhou Creek, matching a half marathon’s 21-kilometer length. This happy coincidence has given the waterway area the nickname “Half-Marathon Suzhou Creek.”

The Shanghai Marathon and all its offshoots are establishing the city as a runner’s paradise.

Richard DeHaven, the 36-year-old team leader of the Shanghai-based RunnersHai group, sets up events that offer

Every marathon course is meticulously planned to highlight iconic landmarks and cultural heritage to a worldwide audience. Runners dash past the ultramodern skyline of the Lujiazui financial district, weave through the quaint streets of downtown districts or sprint along the bustling Bund. Streets are transformed into race tracks, with barriers and signage guiding the runners.

Volunteers line the routes, providing water and encouragement. The sight of thousands of participants starting their race creates a festival-like atmosphere and invigorates the spirit of both runners and onlookers.

The idea combining running events with a city’s heritage will be echoed in the upcoming 2024 Paris Summer Olympics, where the marathon route is designed as a sightseeing tour of the city, passing notable sites such as the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower.

Marathons bring more than just runners. They attract spectators, families and tourists who come to cheer and