

## ISTANBUL MARATHON November 16<sup>th</sup> 2014

This was one marathon that I'd been looking forward to for a long time. Starting in Asia and finishing in Europe, it provides a unique opportunity to run in two Continents within the same race through a fascinating city with great historical and cultural traditions.

Costing a mere 60 Turkish Lira, (£17), to enter it also has to be one of the best value-for-money Big City marathons left on the running calendar. Registration takes place on the three days prior to the event in a large out-of-town Sports Stadium three metro stops from Ataturk Airport; provided of course your flight coincides with opening times. Otherwise, it's a long way back out by a combination of congested tram and metro. It's well worth the effort to attend as this one is no mere marketing exercise. Apart from numerous diverse exhibitors, we were supplied with as much freshly cooked pasta, fruit and drink as we cared to consume. When I somewhat jokingly said that I preferred the officials' T-shirt to the official one, they obligingly gave me one of each to add to the domestic T-shirt mountain.

The £17 also included a 20 minute bus ride across the Bosphorus Bridge to the Asian side of the city on race morning. These left from 7am amid scenes of real pandemonium from outside the magnificent Blue Mosque, one of the many jewels in Istanbul's crown. I made the mistake of catching one of the earlier buses and was subsequently left standing exposed to the cold wind on the Bridge for one and a half hours before the start of the race. With nothing better to do, it was interesting to observe the numerous street vendors attempting to hawk all manner of stuff to the throng of waiting runners – though why anyone about to run a marathon would be interested in buying a carpet at this stage is beyond me.

Waiting for the buses outside the Blue Mosque



This was the 36<sup>th</sup> edition of the marathon that was first run in 1978 at the request of a group of 34 German marathoners. According to the organisers, this year there were over 25,000 runners representing 118 countries entered into the 3 main events: marathon, 15km and 10km plus an untimed "Fun Walk" Approximately 3,200 completed the marathon. The marathon and 15km started simultaneously at 9am, with a great deal of pushing and shoving, following a rendition of the National Anthem. The 10km set off ten minutes later over an already overcrowded Bosphorus Bridge, cluttered with what seemed like thousands of spectators anxious to take advantage of the one day in the year that the bridge is closed.

Knowing that the route had been designed to show us the best that Istanbul could offer: over famous bridges, past iconic mosques and palaces, under historic aqueducts, through

beautiful parks and coastlines, I'd decided to take the camera and run this one in the guise of a marathon tourist as opposed to that of a marathon runner. I wasn't disappointed. Some of the views and architecture we saw en route were simply spell-binding and unlikely to be repeated. Anyway, it's not a course where you can aim for a fast time, Istanbul is built on 7 hills and too many of them were in the way. That said, there were two long, out-and-back stretches where a decent pace could be maintained: from 10km to 17km along the shore of the Golden Horn and from just after halfway to 40km, running alongside the Sea of Marmara. The final 2km through the grounds of the ancient Topaki Palace to the finish outside the spectacularly beautiful Blue Mosque were both uphill. Apart from a splendid medal, we also received yet another T-shirt, (the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the weekend), in our goody bag.

Looking back to the Bosphorus Bridge



Istanbul is probably one of the most memorable marathons I've ever run. For value, it's second to none. It's an unmissable event in a truly unmissable and inspirational city. My only regret was that I wasn't booked for a longer stay – four days is nowhere near enough to take in all that Istanbul has to offer. It's the perfect destination for anyone who likes to combine a love of travel with a love of running.

Finished!



Jim Manford  
November 17<sup>th</sup> 2014