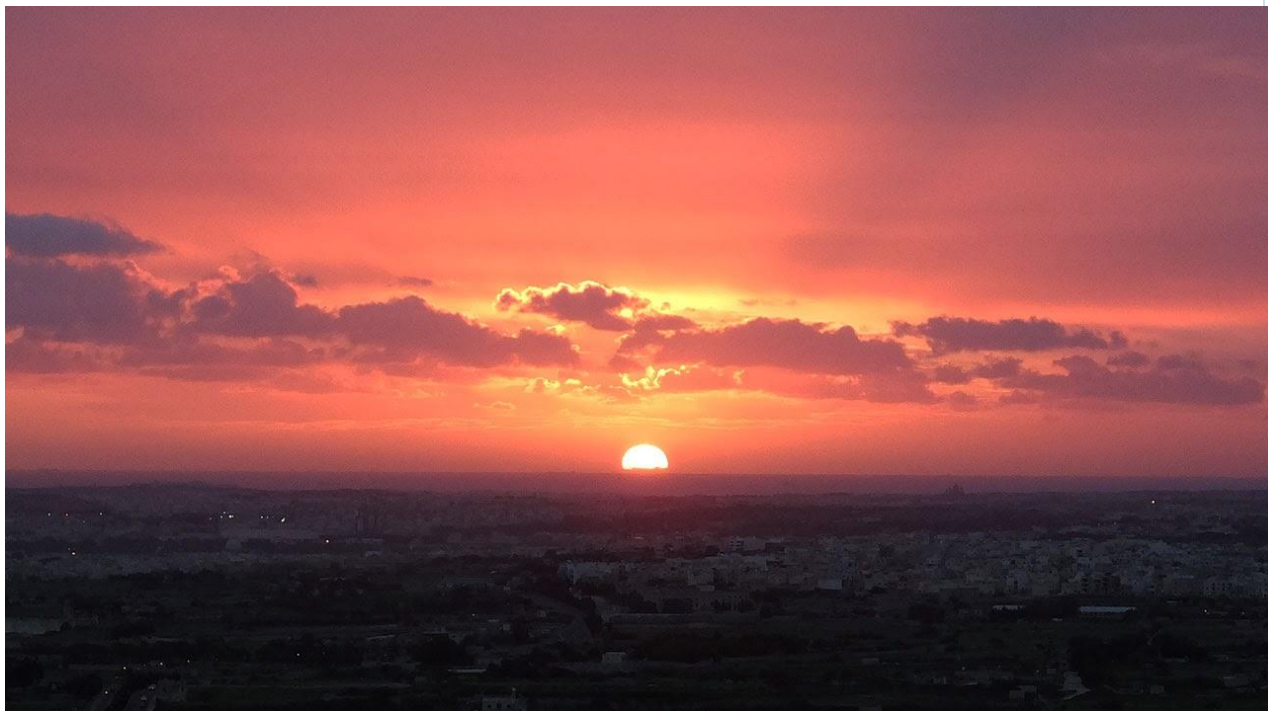


Malta Marathon 2014



What a way to start the day!

I am struggling with where to begin for this one. We had spent two days touring the island nation of Malt and although we barely scratched the surface, we fell in love with it. I looked forward to race day with a mix of elation and the normal anxiety of race day. The views promised to be wonderful, but the wind was wild and black clouds skittered at the edges of the sky threatening to envelop us in a dismal storm.



I was determined to be prepared for any event so with my camera in one hand and a rain poncho in the other, I ran while enjoying and documenting the course



I hid from the wind up on the Mdina waiting for all the runners to be shuttled up from the port. Reluctant to give up my windbreaker pants and long sleeve t-shirt, I put off checking checking my bag to the last minute, .



I found Donald, a fellow member of both Marathon Maniacs and the Marathon Globetrotters so at least I wasn't alone with my chattering teeth :-)



And we're off! Winding our way through tiny streets full of cute windows and doorways



This guy was resplendent in his new jeans and fashionable collared shirt



I wish I could look him up by his bib number because I'm dying to know what his finish time was! I think he finished shortly before I did :-)



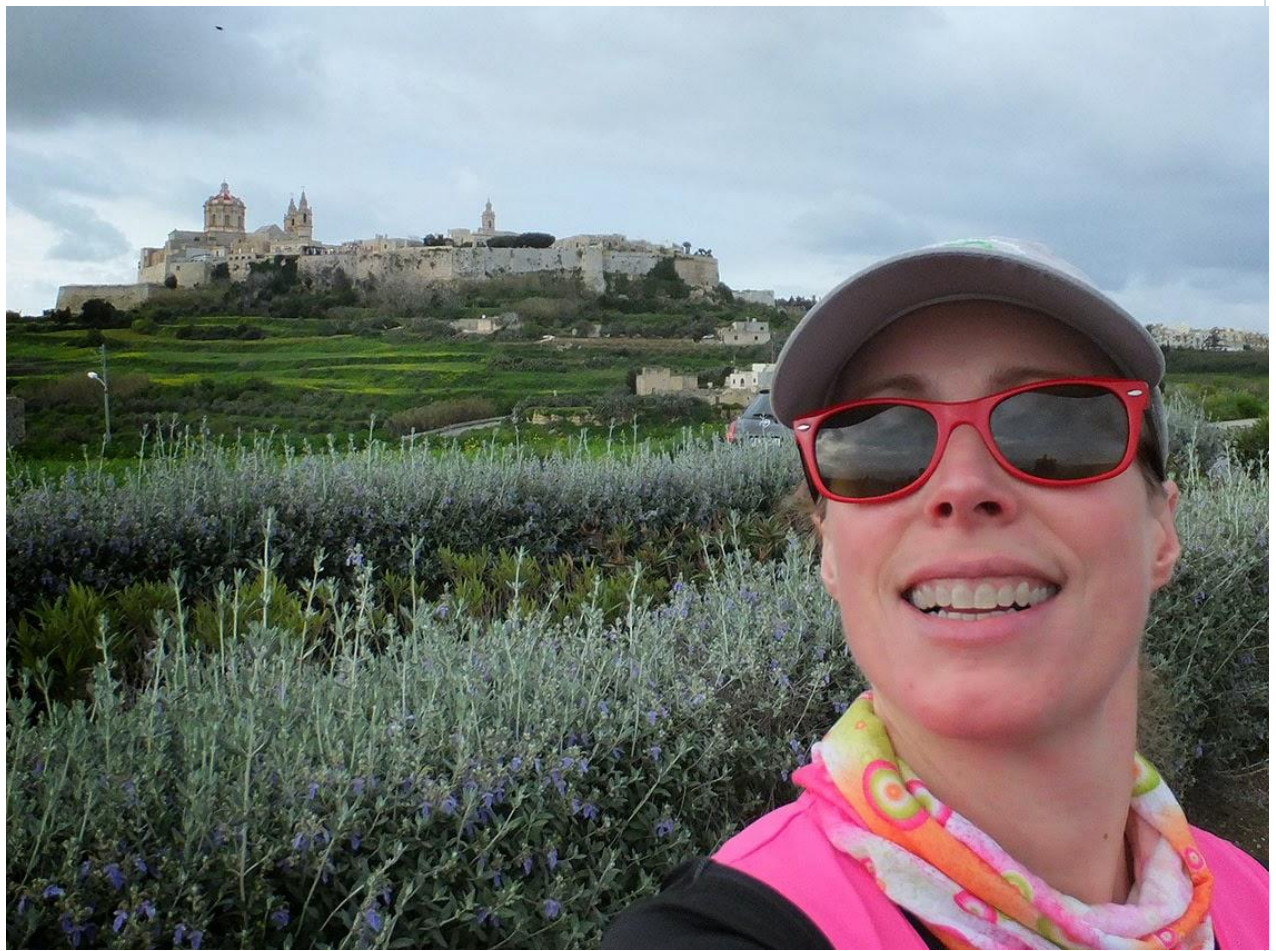
The views of the Mdina were wonderful, but those black clouds were a little scary. I was sure we would get rained on before the end, which explains the yellow rain poncho in my hand in all my race photos, LOL.



A few of the Portsmouth runners. There were a lot of them and I heard their flight was a rollicking good time!



Grandpa in his jeans is still keeping up with the whipper snappers. I hope I can run half as well at his age!



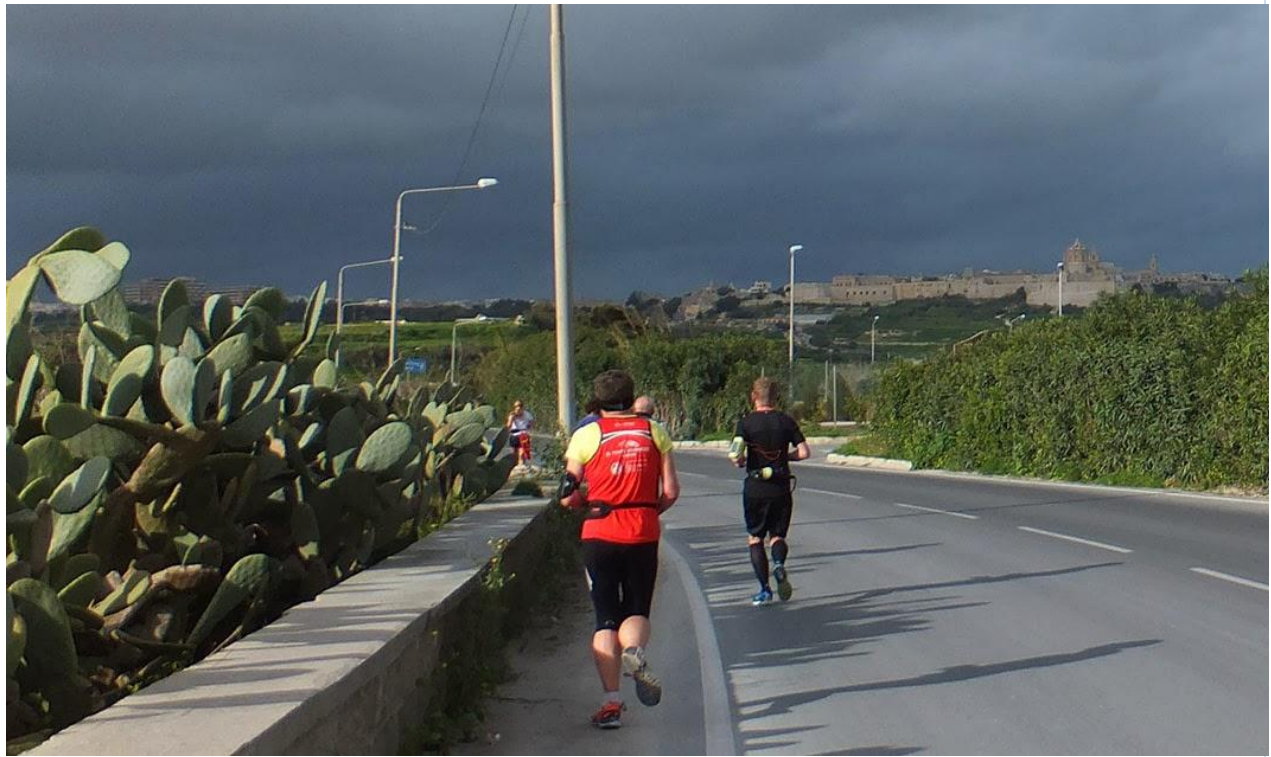
I stink at selfies, but I try :-)



I was tempted to take a snack break!



There was a trio of runners from Greece and the guy in the group kept insisting on taking my camera to run ahead and take pictures of me. This is my "can we get this over with please" smile. I think he was pacing the two ladies behind me bored with their slow shuffle.



Scary clouds getting scarier. The cacti, which are all over the island, are to break the wind.

It didn't take long for the approximately 500 runners to thin out. I was lost in thought and enjoying the scenery when I passed the 21K sign along with another pair of runners. I heard one say we had been running just over two hours, WHAT? I looked at my interval timer and then, in disbelief, asked what time it was. At 10:10 am we had been on the road for 2 hours and 10 minutes, the fastest I have ever hit the halfway mark in a marathon. I was worried, knowing I had gone out WAY too fast, but I also knew the second half was almost entirely downhill. The negative split ship had sailed, but the PR was coming into view!



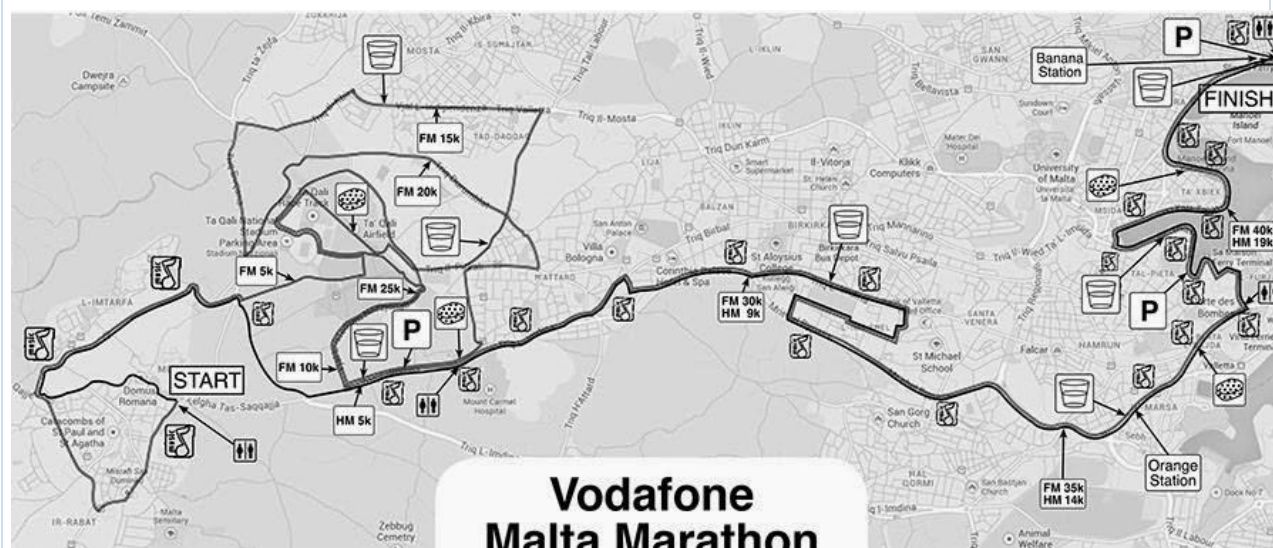
The kids handing out sponges were adorable.



These three took their marshaling and cheering very seriously!



Most of our running zig-zags and loops were in Mosta



The map worried me since that is a lot of potential for missed turns, but it was very well marked and marshalled so there were no problems at all.



The whole race was a swirl of things to look at. Every inch of Malta seemed exotic, from the carefully tended vegetable gardens and vineyards to the spires of the many churches, it was all new and interesting.



I love this picture because it has everything, the Mdina, the cactus, the grape vines, and the stone walls



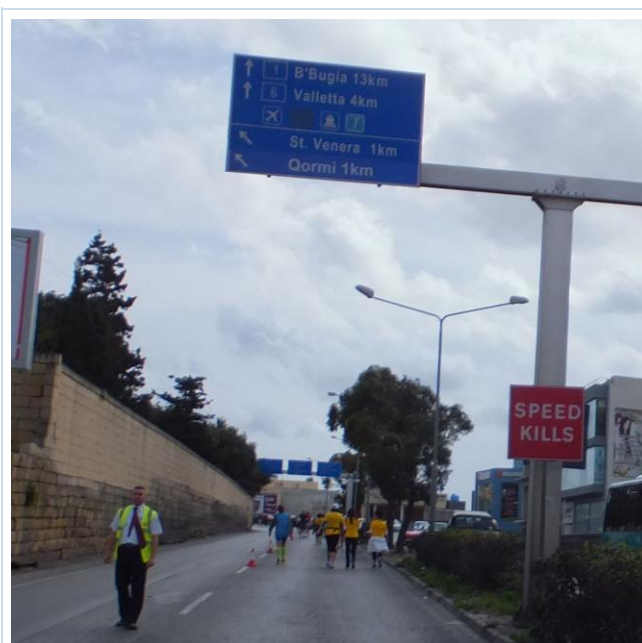
Malta is the most bombed place on earth, thanks to the Nazi's in WWII. A bomb dropped through the roof of this church in Mosta and landed in the middle of 300 people waiting for Mass to start. IT DID NOT EXPLODE!



Viewing the Mdina again and getting ready to turn towards the harbor.



Awesomeness!



Hmmm, speed kills, that must be why the walk-a-thon people were out in force



I caught up to the Greeks again, LOL. I was happier this time since we were getting close to the finish and I was making record time.



In addition to the marathon, there was a half marathon and a walk-a-thon. The walk-a-thon people drove the runners crazy because they kept blocking the way! It wasn't so bad at this point, but once we were down to a single lane of road it was maddening.



This is the Black Pearl, not a Disney rip off, but the original that was owned by Errol Flynn



View of Valletta as we neared the finish line in Sliema



This was cool, they had an arch at the 1km to go mark!

The last 5K was really rough. My fast time was catching up with me full force and my legs felt like rubber from all the downhill miles. I was still running though, slowly, but without walk breaks, grinding my way through the walkers to get to the finish line knowing that unless lightening struck in the way of a cramp or sudden painful disaster, my PR was locked in.



Happy finishers.

As I hobbled my way through the finish line gauntlet, I saw a little girl held by her father leaning over the rail to touch her mother's medal. She yelled over the crowd, "Mamma, did you win!?" I wanted to say, "Yes! Yes she did!" :-)



Vodafone was set up to automatically upload race pictures to Facebook, including having a whole team of people to sort through them and post just the best pictures!



The whole race was a party atmosphere!

The Malta Marathon was truly one of my top races. Not just because I FINALLY broke 4:30 (still awaiting an official time, but right now it looks like my chip time was 4:24:50,) or because it was nearly all downhill, but because I enjoyed all of it and would do it again in a heartbeat. I am shocked that it isn't better known. There were only about 500 runners and the race never filled to capacity. The Island itself needs at least a week of exploration. Temples older than the Pyramids, the last remaining dialect of the Phoenicians (although everyone speaks English and all the signs are in English,) stunning water and beaches, amazing food, reasonable prices for everything, low crime rate, and a mixture of people so rich everyone is welcome. It is truly a fusion of all things Mediterranean.