



Seville Marathon 2014

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I have fond memories of Seville, having been there a couple of times before including for our Silver Wedding, so the opportunity to run a marathon there was something to look forward to. The marathon was advertised as the flattest in Europe. Having already run Amsterdam – this was clearly some claim and in fairness it was pretty flat – but the flattest in Europe?

We flew to Malaga and got the train to Seville. Personal preference is that we'd rather have a couple of hours on a train in an unusual location than spend a similar period travelling to Leeds, Manchester, Edinburgh etc. It's also quicker for getting home once you've got off the flight!

We arrived at our hotel (opposite the Andalusian Parliament building in the Macarena area of the city) to discover that there was a Spanish tour group of runners sharing the same hotel. Once settled in the hotel we attempted to go to the exposition. We were advised by the organisers of the above tour group, that a taxi was the only viable way of getting there, so after a 10-15 minute taxi ride we arrived at the Fibes exhibition centre.



Registration was pretty easy, but they couldn't seem to understand that I didn't want tickets for a "free" pasta party the following day. There is no such thing as a "free lunch" especially as the taxi fare to get there was 12 Euros in each direction. 9000 runners - The taxi drivers must have thought it was their birthday!

One interesting feature of the expo was that all of the trophies were on view and you had the opportunity to have your photo taken with the main trophy (which was based on La Giralda – the top of the Cathedral's bell tower and one of the city's major landmarks).



When I first mooted the idea of doing Seville, I was advised to register my size as plus 1 – Definitely something worth taking on board. Either that or I'm getting tubby! As well as a vest, shorts were in the goody bag.

We spent the Saturday at the Casa de Pilatos, somewhere off the beaten track, but well worth the visit. Having done the Cathedral, Alcazar and Bullring on previous visits we stayed away from the main attractions this year.



And so to the marathon itself. We were a 15 minute walk to the start (or so we were told by the hotel), alternatively we could get the C1/C2 bus or a shuttle bus to the start from across the road from the hotel. We set off to walk, but as a shuttle bus was there we hopped on. It duly stopped close to the Estadio Olimpico, which was to be the finish of the race.

The stadium was opened in 1999 for the World Athletics Championships. It was part of an unsuccessful attempt to bring the 2008 Olympic Games to Seville and was the venue of the 2003 UEFA Cup final between Celtic and Porto.

I'd travelled ready to run and had intended to go straight to the start. but the directions to the start weren't clearly marked, so we ended up following the crowd to the baggage area in the stadium.

Christine made her way back to the hotel which doubled up as the 15k mark and then went for breakfast (some people have all the luck). The 15 minute walk was actually 33! The start was pretty basic down a main road reminiscent of the Great North Run start. It then headed into the city at around 8k and followed the banks of the river past the Torro D'oro and the bullring of Carmen fame and beyond the 1992 Bridge. From there it twisted around some more uneventful streets until the 15k mark, the Andalusian parliament, our hotel and the city walls.

Seville prides itself on having 1300 volunteers. They could have been instructed to stop encroachment of the spectators as a couple of the elite runners had difficulty following the optimum route and lectured the crowd accordingly – or so my spies tell me!

So we headed off towards the station and the football grounds of Sevilla and Real Betis. Betis has a rather inviting fountain outside of the stadium, which was very tempting as the temperatures reached the lower twenties, but temptation was resisted. From 30k to 38k the route is

pretty much down the main sites of the city. The atmosphere through the park leading to the Plaza Espania and round the Plaza was excellent. From there we passed the back of the Alcazar and the University (formerly the tobacco factory – again of Carmen fame) and onto the Cathedral and the Almeida Hercules. We crossed the river just over the 37k mark and went through the 1992 exposition site, through a park area and into the stadium.

The park area was another well populated part of the course, with the inevitable faster runner walking back to the city centre, sporting their well earned medal. I don't know if the stadium was closed to spectators or that they'd chosen to stay outside, (or perhaps they'd all gone home by the time I'd got there), but there were very few in it when I crossed the line in 4:51. The race limit was 6 hours, so there was still time for a number to go through.

On returning back to the bridge where I'd agreed to meet Christine the final runner was followed by the sweeping convoy. He had 40 minutes to complete the final 4k, so I think he would have been okay.

So my first experience of a Spanish marathon. Great atmosphere (sometimes a little bit too enthusiastic from an encroachment point of view). They are already talking about bringing the registration back to the central area. Organisation at the start needs to be improved, although the finish was spot on. Drinks stations are every 5k and well manned – albeit using over-large cups which were difficult to negotiate. Would I do it again – probably not, for no reason other than I've done it and there are others to explore.

