

The 2014 Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend: A runDisney Event Review

by Ed Falso, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The Walt Disney World Marathon is becoming bigger and more popular each year.

And there was something for everybody at the 2014 Disney World Marathon Weekend January 8 - 12.

For runners, there was a full range of events, including a brand new 10K added to the prior lineup of 5K, Half Marathon, and full Marathon. You can pick a challenge that best fits your goals and fitness level, whether you want to run your first 5K in a fun environment or push yourself through all four events in a new combination called the Dopey Challenge. The Goofy Challenge offered in past years, in which a participant runs both the Half and Full Marathons, was another option.

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□ There were also Kids Races for children aged 13 and under, ranging from a Diaper Dash to the Mickey Mile. Parents wishing to do so were allowed to run with their kids.

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□ For non-runners, there were ample opportunities to support family and friends who were running, visit the Race Expo, or just view races. Spectator resources included the chance to select a Disney ChEAR Squad package for information and amenities such as access to special finish line seating.

As in past years, runners picked up their race packets including bibs and shirts at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex. The process was very easy and efficient on Friday when I picked up my packet for the full Marathon.

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□ There was an expanded Race Expo this year. It didn't all fit in Jostens Center, and the Expo spilled over into the concourse of the baseball stadium. Just about anything you could think of that might be useful or appealing to a runner was available for purchase!

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□ Runner tracking was available for the Half Marathon and Marathon, with registration located in the stadium concourse this year.

Representatives were available to assist runners with the sign-up, helping to make registration quick and easy.

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□ Runner tracking is quite useful for folks wanting to stay connected with the progress of a runner. There are sensor mats at locations along

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the course. When a runner crosses the mat, it reads the timing chip in the runner's bib and sends a tracking text or e-mail message (as you select) to recipients you identify at registration. Its a big help not only for spectators, but also for runners who separate during an event.

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□ Kids Races were held Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. We saw lots of kids wearing their "I did it!" shirts after completing a kids event during the weekend.

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□ The main running events began on Thursday morning with the 5K Family Fun Run, followed by the 10K on Friday, the Half Marathon on Saturday and the full Marathon on Sunday. All the races had start and finish lines in the EPCOT parking lot.

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□ Marathon Sunday morning started early for my wife and me, with a 3:00 am alarm at Disney's Yacht Club. Disney bus transportation to the running events was provided for guests staying at Disney resorts. Guests at resorts on the monorail line also had that option available.

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□ Last year, we experienced quite a delay in awaiting a bus to the Marathon start while staying at the Yacht Club. But this year, there was no wait. A bus was loading when we arrived at the stop, with another right behind it; a much smoother start to the morning! (On a side note, as we passed the Beach Club, we could see a long line of runners there waiting for the bus. We heard extra buses were on the way for them.)

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□ This year we elected to purchase the Race Retreat package. The Retreat is a climate-controlled tent stocked with food and beverages for both before and after the race. It's available for Half and Full Marathon runners. It can also be added to a ChEAR package.

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□ The Retreat also includes its own set of porta-johns along with male and female changing rooms. Those used to running events know that there can be a long wait for a toilet, but with the Retreat, I had no wait at all! I also really appreciated the changing room, stocked with towels, to change out of sweaty running clothes after completing the Marathon. And having the food in a comfortable setting was also a plus. Its expensive: \$120 for one race or \$200 for both if you are running both the Half and Full Marathon. You should use your judgment on balancing cost versus benefit, but we liked the Race Retreat and expect to do it again next year.

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□ As in the past, there was a long walk from the staging area to the Marathon start corrals, so plan accordingly. At least the crowd moved right along on Sunday morning and we had no problem reaching our corral.

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□The Marathon Wheelchair start was at 5:33 am. The runner start followed at 5:35 am with Corral A. There were 16 corrals altogether, with successive waves starting about every 3 minutes, and each start was accompanied by a burst of fireworks.

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□The Marathon course is flat. Pretty much the only "hills" are highway overpasses or tunnels. There were ample water and sports drink stations, plus spots with bananas, energy shots, or candy.

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□From the start along Epcot Center Drive, the Marathon takes you up World Center Drive, through a Magic Kingdom ticketing area lined with cheering spectators, and into the Magic Kingdom. Main Street was quite crowded with loud spectators too, offering a boost to runners!

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□After exiting Magic Kingdom via a backstage route, you run past the Grand Floridian and down to the Walt Disney World Speedway. There were classic cars on display for the run around the speedway. Then on to Animal Kingdom.

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□Of course, there are Disney characters and entertainment at various other spots along the course. On the more atypical side, I liked the little female warthog that was alongside the course near Animal Kingdom, and stopped for a picture. She sported her own Marathon bib!

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□After a run though Animal Kingdom, it was on to what I think is the least enjoyable part of the course, running along the roads on the way to Wide World of Sports. Just past 17 miles, there were washcloths dipped in cold water available for runners. Very refreshing!

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□The course continued through Wide World of Sports, including a run around Champions Stadium. Then on it went, through Disney's Hollywood Studios, the Yacht and Beach Club, and into Epcot for a spin around the World Showcase. A gospel choir offered last-minute inspiration at about 26 miles, and helped propel me to the finish line!

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□It was an excellent Marathon Weekend. It's always nice to chat with the many runners present from across the country and from around the world... runners of all abilities and experience.... all with their personal goals and experiences. The Yacht Club was very comfortable and their service and hospitality were excellent. The Expo this year was one of the best. Visits to Epcot and some of the fine Disney restaurants were an added pleasure. And the Marathon run, itself, was quite enjoyable.

About The Author: Ed enjoys running and has been participating in various runDisney events for over three years. This was his second Walt Disney

World Marathon.

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