

The 2014 Disneyland Half Marathon Weekend: A runDisney Event Review

by Bernie Edwards, PassPorter Guest Contributor

The 2014 Disneyland Half Marathon Weekend took place from Thursday, August 28 to Sunday, August 31.

This was a runDisney event, with six major components: a multi-day race expo, a 5K race on Friday, a 10K race and kids' races on Saturday, a "Pasta in the Park Party" Saturday evening, and a half marathon on Sunday. Runners could do a single race or multiple races, and could even sign up for the Dumbo Double Dare, which meant running the 10K on Saturday and the half marathon on Sunday.

This was my first runDisney event at the Disneyland Resort, and I enjoyed it immensely. I was looking forward to earning my first runDisney challenge medal, the Dumbo Double Dare. Unfortunately, work got in the way and I had to return home before the half marathon on Sunday. Still, I experienced enough to know that I will definitely be back to Disneyland for another runDisney event.

I attended the Health and Fitness Expo Thursday evening and Friday afternoon. The expo took place at the Disneyland Hotel Exhibit Hall. It was open from Noon to 8:00 pm on Thursday, 9:00 am to 8:00 pm on Friday, and from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm on Saturday. That is where the runners went to pick up their official race bib (number) and packet. There was an official runDisney merchandise area and a lot of outside vendors selling fitness apparel and equipment; several outside vendors were offering discounts on their products. There was also a shirt exchange, where runners could exchange their race shirt for any of the races for a different size if it was available; I had to use it myself and the exchange was very easy. Finally, the expo is where you can purchase the limited edition runDisney shoes produced by New Balance. These shoes have been a sensation since they were first offered, and can only be purchased at a runDisney event. Unfortunately, many people did not realize that they had to sign up in advance online to get to even try on a shoe. Many were turned away at the extremely crowded New Balance booth. The buying procedures have changed a little from race to race, so be sure to understand the current procedures if you are interested in buying a pair in the future.

I want to give some words of advice about the Health and Fitness Expo. First, be sure to go early in your trip if you want to pick up some official race merchandise. On Thursday evening, there were a lot of shirts,

hats, jackets, and sizes to choose from. By Friday afternoon, a lot of the shirts were completely sold out and what was left was in very few sizes; for example, many men's shirts only had smalls and mediums left to purchase. Some hat styles and jackets were also completely sold out by Friday afternoon. Also, be sure to spend some time listening to the guest speakers at the expo. I have always trained using Jeff Galloway's "run-walk-run" method; Jeff is the official training consultant for runDisney. It was a pleasure to meet with him and pick up an autographed copy of one of his many books at the runDisney booth; however, it was even more fun to listen to him speak and answer questions at the expo's speaker series. I also listened to a couple of nutritionists at the expo, and I listened to the race director and the runDisney "Mom" (a member of the Disney Parks Moms Panel) provide advice to runners and spectators.

The first race of the weekend was the 5K race, which started at 5:30 am on Friday. This was definitely a family event, though most of the runners were adults, and many runners wore costumes. The staging area before the race for the 5K, the 10K, and the half marathon was in a parking lot between the Disneyland Hotel and the Mickey and Friends parking structure. Disney provided water along the way for the runners, which would also be true for the 10K and half marathon.

□ The 10K race started at 5:30 am on Saturday. As in the case of the 5K, a lot of runners wore a costume. Most of the course consisted of running in either Disney California Adventure or Disneyland Park, including some backstage areas. There were also character meet and greets along the course. My favorite was a meet and greet with Stitch dressed up as Elvis. There were also some parade floats set up backstage and many runners stopped to have their picture taken in front of the floats. My favorite moments were running down Main Street USA and then running through the castle. In both cases, I kept my eyes open for official race photographers along the way to take my photo; photos can be purchased later online.

□ The Pasta in the Park Party took place Saturday evening inside Disneyland Park at the Big Thunder Ranch Jamboree. It is a separate ticketed event, and it is kind of a tradition at runDisney events in both Disneyland and Walt Disney World. The event consisted of both food and entertainment, with most of the food being "runner friendly items" containing plenty of carbohydrates and proteins for a well-balanced pre-marathon race meal.

□ The half marathon started at 5:30 am on Sunday. As in the case of the 5K and 10K, runners run through the two Disney parks and just like the previous races, a lot of runners wore costumes. However, in the half

marathon runners also spend a lot of time outside of Disney property. Runners encounter a lot of non-Disney entertainment on the streets of Anaheim, such as being cheered by cheer leaders from a local school. While I personally did not get to run it this year, I would think that a course highlight is running in Angels Stadium.

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□ In all cases, participants who finished each race got a fabulous Finisher Medal to go along with their Champion brand tech shirt that they picked up with their race packet; they also received some post-race refreshments. The exceptions were the 5K and the kids' races. Participants get a rubber medallion for those races instead of a medal made out of metal; also, the tech shirts are reserved for the longer distance races. Runners who successfully finished the 10K and the half marathon, and who officially registered for the Dumbo Double Dare, got to pick up the Dumbo Double Dare medal as well. Finally, runDisney staff and volunteers had Coast to Coast medals at the finish line for those who qualified by running both the Disneyland and Walt Disney World half marathons in the same year.

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□ The 2014 Disneyland Half Marathon Weekend was a great runDisney event. It offered a lot to both new runners and experienced runners alike. It was nice seeing entire families at the Health and Fitness Expo and out on the race courses. If you are interested in a runDisney event, I would definitely consider doing this or the other races at Disneyland. If you stay within walking distance of the Disneyland Resort, it is very easy to get around on race day. There are usually also room and theme park ticket discounts for guests participating in an event. If you are interested, be sure to keep an eye out for when registration opens; most runDisney events sell out very early. Training for an endurance race has been a life-changing experience for me, and I recommend runDisney for anybody looking to make a healthy lifestyle change. I'm already looking forward to my next runDisney event, the 2015 Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend.

About The Author: Bernie Edwards lives in Maryland with his wife and two children. He is an engineer for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and was a member of the Walt Disney World Moms Panel in 2010, 2011, and 2012, and was a member of the Disney Parks Moms Panel in the first quarter of 2013. He enjoys visiting Disney parks around the world, and sailing on the Disney Cruise Line.

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