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PLANNING YOUR DESTINATION RUN

Last February, my wife, Ewelina, and I had an enjoyable experience during our first destination run, a 13.1-mile relay at the New Orleans Rock 'n' Roll Marathon, so when we planned our second destination run—the Birell Prague Grand Prix 10K on Sept. 6—I expected a similar experience.



During the first kilometer on this muggy Saturday night in Prague, I started to regret rearranging our entire three-city European trip just to squeeze in these 6.2 miles. Forget enjoying the scenery of what some would argue is Europe's most beautiful city. I was preoccupied, and not just by the constant shifting of the fanny pack I wore with our passports, credit cards and money. We tried to avoid breaking our ankles on the cobblestones and dodged the much faster runners who didn't care that an ultra-competitive Chicagoan had far overestimated his running abilities when he signed up for this race, leaving him and his mildly perturbed wife in a starting corral where they clearly didn't belong.

Yet the palpable excitement in historic Wenceslas Square as the seconds ticked down and thousands of runners snapped photos, double-knotted their shoelaces and set their music to the right tune before taking over the streets of Prague sticks with me from that night more than any of those little annoyances. I can still hear the local bands and energetic crowds that lined the course and remember posing the handful of cameramen perched a few hundred meters before the finish line. More than anything, I recall slowing down as we crossed the Vltava River twice on the Štefánik Bridge—once in the second kilometer and again in the ninth as we headed back toward the city center—to soak in the Prague Castle lit up atop the city. It wasn't a race: it was an experience.

10 TRAVEL RUNNING TIPS

Travel running involves much more than putting on your shoes and pounding the pavement. To maximize your travel running experience, try the following tips:

- 1 Pack your running gear in your carry-on luggage.
- 2 Watch the weather so you bring proper running attire.
- 3 Get your body clock set to local time.
- 4 Prepare for the ups and downs of the course.
- 5 Plan your pre-race meal.
- 6 Carry local currency.
- 7 Ask the hotel concierge for the safest running routes.
- 8 Run in the morning to avoid tourists.
- 9 Keep an eye on the sights instead of your time.
- 10 Sign up for a race and start your trip on the right foot.

All races won't be this memorable and challenges arise when you run in a different city, such as acclimating to a time change, dealing with lost luggage or trying to find a suitable pre-race meal, but destination running provides ample opportunities as well.

"A lot of people like myself use running as an excuse to travel – that certainly was the case when I went to Berlin and London," Molly Chernick, event director at RAM Racing, says. "Running is also a great way to soak in the city."

Mari-Mar Walton, founder and managing director of Travelling Fit, an Australian-based company that organizes runner accommodations for races around the world, agrees that running is one of the best ways to see and experience a city.

"There are not many sports that have the privilege of having the main streets of major cities closed off for an event to take place," Walton says. "For example, the TCS New York City Marathon gives runners the opportunity to run through New York's five boroughs of Staten Island, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Manhattan; you get to run over the 5 bridges and end in world-renowned Central Park. The BMW Berlin Marathon takes the course along former East and West Berlin and finishes meters away from Brandenburg Gate."

Chernick, who "woke up one day in 2006 and decided to run," has completed 10 marathons, including all of the World Marathon Majors except the Tokyo Marathon.

"What I like is that a lot of courses are designed to highlight the most beautiful architecture and elements [of a city]," she says.

Chicago resident Michelle McConnell, a three-time marathon finisher, echoes those sentiments, but adds that destination running is more than just strolling through the well-manicured areas you'd find pictured on a city's tourism website.

"The thing about some races is you run through some of the gritty [areas]," McConnell said. "You're able to take in the entire city, including the areas you'd likely never see."

McConnell and her husband, Dwight, competed in the Nairobi Half Marathon in 2013 for Team World Vision. You'd expect training would ramp up leading into this type of destination run—one with higher altitudes, October temperatures in the 80s and plenty of hills—but the goal of this trip was to help raise funds for local water projects. The race also took place exactly two weeks after McConnell completed the Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

"To participate in the full marathon in Nairobi you need to be a fast runner, but the half marathon isn't as competitive and you have up to six hours to finish," McConnell says. "A lot of people walk the whole race. So we took our time, had fun high fiving and cheering on Team World Vision Kenya teammates along the course (they had a team of about 200 runners) and took in the sights of the city."

That's what makes destination running so appealing: no matter if you run to raise money for charity, gain a new perspective on a city or just stay active and have fun on your trip, you never know what you'll see, who you'll meet or what will happen.



CHICAGO STAYCATION OPTIONS

You can't make spring come any quicker, but you can find a number of fun ways to stay active and warm this winter in the Chicago area:

- 1 **Chicago Athletic Clubs climbing walls**
www.chicagoathleticclubs.com/services/climbing
- 2 **WhirlyBall in Chicago, Lombard and Vernon Hills**
www.whirlyball.com
- 3 **O'Hare Paintball Park in Bensenville**
oharepaintball.com
- 4 **Windy City Fieldhouse**
www.windycityfieldhouse.com
- 5 **Sky High Sports: The Trampoline Place in Niles**
nil.jumpskyhigh.com
- 6 **iFLY Indoor skydiving in Rosemont and Naperville**
chicago.iflyworld.com
- 7 **K1 Speed Go-Karts in Addison**
www.k1speed.com/chicago-addison-location.html
- 8 **Batting cages at Sluggers in Wrigleyville**
www.sluggersbar.com
- 9 **McQ's Sports Dome in Bolingbrook**
www.mcqsdomes.com
- 10 **The Odeum Expo Center in Villa Park**
www.odeumexpo.com/soccer/facilities.asp