



I'd rather run a mile...

On 22 April, the streets of Central London will resound to the thud of 32,000 eager pairs of trainers hitting tarmac. Katalin Hanniker thinks the Flora London Marathon should be an inspiration to us all – but it's not exactly running she has in mind...

I have to confess, I am not one of the world's natural athletes. But even for those of us whose idea of a good workout is lifting the remote control to change channels on the TV, the Flora London Marathon is still a terrific day out. And on any day of the year, the route that the runners follow is an inspiration, wending its way as it does past some of the city's greatest sights.

On the day itself, over 32,000 participants will test their physical reserves and stamina over 26 miles in this demanding but supremely rewarding course. For

the spectators thronging the pavements, there's the thrill of seeing international champions rippling (seemingly effortlessly!) across the tarmac; and, of course, there's something very moving about the sight of the thousands of participants who are there, not expecting to break any world records, but who hope either to achieve personal bests or to raise money for charity. Festivity rules the streets as everyone cheers on the runners (all of us thankful, no doubt, we're quite literally not in their shoes!) and musicians and entertainers turn out to add to the carnival atmosphere.



This page: Above: Agony and ecstasy in the Flora London Marathon **Left:** the official Flora London Marathon route showing the major sights along the way

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No doubt the last thing on runners' minds as they pound the streets is a spot of sightseeing, but for those of us contemplating less gruelling pursuits, the stunning backdrop of London's sights is a call to action: let's do some serious sightseeing. With this in mind, London Planner has created its own Alternative Marathon.

Entry Rules for the London Planner Alternative Marathon:

1 You don't need to be a hero to take part: you'll find a travelcard handy as you're encouraged to skip out the boring bits and to hop on and off public transport as much as you like.



2 In the Alternative Marathon, everyone's a winner. The only expectation is that you spend as much time as you like exploring London's greatest attractions.



3 This is possibly the best bit of all: unlike the real runners, you can eat and drink to your heart's content. On the official day, many pubs along the route put on special events, but you can enjoy the pubs and restaurants along the route, whichever day you choose to join the Alternative Marathon.

The route:

Just like the Marathon, we begin in Greenwich Park, an excellent point from which to start your exploration of London. Located on the banks of the tidal River Thames, there's more than a whiff of salt in the air in Greenwich. It's the best place to discover London's great maritime connections that so contributed to the wealth of the city and the mighty British Empire.

At the top of the hill in Greenwich Park is the Royal Observatory Greenwich, home of world time. Here you can achieve the apparently impossible - if you stand astride the Meridian Line that dissects the observatory, you'll find yourself simultaneously in two different hemispheres...

From this vantage point you can look down towards the excellent award-winning National Maritime Museum. It's delightful, interactive, airy and absorbing and it captures London's great naval history



Top right The spectacular Westminster Abbey is one of many superb sights along the Marathon route

perfectly - as does the Old Royal Naval College (the coffin of Britain's greatest naval hero, Horatio, Lord Nelson was delivered here with full naval honours following his death at Trafalgar in 1805). Then there's the Cutty Sark, the world's last clipper ship, conjuring up romantic images of Britain's great 19th century sea trade; and there's the "village" of Greenwich itself, its attractive, lively ambience recalling something of its past as a royal playground. You can happily spend a couple of days just pootling around Greenwich.

But it's time to move on and at this point, we recommend a spot of cheating: if you take a look at the route map, you'll see that Miles 7-22 pretty much treble up on themselves on both sides of the river. We suggest you take an alternative route (you can catch the attractions around mile 12 at a later stage). For the time being, hop on to the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) at Cutty Sark for Maritime Greenwich station (around Mile 7) and head north ▶

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west to DLR: Tower Gateway. The Docklands Light Railway runs along an elevated track and it's the best way to see the area's dramatic architecture including London's tallest building, Canary Wharf Tower, recognisable by its red, flashing light, a monument to the financial boom of the late 1980s. Alighting at Tower Gateway you're now effectively at mile 22 of the course; quick work I know, but just wait till you see what the final four miles have to offer!

"Athletes – world class. Organisation – world class. Scenery – world class. Drama – world class. Example of human spirit – world class. Weather – hmmm."

(David Powell, **The Times** athletics correspondent, writing about last year's Flora London Marathon)

Just over the road from the DLR is the fascinating Tower of London with its royal history of political intrigue and murderous power struggles; next door is its equally famous neighbour, Tower Bridge, offering superb views across London (particularly from the top walkway). Take your time to enjoy both attractions to the full.

Here's the clever bit: a quick walk across Tower Bridge will take you to Mile 12. (Think of all that energy you've saved: doesn't it feel good?!). Here you'll find the Bramah Tea and Coffee Museum – a suitable place to take some refreshment (as I'm sure by now your hydration levels will be low) and the ever-fascinating

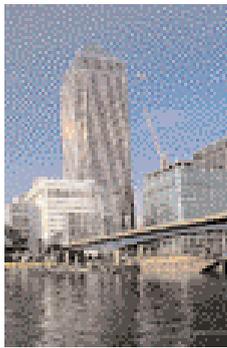


Left: the Marathon route takes you across **Tower Bridge**, one of the city's most famous landmarks, with fantastic views from its walkways **Below left:** see hi-tech London

from the elevated Docklands Light Railway passing **Canary Wharf Tower**, at the heart of Britain's economic renaissance

Design Museum (there are excellent river views from its Blue Print café).

Head back via Tower Bridge to the north bank of the Thames, and from now on we follow the Marathon route faithfully, running parallel to the river. At the junction of Lower and Upper Thames streets (Mile 23), looking north you'll see Sir Christopher Wren's Monument to the Great Fire of London in 1666. If you're still full of energy after all your exertions, you can climb the stone column for great views across the city – and what's more, you'll even receive a certificate proving what an athlete you really are!



Back at ground level, look south and you'll see London Bridge, the Thames' only crossing point until 1750. It is a late 20th-century replacement for the earlier wooden and stone bridges

immortalised in the children's rhyme 'London Bridge is falling down', which indeed it did at regular intervals until the 18th century when disputes over ownership and maintenance were finally quelled.

Continuing upriver, the next bridge that you come to is the beautiful Millennium Bridge, sadly not due to be open to the public at the time of going to press, but still worth stopping to admire. From the foot of the bridge to the north, your view will be dominated by Wren's masterpiece, St Paul's Cathedral. It is certainly worth a short detour from the route to investigate. Its glorious golden ceilings are quite overwhelmingly beautiful. To the south of the bridge, you'll see the equally gigantic Tate Modern, London's newest gallery that has redefined the concept of art appreciation in the 21st century. This spectacular gallery is as much about its austere, industrially chic architecture and superb views over to St Paul's as it is about its paintings, sculptures and installations. To its left, you'll espy the thatched roof of the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe, tiny by comparison with Tate Modern, but just as fascinating to theatre and Shakespeare lovers.

Back on the north bank, a hop and a skip upriver just before Waterloo Bridge (also worth crossing for views of the river), you'll pass in front of Somerset House, reinvented last year as a cultural centre. It has an intriguing naval and artistic heritage and three superb

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museums within its walls and is one of the few places on the north bank of the Thames open to the public. If the weather is good, after Easter you can take a cup of tea on the River Terrace and imagine the view that would have greeted Lord Nelson or Jane Austen, both regular visitors here in their day (minus the South Bank centre and British Airways London Eye, of course!).

After Mile 25, the route veers sharply westwards, past Big Ben, the world's most famous clock and bell tower, where you'll turn right into Parliament Square. Take the opportunity to admire the tremendous mock-Gothic architecture of the UK's political power house, the Houses of Parliament. To the south of the Square is Westminster Abbey where almost all of England's kings and queens have been crowned. It's an awe-inspiring building to visit, a glorious jumble of history, famous names and beautiful artefacts.

Back on track, the route follows Birdcage Walk towards Buckingham Palace, home to The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. You'll be walking in the footsteps of the three officers and 31 (or 40 if The Queen is in residence) guardsmen who march down here at about 11.30 on alternate days in April in the Changing of the Guard, an unmissable ceremony of pomp and pageant.

We're now approaching the home-stretch. The end is in sight as the runners go that final mile, past the Palace into the broad Mall (you'll get the best views of the finish of the race from St James's Park to the right). Why not treat yourself to a stroll around this lovely park, admiring the wild fowl and attractive lawns, and taking a cup of tea in the café?

So, congratulations! You've followed in the footsteps on some of the world's great athletes. You've completed the Alternative Marathon, seen the city's greatest sights and you probably still have some energy left over to go out to the theatre afterwards! What better day out could you ask for?

For details of the Flora London Marathon, turn to page 43. For full details of the sightseeing attractions mentioned here, see pages 61-74. For museums and galleries, see pages 76-81. For information on Getting Around London, see pages 46-52. Changing of the Guard details are on page 75



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