

It's about 13,000 miles long. It spans 15 provinces and regions across China. Its earliest construction goes all the way back to 5th century B.C. And on May 21, 2016, for about 2,500 runners from around the world, it's the site of a marathon.

As you might imagine, the Great Wall Marathon is unlike any other marathon in the world. And with steep climbs, sharp declines, thousands of stairs, and high temperatures, it's also one of the world's most challenging. Check out these facts about what makes this race one-of-a-kind:

Highs, Lows, And Everything In Between

If you're brave enough to sign up for the Great Wall Marathon, get ready for some ups and downs — about 5 miles of them, to be exact — plus a total of 5,164 steps. At the start of the race, runners face a two-mile section that involves a 20-step climb on one end and a 562-step decline on the other. The inclines and declines consist of small, shallow steps – and heartbreakingly knee-high ones, as well.

Keep Up With The Clock

The Great Wall Marathon is relatively strict with its time limit considering how unforgiving the course is — participants are required to complete the entire race in eight hours or less. If runners fail to complete pre-marked sections in a designated amount of time, they are not allowed to continue.

It's A Scorcher

Great Wall Marathon runners should be prepared for all kinds of weather conditions – especially unbearable heat and sunshine. During the inaugural race, held in May of 1999, the temperature hovered around 90°F, and there was no breeze for relief.

Tack On The Time

This challenging race usually takes participants about 50 percent longer to complete than the average marathon. The Great Wall Marathon website tells runners to “leave [their] watch at the hotel, in order not to focus on [mile] averages.”

A Global Affair

This adventure-packed race currently brings 2,500 runners from more than 60 nations to its course. In 2000 – the second year the race took place – a majority of participants

came from Denmark, as well as 11 from China, half a dozen from the U.S. and a smattering from France, Sweden, Germany and the U.K.

On Your Mark, Get Set, Go ... Slow

While its tough conditions draw elite runners and athletes to the start line, the Great Wall Marathon also attracts running and marathon novices because of its breathtaking views and Zen-like setting. The slower crowd often takes breaks to talk to locals, take photographs and socialize with other runners.

Walking The Wall

The race takes place primarily in the Tianjin Province, winding through incredible scenery and small, traditional villages with few tourists. The actual wall section of the marathon is limited to two miles – but it's two miles of treacherous track.

Will Walk For Water

On the morning before the race starts, volunteers carry 15,000 bottles of water on foot to locations throughout the course to ensure runners can stay hydrated in hot conditions. There are water stations approximately every two and a half miles.

Crossing The Finish Line

Between 1999 and 2012, 12,965 tired but elated runners have crossed the Great Wall Marathon's finish line.

Adventure Marathons

From epic locations to extreme conditions, races such as the Polar Circle Marathon in Greenland, Big Five Marathon in South Africa, Bagan Temple Marathon in Myanmar, and the Petra Desert Marathon in Jordan are available for when a regular road race just won't cut it. The races are part of a series of Adventure Marathons organized by Denmark-based Albatros Adventure, the company that founded the Great Wall Marathon in 1999.