

Reykjavik Marathon
Reykjavik, Iceland
Saturday, August 24, 2013
8:40 AM

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Iceland is a Nordic island country, situated at the confluence of the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. Vikings from Norway were the first settlers in the 8th century. The country was part of the Norwegian and Danish monarchies for centuries. Iceland became independent in 1918 and a republic was declared in 1944. The population is approximately 320,000 and nearly 2/3 lives in Reykjavik and its suburbs. Reykjavik is the world's northernmost capital of a sovereign state (Greenland, which is north of Iceland, belongs to Denmark). It is a beautiful and clean city. I was told that the average temperature in January and August were 32 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit, respectively. Iceland's major exports are fish and aluminum. Health care and education (including college at undergraduate level) are free. The dairy products are excellent. There are 400,000 sheeps and 100,000 horses. The horses are a bit small and locals will be insulted if you refer to their horses as ponies! The tap water is very tasty. Be prepared to spend money as it is an expensive country.

I flew into Reykjavik, via JFK Airport, on Wednesday, 21 August. I took advantage of the 10-hour layover and visited the midtown Manhattan. As had been planned, I met Whitney, who is a fashion designer in NYC, for dinner. Her parents and I attended the graduate school at The Ohio State University in the early '80s and have remained friends ever since. I had not seen Whitney since she was 8-9 months old, and that was 30 years ago! We had a nice dinner get-together.



After the dinner, Whitney gave me a tour of the Times Square neighborhood before I returned to the airport for the midnight flight into Reykjavik. I enjoyed the brief time in the Big Apple.



The flight arrived at Reykjavik around 9 AM on Thursday. I was with Boston-based Marathon Tours and Travels, which provided the transportation to Plaza Hotel in the City Center, where I stayed for four nights. A nice hotel within short walking distance to start/finish lines of the marathon as well as nearby restaurants and shops.



The Hallgrímskirkja Church, located at the top of a hill, is the most prominent and visible City Center building.



The Sun Voyager, built in 1990 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Reykjavik, resembles a Viking ship. It is located near the harbor.



On Friday, I enjoyed a daylong south shore excursion that included Eyjafjallajökull - the volcano that erupted in 2010 and adversely affected air travel for few weeks; Seljalandsfoss - a waterfall dropping 130 feet into a shallow pool with space to walk behind it; the tiny village of Skogar; Skogafoss waterfall that drops 200 feet into the river Skogaa; Vik - Iceland's most southerly village; and the black-sanded Reynisfjara beach. On the way back to the hotel, we stopped at the sport stadium to pick up the race packet which included the bib number, timing chip, short-sleeved technical shirt, and a water bottle. We did not stay for the pre-race pasta dinner which was included in race entry. It rained on and off all day and quite windy at times, especially at the country side.



This was the 30th edition of the marathon. There were 14,000 who had signed up for the marathon, marathon relay, half marathon, 10K, and 3K fun run. The marathon start time was 8:40 AM. I woke up at 7:50 AM! The panic mode lasted a few seconds. I made it to the start line on time; didn't have the time to do my pre-run rituals, though. Temperature was in low 50s. On and off light rain throughout the day. A bit breezy. In short, we enjoyed a nice running weather. The course was scenic. I wouldn't describe it as hilly but it was not flat either. Traffic control was good. Water/sports drink stations were located at approximately every five kilometers. There were pace groups. There were a few bands and musicians on the course. We ran the first 10 miles with the half marathoners. There were some recovery drink and food items at the finish area. The finisher's medallion was nice. In short, it was a well-organized running event.

There were 626 male and 225 female marathon finishers; the winning times were 2:33:49 (male) and 2:55:14 (female). There were 1137 male and 967 female half marathon finishers; the winning times were 1:07:40 (male) and 1:22:57 (female). There were 2157 male and 3085 female 10K finishers; the winning times were 31:50 (male) and 38:37 (female).

I have been dealing with a torn lateral meniscus in my right knee for the past several months. I took it easy, running the first half in 2:17 and finishing in 4:40:34 (10:42 pace). I made several stops to take photos and walked the aid stations. Believe it or not, running the marathon felt effortless and I enjoyed it a lot. This was my 99th marathon and crossing the finish line made me very happy.



On Sunday, I enjoyed the daylong Golden Circle tour of the Icelandic countryside. We visited the Þingvellir National Park where the tectonic plates between America and Europe meet and are slowly drifting apart; the Gullfoss waterfall; and the spouting hot springs of Geysir and Strokkur. The tour ended by relaxing in the geothermal hot springs of the Blue Lagoon.



All aspects of the 6-day trip went well. Marathon Tours and Travels had done a nice job in organizing the land part of the trip. I highly recommend Reykjavik Marathon as a destination marathon.