



ZAPPOS.COM
 ROCK 'N' ROLL LAS
 VEGAS MARATHON

ING NEW YORK CITY MARATHON

MILE 1

Next race: Nov. 7

THE MILE: In a race filled with memorable miles, none better represents this marathon than the start from Staten Island over the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. The race famously covers all five boroughs of the city, and the bridge offers runners an impressive view of what lies ahead of them. The huge crowds and uphill climb make for a challenging start—but you won't find too many runners complaining. nycmarathon.org



MEMORABLE MARATHON MILES

Most marathon courses have at least one signature element that makes its way onto the race poster and entry form. But how many have one truly unique mile on the course that's worth bragging about at the water cooler on Monday? It turns out, more than you think. Let the debate begin as Competitor picks the most memorable 26 miles of U.S. marathons.

BY JEFF BANOWETZ

Let's get this out of the way first: For most people, the most memorable mile of any marathon is the last one. Nothing produces a sense of accomplishment like crossing the line and receiving that finisher's medal. And, of course, that's also when you get to stop running. But in the days that follow, you'll usually be able to pick out a few other miles that stick with you. You'll recall the amazing views, crazy spectators or outrageous sights along the course.

A well-organized marathon offers runners the support necessary to run 26.2 miles. But a great marathon is more than that—it's an experience.

In compiling a list like this, we realized just how much the sport has grown. Of the hundreds of U.S. races we considered for this story, most of them responded with enthusiasm, recommending those miles that make their races unique. Finding memorable miles was easy—narrowing the list down to 26 was hard. Our rules were pretty basic: only U.S. races and only one mile per race.

Our final list highlights the variety, beauty and splendor that can be found in marathons across the country. We had to leave off plenty of amazing races, but ultimately, when it came down to 26, these races came out on top. Here is our list of the most memorable marathon miles, start to finish. Get your race calendars ready.

BANK OF AMERICA CHICAGO MARATHON

MILE 1

Next race: Oct. 10

THE MILE: Chicago may be known for its flat and fast course, but you're bound to be even more impressed by the architectural skyline while surrounded by nearly 40,000 other runners. The race begins in Grant Park, with Lake Michigan to the right and the city's skyscrapers to the left. You'll pass Chicago's newest marvel—Millennium Park, with the Frank Gehry-designed Pritzker Pavilion, visually stunning in brushed stainless steel. Then runners travel under a 925-foot-long nonlinear bridge filled with spectators. You'll see it again—at least from a distance—in another 26 miles. chicagomarathon.com



Photos by photonum.net

ZAPPOS.COM ROCK 'N' ROLL LAS VEGAS MARATHON

MILE 3

Next race: Dec. 5

THE MILE: Sky divers, rock music, Elvis, Celine Dion impersonators and quickie weddings.

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Sound like a typical night in Vegas? Actually, it's a typical mile at the Rock 'n' Roll Las Vegas Marathon—the only event to close down the Las Vegas Strip. The race starts near the Mandalay Bay Resort and features a wave of runners who marry or renew their vows on the course. The Running Reverend leads happy couples, along with Running Elvi, who serve as witness to the ceremony. Fireworks go off and runners make their way to Mile 3, where the three-minute ceremony takes place. As with all the Rock 'n' Roll events, bands perform at every mile. runrocknroll.com

BIG ISLAND INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

MILE 4

Next race: March 20

THE MILE: This race in Hilo, Hawaii, prides itself on highlighting the sights of “old Hawaii.” This means you'll get plenty of unspoiled views of interior forests, small fishing villages and, of course, the Pacific Ocean. At Mile 4, runners go through a lush bamboo rainforest and across narrow wooden bridges that show off some of the island's best waterfalls. While it's hard to find a bad view in Hawaii, it's even harder to beat these tropical finds. hilomarathon.org

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26.2 FOR DONNA

MILE 5

Next race: Feb. 13

THE MILE: Founded by Donna Deegan in Jacksonville, Fla., this is the only race in the country that donates 100 percent of its proceeds to breast cancer research and care.

At Mile 5, runners enter the Memorial Mile, a section run on Jacksonville Beach that is filled with inspirational signs dedicated to those who have lost the battle to cancer. It's an emotional sight that puts marathoning in perspective.

breastcancermarathon.com

COLUMBIA GORGE MARATHON

MILE 5

Next race: Oct. 24

THE MILE: In only its second year, this marathon in Hood River, Ore., is already drawing rave reviews for the course that follows the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail and provides beautiful views of the river gorge. At Mile 5, runners pass through the Mosier Twin Tunnels, which were carved out of the rock in the early 1920s. columbiagorgemarathon.com

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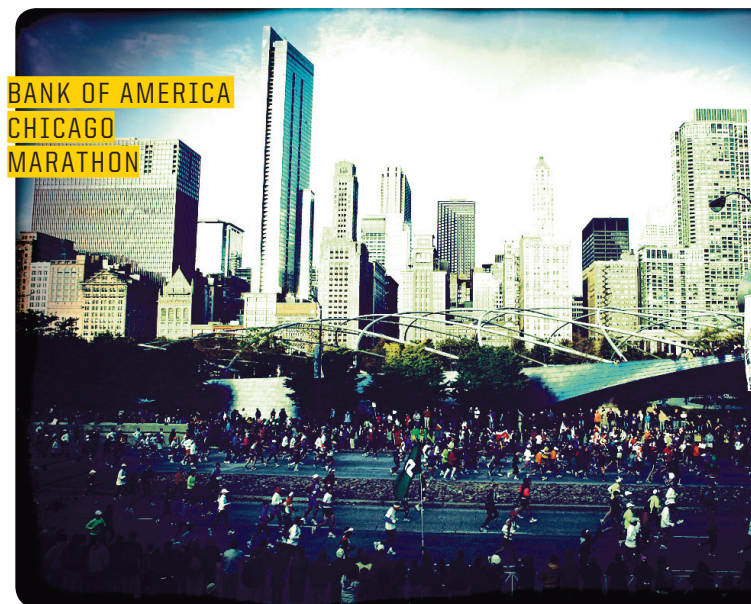
HOOVER DAM MARATHON

MILE 6

Next race: Oct. 30

THE MILE: Run on paved and packed-dirt roads, this race in Boulder City, Nev., meanders through the Mojave Desert and includes historic railroad tunnels and views of Lake Mead. But, as the name suggests, runners really make the trek from Las Vegas

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BANK OF AMERICA
CHICAGO
MARATHON

for the view of the colossal Hoover Dam between Miles 5 and 6. calicoracing.com

DETROIT FREE PRESS MARATHON

MILE 7

Next race: Oct. 17

THE MILE: This marathon actually takes runners out of the country as the course brings them across the Ambassador Bridge to Windsor, Canada, around Mile 3. That may be the more scenic mile, but the more memorable comes at Mile 7 where runners return to the United States via the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, which runs under the Detroit River. freepressmarathon.com

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ST. GEORGE MARATHON

MILE 8

Next race: Oct. 2

THE MILE: Take a look at the course elevation and you'll discover why this race has become such a popular Boston qualifier—it looks downhill the

whole way. But looks can be deceiving, and Mile 8 features a memorable climb.

After crossing the Santa Clara River Bridge, runners climb Veyo Hill, which provides the most challenging mile of the course—especially since you've become accustomed to going downhill. stgeorgemarathon.com

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CATALINA MARATHON

MILE 8

Next race: March 12

THE MILE: Head to Catalina Island for a marathon with wild vistas and off-the-beaten-path adventure. The race features 23 miles on dirt trails, where you're more likely to see wild buffalo than race spectators. Between Miles 7 and 8, runners drop down toward an inlet called Little Harbor. The coastline is on your right, buffalo are usually on the ridge, and you can spy blue ocean and green fields with wildflowers. The views help you forget the 4,000 feet of climbing. pacificsportsllc.com

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THE SAN FRANCISCO MARATHON

MILE 9

Next race: July 31

THE MILE: More than

11

two miles of this marathon is run on one of the city's most iconic landmarks—the

Golden Gate Bridge. Runners start climbing up the bridge near Mile 5, run over to Marin County and then loop back to San Francisco. We chose the mile on the way back for its view of the city skyline.

thesfmarathon.com

WALT DISNEY WORLD MARATHON

MILE 11

Next race: Jan. 9

THE MILE: Your

family won't be complaining about being dragged to another marathon here. This marathon features a tour of all four of the Disney Parks—Epcot, Animal Kingdom, Disney's Hollywood Studios and the Magic Kingdom—and you'll finish early enough in the day to enjoy the parks with your family at a slower pace. Mile 11 goes through the Magic Kingdom, and runners who aren't worried about their finishing times have been known to take a quick ride before finishing the race.

disneyworldmarathon.com

BOSTON MARATHON

MILE 13

Next race: April 18

THE MILE: This marathon

may be the most historic in the world (2011 marks its 115th edition), but for many

runners—particularly of the male persuasion—the most

memorable mile involves the women from Wellesley College who show their support between Miles 12 and 13. For 111 years, the students have been cheering on marathon participants.

The nearly half-mile “scream tunnel” involves thousands of women and can be heard from a mile away. bostonmarathon.com

PIKES PEAK MARATHON

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MILE 13

Next race: Aug. 21

THE MILE: One of the more

extreme races, Pikes Peak features a 13-mile run up, followed by 13 miles back down. The race starts at an elevation of 6,300 feet and involves nearly 8,000 feet of climbing until reaching the summit at 14,115 feet. After punishing your body with 13 miles of uphill (at an average grade of 11 percent), you're rewarded with this middle mile's view from the easternmost 14,000-foot peak in the United States.

pikespeakmarathon.org

BIG SUR INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

MILE 13

Next race: May 1

THE MILE: Big Sur is known

for its jaw-dropping ocean views along the Pacific Coast Highway from Big Sur to Carmel, Calif. But its true

signature moment comes close to the halfway point at Mile 13, as runners cross the Bixby Creek Bridge, which rises nearly 300 feet above the Pacific.

Runners approach the bridge after first ascending Hurricane Point, the toughest climb on the course. Once they hit the



RIM ROCK MARATHON PRESENTED BY US BANK

bridge, they're greeted by a panorama that has graced a thousand postcards. bsim.org

RIM ROCK MARATHON PRESENTED BY US BANK

MILE 13

Next race: Nov. 13

THE MILE: Held in

the Colorado National Monument, this point-to-point race gains 2,000 feet of elevation before losing 2,100 feet. Not for the faint of heart—particularly since weather can be iffy in Colorado in November—the Rim Rock offers breathtaking views of red-walled canyons and rock formations. The crest of the final climb near Mile 13 rewards runners with the best vistas and, even better, the knowledge that the course is all downhill from there. ascentproductions.net

MESA FALLS MARATHON

MILE 14

Next race: Aug. 27

THE MILE: This rural, point-to-point race begins in the Targhee National Forest and finishes

in Ashton, Idaho. The course offers a combination of asphalt, gravel and dirt roads in addition to spectacular views of the sunrise over the Teton Mountains. At Mile 14, runners make their way onto a dirt trail and snake their way along the mountain ridge overlooking the Warm River. It's easy to forget that you're part of civilization. mesafallsmarathon.com

MOUNT DESERT ISLAND MARATHON

MILE 15

Next race: Oct. 17

THE MILE: Held in Acadia

National Park in Maine, this race features sweeping vistas of the Atlantic. Mile 15 is run

along a road that is literally carved out of the side of Norumbega Mountain with views of the only natural fjord on the east coast of the U.S. It's not uncommon to spot eagles above and harbor seals or porpoises below. This is also the mile where you'll spot the famous tree in the race logo and finishers medal. mdimarathon.org

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CENTURYLINK WHISTLESTOP MARATHON

MILE 16

Next race: Oct. 9

THE MILE: Most of the course,

a point-to-point race from Iron River to Ashland, Wis., uses an abandoned railroad bed that's

been turned into a gravel trail. Much of the race takes place in the Chequamegon National Forest. At Mile 16, runners cross over a bridge at Fish Creek that takes full advantage of the autumnal scenery. whistlestopmarathon.com

LAKE TAHOE MARATHON

MILE 21

Next race: Sept. 25

THE MILE: This

event is part of a series of races and events held over five days that reads like a buffet menu put together by over-ambitious distance nuts. Races include a 72-mile ultra, a Tahoe triple (three marathons in three days), a 20-miler and a half marathon—even bike rides and kayak trips. But the festival ends with the Lake

Tahoe Marathon, which offers a signature mile close to the course's highest point at 6,800 feet. laketahoemarathon.com

LITTLE GRAND CANYON MARATHON

MILE 23

Next race: Sept. 10

THE MILE: Held in eastern Utah, this race

features a rare glimpse into the past as well as scenery that will knock your socks off. The last 10 miles go through Buckhorn Wash, with sheer red cliffs rising on either side of the canyon. Dinosaur footprints are visible along the side of the road, and at Mile 23, some huge American Indian art panels are visible. mammothmarathons.org

HONDA LOS ANGELES MARATHON

MILE 25

Next race: March 20

THE MILE: This race debuted

a new course last year to better highlight the area's attributes.

With "A Landmark at Every Mile," the course hits many tourist spots as it runs from Dodgers Stadium to the Santa Monica Pier. But while there are plenty of "Oh,

look!" moments, the highlight for many will be near Mile 25 as runners get their first view of the Pacific and then travel along Ocean Drive to the beach-party finish. lamarathon.com

NIAGARA FALLS INTERNATIONAL MARATHON

MILE 26

Next race: Oct. 24

THE MILE: This race qualifies

as a U.S. race since

it starts in Buffalo, N.Y. But participants will need a passport

to run into Canada where the race finishes in front of Niagara Falls. (Don't worry, you go through customs at the race expo, not during the race.) At Mile 5, runners cross the Peace Bridge into Canada, which offers views of both countries. But it's tough to beat the sheer power and scale of Niagara Falls at the finish line. niagarafallsmarathon.com

CELLCOM GREEN BAY MARATHON

MILE 26

Next Race: May 15

THE MILE: The frozen tundra.

You can thank the 1967 NFL championship game—dubbed the "Ice Bowl" because it was played in below-13 degree temperatures—for creating the legend. But it's tough to come up with a stadium that's associated more closely with a sport and a community than Lambeau Field and Green Bay, Wis. Getting Packers season tickets means putting your name on a 30-year waiting list, but marathon runners can take to the field in the final mile and circle the not-so-frozen tundra in May.

cellcomgreenbaymarathon.com

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FORD IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

MILE 26

Next race: Oct. 9

THE MILE: OK, so technically this isn't a marathon. Or more accurately, the marathon is only one part of this event in Hawaii. But how can a list of memorable marathons not include the most drama-filled, tear-inducing finish to any race in the country? You could fill a book (and many have) about the drama as athletes take the final steps to the finish after a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike and 26.2-mile run. From Julie Moss's crawl to Paula Newby-Fraser's collapse, Mile 26 brings back countless examples of grit and determination. ironman.com

LAKE PLACID MARATHON

MILE 26

Next race: June 12

THE MILE: This marathon

takes advantage of both of the town's greatest strengths—its Olympic identity and scenic

beauty. This multi-loop course winds up with a tough climb back into Lake Placid. But you're rewarded with a finish on the Olympic speedskating oval—where Eric Heiden won five gold medals in 1980, in the shadow of the arena where the U.S. hockey team accomplished its "miracle on ice." lakeplacidmarathon.com **CM**

