

It is not only one of the world's most popular marathons (participants from 68 nations took part in 2019) but, arguably, one of the most demanding, with more than 5,000 steps of the Great Wall to climb.



The race is uphill from the start, with the first of the 5,164 steps kicking in at about 5 kilometers (3 miles). From this point, the course follows a 3-kilometer (1.8-mile) stretch of the Great Wall, including 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) around the magnificent Huangyaguan fortress itself.



► marathon in 1999 (some things remain constant, however—Dane Henrik Brandt has taken part in every race in the marathon's 20-year history!). They can choose from three distances, all of which start and end in the Yin and Yang Square of the Huangyaguan fortress section of the wall. Participants in the full marathon pass through this square twice over the course of the race, looping over a section of the wall itself twice also and enjoying the breathtaking views of the lush, green landscape, with the wall appearing as a single vein ahead and behind. The course's lower section, through farmland and small villages, often has a festive atmosphere, with local onlookers cheering on participants; don't take too long admiring the view or taking selfies with supporters, though—there's an eight-hour time limit and a flight to catch. Those steps won't climb themselves.

Be aware that, as an international runner looking to take part, you must sign up for a tour package, as only Chinese nationals are

eligible for an entry package that covers just the race. These six- or seven-day packages include transport, accommodation, and sightseeing, and will enable you to make the most of racing in this exciting historic region. ■

Length: 8.5, 21.1, or 42.2 km (5.3, 13.1, or 26.2 mi)
Location: Huairou District, China
Date: May
Type: trail/steps
Temperature Ø: 16–35 °C (61–95 °F)