

Marathon OZ Vs Marathon OS

Which one should you do?

Written by Chris Truscott

So you have made the decision to run a marathon. Where and when are the next two decisions you need to make. Let's compare two time periods and two corresponding marathons, both locally and overseas. In April you have marathons Canberra and London and in September, Sydney and Berlin.

Travel

Running overseas is, well, running O-V-E-R-S-E-A-S. A lot of flying hours, the associated jetlag, disorientation in your new destination, and then there's the last minute self control over diet and rest.

Both London and Berlin are approximately 21hrs flying time with a usual layover of approximately two hours in Asia. Add the transfer time at both ends and the airport admin time, and you have over 25hrs on the go. This is with little or no sleep, a lack of quality nutrition and the dehydration resulting from traveling at 40,000ft. And that's not counting the cramped conditions that inhibit any physical movement.

You are also advised to arrive one day earlier for every hour of time change experienced at your destination. That's nine days for London and eight days for

London marathon enjoys spectacular scenery.



Berlin. If you are planning a holiday as part of your overseas marathon you ideally want to run the race early, so you can then kick back and enjoy the holiday. Eight to nine days is a long time to sit idle, eating pasta and resting up before the forthcoming challenge.

So the first points go to the local marathons, Sydney and Canberra. You only need to take a short flight or drive on the morning or day before.

Climate

Next is climatic adaptation. Most of us would live and train in Australia, so you know the weather and the terrain. You will be self-assured that the weather and course on the day won't be a major concern, simply because you are already adapted. Both London and Berlin marathons are held in opposite seasons to Australia, albeit spring versus autumn or autumn versus spring, however both have recorded snowfall in the months that they hold their marathons. My experience of London was one worth forgetting - cold, wet and windy. Legs and arms seizing up in the cold, gloves all the way, and a cold rain. But the 2001 and 2002 Berlin Marathons offered perfect conditions on the day - overcast, 15-17 degrees, and no wind. Pot luck of course. At least if the weather turns nasty here, you don't have the huge investment of time and money at stake.

The Course

As a foreigner, or local for that matter, competing in Sydney on a stunning September morning is almost the perfect start to a marathon. The run crosses the Harbour Bridge, snakes around the Opera House and Botanical gardens, and then Centennial Park. It takes in the CBD and Darling Harbour before heading out to the renowned Bay Run. Canberra offers an almost flat, smooth course around parts of the Nation's capital that you can expect to see in travel brochures. The course is a pleasant experience that enables runners to view their mates on the out and back loops.

London and Berlin on the other hand are completely flat, very fast courses, that ensure an excellent chance to run fast. Both marathons are the traveller's trail, passing iconic structures such as Tower Bridge, Westminster Abbey and

Buckingham Palace in London, and the Brandenburg Gates, Checkpoint Charlie and Alexander Platz in Berlin. Aussies will often run 2-4% faster in London compared to Canberra, so there is not much in it - unless it is atmosphere you are craving to get you to the finish line!

Atmosphere

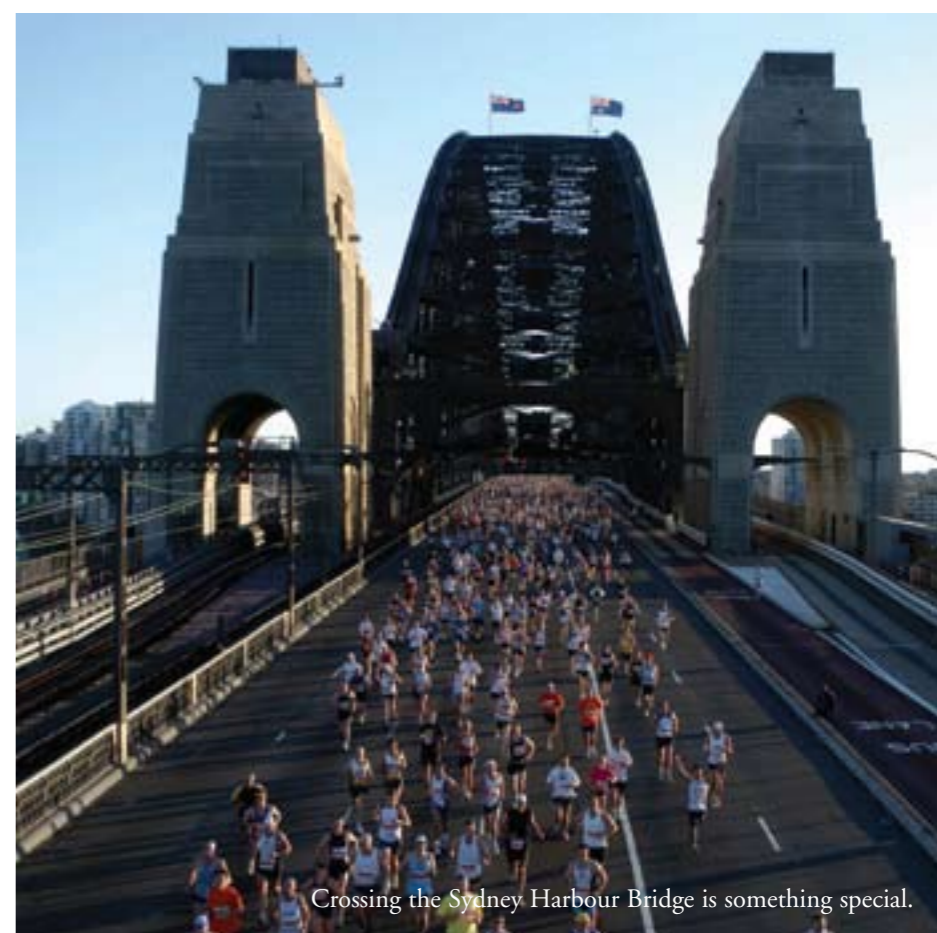
In this category, overseas wins without any shadow of a doubt. My first experience overseas was in Rotterdam, 1998. Since then I have run two Berlin marathons and once in London. Not a lot of races I know, but the atmosphere and support of these cities is overwhelming, no matter what level you are at. The Europeans really know how to throw an event. The music, the layout of the start/finish and the post-race amenities are astounding. And before you think you will be out there pounding the bitumen on your own, think again. Tens of thousands of spectators awake on race day, don their warm attire, and make their way down to their favourite vantage point. Do they have friends and family in the race? Maybe, but most watch the event because this is an annual thing they do. My experiences have been really uplifting and energising, especially when running along by myself with a sea of people either side to push me further. Play up to the crowd and they will respond and boost you even more.

Now compare this to the scant number of Aussies who rise before 10am on a Sunday and can be bothered standing on the roadside for hours, watching an event that is clogging up their streets. Cynical? Very. The culture is very different and unfortunately for us runners, we're on our own as we bound along. Having said that, Canberra and Sydney both provide a good finish area with a modest amount of cheering spectators. The atmosphere in the days leading up to the race can also sometimes have a bearing on your performance. In London and Berlin, you can feel the buzz as it increases towards race day. The event expos are huge and offer some fantastic products and information. The city gears itself up for a complete closure and you can actually feel that the overall support is there. Also Berlin has no cut-off times, so any level of runner can participate.

Your preparation

Touchdown Berlin - what to eat? Bratwurst, Wiener Schnitzel, Sauer-Kraut and beer are plentiful, and certainly appealing post-race, but to exercise a level

The atmosphere at Berlin is inspirational!



Crossing the Sydney Harbour Bridge is something special.

The course might not be flat but the scenery alone is worth the entry fee.



of self-control is necessary. In both London and Berlin there are plenty of pasta restaurants to help you carb-up for the upcoming run. Water and pasta for 4 days straight, it is boring I know, especially when you also need to exercise some restraint on the sightseeing and exploring you will want to do when you first get there. Compare this to the level of control you can exercise at the local marathons. You have the benefit of keeping your normal routine and diet in the days leading up to the race. You will also find it much easier to stay focused on the task at hand.

Cost

Nothing to compare here. If you decide on overseas marathon, prepare to fork out plenty of money. You'll need airfares, accommodation, transfers, taxis, food and drink, entry fees and running gear. The Euro will zap some of the Aussie out of the dollar, but the Pound will crush it, so ensure you budget more than you think is feasibly enough. Canberra and Sydney involve entry fees, accommodation if required, and some pasta money, but that's it. Points to the locals.

Entry Procedure

Unless you have run under 2.15.00 in the past 18mths or you belong to a running

club in London, your only chance of running is via a sports tour company. They have packages that include accommodation, entry and transfer to the start, and although it is reasonably pricey, it is pretty much the only way for the average punter. Berlin is open to everyone but entries are usually filled early in the year, so get in quickly. Sydney and Canberra are okay for entering up until a week or so before the event, but watch for the late entry penalties as they can bite.

Conclusion

It's entirely up to you. For your very first marathon I would suggest testing the water with Canberra or Sydney. The cost and time commitment make local marathons much more appealing for a debut. Once you are hooked then set yourself the goal of going overseas for the experience, it will certainly be something that you cherish for a lifetime and if you plan a holiday around the event your money will go a lot further.

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Pete Pfitzinger is the founder of LocoRunning in NZ & Olympic Marathonner in 1994, 1998 He says, "I love the Perfecto and put over 1400km on my first pair." His best times are 10K 28:41 Half-Marathon 1:03:14 Marathon 2:11:43

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