

Queenstown and action adventure have always been a marriage made in heaven. Now, starting this November, the very first Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon is bringing a whole new element to getting out and enjoying the great subalpine outdoors.

But before you faint at the mental image of marathoners huffing up snowy inclines, fear not – the course is entirely sane, just flat-out beautiful. The full marathon starts at world-famous Millbrook Resort, curling around Arrowtown and stunning Lake Hayes, before heading for a shoreline run along the Frankton Arm of Lake Wakitipu, into the ethereal Queenstown Gardens (nowhere does emerald green better than the South Island) and on to the finish line in the recreational heart of town.

Half-marathon and 10km-run options begin on the same course, and with two lakeside trails and an over-river crossing of the Old Shotover Bridge all framed by Queenstown's spectacular mountain backdrop, this has got to be a candidate for the most visually appealing marathon event on the planet.

So, it's your chance to indulge in all the resort area's renowned gorgeousness – and stretch your legs at the same time, says event manager Dave Beeche, CEO of Lagardere Unlimited. "We have been working on this for some time, recognising the gap in the market for an international running festival of this kind in Queenstown," says Beeche.

He's on the money: interest from all over the world already is such that pre-registration, via the event website, is strongly recommended, with participation to be capped this inaugural year "to make sure we get the athlete experience right. Then we'll grow it from there into an event that attracts 10,000 people in future".

Having run a few marathons and Ironmans himself, Beeche says he has extra incentive to make everything go smoothly first pop: "I'm on the ground in year one so that I can run it myself in year two."

Running through an ever-changing scenic postcard has got to be a natural tonic for overcoming the lactic wall, but it's not only the inspirational scenery that runners will be impressed by. "One of the unique things about this event from a runner's perspective is that the course is this combo of surfaces, including a lot of smooth, hard-packed trail – which runners love, because it's easier on the old bones than tarseal. It's not a Camelback-style hard trail, it's a softer version, for non-hardcore trail runners. And the achievement that was absolutely key is that we've managed to create a predominantly flat trail in a reasonably hilly area."

The trails were created by the Queenstown Trails Trust, which is the Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon's official charity. Ten dollars from each marathon entry fee will go directly towards maintaining and developing cycling and walking trails throughout the Wakatipu Basin.

But what if you've never raced before? No problem, there's something for everyone. You've got plenty of time to start training – and the half-marathon and 10km-run options

With one of the country's most stunning scenic backdrops, the Air New Zealand Queenstown International Marathon is set to become a runner's dream.

flat-out
BEAUTIFUL



Destination Queenstown

QUEENSTOWN CENTRAL Born in the gold rush, surrounded by soaring scenery and so named because its beauty “was fit for Queen Victoria”, the vibrant town of 5000 is focused on adventure, boutique shopping and convivial entertainment, and custom-made for chilling out after all that bungy-jumping, horse-trekking, jet-boating and river-rafting on its doorstep. Puttering across Lake Wakatipu on the 1912 steamer the TSS *Earnslaw* is a quintessential local experience.

ARROWTOWN

Immerse yourself in living history in an 1860s settlement built by gold-rush pioneers, or take a step back in time and visit a stone-cottaged ghost town by heading up by bike or 4WD (you’ll need it to cross the Arrow River 22 times) to spookily peaceful Macetown.



LAKE HAYES Picture mountains and poplars shimmering in reflected glory on a still blue canvas. Arrowtown’s scenic jewel is said to be the most photographed lake in New Zealand, a highlight for artists and nature-lovers (spot the spiffy-looking crested grebes), a magnet for fly-fishers (brown trout), swimmable, and great for mountain-biking thanks to the Lake Hayes Circuit shoreside loop. It’s even got a coffee stop and winery. What more could you need?



offer easy, entry-level running on the mainly flat, fast course, which has a few gentle undulations and a mix of trails and road running to keep it interesting. There are event-specific training programmes to get you started, available to all registered entrants.

Walkers can also sign up for these shorter distances, plus there’s a family-friendly three-kilometre Kids’ Run (for parents, too), with all young finishers receiving a memento, and prizes for the top boys and girls in the seven-to-nine and 10-to-12 age groups. As for grown-ups, there’s incentive and fun in the form of prize money for the top marathoners, and spot prizes and finisher’s medals up for grabs for all competitors.

Naturally, Air New Zealand is delighted to be on board from

the outset, supporting an exciting new international event at one of our premier domestic showcase destinations. Overseen by experienced operators who have already introduced and successfully run ITU World Triathlon Championships events in New Zealand, it’s no overstatement to say this is the birth of a famous annual drawcard.

“The course does a fantastic job of taking in so many of the scenic highlights of the region,” says Air New Zealand head of sponsorship James Gibson. “It has the potential to be a ‘destination marathon’ that sits alongside some of the world’s great marathons. People both here and abroad

will be adding it to their bucket list.”

A sports expo and festival will run alongside the event, and the buzz around the compact resort town well known for turning it on for major sporting and festival celebrations means the scene will be set for a memorable after-party.

“Queenstown is an important destination for us and supporting a new event such as this is another way we can contribute to the continued growth of the region,” says Gibson.

While many people are familiar with the area’s snowy allure during its winter sports festival season, the clearly defined seasons of the south mean you’ve just got to see it in springtime, too. A relaxing pre-event traipse through the spectacular movie-set countryside of Glenorchy, just 40 minutes away, quickly fills up the memory card with its change-of-season palette, then there’s all those award-winning Central Otago wineries and (if you have the verve) show-stopping golf resorts waiting to treat you after you’ve nailed your race goals. Run hard, play hard – you’ll have earned it. Get your running shoes on now. 

STORY **MARGOT BUTCHER**

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