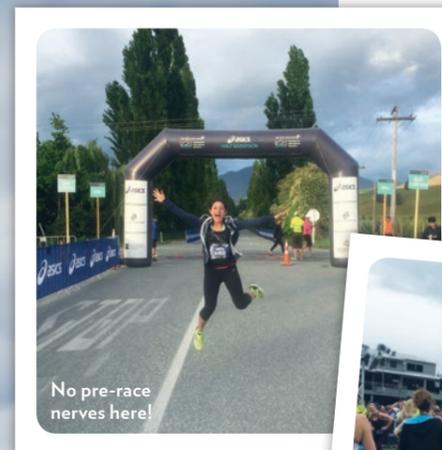


VIEW TO RUN



WF's Samera Kamaleddine races her first half marathon in picturesque Queenstown, NZ



No pre-race nerves here!



Why you should try trail running

Heading off-road is good news all round. "Trail running is easy on your body and takes your mind away from the day-to-day grind," says elite running coach Andrew Kastor. "When your foot comes down on an uneven trail, your hips, knees and ankles have to compensate to allow your body to move forward. The muscle tissue consumes oxygen and glycogen as it contracts to keep your foot stabilised, and metabolically consuming these products will help boost your VO2 max and aerobic capacity."

PART ONE

THE RACE

Crossing that finish line, I knew I'd just experienced my best run. Not only did I feel faster, fitter and more focused than I'd expected to mid-race, but just have a look at my crazy-beautiful surroundings!

Rewind two hours, 11 minutes and 24 seconds earlier and I'm standing in the middle of a road beside a paddock of very confused-looking llamas – aka the start line of the Queenstown International Marathon.

It seems an unlikely backdrop for a race – probably because I'm more familiar with the concrete views of the world's most famous marathons – and I'm soon to learn the scenery only gets better from here.

Heading off down the sealed road at the command of the starting gun, my head is travelling in two directions. The cue to keep my pace slow and steady for

the first two kilometres is very much front of mind, but so is the reminder to soak up the sights on what I've already predicted will be an impressive 21.1km course.

After a few (slow and steady) Ks, I'm led off-road and onto a hard-packed trail – the first of many on this route that's made up of 70 per cent trails. Racing down the small slope, the shifting of tiny gravel pieces underfoot unnerves me... because my training involved zero off-road action (oops!). But before I know it I'm finding my feet (literally) beneath a canopy of trees of the crouch-down-to-get-under variety and stepping on and off the snug trail to weave between other runners.

A change in terrain at about 5.5km in widens the trails, so that racers can spread out over the forthcoming 172m-long Lower Shotover Bridge. On a regular day, I'd probably stop here for a selfie with the pretty Shotover River and surrounding

mountains, but today, we only have time for quick glimpses if we dare to dart our eyes away from the dirt road ahead.

Breathing in the fresh alpine air, I ponder how much it has contributed to my race feels right now, as I've just breezed through the first 9km and I'm feeling pretty stoked. But my confidence is about to be challenged at the halfway mark...

An unexpected (and fairly steep) hill looms in front of me and, looking around, I can see my fellow runners wear the same expression I do: the 'oh s#\$t!' face. It's a narrow climb, and while some drop the speed, I'm determined to keep my race pace up for the entirety.

Admittedly, the ascent doesn't go for *that* long. And my running playlist shuffles at the very moment I need it to, as Sia's "Chandelier", one of my most mood-boosting tunes on this carefully curated playlist, comes through my

headphones. Simultaneously, I'm using the stunning nature to drive me. With the Kawarau River to my left, surrounded by stems of gorgeous yellow flowers, I repeat the words, "beautiful blue lake, beautiful yellow flowers" in my head. I'm now running in appreciation of its beauty.

There's a chance to catch my breath and refocus once I'm on the other side of the hill, before we pass the roar of the airport, run along one short sealed road and make it onto what is essentially the final stretch – a long trail alongside Lake Wakatipu that'll guide us into the finish line in the heart of Queenstown.

"Don't Stop Believin'" (the *Glee* cast version, natch) is now feeding into my ears; another pertinent time for one of my running anthems to play, with only 5km to go and the onset of a niggle in my rehabbed foot.

The motivation just keeps coming. We now have an audience to help spur us

on, as we pass by the lakeside residences of Frankton. Our race bibs bear our names – a clever touch by the organisers – so the locals can shout out "Keep going Jessica!", "You're doing great Emily!"... or in the case of an unpronounceable name like mine, "Go, girl running!"

At the 20K mark (with just a kilometre left to go), I finally stop eye-heating

the incredible turquoise blue of the lake that glistens around us as we loop the Queenstown Gardens. Instead, my eyes are drawn to a sign planted on the edge of the track: "Keep smiling. There's a crowd waiting". The thing is, I'm already smiling. Because I couldn't imagine a more incredible setting to smash a fitness dream. >

THE NEED-TO-KNOW INFO

RUN: This year's Queenstown International Marathon is set to take place on 19 November. Want in? Register at queenstown-marathon.co.nz.

FLY: Air New Zealand flies direct to Queenstown from most Aussie cities, with extra flights in operation for the event. Visit airnewzealand.com.au.

STAY: Novotel Queenstown Lakeside sits pretty beside Lake Wakatipu, and is a short walk to the event shuttle buses. See novotel.com/queenstown

PART TWO

THE RECOVERY

I thought the half-marathon views were Insta-worthy, but the sights from the windows of Sherwood (sherwoodqueenstown.nz) make me want to double tap even more. Set on three hilly acres overlooking beautiful Lake Wakatipu and the Remarkables mountain range, this dreamy timber lodge 10 minutes from downtown Queenstown is the ultimate spot to unwind post-race.

A converted motel from the '80s, pretty much everything here is recycled in a unique way – old blankets from the New Zealand army drape the windows, an empty pool serves as a bonfire, and rubber wheels have found a new home as flooring, while some of the carpets are made from fish nets.

The goal here is to reconnect with yourself, which is the next step for me after throwing back a chocolate, banana, almond milk and maca smoothie. That reconnection comes in the form of a slow, restorative yoga sesh, in the cutest of cute rooms. With a ceiling of recycled cork from Portugal, a big bay window donning a dream catcher (every room here has one, as made by local artists) and a view of the pretty teepee sitting hillside (there are food lessons and private yoga classes held inside), I almost forget the pain my body is in after the previous day's running efforts.

That pain is about to meet its match – Katie Hamilton-King, Sherwood's resident yoga instructor, is leading this non-yogi through the most soothing yoga sequence ever. Hamilton-King has based this class on her own

half-marathon experience, and also knowledge of what runner's bodies are often like, having spent years teaching yoga to runners in Vanuatu.

Although popular with mountain bikers who frequent Queenstown, the adventure capital of the world, this restorative class, she says, is awesome for running recovery. "The aim is to try to bring balance and a quieter aspect. Running can be very yang; yoga is the yin to running," Hamilton-King explains. "I try to incorporate a bit of heart opening because, at the end of the run, there's often been a lot of pressure on the lungs, so it's restorative for the lung area as well as the muscular body."

As we move through a series of hip stretches, my muscular body is thanking her. "There's a lot of tightness through the hips from running, so these moves bring healing to those muscles and joints," she says. "Hopefully they'll feel lighter and you'll recover quicker."

There's a dash of downward dog (a good ITB stretch), reclined eagle twist, wide-leg forward fold and cat cow, and most importantly, the legs up wall position that's not only ideal for resting the heart, but also for clearing out lymphatic fluid and bringing lightness to the legs.

"You don't have to have a lot of yoga knowledge to do this class," says Hamilton-King. "With some styles of yoga you have to be upper body strong, but I like to teach in a way that fits everybody."

Girl power
Participation in the half-marathon group of the 2015 Queenstown International Marathon was a massive 62 per cent female! Grab some fit friends and turn a half marathon into a girls' weekend away. All of the wine tasting, here you come...

RECOVERY PIT STOPS

Get refuelled
You just clocked some serious distance – so permission granted to eat until you can eat no more! Take a ride up Bob's Peak on the Skyline Gondola because an epic buffet dinner awaits you at Stratosfare Restaurant & Bar, 450 metres above Queenstown (yes, that means more glorious views!). Think salad bars, carvery and seafood stations, DIY laksa and sushi, and a sweet dessert bar. skyline.co.nz/queenstown

Pamper time
Do yourself a (massive) favour and book in for a full-body massage post-race. But not at any old spa – set your GPS for The Spa at Millbrook, on the outskirts of Queenstown. This award-winning spa is nestled amongst the renowned Millbrook golf course – and yep, it has mountain views! Try the one-hour signature massage with your chosen aromatherapy blend. millbrook.co.nz/spa

Soak it up
Relax those overworked muscles with a dip in a private pool room overlooking (more) beautiful mountain views at Onsen Hot Pools. Water temps are set to a toasty 37.8-39.8°C (depending on the season), while you're also armed with a clever remote control that can retract the roof and front wall windows to take your pool room from indoor to outdoor. onsen.co.nz

Take a dip in the Onsen Hot Pools – the only tough bit is getting out!



Sweet surrounds and delish dishes... Sherwood gives you a licence to chill

