

Reggae Marathon ... not just for running

Participants from over 15 countries and hundreds of Jamaicans are now packing their bags for arrival in Negril for the Reggae Marathon, Half marathon and 10K on Saturday, December 3.

According to race director, Alfred Francis, since Reggae Marathon was launched in 2001, runners and walkers from over 20 countries have visited Jamaica to participate in the event, but they do so for a variety of reasons. "While for the elite athletes - those who are able to complete the 26.2-mile course in less than 2.1 hours - the primary objective may be to secure a ranking among the world's best; for the average marathoner, it's mainly about healthy lifestyle and fitness. Some also run for a cause while others see the event as an effective fund-raiser."

There are still others who combine their desire to be more fit and healthy with a love of travel and use the occasion to see new places, meet people and even celebrate significant milestones. In its 11-year run, Reggae Marathon has welcomed all types to the event. "We have had engagements and proposals; and there are even those who decide to take the Reggae Marathon challenge in memory of friends and family members," added Francis.

This year, for example, Gayle Friedman out of the USA will be using the marathon event to mark a very special occasion. "The race is actually on our wedding anniversary, so I think we'll just have a nice enjoyable walk to celebrate," she explained. The "Running Girlz (a group of over 20 women from Burlington/Oakville, Canada) love to combine running with a 'women only' ... vacation." The group, which has been running for years, claims to have found "equal health and friendship benefits" from the activity. They will be returning this year to Jamaica for their second visit, and while they have run in many different places, they state that they have "fallen in love with Jamaica and Reggae Marathon".

Reggae Marathon has also welcomed the physically challenged, as well as those who have health challenges, and this year a cancer patient who has trained for the event even during chemotherapy, will be one of the special participants.

Also arriving for the event will be a host of overseas journalists, including a magazine crew of 10, courtesy of Puma, Japan.

Reggae Marathon weekend begins on Thursday, December 1 at 1 p.m. with registration at the Couples Swept Away Sporting Complex in Negril. Other events for the weekend include the JHTA 'World's Best' pasta party at the same venue as well as the Village Bash in the Negril town square on Friday.