



RUNNING THE
CHICAGO
MARATHON
THE ADVENTURER'S GUIDE

BY THE ADVENTURE FIT CLUB

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INTRODUCTION

HEY RUNNER!

Welcome to The Adventure Fit Club guide to running the Chicago Marathon!

This guide is to accompany The Adventure Fit Club podcast's special episode on running the Chicago Marathon 2025 (hosted by Meg Walker and David Yim).

We appreciate that there can be a lot of information shared in these episodes, so I've (Meg!) made this guide in the hopes it can provide some written prompts of some of the information already shared to make remembering some of the information easier.

Please note that anything mentioned or recommended within this guide or the podcast is from our own personal experience and that I am not sponsored by or affiliated with any particular brands. This is also not intended to replace any official race guides provided by the event itself.

Both this resource and the podcast are entirely free and we have created them in the hopes of sharing some key information, tips and tricks that we've learned along the road to help you to have the best trip and event experience possible.

So get excited, get curious and get ready to create your own adventures and memories in an incredible city!



AN ICONIC RACE IN THE WINDY CITY...

WHEN IS IT?

Sunday 12th October 2025!

FIELD SIZE

53,000+ runners will be taking on the windy city this October (thank goodness for those big wide streets!)

MEG AND YIMMY'S 3 WORD RACE ROUND UP: FLAT. FAST. FRIENDLY.



THE EXPO

THE EXPO

THE MOST GENEROUS EXPO OF ALL TIME

WHERE IS IT?

The Abbott fitness and health Expo
McCormick Place
Lakeside Center, Hall D
2301 S. Martin Luther King Drive*
Chicago, IL 60616

HOW CAN YOU GET THERE?

The expo is accessible via public transport (CTA & Metra Train service) however we found it to be most accessible via a drop off car service. As recommended in our latest podcast, we recommend you try ride share to the expo (if travelling solo, you can always make some friends in the hotel lobby and see if you can share an uber to the expo!)

OPENING TIMES

Thursday, October 9, 11am - 6pm

Friday Saturday, October 10-11 9am - 6pm

WHAT YOU NEED FOR BIB PACKET PICK UP

You must pick this up in person from the expo. There are no exceptions to this rule and you cannot collect on race day.

For the pick up you will need:

- Packet Pick-up email
- Photo ID

INSIDE YOUR BIB PACKET

- Bib number and safety pins
- MYLAPS ThinTag timing device
- Gear check tag
- Nike participant running shirt
- Participant bag

EXPO EXPERIENCE

I'd recommend giving yourself about 2-3 hours to cover the whole expo experience. Once you have passed a security screening and collected your race bib, you will have the opportunity to explore the vast number of brand stalls available before collecting your race shirt.

Be careful not to spend all of your pocket money at once as on Saturday 11th October, Nike will be releasing special Chicago Finisher's merchandise available only at Nike Chicago Store, Nike.com and the Nike app.

Other race merch is also available at Fleet Feet South Loop, Old town and some Dick's Sporting Goods Stores.

PRE - EVENT

DO NOT BEND OR LOSE YOUR RACE BIB!!!

Please treat your race bib like it is more precious than Gollum's ring! It's your ticket to run and any bends in the bib could affect the timing chip on the back and how effective it is at picking up your timings on the day. So please treat it with care!

THINGS TO DO PRE-EVENT

Sightseeing - Chicago is an incredible city with beautiful skyline and some iconic sights. Some sights you might want to check out:

Cloudgate (aka "The Bean")

Millenium Park (Found right by the Cloudgate)

Chicago River Boat Tour (although this can be a great post race activity!)

Willis Tower

Skydeck Chicago

Navy Pier

The Art Institute of Chicago

Sports - Chicago is home to some of the most beloved sports teams. See if you can catch a Pre season Chicago Bulls Game at the United Center.

Entertainment - Chicago is also famous for its music and comedy. Check out what bands are in town or go have a laugh at Second City or one of the many other comedy venues in the city (just don't burst a gut laughing too hard before the marathon!)

Expo Talks - Throughout the expo weekend there will be a number of talks that take place throughout the day on the main stage.

Millenium Hall Pasta Dinner - From 10th -12th October, there will be a special pre-race pasta dinner held in Millenium Park. A perfect opportunity for carb loading whilst taking in the beautiful skyline of the city.

Food - Chicago is famous for it's deep dish pizza, Garrett Popcorn and chicago style hot dogs. Lou Malnati's Pizzeria was a favourite of Yimmy and I's for Deep Dish (and they also provided incredible Gluten Free options).

Abbott Chicago 5km - Run the Downtown Chiacgo 3.1 mile course to earn your prestigious bobble hat! This race sells out early, so congratulations if you've gotten a place and mark your calendars for notifications if you plan to run in future years. The 5km bib is collected at the expo along with your Marathon bib pick up.

Saturday Shakeouts - Keep your ears and eyes open for lots of other opportunities to join a 5km shakeout run on Saturday 11th. It is very typical for lots of different brands, clubs, parkruns and friends to be creating and extending invitations to their own 5km shakeout runs. So all is not lost if you couldn't book onto the official organiser 5km race.

RACE READY

GET YOURSELF RACE READY

CARB LOADING

Don't forget to fuel and hydrate yourself well throughout your trip so that you well prepared going into the marathon. Please don't forget to book ahead where possible for your evening meal on both the evening before and evening of race day as restaurants in the city will be extremely busy with people wanting to carb load, refuel and celebrate.

EASY ON THE LEGS

I'm all about adventure and making the most of the city you've travelled to but remember not to overdo it and save some energy in the legs for the big day.

DON'T LOSE YOUR RACE BIB!

Yup, saying it again... Take good care of your bib once you've collected it!

BREAKFAST AND START LINE PLAN

Race mornings can be a little chaotic and Chicago is an early start. To avoid any mishaps, help yourself out by having a clear plan (and a back up in case!) on what you are having for breakfast, what time you need to be at the start line, the time you need to leave and how you're going to get there (account for any last minute toilet trips!)

FLAT LAY

This is where you take an image shot from above of all of your running clothes and gear laid out in front of you. This can be a really helpful exercise to do (both before you travel and the night before a race) to make sure that you have all of the running clothes, bib, shoes, gear, fuelling and identification you need for your race. It's so easy to forget something and this can hopefully rejoy your memory and give you time to track down any last minute items you've forgotten.

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE MARATHON

CHECKLIST:

- Flat lay to double check kit is all there and ready (including fuel!)
- Back up clothing for any weather changes
- Pinned Race bib to your race top
- Drop off back packed (with race number label/sticker)
- All electronics charged
- Athlete wristband is still on your wrist!
- Set your morning alarm (and multiple back up alarms!)
- Breakfast and start line plan (Dunkin Donuts is always open but remember - nothing new on race day!)
- Supporter plan - where they will be on the course and post race.

✓ CHECKLIST

CHECKLIST

TYPICAL RACE DAY ESSENTIALS YOU MAY NEED

(Not all are essential and some are weather dependent. But pick what you need)

- Race top
- Race bib and safety pins/bib clips
- Shorts/Tights
- Underwear
- Sports Bra
- Underwear
- Socks
- Running shoes
- Running Watch
- Heart Rate Monitor/strap
- Weather appropriate hat/visor/buff
- Sunglasses
- Rain jacket or disposable poncho
- Arm sleeves
- Sweatbands
- Gloves
- Headphones (Open ear is permitted for this race)
- Running pack/belt
- Arm phone holder/case
- Water bottle/flask
- Run nutrition (chews, energy gels, energy drink, electrolytes)
- Anti-chafe
- Nipple tape
- Injury tape
- Blister plasters
- Sanitary products
- Toilet paper
- Sunscreen/ SPF lip balm
- Tissues (you never know when the portaloos might get short!)

If you would like to wear old clothes to the race start to keep warm (you then throw and they get collected for donation):

- Sweater/coat/hoody/poncho
- Sweatpants
- Weather appropriate hat
- Bin bag to either wear or sit on
- Water or other drink
- Pre-race snack depending on time of race



DROP OFF CHECKLIST

BAG DROP OFF

DROP OFF BAG CHECKLIST

THE JOYS OF A LOOP RACE MEANS YOU START AND FINISH WHERE YOU DROPPED YOUR BAGS:

REMEMBER TO LABEL YOUR BAG (THIS IS USUALLY PROVIDED IN YOUR BIB PACK AND IS UNIQUE TO YOU. YOU CAN'T DROP IT WITHOUT IT)

- Warm clothing (e.g. sweater, sweatpants)
- Clean change of clothes including socks and underwear
- Money/Bank Card
- Mini first aid kit e.g. plasters, blister plasters
- Hygiene essentials (if (like wet wipes, deodorant, moisturiser, lip balm, toothbrush and toothpaste after all the gels)
- First aid (plasters, anti-chafe, etc)
- Change of shoes (think what your post marathon feet will need)
- Bag for your sweaty marathon clothes
- Refuel and hydration (e.g. electrolyte drink, carbs and protein)
- Portable phone charger
- Mobile phone if you've decided not to run with it (this is always at your own risk)

DON'T FORGET TO CLOSE YOUR BAG TIGHTLY (THEY USUALLY ADVISE YOU TO KNOT THE STRAPS TOGETHER AT THE TOP)



BEFORE STARTING

BEFORE STARTING

THE BIG WIDE START LINE!

ENTRANCE TO THE START

The start and finish line of the Chicago Marathon is at Grant Park. You cannot miss it! There are several entrance gates into the start area on race morning that are assigned according to your corral letter to help break up crowd flow. Your corral letter and wave number will be provided on your race bib and you will have also received an email with further details about your start entrance. Expect a short security check at each entrance before entering the start area.

START TIMES

- Grant Park opens to participants: 5:30 a.m.
- Gear check opens: 5:30 a.m.
- Start corrals open: 5:30 a.m.
- Wave 1 - 7:35 a.m.
- Wave 2 - 8:00 a.m.
- Wave 3 - 8:35 a.m.

Your start corral group will be shown on your bib and has been provided based on your initial predicted race time. You cannot move forward to an earlier start group but you can drop back to a later Group. E.g. You cannot move from E to D but you could drop back from E to G. Be aware that each corrals close around 20 mins before their start time.

TOILETS

There are plenty of toilets available in the start and finish area of Grant Park. As expected at a World Major Marathon, the queues can be long pre-race but keep heading further down the line for shorter queues.

CLOTHES DROP

The start line for the Chicago Marathon is very wide which is great for getting people across the line quickly, however, please be considerate and make the effort to drop any clothes or discarded items to the sidelines (let's look after each other to avoid any unnecessary tripping!)

GET EXCITED!

Don't forget to celebrate the start line. This is where you dreamed of being. You wanted the opportunity to experience one of the world's most iconic races and if you are on that start line then you've made it! Don't miss the magic of the present moment by focusing too hard on the finish line. Chicago has one of the widest and friendliest starts, so soak up the huge atmosphere and get involved!

 [GET STARTED](#)

THE COURSE

RUN LIKE THE WIND!

TIME ALLOWANCE

- Time limit: 6:30 hours (this is a 15 minute mile pace)
- Anyone who finishes after 4pm may not be recorded or published as official finishers.

FOLLOW THE LINE

Line markings can usually be found on the road to follow as an exact measure of the 26.2 mile distance (although hard to follow consistently when it's crowded!) There are also timing checkpoints are positioned at the start line, at each 5K, at the halfway point (13.1 miles) and at the finish line.

PACERS

There are flagged pacers spaced out every 5 minutes from 2 hrs 55 mins until 4 hours, then every 10 mins until 5 hours and then every 15 minutes until 6 hours.

REFRESHMENT STATIONS

20 stations on course only 1-2 miles apart (all drinks served in paper cups)

- Water
- Endurance Formula (lemon-lime flavor)
- Maurten Gel 100 (Caffinated and Non-Caffinated) (Miles 12.4, 15.7 & 18.1)
- Chiquita Bananas (Miles 20-23)

AID STATIONS

Medical support is available at 22 stations on course. There are medical tents at all 20 aid stations and additional between mile 14 and 15 and the finish line.

There is also a Biofreeze pain relief zone at 21.2 (you'll smell it before you see it)

TOILETS

Portable toilets are available at each aid station!

 [GET STARTED](#)

THE COURSE

FLAT, FAST AND FRIENDLY!

Section 1: The Excitement (Miles 0–8)

- **Start Line (Columbus Drive):** A wide, dramatic start (one of the biggest in the majors). Runners funnel down under an underpass before emerging onto wide city streets.
- **Downtown Loop (Miles 1–3):** Early miles take you through iconic Chicago streets (Grand Ave, State Street, and past landmarks like the Chicago Theater).
- **IMPORTANT:** GPS is unreliable here due to skyscrapers. Use manual lap at mile markers if pacing carefully.
- **Heading North (Miles 4–8):** The course follows LaSalle Street north with strong crowd support. You'll pass the Federal Reserve Bank, then through Lincoln Park.
- **Lincoln Park (Mile 6–8):** A shift in scenery from skyscrapers to greenery. You'll spot the Elks National Memorial and the Conservatory, with roads narrowing compared to the downtown start.
- **Lakefront Views (approaching Mile 8):** The course briefly opens up along Lake Shore Drive before turning into Sheridan Road.

Section 2: The Grind (Miles 8–13.1)

- **Broadway, Clark, and Sedgwick:** A long, straight stretch through residential and light commercial areas. This is a mentally steady section with fewer turns.
- **Old Town (Miles 10–12):** Beautiful architecture, brick homes, and plenty of community support. Often lots of dogs and neighbourhood energy (Dog hugs on route are the best!)
- **Back into the City (Miles 12–13.1):** You'll cross the Wells Street Bridge near Merchandise Mart, then head into the West Loop for the halfway mark.

 **GET STARTED**

THE COURSE

WE'RE INTO THE 2ND HALF...

Section 3: The Neighborhoods (Miles 14–22)

- Greek Town & Little Italy (Miles 14–16): Strong cultural support and plenty of energy, though some quieter patches in University Village.
- 30K Mark (around Mile 18.6): A major checkpoint with photographers stationed high above. Good place to rally yourself.
- Pilsen (Miles 19–20): A highlight of the course with its vibrant Latino community, music, and crowd energy.
- Industrial Stretch (Miles 20–21): A tougher, quieter drag before the atmosphere builds again.
- Chinatown (Miles 21–22): A huge crowd moment along with colorful decorations, lively atmosphere, and the famous dragon greeting runners. Streets narrow slightly here with dense support.

Section 4: The Push to the Finish (Miles 22–26.2)

- The Switchback (Miles 22–24): A long out-and-back stretch down Michigan Ave and Indiana Ave. Mentally tough placement this late in the race, but you know the end is near.
- Michigan Avenue (Miles 24–25.7): Wide road, lined with retail and tall buildings. Crowds are big, though wind between buildings can dampen the noise.
- Roosevelt Hill (Mile 26): The final test is a short but steep hill just before the finish. Only ~250 meters, but challenging after 26 miles.
- Finish (Grant Park): Turn left off Roosevelt and the finish line appears quickly. A clean, wide finish with photographers everywhere (so get yourself smile ready!)

Post-Finish

- Efficient medal distribution, heat sheets, food and even a local Chicago beer (for those 21+). Bags are conveniently waiting back where you dropped them, thanks to the looped course design.

 **GET STARTED**

POST RACE

YOU ARE A CHICAGO MARATHON FINISHER!!!

RACE GOODIES

After you crossed the finish line you will receive your official Finisher's Medal, heat sheet, banana, alcoholic beer, a reusable aluminum bottle filled with Culligan water and maybe some other goodies!

BAG DROP

Signage will be up to direct you to your bag pick up if you dropped off prior to the start of the race.

PHOTO OPS

There's usually some official photographers around to snap your photo but also take up the opportunity (post stretch - don't forget) to get some post-race selfies in front of the city skyline backdrop.

SIX STAR FINISHERS

If you are a Six Star Finisher (WELL DONE YOU LEGEND!!), don't forget to go collect your six star medal from the designated Abbott Major Marathon Medal Collection area.

MILE 27 POST-RACE PARTY

The post-race party is known as "Mile 27" because if you carry on walking after the finish the start line at Columbus Drive and Jackson Drive you'll find a post-race party in Butler Field. The post-race party has music played by a local DJ and opportunities to buy food and drinks. If you are over 21 years old and have your ID on you, you can tear off the free beer icon on your bib to receive your post race beer.

The 27th Mile Post-Race Party is open to everyone from 9:30 a.m to 4 p.m.

FIND YOUR FAMILY

Also at Butler Field, you will find the family reunion point to meet back up with your loved ones post race. You can find them via bright red alphabetical towers (A-Z) and typically you go to the tower that is the first letter of your last name.

(Organisers estimate it takes roughly 30+ minutes to get through the finish line and arrive at the Mile 27 Post-race party).

MEDAL MONDAY

Massively recommend booking a boat cruise on the Chicago River for some incredible medal snaps and don't forget to also get some photos in front of the iconic Chicago Bean (Cloudgate).

REMEMBER

The good ole days are now!

FINAL WORDS

SO LONG, FAREWELL...

HAVE THE BEST TIME!

I truly believe that experiences are what you make of them. There can always be things out of our control but there is also so much within your influence to help yourself have the best weekend!

You've done the training (arguably the hardest part!) All that is left is for you to turn up with the best of your knowledge, training and capacity that you have at the time and soak up the experience!

Don't be so focused on finish lines and finish times that you left this incredible experience pass you by!

Cheer on your fellow runners, thank your supporters and please remember to have appreciation and compassion for all hard working people that you come across on marathon weekend from race staff to local residents!

CELEBRATE YOURSELF

Only 1% of the world population have completed a marathon. 26.2 miles is no small achievement. Whether it's your first time or your 110th, please don't forget to appreciate yourself for what an incredible achievement running that distance is!



Fit for every adventure.

Have you got your off-season and post race plan sorted?

If you want to get strong, pain free (no more pesky reoccurring niggles!) and confident going into your future training and races, send me your application of your interest using the link below and i'll be in touch with more details:

[Apply For More Information Here](#)

Please also let me know if you have any questions regarding the race and I will be more than happy to discuss them directly with you.

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