

# Destination paradise

By Roman Floesser

The catchline of the Laguna Phuket International Marathon is "Run Paradise!" and what a day in paradise it was. A perfect sunny day greeted the runners in the early morning for the third edition of Southeast Asia's leading destination marathon on the Thai resort island of Phuket.

Established in 2006 in an effort to bring tourists back after the devastating tsunami earlier that year the event organizers have positioned the event as a fun-oriented, family and runner-friendly event with a focus on enjoyment over fast times.

In pursuit of this objective race director Raimund Wellenhofer had invited not some of the fastest runners in the world, but one of the slowest. Hajime Nishi, slow running advocate from Japan, joined close to 200 of his Japanese compatriots on the marathon course. Nishi has run more than 500 marathons around the world sharing his "Slow is beautiful" philosophy with runners and race organizers. For this year's event he initiated a photo contest for runners and spectators encouraging runners to take their camera along the course and to capture their day on camera. Runners were asked to hand in their favorite picture after the race and a panel voted for the best pictures. The winners were presented at the farewell party on the evening of the event.

Nishi himself took part in his first marathon in four months after knee surgery prevented him from pursuing his goal of running 1,000 different marathons by the year 2050. After his long lay off he was eager to get out on the course and to do what he loves the most. The generous time limit of 8 hours for the marathon gave him the opportunity to stop regularly for photos, thank every volunteer on the course and to as he put it "enjoy the marathon the longest of



all runners". He eventually finished in 6:34:19 hours, one of the slowest times of the day.

Testifying to the success of the unique event concept is the increase in participants from less than 2,000 runners in 2006 to more than 4,000 runners and walkers in 2008. A total of 458 runners raced the Marathon, 782 in the Half-

Marathon, 825 in the 10.5km Run, 950 in the 5km Walk and more than 1000 in the 2km Kids' Run. Among the total were 1,567 international runners from 45 countries. Singapore had the largest contingent of international runners with 327 entrants, followed by Malaysia (212) and Japan (192).

Race Director Raimund Wellenhofer was very pleased with these numbers. "We are a destination race and one of our main objectives is to bring tourist runners to Phuket not only to enjoy our event but the unique Thai hospitality and our world class destination. Our success in attracting international runners in large numbers gives us the encouragement to continue on the path we have chosen for our event."

Phuket is Thailand's largest island located 862km south of Bangkok in the Andaman Sea. It welcomes



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more than three million visitors per year who are attracted by the beautiful white beaches, stunning coral reefs, sumptuous seafood and the thousands of activities the island has to offer.

With a history stretching back at least one thousand years, Phuket was a way station on the route between India and China as well as a wealthy tin and rubber manufacturing centre and a major trading city.

The Dutch established a trading post during the 16th century. The island's northern and central regions were then governed by the Thais, and the southern and western areas were given over to the tin trade, which was operated by a number of western countries under a power-sharing relationship with the Thai monarchy. During the 19th century large numbers of Chinese immigrants arrived as labour for the tin mines. The ethnic makeup of the island's interior became predominantly Chinese, while the coastal settlements remained populated mainly by Muslim fishermen.

Under Rama V, Phuket became the administration centre of a group of tin mining provinces called Monton Phuket. In 1933, when the government changed from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary system, the island became a province.

Around 1980 the tin ore became depleted and world tin prices fell; the mining merchants turned to tourism. One place where the





connection between the old tin mining days and the new tourism era is most obvious is Laguna Phuket, the start and finish of the marathon. A former tin mine once declared too polluted to be redeveloped, a Singaporean lead group of investors decided to take on the challenge and turned the moon-like land into a resort and hotel complex with six hotels and resorts surrounded by lagoons and with a view of one of Phuket's most unspoiled beaches. During the marathon weekend Laguna Phuket offers special hotel rates for marathon participants which make the event ideal for a marathon holiday for the whole family.

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international runners the local runners are still the backbone of the event. The Phuket provincial government made a tremendous effort to involve the local community and schools in this year's event. The local sports office conducted running clinics for school children in the lead up to the marathon and close to 1,000 students took part in the 2km Kids Run.

One day one of these kids may be able to challenge for victory in one of the main races and follow into the footsteps of this year's winners. The next opportunity to run in Paradise will be on 14 June 2009 when the fourth edition of the event will be run.

**RESULT**

**MEN:**

1	Stephen PAINE	AUS	2:37:52
2	Brent C ROEGER	USA	2:41:57
3	Yung-Fa WU	TPE	2:44:42
4	Chadarak CHAIKAMJORN	THA	3:02:43
5	Hiroshi KOGANE	JPN	3:05:38
6	Seijiro SATAKE	JPN	3:09:42
7	Niwat SOMJIT	THA	3:12:40
8	Chi Man FONG	CHN	3:14:37
9	Seehanart NGAOSRI	THA	3:16:40
10	Jaraj JEARRANAI	THA	3:19:21

**WOMEN:**

1	Angela Louise STEVENS	AUS	3:14:17
2	Peta-Jane HARTHEN	AUS	3:35:32
3	Miho MIYASHIRO	JPN	3:40:18
4	Premchit NARULA	THA	3:45:31
5	Kim Joanna ISAAC	GBR	3:53:05
6	Chie SANO	JPN	3:58:11
7	Cindy Kin-Mi TSUI	CHN	3:59:54
8	Jacqueline L PRINSLOO	RSA	4:01:49
9	Chun Lien PEN	TPE	4:03:47
10	Tsurumi YUKIKO	JPN	4:17:38

**HALF MARATHON:**

**MEN:**

1	Stefano PASSARELLO	ITA	1:13:26
2	Niwat OITHIP	THA	1:19:30
3	Sitti Pong CHANGLAI	THA	1:23:36

**WOMEN:**

1	Nicola GREEN	GBR	1:34:51
2	Emily WOODFIELD	GBR	1:36:18
3	Kerrie EDWARDS	AUS	1:40:57

**RACE CONTACT DETAILS**

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Full race contact listings start on page ??