Inaugural half marathon showcases Putuo's transformation and ambition

Yang Jian

Featuring a unique route and breathtaking scenery, the inaugural Shanghai Suzhou Creek Half Marathon was held in Putuo District on April 22.

The race with the theme of "Stunning Shanghai Style, Shining Suhe Vigor," fired its starting pistol at 7am, attracting runners from both home and abroad to explore the beauty and culture of Putuo. The event has also highlighted the district's ambition to create a world-class "golden waterfront."

About 4,000 runners set off on the 21-kilometer journey along the creek from the landmark structure Tian An 1000 Trees shopping mall, dubbed Shanghai's "Hanging Gardens of Babylon."

They ran past the Shanghai Mint Museum, the Global Harbor and Changfeng Park before reaching the finish line at the new Suzhou Creek Half Marathon Park.

Ma Rui became the first male runner to complete the race, clocking 1:03:46. He was followed by Yang Dinghong (1:05:06) and Mu Zhenhua (1:06:55).

The women's crown went to Liu Min (1:13:19), who was followed by Chen Linming (1:16:44) and Tang Xiaofang (1:18:32).

Apart from prize money of up to 15,000 yuan (US$2,166), the top 100 male finishers and top 50 female finishers were awarded quotas for the 2023 Shanghai Marathon, which will be held in the latter half of the year.

According to the organizers, 98.78 percent of half-marathon runners managed to complete their race.

"I was aiming to make the top three, and surprisingly I won the race," said Ma, a famous marathon athlete from northeast Jilin Province. Ma said it was the first time that he took part in a marathon in Shanghai.

He ran together with another famous runner Yang Dingguo and was in second place through most part of the journey, but exceeded his partner near the finishing line.

Ma ascribed his win to "good weather, a smooth track, an enthusiastic audience and sufficient energy."

Liu, the female champion, said the scenery was too beautiful that she was almost distracted when she was running inside Changfeng Park.

"I'd like to visit the park and walk along the route again to fully enjoy the riverside scenery after the race," she said.

Many other runners said they were impressed by the riverside natural environment along the route.

"It was a special experience to finish a half marathon near my home," said Liu Kai, who lives on Changshou Road in Putuo. "I'm proud of Putuo's great changes in recent years. I'll bring my family to the event next year."

Liu Kai said the half marathon was distinctive because the route passes three parks and multiple riverside boulevards, putting every runner in good spirits.

More than 900 volunteers and some 130 referees provide services for the event. Twenty-one medical spots and 12 ambulances were arranged along the route to assure safety.

Water stations were arranged every 5 kilometers along the route. There were also food supply stations, as well as water spray facilities to help runners cool down in case the temperature climbs high on race day.

The medal for the inaugural Suzhou Creek Half Marathon is in a rough shape of Putuo, as the whole route is run within the district. The R-shaped route represents both "river" and "run," according to the organizers.

Shanghai aims to distinguish itself with its key waterways to rank alongside the world's other top metropolises, such as London, Paris, Sydney and San Francisco.

About 4,000 runners set off the 21-kilometer journey along the Suzhou Creek for the Shanghai Suzhou Creek Half Marathon.

Jogging into the history

Suzhou Creek, known as the "mother river" of Shanghai, is set to become demonstration of how a megacity can achieve quality development and life, with simultaneously with a socialist government.

The creek is actually a 125-kilometer waterway that originates in Taihu Lake in neighboring Jiangsu Province and winds through the cities of Suzhou, Kunshan and Shanghai before finally emptying into the Huangpu River at the West Bund.

Since Shanghai opened its port to the world in 1843, the creek has been the backdrop for dramatic watersheds in the city's history. It was the scene of wartime suffering and the birthplace of China's earliest national industries.

The longest part of the creek is in Putuo, accounting for half of its downtown section, known as the "Half Marathon Suzhou Creek."

The Half Marathon Suzhou Creek is mapped out on the 21-km-long riverside section in Putuo, which aims to become a "sitting room" for the Yangtze River Delta region and a world-class waterfront.

As a highlight along the route, contestants raced through the stunning backdrop of the Changfeng Ecological Business Hub, which is surrounded by over 50 percent of greenery, ecological landscapes and a pleasant living environment.

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>
> **Liu Min**
> Women's champion of the Shanghai Suzhou Creek Half Marathon

The area once housed the Shanghai Chemical Reagent Co, one of China's homegrown industries. A 70-meter chimney from the factory has been preserved and served as a landmark at the finish line.

Runners also had the chance to see other industrial relics along the race route, including former factories for matchboxes, the Jackie Chan Film Gallery and the exhibition hall of Suzhou Creek's industrial past.

As the creek passes through Putuo, it flows through the history of Shanghai's growth into an industrial city, according to the Putuo Culture and Tourism Bureau. Waterfront redevelopment preserves that heritage.

Beginning in the first decade of the 20th century, Chinese entrepreneurs built national industries, including textiles, flour, beer, minting and printing, along the most zigzagged section of the creek, known as the "18 bays."

Factories were established in what is now northwest Putuo to take advantage of convenient water transport.

Many of the former factory areas have been preserved by converting them for modern use, including the now popular M50 art hub, which opened in 2000, and the two-year-old X Tower specialty park.

Walls and fences in parks and residential neighborhoods have been removed to allow convenient public access to the waterfront.

The route of the half marathon was well designed to showcase the newly refurbished riverside attractions along the creek, according to organizers.

Changfeng Park, for instance, features a large vista of white magnolia flowers, a large lake and several other eye-catching facilities, including an aquarium and boating on the lake.

The Suzhou Creek Industrial Civilization Museum, another cultural attraction on Guangfu Road W., celebrates the former glories of the riverside region where early national industry was concentrated. In its heyday, there were more than 1,900 companies in what was known as the Huxi industrial district.

The museum at 2689 Guangfu Road W. was converted from the former site of Shanghai Glasses Factory in Changfeng Ecological Business District. The museum has both indoor and outdoor displays showcasing artifacts and historical archives.

Some large machines dating back to early last century are being exhibited outside the museum. Fufengli, a former workers' neighborhood in the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), has been restored to showcase the working and living environment of China's earliest working class.

The door of Fufengli Residential Ward, at the entrance to the exhibition hall, was recreated according to the residential dormitory for the workers, built by the first Chinese flour mill. The two wood boards hanging on the door are originals.

The Shanghai Children's Library, featuring a "floating pavilion" with a rooftop garden, has become a center to promote information, knowledge, reading and cultural heritage for children aged between 4 and 16.

China's first eSports-themed shopping complex has opened in Changfeng area, geared toward people between the ages of 12 and 30. The ESP eSports Experiencing Center in Changfeng business district along the creek features a professional eSports arena, as well as animation, movies and virtual reality games. The east China postseason games of the King Pro League are held there.

Above: The inaugural Shanghai Suzhou Creek Half Marathon, with the theme of "Stunning Shanghai Style, Shining Suhe Vigor," has attracted runners from both home and abroad to explore the beauty and culture of Putuo.

Left: Volunteers get ready to help the runners in need at a supply spot along the half marathon route.
— All photos by Ti Gong

'Golden waterfront' for sports

The district aims to develop its waterfront into a "golden waterway" for sports competitions to attract the world's top sports events and draw global attention, according to the district's culture and tourism bureau.

"Apart from the half marathon, we will also host a regatta and dragon boat competition on the creek to invite participants from across the world to the waterfront," said Wang Yu, deputy director of Putuo.

More than 1,000 sports, cultural and tourism events have been announced along the riverside section in Putuo.

The 2023 Shanghai Elite 10K Race, which has become one of the world's top elite races, will also be held on October 15. The route covers some of Putuo's signature landmarks, including Changfeng Park and the half marathon park.

On the water, an urban elite regatta will be held in Putuo today to gather amateur teams from local enterprises, clubs and universities. It will become another key regatta on the creek, in addition to the Head of the Shanghai River Regatta at the mouth of the creek.

Dozens of dragon boat teams will race each other on the creek during Shanghai's annual dragon boat competition between June 17 and 18, ahead of this year's Dragon Boat Festival which falls on June 22.

The contestants will compete along a downtown section of the creek in Putuo.

The Suzhou Creek dragon boat race was launched in 2004 to highlight the results of a clean-up campaign on the waterway. It had become an important fixture in Putuo, as it showcased the city's commitment to the environment and rapid urban development, according to the Putuo District government.

Other public sports competitions, including paddle boarding, frisbee, rugby and drone flying will invite amateur citizens to compete along the creek through December.

The medal for the Suzhou Creek Half Marathon is in a rough shape of Putuo, while the R-shaped route represents both "river" and "run."

According to the blueprint, Shanghai's biggest riverside park along the creek will be built in the Changfeng area of Putuo.

The park, covering 350,000 square meters, equivalent to about 50 standard football pitches, will include sports and exercise facilities, preserved industrial heritages, cruise ship docks, children's parks and ecological gardens.

It will become a key part of the 21-kilometer-long Suzhou Creek waterfront path in Putuo. A total of 26 service stations will be built along the path to offer various services to residents and tourists.