Dragon boat races light up Suzhou Creek, celebrate sports and culture in Putuo

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Rowers compete fiercely in the annual dragon boat race on Suzhou Creek.

Runners joyfully take part in the Half Marathon Suzhou Creek race in Putuo.

The annual dragon boat races on Suzhou Creek have once again showcased the vibrant sports culture of Shanghai's Putuo District.

The 20th Shanghai Suzhou Creek City Dragon Boat Invitational dipped paddles at the Mengqingyuan section in Putuo ahead of the Dragon Boat Festival on June 10.

The event drew 36 teams and over 700 athletes from across the country, embodying the spirit of speed and passion.

The event captivated a large number of spectators and solidified Putuo's reputation as a hub of sports excellence, the district government said.

Since its inception in 2001, the dragon boat race has become a hallmark of Putuo and a renowned dragon boat competition nationwide.

Suzhou Creek, stretching 21 kilometers through Putuo, forms a significant part of Shanghai's central urban waterfront, aligning with the half-marathon distance.

The dynamic waterfront, dubbed "Half Marathon Suzhou Creek," has become a popular attraction, providing ideal natural conditions for both sightseeing and various water sports, according to the district's sports bureau.

The district is committed to sports development by organizing events and continuously improving the culture and reputation of the creekside areas, the bureau said.

This year's dragon boat race highlighted the distinctive charm of water sports in Putuo and showcased the rich resources of the Suzhou Creek waterfront.

The popularity of the Half Marathon Suzhou Creek sports brand is closely tied to the diversity and innovation of its events, the bureau said.

Putuo aims to introduce fresh and exciting sports projects that enhance content, spectacle and participation, an official with the bureau said.

The second Shanghai Suzhou Creek Half Marathon, for instance, brought together 7,000 runners from both home and abroad to experience the scenic 21-kilometer stretch of the creek in Putuo on March 24.

As one of the most popular races in the Shanghai Marathon series, it maintained high standards and attracted numerous elite athletes.

Another highly anticipated event, the Shanghai 10K Elite Race, is scheduled for October.

This year, the race route extends to the newly developed Phase II of the Suzhou Creek West Bank Park, offering participants new challenges and experiences, the district government said.

The race has already secured a place among the world's top six 10K elite races, demonstrating its influence and prestige.

Additionally, Putuo District will host the second "Half Marathon Suzhou Creek" Shanghai Rowing City Elite Race this year, aiming to expand the influence of the waterfront further.

The event will showcase the unique charm of the "Left Bank of Suzhou Creek" and promote the ongoing development of water sports on the creek.

Putuo has also integrated sports events with culture, tourism and commerce, creating a series of distinctive sports activities.

Innovative projects like the Sports Life Festival and Sports Market have attracted numerous residents and tourists.

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

The creek is 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.

Profound history

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."

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.

The waterfront section known as Baocheng Bay, for instance, was home to one-fifth of China's earliest textile factories, dating back to the 1920s. After 1949, the Shanghai No. 1, 6 and 7 cotton factories were located on the waterfront, along with a military warehouse for quilts and uniforms. The site was dubbed the "cradle of China's textile industry."

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 X Tower specialty park.

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

"Putuo aspires to transform 'Half Marathon Suzhou Creek' into a world-class waterfront space, with high-quality, culturally rich and visually appealing landmarks along the Suzhou Creek," said Gu Weiling, director of the bureau.

"Through these races and activity routes, we can vividly showcase Putuo District's historical culture and economic achievements, making 'Half Marathon Suzhou Creek' a shining symbol of the district," Gu said.

Vibrant waterfront

Putuo is renowned for its vibrant waterfront, where sports events are combined with ecological preservation.

Global athletes, immersed in the bustling urban landscape, have felt the city's pulse during intense competitions alongside the creek in Putuo.

The marathon races offer runners and spectators the great views of the creek's iconic landmarks.

Dragon boat and rowing competitions on the shimmering creek present a unique experience compared to park or countryside lake events.

The perfect blend of competition and sightseeing showcases the lively and ever-changing waterfront, making it a beautiful landscape in Putuo, the bureau said.

"With the city's continuous development, the event scenes change annually. Even the same racecourse presents new scenery each time," Gu said.

"Such constant change and renewal not only bring a fresh experience to participants and spectators but also inject endless vitality into the city."

Gu said the sports events, as a driving force for urban development, can significantly enhance a city's quality and sophistication.

Through hosting various water sports events, Putuo has attracted numerous spectators, allowing more people to appreciate the unique charm of Suzhou Creek. This increased attention undoubtedly fuels the growth of the waterfront economy, she added.

As events continue and urban construction progresses, more businesses and residents recognize the bustling vibrancy of the creek.

Such recognition has made Putuo a popular area, with businesses choosing to set up office here, further driving the prosperity of commerce, real estate, dining and retail industries, the district government said.

The cultural and tourism sectors have also significantly benefited. More tourists are drawn to the scenic beauty and dynamic water sports of Suzhou Creek, bringing richer tourism resources and economic benefits to Putuo.

The formation and development of the Half Marathon Suzhou Creek sports brand not only highlight Putuo's dedication to sports but also reflect its long-term planning for urban development and cultural construction, the district government said.

Looking ahead, Putuo will continue to leverage the resources of Half Marathon Suzhou Creek, hosting more high-quality sports events and enhancing the district's urban image and influence.

By organizing larger-scale, higher-quality sports events and exploring innovative, popular and vibrant public sports activities, Putuo aims to present a vivid picture of the Half Marathon Suzhou Creek.

These efforts will boost urban development, empower the regional economy, enrich residents' lives and showcase an innovative and dynamic Shanghai Putuo to the world, the district government said.

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> Director of the Putuo Culture and Tourism Bureau

Citizens jog along Suzhou Creek in Putuo.