For many of us in the running community – and surely also for the general population – Paraguay is one of the least known countries in the world.

Six million people, including a broad mix of ethnicities and cultures (official languages are both Spanish and Guarani), inhabit a country 30% bigger than Italy, enjoy a gorgeous landscape, a tropical climate, an economy based on agriculture, and good relations with their neighbors Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina.

Asunción, the national capital, has around one million people, and is the centre of political, social, and economic activity. No surprise then, that road running was first introduced there, launched by the Paraguay Marathon Club through the efforts of several pioneers headed by people like Myrta Doldán. Doldan went to learn about the sport by volunteering in the Marathon of Porto Alegre (Brazil) for 10 years and then New York City for two more, before setting up a Half Marathon in Asunción years ago...

Paraguay celebrated the 200th anniversary of its independence in 2011, which the Paraguay Marathon Club prepared for by organizing the first ever full marathon in 2010 as a test event. It was so successful that it was agreed to hold it every year. The Maratón Internacional de Asunción joined AIMS immediately after this initial experience and became part of the international athletics calendar. To maximise the appeal of the race, in common with many new running events, the full marathon was hosted together with a half marathon and a 10K, all distances duly certified.

Always keen to co-operate with their international federative alliances, the 2012 edition hosted the South-American Half Marathon Championships, an event for many of us in the running community – and surely also for the general population – Paraguay is one of the least known countries in the world.
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additional means to attract runners from the widest possible spectrum of the continent. Through such efforts some hundreds of foreigners, mostly Brazilians, participated at all the distances offered.

With two editions successfully concluded, this third celebration was some kind of test for both the organising club and the city – and in this case also the country). All races try to project themselves to the world, and on this occasion the organisers achieved great success.

All technical preparations went smoothly: the courses had been measured by Rodolfo Eichler and certified by the AIMS/IAAF Administrator Bernard Conway; the Expo was organized at the old railway station, now transformed into a museum (the first railway in South America was built in Paraguay); the bib-numbers given to all 2850 runners contained their chest timing chip (Chronotrack), and the main commercial sponsors were present in force (Adidas, Powerade, Vision).

The President of the Republic, Dr. Luis Fernando Franco, gave the starting signal to the 2850 runners accompanied by the Ministers of Sport, Mr. Marcelo Bedoya, and Tourism, Mrs. Liz Rosanna Cramer. The courses were designed to allow each race to finish at the common start by using separate turnarounds for the 10K and half marathon. All routes passed by the most interesting parts of the city, including some kilometres along the River Paraguay, the natural border between Paraguay and neighbouring Argentina.

Locals call Asunción the “town of seven hills”, so nobody was expecting any special records; the crowd lining both sides of the course gave a warm reception to all runners, something deeply appreciated by them – to the point of describing the race as “the best they ever ran”.

As in many international races held all over the world, Kenyans ran out as winners. Eunice Jepkirui Kirwa put up an especially good performance with her 2:33:42 in the marathon, followed by the local woman Carmen Martínez Aguilera 15 minutes later. In the South-American championships both male and female winners were from Brazil who maintained their longtime road racing leadership on the continent.

The reception of both the Marathon and the half marathon, including the South-American Championships, was hosted by Mr. Arnaldo Samaniego Gonzalez, Mayor of Asunción. Alongside him at the awards ceremony were President of the Paraguay Olympic Committee, Mr. Camilo Perez, and President of the Paraguayan Athletics Federation, Francisco Rojas.

Anyone who had the opportunity to be present at this special marathon could not fail to be impressed by the extensive press coverage and the striving for excellence of the Paraguay Marathon Club organization. Moreover, the active involvement of the whole country and the city’s public institutions makes the event something like a national monument. Such a situation is the heartfelt desire of most race directors worldwide.

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