Each year in autumn ten thousand runners converge on a region in Austria called Wachau to run the Marathon there along the banks of the Danube River.

For approximately 36km of its length the River Danube meanders through one of the most stunning cultural and natural landscapes of Europe, a UNESCO World heritage site. The marathon begins in the village of Emmersdorf – where art, culture and history are part of daily life. Runners get a view of the majestic baroque monastery of Stift Melk before passing through several charming medieval villages – with the river Danube always alongside them. After 20km they pass the pleasant village of Spitz on the north bank of the Danube which is where the half marathon starts.

According to legend, King Richard I of England (Richard the Lionheart) was imprisoned in the year 1192 in the pretty medieval town of Dürnstein. Willendorf, located 21km from Krems, is where a 25,000-year old figurine of Venus was discovered.

The wine producing villages nestle between terraced vineyards, which have been a centre of the trade for most of its history. On an agricultural area of 1400 hectares famous wine-growers here produce wines of the highest quality, known throughout the world.

This magnificent blend of culture and history creates a special atmosphere and attracts thousands of runners each year.

Apart from the Marathon and half Marathon, a quarter Marathon and a Nordic Walking event are also offered. The flat course, which slightly descends with the river over its length, makes it favourable for newcomers to the Marathon. Not only that, but the distance can also be run as a relay consisting of 2, 3 or 4 persons.

Late summer in Central Europe can vary in temperature, but this year conditions were perfect. The race started at 10.00 with a wonderful clear blue sky and a temperature of 20°C – rising to 25°C at the finish. 10,800 enthusiastic competitors rushed off from different Start zones heading for Krems, the medieval capital of the region.

In terms of performance race director Michael Buchleitner explained: “The half marathon is the mainstay of ordinary runners here in Wachau. That’s why we like to draw attention to that distance.” To achieve a new course record in the half Marathon Buchleitner recruited top Kenyan runners. The strategy was to let a group with personal best times of slightly over 60 minutes be pulled by pacemakers with top times over 10km (such as Josiphat Bett Kipkoech with a best time of 26:49).

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visitors and runners enjoy the music and enticing savory dishes.

The WACHAU marathon has been run for the last 15 years. The present organizer of the race, Michael Buchleitner, won the first WACHAU marathon in 1998 and ran in the Olympic Games three times. In recent years the numbers of participants has risen continuously from 5700 registered in 2008 to 8500 in 2010 and 10850 in 2012.

The next WACHAU marathon is on 15 September 2013. See: www.wachaumarathon.at

The Wachau region is approximately 80km west of Vienna. The organizers offer direct transport from Vienna. The logistics are a huge challenge because there is only one road – and that is the one on which the race is held.

When the competitors register they choose which kind of transport they prefer: boat, train or bus. Any choice provides them with a unique experience. They can sit back and enjoy the natural splendors of the scenery while the organization gets them where they need to be.

After the race there is also a special atmosphere. Food, sports massage and medical support is provided in the public park in Krems. Thousands of visitors and runners enjoy the music and enticing savory dishes.

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Runners from 52 different countries and 5 continents competed. Most came from neighbouring countries: Germany, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, but some came from as far away as USA China, Argentina and Gambia. Ching Te-Huang from Taiwan was on his way to enter the Guinness Book of Records by running 100 marathons in 100 weeks – the WACHAU marathon was his 55th. He finished with a time of 5:23:41.

For a while it looked like the Austrian all-comers’ record might be broken. (Haile Gebreslassie’s 1:00:18 in the 2011 Vienna City Marathon). But after pacemaker Stanley Salil dropped out at 10km the leading trio, Robert Langat, Benson Oloisunga and Daniel Kinjua-Wanjiru, couldn’t keep up the pace. No big breakthrough happened, but Robert Langat did manage to beat the old course record by running 1:01:05 – five seconds faster than Weldon Kirui’s winning time of 2010.

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