

There's more to choosing the right apparel for extreme runs than meets the eye, as **Shari Shallard** has found out from researching the subject in depth and from her own running experience.

More than mileage

In February I ran my fourth Double Bridge Run, an annual 15K race that starts downtown in the lovely Florida panhandle city of Pensacola. About 16 weeks before the run, my running partner and I began working on increasing our miles. About four weeks before the run, we began debating where we would eat our celebratory lunch afterwards. And for about two weeks before, we discussed how to dress strategically for the race. This – the dressing conversation – was the most fraught discussion.

Choosing the right outfit and shoes for any race is an important component of performing well and enjoying the experience. But, for some events, this is even more important and even harder to get right. Races with unusual terrain, extreme climates or even specific cultural requirements call for a closer look at recommended apparel and footwear. Below are five such races; these are races for which the experiential payoff is great, but outfit selection needs to be part of the training process.

The Double Bridge Run (Pensacola, Florida, US)

This is the least extreme race on our list. If runners get the outfit wrong, they might end up chilled, wind-chapped or sunburned – but not frostbitten or accused of indecent exposure. The route winds through the small city on its way to a three-mile bridge spanning the glistening Pensacola Bay. It's then a straight stretch through the peninsula town of Gulf Breeze, before veering off toward a second bridge that arcs out to Pensacola Beach – a white-sand barrier island often listed among the country's most beautiful beaches.

It's a special run. The route is varied enough to be interesting, and long enough to be a challenge, but accessible to most runners willing to put in few months of training. But more notably, the views from each bridge – both too covered in cars to safely jog across on any other day – are just stunning.

Completing marathons in both the North Pole and Antarctica required William Thomas to cover every inch of his skin.

 2016 North Pole Marathon





Runners get over the hump of the three-mile bridge over Pensacola Bay.

 Pensacola Sports

This year, more than 4,600 people participated. Forty-three percent of those were out-of-towners, including runners from 40 states and several other countries. People travel to this event for a combination of reasons, says Ray Palmer, executive director of Pensacola Sports. "A rich history as the US's first European settlement, combined with the natural beauty," he says, "makes Pensacola an exceptional destination."

But a sea of question marks surrounds what to wear. It's February in northwest Florida, which can mean it might be freezing outside or it might be sunny enough for shorts. And, regardless of what the weatherman predicts, the route invariably crosses three climate zones. At the start, the sun is barely up and the city is chilled in the shadows of tall buildings. Over the three-mile bridge, Gulf Breeze's eponymous winds kick in. The sun continues rising as runners approach the second bridge to the beach, and shines bright and strong as they cross the finish line. "We advise travellers to come prepared for virtually every condition," Mr Palmer says, "although more often than not, the weather is a cool and crisp morning start and very comfortable finish on beautiful Pensacola Beach." He recommends cheap, disposable outer wear at the start, with a light-to-medium cover at the finish.

The truth is, though, that runners involved in the following four races could probably show up at the Double Bridge Run wearing everything or nothing and be just fine. The real challenge is how to cover 26.2 miles in culturally complex Iran, the wild expanse of an African wildlife conservancy, and the sub-freezing environs of Antarctica and the North Pole.

I Run Iran (Shiraz, Iran)

In early April, Iran held its first ever marathon. It began at the necropolis, Naqsh-e Rostam, with its ancient tombs, ran through Marvdasht and on to Persepolis (past the Gate of all Nations), then looped back to the necropolis where the race

finished at the 2,500-year-old Cube of Zoroaster.

The marathon and its surrounding four days of events aimed to introduce more people to Iranian culture and inspire a large, young Iranian population to embrace running as a fun activity – because, according to organiser, Iran Silk Road, most sports in Iran are practised indoors.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this event was not without controversy. Women were excluded from registering for the event, prompting protests from activists around the world. Yet, as it turned out, women's history was made at this already-historic event. Despite having their applications rejected, two women ran the full race, starting two hours before the men. Today, the marathon's official website acknowledges both women among the lists of participants and even includes photos of both women.

"Female runners Mahsa Torabi and Elham Manoocheri were the first to run this Persian Marathon," the caption reads. "Both of them finished and the I Run Iran organiser has proudly awarded them with their well deserved medal!"



Two women ran in Iran's first marathon, despite being barred from registering.

 Marton Kallai



Safaricom runners cross the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya.

 Tusk Trust

In Iran, the challenge of dressing for the marathon lies more with culture than climate. The weather in the region is relatively mild during April, averaging 20-30°C with occasional rain. But the Iranian dress code applies to all visitors. Runners are no exception.

While men can't wear shorts while walking in public, running shorts are fine during sporting activities, although the runners were asked to wear long pants again at the site of Persepolis. Participants generally honoured these parameters. Photos of runners – which, at a typical marathon, might feature lots of airy running vests and very short running shorts – show many men wearing mid-thigh length shorts and short-sleeve tops.

As for women's running gear, Torabi and Manoocheri's ensembles demonstrate how females can run in compliance with the country's dress code of covered heads and prohibited bare legs. Manoocheri ran in Asics running pants and a long Asics top, while Torabi outfitted herself in a similar adidas kit. Neither woman's head covering seemed particularly designed for sports, though the options for such modest workout wear is growing. Capsters, a company who "believes in the empowerment of women through sports" carries hijabs designed for a variety of activities. It will be fascinating to see whether sporty hijabs like Capsters will show up in greater numbers next year.

Safaricom Marathon (Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Kenya)

Although Kenya's Safaricom Marathon is in its sixteenth year, it perhaps entered the public consciousness in 2015 when Pippa Middleton – sister of the Duchess of Cambridge – completed the 42.2 kilometre trek in under four hours. This was no easy little photo op. Ms Middleton achieved a time of 3:56:33, under the African sun, at an altitude of more than 1,500 metres, and with

the genuine possibility of encountering the wildest of animals. The route winds through the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, rewarding those willing to undertake the challenge with breathtaking views of the savannah and the thrill of running through such a raw and unpredictable expanse. (And yes, spotter planes and rangers are on hand should anything too unpredictable show up.)

So, what to wear in a safari-esque marathon? Dean Karnazes, an ultrarunner who has done his share of running through Africa, told OutsideOnline.com that his hot climate gear of choice is The North Face's Better Than Naked line and, when temperatures approach 50°C, Moebe UV arm and leg protection sleeves. When crossing the African savannah, though, good trail running

Sportswear that complies with Islamic dress code, like this running hijab, is becoming increasingly available.

 Capsters



shoes are essential. Named Editor's Choice in a recent review of trail shoes by Trail-RunnerMag.com, the Altra Olympus 2.0 is a great example of appropriate footwear. "Max-cushioned, comfortable and amply treaded," according to the review, "this shoe works for long runs and ultras with varied surfaces but nothing ankle-breakingly technical." Even though water stations are available, a hydration belt is also a good idea. And sunscreen. Lots of sunscreen.

North Pole Marathon and Antarctic Ice Marathon

These last two marathons share the distinction of being hardest to reach. (Highlights from the Antarctic Ice Marathon's FAQs include Q: Can I be guaranteed to be in and out of the Antarctic as scheduled? A: No. You are going to one of the most difficult places in the world to fly to.) They are also the chilliest.

Will Thomas has run in both of these. As the Antarctic Ice Marathon is the world's southernmost marathon and the North Pole Marathon is run only about 50km from the top of the world, he says the runs share more similarities than differences. "The climate and terrain, though, are not exactly the same," Mr Thomas says. He explains the Antarctic course has been checked carefully (for crevasses that could be a kilometre deep!), so shoes might sink somewhat in the snow – but not by much. The thinner ozone layer over Antarctica allows more intense UV rays, so goggles or polarised sunglasses are essential for preventing snowblindness.

In the North Pole, snow ranges from shoe-deep to knee-deep, according to Will Thomas. "There is no land at the North Pole," he points out, "just one or two metres of ice between the runners and the Arctic Ocean. There is always the chance the ice will crack open unexpectedly, as happened to our runway soon after the first planeload of runners landed." The crack left the runners stranded for three days until staff could prepare a new runway.

Therefore, Thomas's choice of running-day wear for the North Pole Marathon – which was -25°C for most of the race – was complex and carefully planned, and not dissimilar to what he wore in Antarctica:

- A wicking baselayer on both the upper and lower body.
- A middle fleece layer for insulation on top, zipped all the way up to protect his neck.
- Outer wind shell layer – jacket and bottoms.

"The key is to monitor your body heat and try not to sweat too much," he says. Vents under the arms of the wind shell allow heat to escape. "Once those inner layers get wet and start to freeze, and you then stop to get a drink and generate less heat, the word 'cold' takes on a whole new meaning."



Yes, marathons at the North Pole do exist. Here, William Thomas just finished one.

 2016 North Pole Marathon

To ensure all of his skin was covered, Mr Thomas wore a fleece cap, balaclava, ski goggles and two pairs of gloves: a thin inner layer and heavy mittens on the outside. For his feet, "trail shoes work just fine in the snow and ice," Thomas says, "though I did make sure to get a pair made with Gore-Tex, and I bought them a size larger than normal because I was wearing two pairs of thick wool socks." He also placed hand and foot warmers into his gloves and shoes, as fingers and toes are highly susceptible to frostbite.

The only gear-related problem Thomas encountered was his goggles icing up. "By the time I was done, there was a layer of ice outside my balaclava where the water vapour had gotten stuck and then frozen," he says. "Looking back, I wish I had worn a face mask with a hard shell and air holes over the mouth."

A world full of marathons

An US runner currently living and working in Bangkok, Will Thomas has completed the Marathon Grand Slam – a marathon on all seven continents and the North Pole – and continues to maintain an impressive running schedule. He's an Ambassador for the Abbott World Marathon Majors, and has run three of the Majors' six marathons; he'll run number four this October in Chicago.

Choosing what to wear remains a key part of his preparation. "Whether it's -30°C at the North Pole, 3 Celsius at the Tokyo Marathon, or 30 Celsius at a race in Singapore, I am always thinking carefully about my running clothes," he says. "I look for weather data online, try to talk to people who have run the race before, and look at photos from the event to see what people are wearing."

He knows, you have only one chance per race to get it right. "If I have made the wrong choices," he says, "an already long day is going to feel even longer." 