



Hard yards

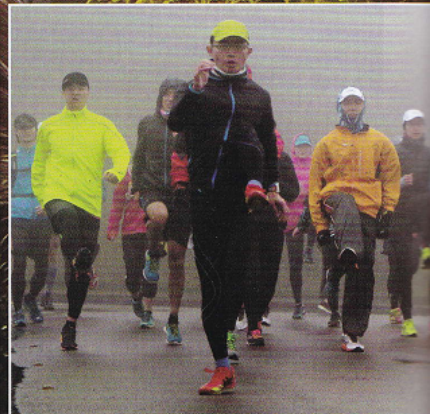
BIG CITY MOJO

PENNY COMINS FINDS HER RUNNING MOJO IN AN UNEXPECTED PLACE – ON THE TRAILS OF BUSTLING TAIPEI.

Have you lost your running mojo? New Year's resolution lost its shine? Mine had – so I imagined how I'd get my running mojo back and jotted it down: Run with someone else. Watch their dedication. Go back to basics and hone the skills. Run in a new location that is visually stunning. Commit to an event.

And that is just what I did – in Taiwan. Yes, in a big city. I didn't find solace in the usual trails of New Zealand. I wasn't finding my flow in the silence of the outback.

Ruth Croft – Kiwi professional runner and friend – was living in Taiwan. We had run the Tarawera Ultra in 2015 and were keen to have a laugh together again – unfortunately a stress fracture meant I hadn't made the 2015 Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc



Dedicated Taiwanese runners meet weekly at Yangmingshan National Park for a punishing session of drills, intervals and plyometrics.

to re-connect with Croft. After a bit of deliberation we decided I would go to Taiwan and visit her home of the last three years. She assured me there were trails within easy access of the city – and I believed her; after all she was the first woman home in CCC (one of the UTMB stable races) and she placed sixth overall.

You don't get to that level of technical expertise by pounding the streets alone.

Packing running kit, I was still dubious about the quality of the trail action as Taipei has 2.7 million people and is the 40th most populated area in the world. On arrival I was pleasantly surprised. Taipei city's footprint is only 271km² and it is flanked by rivers and volcanos with untouched urban rough jungle.

Numbers one and two on my list to recapture running mojo kicked in as Croft and I head out at crazy o'clock on the MRT and then via winding taxi to Yangmingshan

NEARLY 50 TRAIL-CLAD TAIWANESE RUNNERS WERE PERFORMING PLYOMETRIC STRETCHES IN THE MISTY CAR PARK WHEN WE PULLED UP.

Penny Comins

National Park.

We climb higher than the sun level into the cloud. It is cold, windy, wet and inappropriate for the clothing I have brought with me from a hot New Zealand summer. Yangmingshan National Park was formed from volcanic action as part of the Datun Mountain range. Fortuitously the volcanic nature has produced many hot springs throughout the park which offer great recovery for tired muscles. During the Qing dynasty the area was mined for sulphur, changing the landscape as the

soldiers burned the forest leaving grass fields. Protected since Japanese rule, it was made an official park in 1985 as the city smothered adjoining spaces.

Nearly 50 trail-clad Taiwanese runners were performing plyometric stretches in the misty car park when we pull up. We are late, but it is clear the show has just arrived: Croft is a trail running rock star in Taiwan.

The sport is growing faster than the electronics industry and Croft is their pin-up girl: I am blonde and taller which was an added bonus for their morning run clinic photos.

Ching Hua Huang – known as Rocket Man from his Hash House Harrier running profile – takes us through our paces. My jet-lagged DVT legs start to free up as we do drill after drill. I realise I haven't done these in years. It feels good to go back to basics and focus on the intricacies of the motion of running instead of the kilometres



Big City Trails



London, United Kingdom

Population: 8.5 million

Green space: 14,160 hectares

Recommended: Jump on the tube and head to Richmond on the District line. Grab a coffee outside the station and walk out of the shopping area. Black signs point up the hill to the Richmond Gate entrance to Richmond Park. 955 hectares of wild forest complete with Royal wild deer provides a running and cycling haven within the city. A graded gravel 11km path runs the circumference of the park from gate to gate, and there are water fountains and toilets at each gate. Explore the interior of the park on trails carved by the deer; find lakes, traverse over the A3 in to Wimbledon Common (don't leave any rubbish for the Wombles) or hit the Thames River and run all the way to the financial district. It is very easy to get lost so make sure you know which gate you came in.

New York City, United States of America

Population: 8.4 million

Green space: 11,330 hectares

Recommended: Hit Central Park and feel like a rock star as you run the undulating paths with hundreds of other people. Each morning the park (established in 1857) comes alive with the sound of footsteps. The outer path circumnavigates the 340-hectare park in 9.8km. There are many organised running groups and before you know it you will be talking away with runners of all abilities. Train stops on all sides of the park make it easy to get to and have a coffee after.



Singapore

Population: 5.4 million

Green space: 6,270 hectares

Recommended: The entire city of Singapore would fit into Lake Taupo so getting out to the forest is just a short taxi ride. Head out to the Central Catchment Reserve, a popular residential area for expatriates. Try the Woodcutter trail, a hidden gem that only trail runners know about. The clue to the trailhead on the east side of the park lies behind a sign that forbids cyclists using the trail. Follow tape around the Upper Pierce Reservoir for an 11.5km return trip. Enjoy tranquility in the Garden City.

needed at a certain pace. Mojo running number three - tick.

Fully loosened up, we head out into the park to run a number of intervals on different terrain. Mud makes everyone laugh and we enjoy a shared commonality despite the language barrier. The mist lifts periodically to reveal tussock-clad countryside streamed with stone cut paths. The view is clear down to the towering apartment blocks and the sea fills the valley end: picture Scotland meets Blackpool. The mountains are stunning and make up two of the 286 summits that are higher than 3,000 metres found in Taiwan. It is visually

stunning; I am in my happy place. Number four, done.

After the cruel level of stretching (never underestimate the Asian population to be able to bend in a way you didn't think was possible) Rocket Man debriefs the clinic. I understand none of it, yet from his gesticulation I know he is conveying the beauty and simplicity of running in the wilderness.

I am in love with running again. Back in Wi-Fi range at Croft's apartment I enter the Hawke's Bay Marathon, a journey from the coast to a winery. Perfect. Number five in motion. ☺

Top tips to recapture your running mojo

- 1 Run with someone else.
- 2 Watch their dedication.
- 3 Go back to basics and hone the skills.
- 4 Run in a new location that is visually stunning.
- 5 Commit to an event.