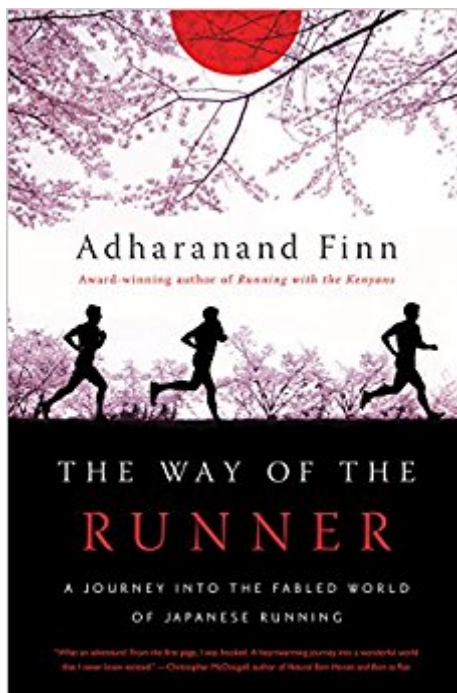




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The Way Of The Runner: A Journey Into The Fabled World Of Japanese Running



Synopsis

Welcome to Japan, the most running-obsessed nation on earth, and home to a unique running culture unlike anything we've ever experienced. It may come as a surprise to many people, but Japan is the most running-obsessed country on earth. A 135-mile relay race, or "ekiden," is the country's biggest annual sporting event. Thousands of professional runners compete for corporate teams in some of the most competitive races in the world. The legendary "marathon monks" run a thousand marathons in a thousand days to reach spiritual enlightenment. Yet so much of Japan's running culture remains a mystery to the outside world, on par with many of the unique aspects of contemporary Japan. Adharanand Finn, the award-winning author of *Running with the Kenyans*, spent six months immersed in this one-of-a-kind running culture to discover what it might teach us about the sport and about Japan. As an amateur runner about to turn 40, he also hoped to find out whether a Japanese approach to training might help him run faster. What he learns about competition, team work, form, chasing personal bests, and about himself will fascinate and surprise anyone keen to explore why we run and how we might do it better.

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Customer Reviews

"What an adventure! From the first page, I was hooked. A heartwarming journey into a wonderful world that I never knew existed until Finn swept me up and brought me there." - Christopher McDougall, author of *NATURAL BORN HEROES* and *BORN TO RUN*

"Engaging. The Way of the Runner drops us deep behind lines in the land of the rising

sun. **–** Newsweek **–** “A great look at Japanese distance running and will provide an interesting read to anyone who wants to know what makes a particular running community tick. If you liked *Running With the Kenyans* then you will definitely enjoy this.” **–** Athletics Weekly **–** “It’s a wonderful adventure, and it’s not far-fetched at all to liken it to one of Plimpton’s escapades, even if Finn seems to be a better runner than Plimpton was a football player. An elegant, well-written pleasure even for readers with no particular interest in foot racing.” **–** Kirkus Reviews (starred review) **–** “Finn’s explorations of Japanese running culture will be fascinating to anyone who enjoys the sport or is interested in learning about life in Japan.” **–** Library Journal **–** “Combines great storytelling with immersive research. Finn, a lovely, anxious narrator as he approaches his 40th birthday worried about his race times, discovers how utterly ingrained in the Japanese psyche running is as a mainstay of both community and psychology. Useful as a fresh perspective on your own running.” **–** Alexandra Heminsley, author of *RUNNING LIKE A GIRL* **–** “Brilliant, funny, charming and wise. Finn shines a light on a way of life that puts serious running at the heart of its culture and shows why the way of the runner: the racing and preparation, but also the culture, diet and lifestyle, is really a way of life – one that all of us, runners and non-runners alike should all aspire to.” **–** Robin Harvie, author of *WHY WE RUN*

Adharanand Finn is the author of *Running With the Kenyans*, which was shortlisted for the William Hill Sports Book Award. He is an editor at The *Guardian* and a freelance journalist. He currently competes with the Torbay Athletic Club in Devon, U.K., where he lives with his family. Follow him on Twitter at @adharanand.

I was a big fan of Adharanand Finn’s “*Running with the Kenyans*.” I love his immersive style. He moved to the Rift Valley with his family for that one. Here, he troops the entire family -- including three young children -- to the suburbs of Kyoto to explore Japan’s Ekiden running culture. Indeed, the book is as much about his family’s journey as it is about his deep dive into Ekiden. Let’s just say that anyone’s romantic ideal of a vacation journey via the Trans-Siberian railway will be put off the idea for good here. I loved the premise of this idea. I’ve been intrigued with Japanese running since the days of the great Boston marathon champion and long-time 25k and 30k WR holder, Toshihiko Seko. [In fact, if I have one quibble about the book, it’s that I wish Finn had sought out Seko for comment...or maybe he did and the famously monkish Seko turned him away.] Finn does well to tie the discipline and struggle of running to the self-professed ideal traits of the Japanese. I like the way

he uses Robert Whiting's seminal book, "You Gotta Have Wa." Whiting did much the same thing as Finn, but used baseball as his vehicle. Finn quotes Whiting's work: "The Japanese believe that only through endless training can one achieve the unity of mind and body necessary to excel . . . The traditional view in this rich but cramped and resource-poor land is that nothing comes easily, and that only through doryoku (effort) and the ability to persevere in the face of adversity can one achieve success." Finn finds that the obsessive Ekiden culture fits Japan like hand in glove...the ideas that the nail that is stuck up gets hammered down, and of sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the team. These ideas are steeped deep into Japanese culture. Finn points out that the dominant theme of Manga, Japan's rich graphic novel scene, is not of individual glory and triumph, but rather of personal struggle until our hero learns to become part of the team. That leads to some perverse outcomes in Japanese running. In terms of pure magnitude of good runners, the numbers are shocking. Finn juxtaposes results in Japan and his native UK, noting that "[a] few weeks after I return from Japan, the British half-marathon trials take place...The winner, Scott Overall, runs a time of 64 minutes 44 seconds. On the very same day, in Japan, the national university half-marathon championships take place. The student in that race finishing way back in 100th position runs almost exactly the same time as Overall, the British champion, finishing in a time of 64:47." And, yet: "So yes, they are good. But in the end, the more interesting question was why are they not better? Why, with a highly developed running system unrivalled anywhere in the world, was the winner of the university championships that day, a full hundred places further ahead, only running 62:09? While this is quick, it's hardly a time to cause even a ripple on the international stage." Finn attributes this outcome to two factors: corporate sponsorship of Ekiden leads to a level of comfort for runners that the Kenyans and Ethiopians just don't have (some of those guys are running to literally put food on the table). And, of course, there's the constant theme of Japanese overwork. The word "Karo'shi" (death from overwork) never makes an appearance here, but its spectre is felt: Finn's book abounds with tales of injury from overwork and brutal coaches whose physical abuse would never be tolerated in most Western societies. One bright light: Finn focuses on a new breed of coaches whose sensitive, emotionally intelligent approach is the new broom sweeping out the old. I bought and read the Kindle version and there's one odd, off-putting note: the editing. Do we really have an editor who does not know the difference between "Its" and "it's" and "affect" and "effect"? It's jarring to read sentences like these two: "Interestingly, in women's ekiden running, Hakone has the opposite affect." "We stick it in a pot and hang things off it's three tiny branches." The misuse of "it's" for "its" pops up a dozen or more times. It's a discordant note on an otherwise enjoyable book.

I loved Finn's previous book, *Running with the Kenyans*. Here he continues his marvelous storytelling style of writing, weaving his story around his travels to Japan. Most of us will not get the opportunity to go to Kenya or to Japan, much less become embedded in the running scene. This will be our only chance to see the running society up close. Finn has his ups and downs in contacting the ekiden running clubs and the running monks. This makes the story even more adventurous as you turn each page to find out if he makes contact despite language barriers and the somewhat closed off manner of the Japanese culture. An added bonus is the candid profile of Japan's most popular marathon runner in the current running era. If you loved *Born to Run*, you are sure to enjoy Finn's books as he takes you inside the culture as much as introducing the motivations and training of the runners, all in the same enthralling narrative style.

I wish he'd gone more into depth on the "marathon monks" of Mt. Hiei. This is more of a travelogue of one guy than a truly in depth focus on the ekiden system of Japanese running. It goes into adequate surface detail of the Japanese corporate relationship with ekiden running but if you want a true history of that sport you should look at other sources. I have not read Mr. Finn's other book about the Kenyan runners yet, so I cannot really compare this work with his other one, but as a standalone piece, this book only gives a taste of Japanese running that the reader may wish to learn more about.

I was a huge fan of *Running With the Kenyans*, having read it front-to-back twice and going back for certain parts of it more often. So I was very excited to see Adharanand had tackled a new running topic in *The Way of the Runner*. And I loved it. He has a writing style like no other, weaving together science, culture, current thoughts on training and nutrition, humor and flashes from his own personal life to put together a complex puzzle that is engaging, informative, thought-provoking and fun as hell. He immerses himself (and his family) in the different cultures he's investigating and the result is a far more personal and complete picture than one would get by research and interviews alone. I finished this one in two days and can only hope he's got another running culture to tackle, and I can't wait to see it.

This is an excellent book which builds on the features of of his book about the Kenyans. He's an excellent storyteller who delivers on his promise to reveal the secret to Japanese running success. Anyone who enjoys running will enjoy this book immensely.

After Kenya, Finn goes to Japan to experience the traditional relay race called 'ekiden'.

Long-distance running is a big business in Japan and they have fast runners if compared to Europeans. But to beat the east Africans, Finn concludes, seems that they should avoid overtraining and start having fun (i.e. going a bit wild). Where there is fun, there is success. The wise monk added: "The challenge is continue enjoying life".

Great book. Inspiring & insightful.

Actually really good running information to take away and use - worth the read for sure. Good references for form and technique as well

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