**Race Report: SwimRun Hydra, November 1-3, 2024**

**Hydra** – a truly exceptional island, located just a two-hour ferry ride from Athens, continues to captivate more and more participants each year. Known for its timeless beauty and charm, Hydra stands out not only for its warm weather and crystal-clear seas at the tail end of the season but also for its car-free streets, laid-back atmosphere, and stunning flowers and buildings that line the harbor.

**SwimRun Hydra** itself offers an extraordinary race experience, with a long-distance course spanning nearly 40 km, which includes two crossings of the island’s mountain ridge and 1,200 meters of elevation gain. The challenging terrain demands not only physical endurance but also mental focus, as the trails can be steep and technical, requiring careful attention. Despite the toughness of the course, the breathtaking views of Hydra, the sparkling sea, and surrounding islands provide ample opportunities for participants to enjoy the island’s unique beauty throughout the race. Along the course, participants are also drawn to the island's historic monasteries, which add a sense of awe and tranquility.

The swims in the clear, refreshing sea, especially on the backside of the island, are often described as the most beautiful open-water swims participants have ever experienced. It's no wonder that after crossing the finish line, many racers describe SwimRun Hydra as “the best race ever” or “a lifelong memory.”

For those not ready to tackle the full long distance, the Core distance (23 km) and Initial distance (13 km) are also available, and they too offer plenty of challenges. In 2024, conditions for the open-water swims were ideal, with light winds and calm seas. The emotional finish line along the harbor, cheered on by friends, family, and spectators, made for a truly inspiring and motivational end to the race.

In the lead-up to the event, around 70 participants took part in a pre-race camp, mainly French runners and swimmers led by influencer Lucile Westward, with coaching support from Nicolas Remires and the Envol team. Many of these participants were first-time SwimRunners, competing mainly in the Initial distance.

**Event Highlights**

Each year, SwimRun Hydra grows and evolves thanks to the tireless work of race director Constantinos Mitropopapas and his team. The event has transformed into a three-day celebration, offering a unique and immersive race experience. The race briefing, held at the museum, followed by a pasta party on the rooftop, sets the tone for the weekend, encouraging camaraderie and sparking conversations between old friends and new acquaintances.

The race day begins early, with the longer distances starting at 8 AM. What makes this event truly special is the individual introduction of each team, who run through the starting arch to applause before the race even begins. The first run, though a gentle warm-up, already offers an idea of the terrain to come, with the undulating landscape hinting at the challenge ahead.

**The first swim** takes participants to a beautiful white monastery, followed by a steep climb to the first mountain ridge. From there, competitors tackle a challenging trail that demands full focus. The second swim, with its picturesque surroundings, is an emotional highlight of the day. The challenging ascent back to the ridge offers some of the best panoramic views of Hydra, and despite the physical demands, participants share smiles and encouraging words as they pass one another.

**The final stretch** leads back into the city and back to the finish line, which involves a final run with a jump into the harbor, where the waves offer some refreshing relief. The second loop – equally tough as the first – takes participants back along the island’s rugged terrain before returning to the harbor for the grand finale.

**The winning time** in 2024 was 5:00:46, set by none other than ÖtillÖ World Champion Sabine Rapelli and SwimRun Marathon World Champion Viktor Törneke. But in SwimRun Hydra, every finisher is a winner. About 20 nations and 120 particiapants build the startline for the 3 distances and everybody is a winner. A special touch of this race is the recognition of every team with their own banner as they cross the finish line. And it’s worth noting that SwimRun Hydra only allows team entries, adding to the sense of community and collaboration.

Throughout the day, spectators could watch the race unfold from the many cafes and restaurants lining the harbor, and racers had ample opportunity to socialize, make new friends, and celebrate each other’s achievements. The festive awards ceremony at 8:30 PM, held at the start/finish area, brought together competitors of all distances in a joyful celebration. For many, the post-race parties carried on into the early morning, providing a perfect way to shake out the sore legs.

On Sunday, creative kids’ races added to the weekend’s fun, and the camaraderie continued with heartfelt goodbyes and reuniting with friends who had departed at different times for the journey back to the mainland.

**A Heartfelt Thanks**

A huge thank you goes out to Constantinos Mitropopapas and his team for organizing such a flawless and memorable event. Their dedication to ensuring the safety of all participants through extensive water rescue teams, as well as the careful marking of the course, ensured that everyone had an unforgettable experience. We look forward to another amazing SwimRun Hydra in 2025!

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