

CELEBRITY TRAVEL

Marathon races help Molinaro know cities

By Jae-Ha Kim
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AGENCY

Joanne Lee Molinaro — better known online as the Korean Vegan — has always offered more than cooking instructions to her millions of social media followers.

Her latest book, “The Korean Vegan: Home-made,” weaves professional essays and stories about her family with her unique vegan take on Korean cuisine. A former partner at a Chicago law firm, the bestselling author and James Beard Award winner quit her full-time job and relocated to Los Angeles in 2022 to expand her business and launch her latest venture, Korean Vegan Beauty.

This interview with Molinaro has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: What are some of your favorite weekend destinations?

A: The state parks are so beautiful. My nephew, Liam, is 7 years old now, and he loves looking for sea creatures. When you go to the state parks, there’s a ton of rocks all over these large boulders, and they create these little shallow pools. That’s where he would find all of his little creatures — crabs, fish, stuff like that. It was just wonderful for him. But then for the adults, you get to walk along the beach. You’re allowed to bring your dogs with you. My whole family went out. We brought a little blanket and it was so great. And there are so many state parks all over like Malibu State Creek Park. Cheeseboro is right by us. It’s wonderful (for me) hiking trails that go way up high. You can see the entire city and it’s just



Joanne Lee Molinaro says visiting state parks makes for a wonderful time. **JOANNE LEE MOLINARO**

really amazing.

Q: What did you do on your last trip to Italy?

A: We went to Venice, we went to the Dolomites, and we went to Rome, because (my husband) Anthony’s family is in Rome. We did that trip, which was absolutely sensational. The Dolomites are like nothing I’ve ever seen in my entire life.

Q: You’ve run marathons all over the United States. Is there a difference depending on the cities you’re in?

A: There are definitely differences. I have run multiple marathons in Chicago, obviously. I also ran one in Indianapolis, one in Cincinnati, one in New York City. The geography is different, right? ... When I found out I was running in New York, a lot of my training involved lots of hills to make sure that my legs were conditioned — particularly my quads — to handle the incline and the decline of all the different bridges. Chicago is very different. It’s very flat, so I don’t have to do as much hill work, other than Mount Roosevelt, which has a little bit of an incline (before the finish line).

Q: What about the vibe of each city?

A: I think running a marathon is one of the best ways to get to know a place. The real differences are the personalities. You really get a sense of each city. For example, the sheer

diversity of the different boroughs of New York. You’ll pass the Orthodox Jewish area, which is so distinctly quiet on a Sunday, and then you end up in Central Park, where everyone’s hair is on fire. You run through Brooklyn, and people have their coffee and bagels. In Chicago, I’ll never forget running through Chinatown and through Pilsen. I’ll never forget the little block that was cordoned off by the Korean Americans. In Ohio, it’s a very different Midwestern vibe. Their marathon is called the Flying Pig Marathon, so there was a lot of bacon involved.

Q: When you return to these cities, do you find that they look different than how you viewed them while running?

A: The cities take pains to block traffic, so you literally will never see it in the same way as when you’re running the marathon. And then on top of that, it’s the one day of the year when that city comes out and says, “You know what? We hate each other every other day of the year. But today, we’re going to love each other and support the runners.”

Q: When in a new place, do you enjoy doing touristy things?

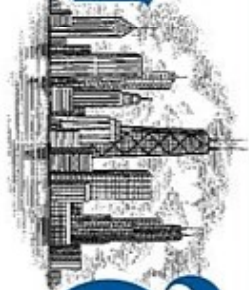
A: I’m not into that stuff. I hate tourist things.

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