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Innsbruck-Stubai is hosting the world

So far, the World Mountain and Trail Running Championships have been living up to their name. More than 1,300 athletes from 68 countries participate in four contests – the Vertical, the Trail Short, the Trail Long and the Mountain Classic – giving it their all on the challenging courses in Innsbruck and the Stubaital valley. They are not the only ones to have made the journey to Innsbruck from every corner of the globe; the team of volunteers - without whom it would have been impossible to stage these World Championships - is equally international. We are taking a look behind the scenes in Innsbruck-Stubai.

Nepal has sent a total of three athletes, including Asia's top ultra runner, Sunmaya Budha. She has participated in numerous international races and, according to the ranking of the ITRA, the International Trail Running Association, is the eighth-fastest runner over 100 kilometers. Budha is going to compete in the 86.9-kilometer Trail Long on Friday, along with her teammate Arjun Kulung Rai. "We want to demonstrate our potential as a world-class mountain and trail nation," says Sunmaya Budha. While Nepal may be best known as the land of the eight-thousanders, it also has amazing trail terrain to offer.

The two World Cup runners from the Himalayas "know about the challenges of growing up in the remote villages of a poor country. We are surprised about the level of modern progress here in the villages of this region," says Budha. They inspected the route prior to the race at the Hoadl and the first checkpoint. "The landscape is as beautiful as around our home villages in the Himalayas, but the lifestyle is very different from ours," says the 24-year-old athlete. Sunmaya Budha dropped out about halfway through Friday's race, while Arjun Kulun Raj came in 50th place.

Coming from a completely different part of the world, the Mexican participants represent the indigenous Raramuri people from the Sierra Tarahumara. It is their first attempt at the World Trail Running Championships; last year in Chiang Mai, they didn't participate. With Onorio Tomas and Antonio Ramirez, two Raramuris are going to compete in the Trail Long. "For us, running is part of our daily lives, as we walk 30 to 50 kilometers a day to get to other places in the mountains," says Onorio Tomas.

The Raramuri live in the mountainous regions of Mexico's north-east, towards the US border. In Mexico, they participate in mountain runs to earn money for food. "We run in our typical regional costume and our special running sandals," says Tomas. The so-called huaraches are made of rubber material and can last over distances of up to 300 kilometers. Tomas and his teammate Antonio Ramirez are opting for Mexican food during the competition, getting energized by burritos (corn tortillas with beans) and Pinole (roasted corn that's ground up



and dissolved in water). They finished the Trail Long in Innsbruck-Stubai in 49th (Onorio Tomas), respectively 118th (Antonio Ramirez) place.

Karl Midlane from Zambia is a relatively unknown contestant, but one that is no less likable. The 27-year old is his country's only participant at the World Championships. The former tennis player got into trail running through friends who took him to the mountains around Cape Town. Last year, he decided to go abroad and compete in international races. "In January I flew to Innsbruck - with just a few hundred Euros in my pocket and without a plan. All I knew was that I wanted to build a life here. What I did do was let my country nominate me for the World Cup," says Midlane. He finished the Short Trail on Thursday as the 123th out of 185 runners.

400 volunteers support the WC organizers during the event, including about 100 voluntary aides from all over the world. Rodrigo Herrera's journey was particularly long, coming all the way from Catamarca in Argentina. "I participated in the Innsbruck Alpine Trailrun Festival and decided to stay on to help at the WMTRC," says the 34-year old. His jobs included deliveryman and race marshal but he also supported the media and press teams. "The people are very involved and the work ethic as well as the overall atmosphere is great," he adds.

Johanna Roth's trip was much shorter; she comes from Munich, which is basically around the corner. The 23-year old supports the media team. "It feels great to be working at a well-organized event and to be able to contribute," she says. Her task is to support the media representatives: "I answer their questions, hand out start- and result lists and hold the fort during the races," she adds. Dejan Krle, 41, comes from North Macedonia, where he organizes an international trail running race at Lake Ohrid. At the WMTRC in Innsbruck-Stubai, he works with the logistics team, handling the equipment check at the finish and supporting the event setup. "I really like the region; the mountains are much steeper and more rugged than back home. I learn a lot and I am sure I can take back some valuable knowledge regarding events."