

Click for printable PDF itinerary (Mauritius-Turkey)

Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

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(We know some of you have been dreaming of visiting Cappadocia with its iconic hot air ballooning and so much more. We will present a pre-trip add-on. Details coming soon. Depart USA November 23.)

Nov 27 - Main group flies USA on Turkish airlines round-trip to Mauritius for the best connections and fare deals. This includes a free stopover to visit Istanbul. Details to come and trip tips.

Nov 28 - Arrive Istanbul (Land portion begins)

Hoşgeldiniz! Welcome to stunning Istanbul. Set on the Bosphorus Peninsula with part of this stunning city in Europe and part in Asia, Istanbul is perhaps one of the most important cities in history. Founded as the city of Byzantium and later renamed Constantinople, Istanbul served as an imperial capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires for almost 16 centuries.

Check into hotel located in city Center. If time, nothing like visiting a traditional Hammam Turkish bath to rejuvenate from Jetlag. Our guide Mehmet will be there to assist you. Then we will sample local cuisine and get to know your fellow AFS Travelers with a Welcome Dinner at a pier on the Bosphorus that divides two continents.

Overnight at hotel Holiday Inn Old City (2 Nights) D

Nov 29 – Full day City Tour, Istanbul

Our full-day tour begins with a visit to the renowned Sultanahmet Mosque, known popularly as The Blue Mosque. Incredibly beautiful, it is known for its blue Iznik (Nicaea) tiles and six minarets. We then continue to the Hippodrome, a massive arena that once functioned as the heart of sporting events and political activities of the old city.

From here we continue to the nearby Hagia Sophia, the Church of Divine Wisdom. Ranking as one of the greatest marvels of world architecture, this awe-inspiring building was constructed as a basilica in the 6th century by Byzantine Emperor Justinian. From here, we take a short walk to the Underground Cistern, the largest of the many underground cisterns built during the Byzantine Empire to supply the city with water. This cistern is especially fascinating because the Byzantine builders repurposed many stone structures-capital heads and columns that had been used in earlier temples. Now, an upside-down Medusa stares out at you from her watery home.

We'll continue with a visit to the Topkapi Palace, which was the imperial palace of the Ottoman Sultans and features the fascinating imperial treasury, the Chinese porcelain section, the calligraphy section and much more. Visit the jewelry collection segment of the palace. Our tour ends at the incredible Grand Bazaar, a vast and legendary covered market that is the biggest souk in the world with nearly 4000 shops of antiques, jewelry, carpets, and so much more. You can choose to stay to visit the fabulous Spice Bazaar, the largest market in the world for culinary delights or return to our hotel. Evening free to explore on own.

Overnight at Holiday Inn Old City Hotel B

Nov 30 - Free day fun in Istanbul! We had to give you some downtime to relax and play here. One could spend a month exploring this city and will have plenty of recommendations for you like a day cruise to Prince Island, our baklava tour, Turkish baths, museums and much more. Overnight at 4-star airport hotel for convenience and to prepare for our early morning departure next day.

Dec 1 – Fly to Mauritius

We head to Istanbul airport to catch our 9-hour flight to Mauritius. Welcome to the beautiful island most famous for its beaches, lagoons and reefs!

We'll arrive in the late afternoon at Ramgoolam Airport in Port Louis and be greeted by our local guide. We head to our resort where we have a free evening in our stunning tropical surroundings. From Port Louis it's just an hour drive along the west coast to our paradise resort to be pampered throughout. Set in tropical gardens along palm-fringed Sugar Beach on the Indian Ocean our resort has an Asian spa and restaurants specializing in grilled seafood as well as two pools. Activities in the calm lagoon and coral reefs here make it perfect for snorkeling, sea kayaks, pedal boats and scuba diving with beach horse riding nearby. The resort lies on two beaches with incredible snorkeling among submerged statues. After dark, enjoy seaside dining under the stars.

Overnight at hotel Sofitel le Imperial Mauritius Resort & Spa B

Dec 2 – Southern Mauritius – Gorges, Waterfalls and Lakes

Highlights - Total immersion in the lush nature of the Black River Gorges National Park. Blessing from a Hindu priest at the sacred lake of Grand Bassin. Seven-colored earth, nature's wonder, and its waterfalls. Michelin Acclaimed Litchi wine tasting. Home hosted Creole lunch in Chamarel.

Breakfast at the hotel. (Wear comfy walking shoes today).

Today we discover the spectacular wild beauty of the South during this unforgettable day which combines everything that the island has to offer. From the splendid panoramic view from the Trou aux Cerfs crater to the guided tour of the Takamaka Winery, the only winery in the world dedicated exclusively to lychee wine, the South of Mauritius is a perfect tour for those who want to connect with nature since it is one of the most scenic and unspoiled parts of the island.

Learn about the history of the Sacred Lake and its relation to the Ganges in India according to Hindu mythology. Photo stop at the viewpoint of the breathtaking Black River Gorges National Park – Enjoy a full day of scenically contrasting delights.

Lunch will be hosted by Rico in Chamarel. Well-known in the village for coffee and creole cuisine, he will be pleased to welcome you to his place for an authentic Creole meal. Nestled amidst a steep landscape surrounded by lush and unspoiled nature, Chamarel is a small village with a thousand inhabitants, often called the cradle of Creole culture. Chamarel is a village of resistance because it is the place where the slaves who rejected the colonial order came to hide. This history adds a mystical dimension for the Rasta community and the village is home to their Nyabinghi Tabernacle, where they regularly meet to perform their rituals. Chamarel is also home to a true wonder of nature; unique dunes that have different colors, including red, brown, violet, green, purple, and yellow. Drive back through small remote villages along the West coast.

Overnight at hotel Sofitel le Imperial Mauritius Resort & Spa B, L

Dec 3 - Swim with Dolphins, Breakfast with Giraffes & Walk with Lions

Get ready for an early 6AM departure for a day of once-in-a-lifetime experiences! Wild Dolphin Swim- we start our day with a peaceful and responsible swimming experience with wild dolphins in the open sea, plunging into the remarkable world of these powerful marine mammals and come face to face with them.

Back on land, we make our way to Casela Nature Park for Breakfast with Giraffes, one of the most unique experiences anyone can have. Peering in over the raised deck where you will be having breakfast with their elegant necks, encountering giraffes at such close quarters gives a real appreciation of just how beautiful and soulful these creatures are.

And just when you think you can't top that, we'll meet the world's fastest land animal on our Cheetah Encounter. These elegant and graceful mammals, part of the Big Cat family, are an endangered species in the African bush. Experience a unique session among these magnificent beasts as we walk side by side and interact with the cheetahs alongside the

handlers. You will have the opportunity to learn about the animals, their habitat, and their behaviors. Later board the safari truck into the Animal Kingdom to photograph monkeys, zebras, giant tortoises, exotic birds and more.

There are several options you can choose from to round out your day-

Walk with lions. Take a walk on the wild side and feel the adrenaline rush on our lion walk. Our past group loved the sense of adventure and being so close to these amazing big cats. Professional guides lead us out to Rivian Rampart for a brief introduction on these lions. Truly once in a lifetime experience for some unique photos. Or opt for the new Rhino Encounter in addition to this. (\$129 book there.)

Zipline - Step outside of your comfort zone and Zip through the sky on a heart-racing Zipline Adventure, the ideal outdoor experience for any fun-loving thrill-seeker. Your journey will culminate with the legendary 400m zipline!

Quad Bike Safari Experience - Quad biking safari in the most amazing natural setting is a great adventure. This one-hour ride of intense fun will help you appreciate the exclusivity and the charm that prevails in the reserve. More than a quad bike outing, it is a real safari, allowing you to get close to deer, zebras, ostriches, African antelopes, wild boars and many more. Later in the Thrill Park here, you can also enjoy the Canyon Swing and mountain toboggan slide.

Overnight at hotel Sofitel le Imperial Mauritius Resort & Spa B

Dec 4 - Charming & Historic Mahebourg

After buffet breakfast, we take a scenic drive through small villages set in rolling sugarcane fields to the southeast of the island. We'll visit the 18th-century local family-owned Biscuit Factory, which has been producing manioc biscuits since 1870. Learn the cooking technique and unique biscuit recipes that have made the success of this factory as we take a guided tour and of course get to sample!

We then head off to the historic Portugese village of Mahebourg, where we get a chance to tour this laid-back fishing community of 20,000, crammed with colorful old houses. A monument at the Mahebourg waterfront honors the naval battle between the French Napoleonic navy and the British Navy who wanted to conquer the Island in 1810.

We'll visit the Naval Museum, housed in a beautiful 18th century Creole mansion. Exhibits guide you through the Dutch, the French, and the British periods of Mauritian history and includes objects recovered from shipwrecks along the Mauritian coast. They include the bell of the St. Geran which sank back in 1744 or items from the Magicienne a British frigate that sank during the French-British naval battle in 1810. Lunch will be served in a local restaurant.

Late afternoon, you have the option of booking a breath-taking Helicopter Tour as an exciting way to discover the Mauritian landscape. See the Southeast part of the island unfold beneath you as you rise above a panorama of magnificent lagoons, pristine coastlines, undulating sugar cane fields, and other spectacular views. (Helicopter tour \$240 with four per chopper.)

Overnight at hotel Sofitel le Imperial Mauritius Resort & Spa B, L

Dec. 5 - Full Day Ile Aux Cerfs Island-Paradise Island

Today is a day to chill and enjoy the superb beaches of Mauritius. The day begins with a boat cruise to one of the stunning beaches of the famous Ile aux Cerfs to enjoy swimming and snorkeling in the beautiful lagoon surrounding the island. The uninhabited Ile aux Cerf's is one of Mauritius's best-known tourist attractions, with its beautiful beaches, golf course, a handful of restaurants and plenty of water sports facilities. No wonder it is better known as "Paradise Island." Enjoy the beach, take a walk, swim or snorkel in crystal blue waters.

Lunch will be a BBQ at the beach. A boat trip in the estuary of the longest river in Mauritius is included, as we visit the famous waterfalls of the Grand River Southeast for a dip and great pics.

You can also take advantage of optional activities here, such as parasailing, sea scooters, submarine and the new underwater walking. We'll return to the hotel in late afternoon, where we'll enjoy our Farewell Dinner.

Overnight at hotel Sofitel le Imperial Mauritius Resort & Spa B, L, D

Dec 6 – Day at Leisure and Head home

Following breakfast, you will have a full day of leisure for last-minute enjoyment in this tropical paradise.

Early evening, we check out and have a group transferred to the airport for our flights back home. (Group air on Turkish Airlines departs Mauritius at 9 PM and flies via Istanbul to land at JFK at 12:50 PM on December 7).