

Note – Itineraries are prepared one year in advance. Always go to the website for the latest information before departure.

## **Dec-1 Depart USA**

Departure – Fly USA to Vienna (return air from Munich. Air details and all coming soon in your trip tips.)

## **Dec-2 Welcome to Austria! D**

Today our tour officially begins. Vienna is a city so rich in history, culture in architectural beauty with stunning baroque architecture from Schonbrunn to the Belvedere Palace, as well as the Gothic St Stephen's Cathedral. It's also home to world-renowned museums, including Kunsthistorisches museum and the Albertina to appreciate works of art spanning the centuries. Music lovers are thrilled to visit the birthplace of some of the world's greatest composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. The Vienna State Opera offers unforgettable evenings of classical music and ballet. Vienna's culinary scene is a delightful mix of traditional Austrian dishes and modern fusion. Indulge in tasty pastries like Sacher torte in the elegant coffee houses. Winter is enchanting as warm lights cast a glow while snowflakes swirl. There are inviting cafés with the richest hot chocolates and mulled wines. Enjoy ice-skating at the famous Rathausplatz. It's a sophisticated atmosphere all around you in this elegant and timeless city.

Arrive Vienna International Airport and transfer to our hotel. (One common group transfer from airport to hotel. Details in trip tips.) Depending on your arrival times, relax or explore this beautiful city. Everything centers around the fabulous squares of Saint Stephen's and City Hall. Tonight we gather for a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant to get to know our fellow AFS Travelers.

## **Overnight at Leonardo Vienna <https://www.leonardo-hotels.com/vienna/leonardo-hotel-vienna>**

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## **Dec- 3 Best of Vienna Tour B**

After breakfast, prepare for a full day revealing this classy city's regal wonders. We start with a guided tour of imperial **Schonbrunn Palace** to marvel at its frescoed ceilings, crystal chandeliers and gilded ornaments. This is Austria's most popular attraction. Vienna is the former center of the Habsburg Empire, and this place presents real history! See fantastic art and furnishings in the many staterooms. Admire the expansive gardens, courtyards, fountains, sculptures and much more. The corridors echo to the sound of Empress Maria Teresa planning royal weddings here in the 1700s. Mozart performed to the courts behind these walls. So much opulence acts as a monument to the decadence of the nobility in times past. For more details, visit [www.visitvienna.com](http://www.visitvienna.com)

We proceed for a walking tour of approximately 3 hours. **St Stephen's Cathedral** in the heart of the city is Austria's national symbol, located on **Stephanplatz Square**, a UNESCO world heritage site. The magnificent cathedral is known for its intricately tiled roof with stunning lookout views. With its dark Gothic spires and imposing Belltower, it's an architectural wonder both inside and out. Learn about the great historic significance and the Habsburg dignitaries buried here. **“Secret rooftops & catacombs”** Enjoy a guided tour and explore the roof of St. Stephen's Cathedral with breathtaking views of Vienna. Next to the North Tower elevator is the entrance to the catacombs underneath the cathedral, an underground burial place that contains the mausoleum of the bishops, the tombs of Duke Rudolph the Founder and 14 other members of the Habsburg family, and 56 urns with the intestines of the Habsburgs buried between 1650 and the 19th century in the Imperial Burial Vault. For those feeling fit, from the south tower, you can climb the 343 steps up a tight spiral staircase leading up to the watchman's lookout 300 feet above street level; it was once used as a fire warden's station but now serves as an observation point offering great photos.

Next, we visit the famous **Spanish Riding School**. The Spanische Hofreitschule is the oldest and last riding school in the world, where classic dressage is still practiced in its purest form. This Institute was founded in 1572 and its very name gives away the fact that the horses were of Spanish origin. The Lipizzaner is regarded as the oldest classic horse race in Europe.

We will have our tickets to enjoy a training session. The training offers you an insight into the exercises of the riders with their Lipizzaners. You will see both the exercise of the often still grey young stallions and the fully trained school stallions - our "white stars" - in the imperial setting of the baroque Winter Riding School, accompanied by classical Viennese music. The training of the horses includes relaxation exercises, the refinement and perfection of lections, as well as the targeted strengthening of muscles. Training sessions keep the horses motivated and fit for spectacular performances.

At days end, our coach will transfer you to the hotel or drop you off at the city's greatest Christmas Market! Revel in all the delights presented here. Unlike smaller towns, which only have one main Christmas market, Vienna has over a dozen Christmas Markets.

Overnight at Leonardo Vienna

#### **Dec-4 Melk Abbey Tour & Salzburg**                      B

Checkout and drive to Salzburg enroute stop to visit beautiful Melk. On the banks of the winding Danube river, past crumbling castles, quaint towns with orange-topped roofs and vineyards is one of Austria's most iconic sites: Melk Abbey. The monastery is impossible to miss—especially for those approaching the town on a river cruise—as it's perched high on a hilltop overlooking the beautiful town below. Its sunshine yellow facade is a welcoming sight, and the twin spires and huge octagonal dome make for an inspiring scene.

Visit **Melk Benedictine Abbey**. Built-in the early 1700s as a royal palace, Melk Abbey was eventually gifted to Benedictine monks who turned the estate into a fortified abbey. Today, despite being open to tourists, it continues to serve its religious purpose and is home to hundreds of pupils training to become monks. While monk sightings at the Melk Abbey aren't guaranteed, stunning lookout points, incredible architecture and some rather shocking surprises make it well worth a visit.

Continue to **Salzburg**, birthplace of Mozart. In December, there's magic in the air in Salzburg, with its snowcapped peaks and frost-tinged baroque architecture, transforming this picturesque city into a breathtaking wonderland. The charming old town, or Altstadt, brims with history and culture. Roam the quaint cobblestone alleyways with centuries-old buildings blanketed in powdery snow. At night, stroll through the delightful Advent markets that illuminate Salzburg squares with a warm festive glow, whimsical sense of baked treats and warm wine wafting through the air. The **Christkindlmarkt** in front of the fortress remains one of Europe's oldest and most authentic Christmas markets, dating back over 500 years! Winter comes alive with music and waltzing and an opulent cultural scene of concerts, ballet and opera. Despite its snowy landscapes, you'll have a heartwarming encounter with winter charms here.

Check into our hotel, an ideal retreat of contemporary elegance. Enjoy the indoor heated pool, Finnish sauna, gym, free Wi-Fi and bar set in a great location.

Overnight at Wyndham Grand Salzburg

<https://www.wyndhamhotels.com/wyndham-grand/salzburg-austria/wyndham-grand-salzburg-conference-center/overview>

Wyndham Grand Salzburg is a modern oasis amidst baroque grandeur, our hotel offers contemporary elegance, superior service, and state-of-the-art conference facilities. Situated in central Salzburg, only 5km from the airport, we provide convenience for those seeking to explore the stunning Alps. Indulge in a refreshing swim in our heated indoor pool, relax in our Finnish sauna, or stay active in our well-equipped Fitness Center. Enjoy the convenience of free WiFi and make use of our fully-equipped business center for increased productivity. At our BarRoque bistro and bar, experience trendy takes on traditional Austrian cuisine.

### **Dec-5 Sound of Music Tour**

B

After breakfast, we embark on our guided tour to the picturesque World Heritage City of Salzburg and then the beautiful landscapes where the scenes of the movie *The Sound of Music* were filmed! The Sound of Music Tour Salzburg includes original shooting locations from "The Sound of Music" movie: Mirabell Garden and Pegasus Fountain, where Maria and the children danced in the movie Nonnberg Convent, where Maria was a novice, Schloss Leopoldskron, the house, where the Trapp Family lived in the movie which is now a luxury hotel, Hellbrunn Palace (singing scenes in the movie), Gazebo (now placed in Hellbrunn), where the Baron von Trapp kissed Maria for the first time Church Mondsee, where Maria and the Baron get married.

Later, we coach through the hills to the charming town of **Oberndorf** - the birthplace of the world- famous carol "Silent Night". Find out more about the history of "Silent Night" composed and first performed in Oberndorf in 1818, and take a stroll through the picturesque town. We will visit the **Silent Night Chapel** and Museum for a unique experience delving into the history of this Christmas carol and its creators, Gruber and Mohr. It showcases historical exhibits that provide insight to their lives and social context. You can listen to many translations of the song at your phone stations in the sound room. Here, visitors embrace the Christmas spirit with lasting memories. So much to do here. It's free to visit the cool Red Bull museum. At night, easy to arrange Mozart dinner, Mirabella palace concert and horse drawn sleigh rides. Return to the hotel.

Overnight– Wyndham Grand Salzburg

### **Dec-6 - Innsbruck - Lagenfeld**

B & D

Check out. Depart Salzburg to Innsbruck to visit the world-famous **Swarovski Crystal World**. You'll enter a realm of fantasy designed by some of the greatest artists in the world. Explore the Chamber of Wonders and the illuminated art installations around the gardens with Christmas themes here. Free time to shop for crystal art and jewelry at great prices.

Continue our drive around two hours into breathtaking Lagenfeld, a village nestled in Otzal Valley and surrounded by majestic Mountains. Check-in for 2 glorious nights at **Aqua Dome Tyrell Thermal Resort**. It brings wellness to a new dimension as you are carried away into a world of the most unique thermal baths, spas, saunas and swimming pools! Don your hotel robe for the full day to explore each amazing chamber. Then we gather in the restaurant for artisanal gourmet dinners.

Overnight - Aqua Dome <https://www.aqua-dome.at/en/>

Delight in the culinary treasures and comfortable ambiance of our rooms, crafted with natural materials, abundant wood, and inviting tones. Our modern alpine setting will envelop you in relaxation and tranquility. Immerse yourself in the captivating beauty of nature and revive your body and soul.

Your stay includes - Daily Thermal Vital Arrangement with a sumptuous breakfast buffet, Dinner (5-course menu of your choice, served or offered from the thermal-bath buffet). Use of the thermal bath, sauna and fitness world. SPA 3000 a huge area for hotel guests only, free Wi-Fi, fresh fruit and robe in room.

### **Dec-7 - Aqua Dome**

B & D

The whole day free to relax at Aqua Dome! The staff will brief you on all outside options to play and detail all spa facilities.

Tobogganing fun- Whether racing down the mountain or leisurely through the snow-covered winter world, experience the Ötztal landscape on skids. Wurzburgalm near Winklen provides some exciting toboggan runs. Take a leisurely hike along the wide forest path toward the Nisslalm. Once you have reached the top, enjoy a hearty snack with the innkeeper Albertina before returning to the village on the toboggan.

Längenfeld suspension bridge: Since 2013, a new architectural highlight has been swinging high above Längenfeld: an ultra- modern 82-metre suspension bridge at a height of 150 metres. Starting from Burgstein, you can reach the suspension bridge in just a few minutes. Cross the suspension bridge to reach the hamlet of Brand - here, you will find the Brandalm and ancient farms with spectacular views of the picturesque Ötztal valley in the glorious winter sun. This mountain hike takes around three hours up and back.

Overnight - Aqua Dome Be sure to rest here for the full day tomorrow.

### **Dec- 8 Munich city tour and Christmas Markets**                      B & D

We start with a guided **walking city tour** of Munich's iconic sites. We stroll along sites including the Town Hall, the Old and New Pinakothek, the former artists' quarter Schwabing, and we go all along the impressive Ludwig and Prinzregenten streets lined by magnificent buildings, Theatiner church, Hall of Generals, Frauenchurch House of Arts, Bavarian National Museum and the Angel of Peace. The elegant Maximilian Street takes us back to the center of town, with a view of the Bavarian Parliament, Deutsches Museum, Royal Palace and the Opera House. In the ancient part of town, we point out the well- known Hofbräuhaus, the medieval town gates and the colorful open-air market (Viktualienmarkt).

Then we depart to one of Germany's most famous restaurants, the lively **Hofbrauhaus** with nonstop fun! Toast your new AFS friends farewell at a place you'll never forget. After dinner, driver will drop us off at Marienplatz Square to explore the endless open-air stalls of **Christkindlemarkt**. At set time, driver will transfer you to our 5- star Movenpick hotel near the airport.

### **Dec- 9 Depart Munich**                      B

After breakfast, check out on your own and walk to the airport for your flight home. Many of our past groups here extended more time here on their own at the trip's end.