

AVSIM Commercial Scenery Package Review

Casablanca: Gateway to Northern Africa



Product Information

Publisher: [Aerosoft](#)

Description: Photographic ground textures, with custom autogen and 3d buildings, for Anfa airport, Mohammed V airport, and the city of Casablanca, Morocco.

Download Size:
81 MB

Format:
Download

Simulation Type:
FS 2004 only

Reviewed by: [David Wilson-Okamura](#) AVSIM Staff Reviewer - 25 May 2006

Introduction



If that plane leaves the ground and you're not with him, you'll regret it. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon—and for the rest of your life.

Last summer I watched the movie Casablanca for the first time since high school. It holds up well and it deserves all the good things people say about it. But while you're watching it you have to keep reminding yourself that, when Captain Renault said it in 1942, "Round up the usual suspects" wasn't a cliché yet. Neither was "I'm shocked, shocked to find there is gambling going on here" or "Here's looking at you, kid."

At the end of the movie there is [an airplane](#) and a famous line about flying: "If that plane leaves the ground and you're not with him, you'll regret it. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon—and for the rest of your life." But Casablanca isn't really an airplane movie and, while it's tempting to say that Aerosoft's new Casablanca scenery for Flight Simulator 2004 will help you relive those golden moments, that's not really the point. This is an invitation to explore, not the legend of Casablanca, but the city itself.

Test System
Dell Dimension 2350 P4 @ 2.2 GHz 1 gig RAM Radeon 9100 w/ 128 mb (PCI) TrackIR 3 CH pedals, yoke Saitek ST290 joystick also using Flight Environment, Ground Environment, Koorbygen building textures Flying Time: 6 hours

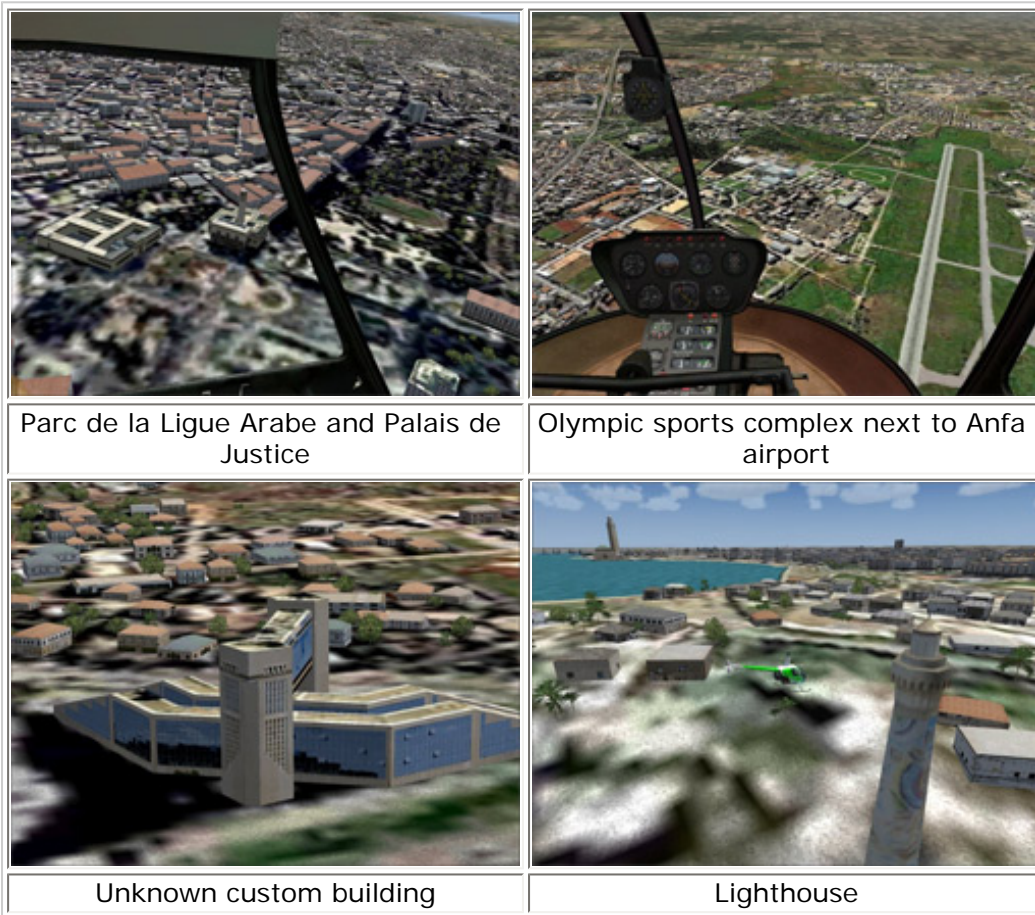
Installation

Buying add-ons from the [Aerosoft download shop](#) is no more or less complicated than buying add-ons from other major vendors. The only hang-up I foresee is if you want to uninstall the program.

The install program asks if you want to use an improved palm tree texture, but it does not ask you about overwriting some other files: \Scenery\Vehicles\Texture\cargaA.bmp, \Scenery\Vehicles\Texture\cruise_linerB.bmp, \Scenery\Afri\Scenery\AB9452000.bgl, and \Scenery\AfriScenery\FL945200.bgl. This isn't a big deal: the installer tells you what it's doing and it makes backups of the originals. But if you wanted to go back to the originals, finding them would not be easy, since Flight Simulator has hundreds of different .bgl and .bmp files. If only there were an installation log, or a list of overwritten files in the documentation. There isn't, which is why I'm listing the files here.

Documentation

The problem is knowing where to look for them, and what you're looking at once you find it. What this package needs and doesn't have is a map of the city. It comes with all of the charts for the two airports, but there's nothing to tell you what you're looking at in the city proper. I found a couple of tourist maps online, and printed them out. The map wasn't great, but they gave me some things to look for and explained what I was looking at.



For example, once I knew about the Parc de la Ligue Arabe, I could look for the buildings that are around it: the disused but beautiful Cathedral of the Sacred Heart and, on the Place de Mohammed V, the Palace of Justice—and another custom building which I could not identify, but is clearly in the same architectural style. Working from the map, I also noticed that Casablanca has a lighthouse. It's dwarfed by the Hassan II minaret, so if you aren't actively looking for it, you might not notice it. But when I went to the spot on the map, it was there, with a very interesting design painted on the sides. I also learned from the map that Casablanca has an Olympic sports complex separate from the big stadium. Again, I went to the spot on the map (just south of the old Anfa airport) and there it was.

What You Get

Not that you would want to uninstall Casablanca. There isn't a lot of add-on scenery available for Africa. [FSGenesis](#) has 76m terrain mesh (payware) and [Jim Keir](#) has released several freeware add-ons, including landclass for the whole continent. Outside of Egypt, though, the cities of Africa are not well served by Flight Simulator.

Casablanca is a good place to start, because it's in Morocco, on Africa's northern coast, which makes it accessible to Europe. From Barcelona (LEBL) it's only 460 nm (though most of that is across the Atlantic Ocean). Casablanca is also a good place to show off the developer's talents: the default scenery is virtually nonexistent, so anything new is an improvement.

Casablanca is in the coastal plain, north of the Atlas Mountains. The scenery includes a terrain mesh, but the land here is so flat, there's not much of topographical interest. What the package concentrates on, therefore, is the man-made elements of the urban environment. Specifically, this scenery enhances two closely spaced areas, the city of Casablanca itself (including the Anfa airport) and Mohammed V International Airport, which is ten miles to the south. The area between them is rural and seems not to be enhanced.

Mohammed V Airport

Mohammed V airport (GMMN) is the hub of Morocco's national airline, Royal Air Maroc. We'll start there, since this is where most international visitors will arrive. I had never installed a detailed airport add-on before, so I was

unprepared for the level of detail on the ground. Where the runways and taxiways meet dirt and grass, the edge is organic, fading in and out. Taxiways are not only marked but labeled. "Don't go here" areas are crossed out in yellow. And sections of the ground that would receive a lot of wear from aircraft stopping or turning on them have tire smudges.



Welcome to Mohammed V Airport

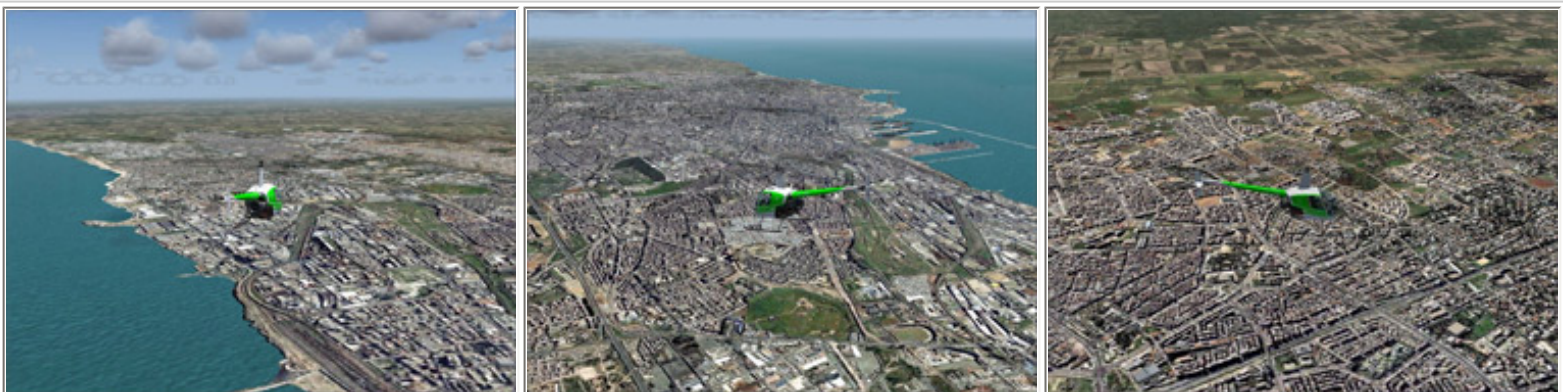
Labeled taxiways and tire smudges

I decided that the best way to explore the airport was by car, so I switched to the 1934 Ford convertible from Bill Lyons' Stinson package, now available as freeware in the AVSIM file library. Everywhere I went, I saw the elements of a modern airport: baggage containers, baggage-loading trucks, baggage tugs, catering trucks (the kind that crank up to load the plane with foodstuffs), jetways for the big aircraft, wheeled staircases for the smaller aircraft, and three huge cranes.

What were the cranes for? I read about the airport at Wikipedia and, like every other major airport in the world, Mohammed V is constructing a new terminal, so the cranes make perfect sense. Out on the field there are some large hangars, but I didn't find any that you could park inside.

A word about detail: there are lots of 3D objects in the airport, but the developer is serious about maximizing framerate. If you are running FS9 on a Cray-compatible, you will wish he had used more detailed textures for some of the buildings. The rest of us will be happy with the compromise. Things look right, but if you put your nose up to the computer screen you will be able to tell: it's not live, it's Memorex.

The City



Photoreal textures, medium autogen. You can see in the distance where the default scenery takes over.

Casablanca has one other airport, Anfa (GMMC), which is in the western part of Casablanca itself. The flight between Anfa and Mohammed V is only 12 nm, but this year, Anfa will be closed to non-military traffic, so pretty soon this will be a flight that most of us can make only in the sim. The Aerosoft package has enhanced this airport, too, though you won't find the same level of detail as Mohammed V. Anfa is older and smaller than Mohammed V, but it looks cleaner somehow—maybe because the ground textures don't have tire smudges.

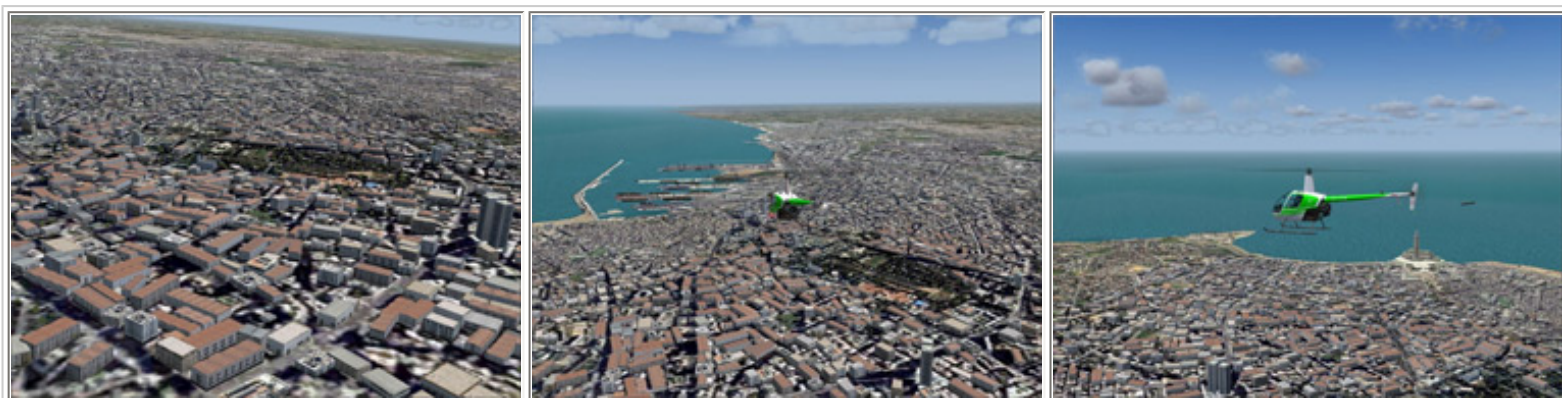
There are lots of custom buildings, but fewer accessories than at Mohammed V. That makes sense, though: this is a small airport, not a passenger hub. There's an attractive airplane mural over one of the hangars and, if you go to the east end of the field, you'll also find the crew from Casablanca, waiting for that plane. No fog, though: in real life, Casablanca is a very sunny place, something that seems be reflected in the colors at Anfa, which have the look of paint that has been in the sun for awhile.



Detail of Anfa airport

The city of Casablanca is reconstructed using several elements. The coastline has been carved out, so it follows a curvier and more realistic line which includes the harbor. Custom buildings have been added everywhere. In addition, there is very dense custom autogen. Finally, all of this is on top of photoreal textures derived from satellite photography.

Initially, I tried flying over the city with autogen set to normal. The effect was similar to the original MegaScenery packages, before they started using aerial photography for cities. (Satellite photography is cheaper but has a lower resolution.) Very pleasing, but like all photosceneries, this one looks best from an altitude of 3,500 ft. or higher. Again, as with most photosceneries, framerates are excellent. And, because the area covered is so small, I never had a problem with blurries (the big bogeyman of photoreal scenery).



Photoreal textures with maximum autogen

Actually, I didn't mean to run this experiment. It wasn't until about 30 minutes into my first excursion over the city that I checked my autogen setting, and finding it at normal moved the slider up to max. Wow! The eastern end, especially, of Casablanca is very built-up, and this was the densest autogen I'd ever seen. Framerates dropped a little, but not much. I suspect this is because there's less competition for computing resources: you're on the coast, so to the north it's just water, so your CPU and GPU can concentrate on what's right front of you.

The Aerosoft website mentions the night lighting of this scenery. I found this was quite good at the Mohammed V airport. The terminal windows have a separate night texture that "reveals" a lighted interior, and the ground outside

of the terminal (including the round parking lot) is illuminated by tall lamp posts. The cranes aren't lighted, but they do have blinkers to ward off low-flying aircraft.

The night lighting of Casablanca itself was less impressive, by the standard of other photosceneries, such as MegaScenery. The odd thing is, it got sharper and more detailed the closer I got to the ground. Normally, when you drop below 3,000 ft. or so, photosceneries start to look bad. The reason Casablanca looks good is that dense autogen that I mentioned earlier. Unlike the photographic ground textures, the autogen buildings are mipmapped to have more detail as you get closer to them. The result is that flying over the city at 2,000 feet or lower actually looks better at night than flying at 4,000 ft. (which is more normal for a photoscenery).



Hassan II Mosque

The custom buildings also add to the realism of urban experience. Again, the developer has struck what I think is the right balance between detail and performance. The city's most noticeable landmark is the Hassan II Mosque. This is the second-largest in the world, and has the world's tallest minaret (210 m). You won't see it in the movie, partly Casablanca was under German control and the movie was filmed in California, but mostly because the mosque wasn't finished until 1993.



Long Champ Hippodrome

There are other landmarks as well, the trouble is knowing that they're landmarks. A few of them stick out because they're so big: the Long Champ hippodrome, the Parc de la Ligue Arabe, the huge sports complex east of the city airport, and the Twin Center (named for its twin towers). But there are lots of other custom buildings, as well, not to mention all of the ships in the harbor and the various pieces of harbor machinery.

This is helo scenery. The developer, Matthew Dalton's, last scenery project (also published by Aerosoft) was the tiny kingdom of Monaco, a country smaller than many airports. In fact, Monaco is so small it has no airport, only a heliport. Like his earlier Monaco package, Dalton's Casablanca is full of little building gems that are best explored from up close.

Conclusion

With the impending release of FSX, the demand for FS2004 add-ons is slackening somewhat. In response, Aerosoft has lowered prices on some of its offerings, including the very popular DHC-2 Beaver. In the last month, we've also seen publishers release smaller packages at smaller prices. MegaCity Aloha is one such package (US\$10), Casablanca is another. This is a nice trend. The download version of Casablanca is €12.98, which, as of this writing, is about \$16 (US). Although the area covered is small, you get a lot for your money.

What I Like About Casablanca

- Wide variety of 3d objects and buildings.
- Scenery detail is well balanced with FPS performance.

What I Don't Like About Casablanca

- Documentation or install log should record which default files are replaced.
- Should include a map of city landmarks.

Printing

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[Casablanca](#)

[\(adobe acrobat required\)](#)

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