

## AVSIM FSX Mission Package Review

# *African Airstrip Adventures*



### Product Information

**Publishers:** [Aerosoft](#)

**Description:** an FSX flying career add-on, based around flying light and medium aircraft in Kenya on civilian charters.

**Download Size:**  
311 MB

**Format:**  
Download

**Simulation Type:**  
FSX

**Reviewed by:** [Alan Bradbury](#) AVSIM Staff Reviewer - August 27, 2009

**The real stars for me...**

Probably like a lot of people, one of the things that got me interested in aviation was action movies, and especially the exciting things aircraft get up to when up on the silver screen.

It's interesting to note that, then as now, lots of action movies which feature aircraft are set in Africa: The Wild Geese, The Dogs of War, Blood Diamond, Game for Vultures, Raid on Entebbe – to name a few. Much of that is of course because Africa lends itself to adventure and being both remote and vast, especially to the most obvious form of transport in such terrain, the aircraft. In cinematically pleasing terms, aircraft against the scenic beauty of Africa is one of those things that just seems to work. That's obviously the opinion in Hollywood too, since they are currently revisiting the Wild Geese, with a remake of it set to start production next year, and as with the original movie, the real stars for me will be the aircraft, not the shenanigans with machine guns.

I don't think the magic is restricted to movies either. As I discovered, the combination of aircraft and the vast African wilderness lends itself very well to Flight Simulator too. But with Aerosoft's African Airstrip Adventures, you won't be shooting guns, or shooting a movie, you will however, be shooting some of the toughest approaches you've ever had to manage in FS, which makes for some exciting moments. But have Aerosoft managed to create Oscar material out of Africa? Or is it strictly B movie stuff? Well let's find out...

### Coming soon to a hard drive near you...

African Airstrip Adventures is available from [Aerosoft's](#) website as a download, which weighs in at 311MB, expanding to 470MB when you install it. Make no mistake about it, this one means you'll need FSX fairly well optimized too, because as you can probably guess from the file sizes, it's a lot more than a few mission scripts tied up with string and bundled under a fancy name. There's a lot of scenic detail in the package, much of it animated, and although at first I struggled to find a position for the sliders in FSX to get the best out of it, with a bit of playing around, I found that you can have it looking prettier and smoother than Kate Winslett picking up a BAFTA.



At first I found it a struggle to get African Airstrip Adventures to run to my satisfaction; this is a product which needs solid frame rates to get the best out of it. To get down smoothly on the tricky airfields that abound, those FPS have to be pretty good. Fortunately, with a little playing around, and none of the essential detail lost, I found it can be kept pretty and still run smoothly. I'm actually glad about that initial difficulty now though, because the FSX settings I settled on are pretty good all round, and I've kept them that way. Thank you Aerosoft!

### The price of freedom...

Priced at 24.95 Euros or 29.83 Dollars, what you get for your money is quite a blockbuster. For a kick off, you get

40,000 square kilometers of realistic Kenyan scenery in the area north of Nairobi, centered around Mount Kenya. This features over twenty airstrips, ranging from large military bases to hair-raising tiny strips carved out of the scrublands and marked out with conveniently placed fifty-five gallon oil drums. And you should be aware that although they mostly have an NDB to locate them (not all of them do), some of those airfields are damn tricky to land on even if you are a seasoned bush flyer, with undulating runway surfaces and potential hazards such potholes, ditches and even wild animals wandering around them. If you fancy yourself a hotshot pilot, this will definitely be up your street. But there's a lot more to the scenery than that.



If you think this airstrip looks tricky, you'd be wrong, this is actually one of the fairly large ones

### **Lions, leopards and birds, Oh My!**

In addition to that large chunk of scenery, you'll also find a host of other terrain features, such as safari lodges small townships and native villages, and these are extremely well modeled. What is more, the entire place is populated with thousands of animated creatures, from pink flamingoes to giraffes, elephants, leopards, lions, rhinos, zebras – you name it, with many birds flying around the place as well. There are signs at most of the airfields you can find, warning of the dangers when the animals are present, and they are not kidding, this is a wild place!

One nice thing about all this scenic wonder though, is that you can cheerfully turn off FSX autogen and still get believable terrain, since there is a lot of vegetation in the scenery to accompany those well detailed airstrips and other scenic touches. You are probably going to want to do that too, because those animal animations can eat FPS faster than one of the lions would probably eat you if you climbed out of the cockpit.

As the sign says, the animals might indeed be dangerous, but they're not as dangerous as some of the landings and take offs you have to make in this game – and game is the word here, because this is exactly the kind of fun African Airstrip Adventures manages to turn FSX into.



An additional bonus, if you have some of Aerosoft's other add-on aircraft, is that they are incorporated into the program. So if you have their DeHavilland Twin Otter (and if you don't, go and buy it immediately because it is great), or their Bush Hawk XP (also great from what I hear, although not in my personal collection), then you can fly those in your career adventures alongside the default birds. However, you are not especially shortchanged if you don't have those aircraft, since it will use the default FSX Maule and King Air in lieu of those fancier payware add-ons, which, given the STOL abilities of the Twin Otter, might actually make things even more of a challenge. But whatever aircraft you use, you'll find they all get custom paint schemes for the African Safari Charter airline you join when in the career mode, those paint jobs involving suitably zebra-like stripes of some kind.



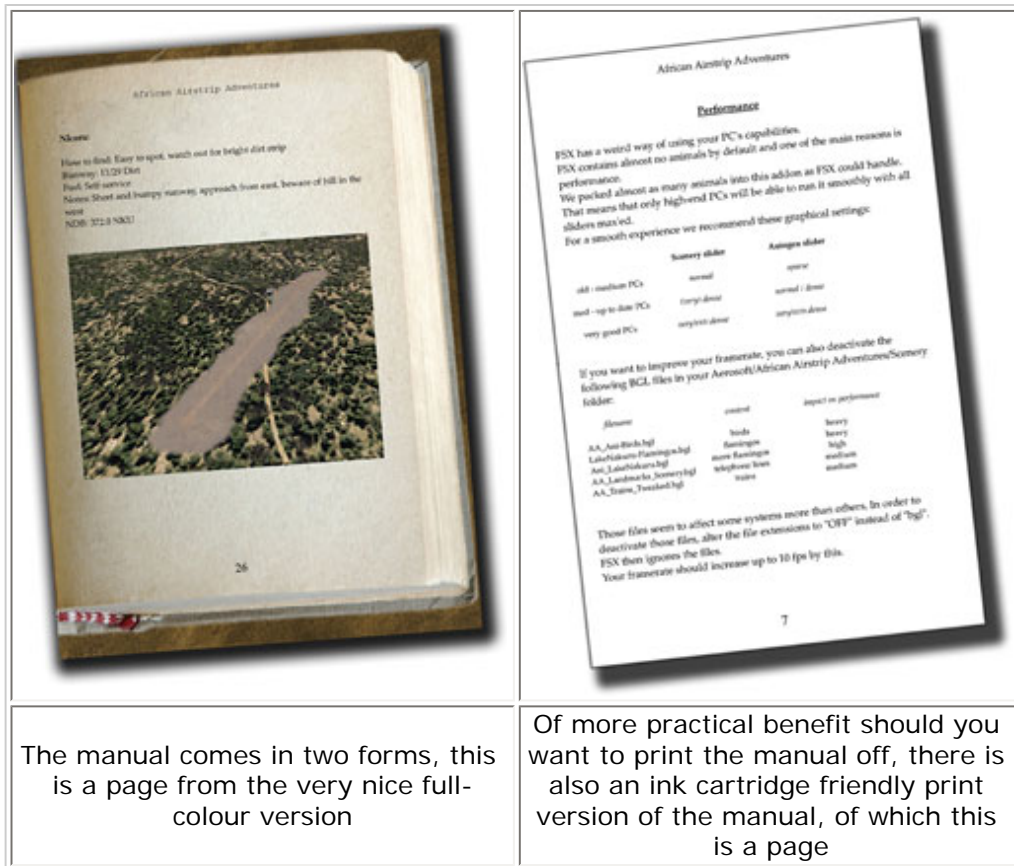
If you are fortunate enough to have either Aerosoft's DH Twin Otter, or their Bush Hawk, these will show up in the game in place of the default King Air and the default Maule. Each of the aircraft are located at specific airfields, and if you want to switch to a particular one, you simply fly to where it is located, taxi up to it and stop, whereupon you get the menu option to switch to it. Here I've landed at the tiny high altitude Buffalo Springs airstrip, in order to switch to the Twin Otter.

In total, you'll find the career mode sees you using quite a few aircraft, although you can decide which ones for yourself by simply landing at the airfield where one is based and choosing to switch aircraft via a pop up menu. Choices include the Bush Hawk/Maule, Twin Otter/King Air, Cessna 208 Caravan and Robinson R22 helicopter. With some fancy footwork in config files, it would doubtless be possible to use others too, but I didn't try, so I wouldn't swear to that and was happy to stay with what you get without messing.

Because of the nature of the loads you carry in African Airstrip Adventures, and the fact that many of the airfields are well up above sea level and in high temperatures, what aircraft you choose can turn out to be a critical choice. This is where things turn out to be more complex than first meets the eye. But before we get into that, let's take a look at setting things up.

### Installation and documentation

Installation itself is a simple affair. It is completely automated even if you have those additional Aerosoft aircraft, since my DH Twin Otter showed up in the sim without any intervention from me, meaning it is completely painless to get the thing up and running. There is little more to say on this, other than it installs faultlessly, taking up the aforementioned 470MB on your hard drive and places two PDF manuals and a map on an Aerosoft menu, accessible via your PC's start menu.



The manual comes in two forms, this is a page from the very nice full-colour version

Of more practical benefit should you want to print the manual off, there is also an ink cartridge friendly print version of the manual, of which this is a page

The PDF documentation is similarly excellent to the flawless installation process, with a very nice 46-page colour manual explaining everything you need to know. This can be printed, incidentally, but in a thoughtful move Aerosoft also included a simplified text-only 'print version' of the PDF manual which condenses things down to just the bare minimum info, being only 25 pages, and in black and white. So your printer cartridge, and indeed your wallet, can breathe a sigh of relief if you must print the manual.

In practice you probably won't need to though, as a simple skim through it will be more than enough to get you going, with just the occasional need to flip back to it and check out one or two things. As complex as things can get in African Airstrip Adventures, getting to understand it is not one of them.

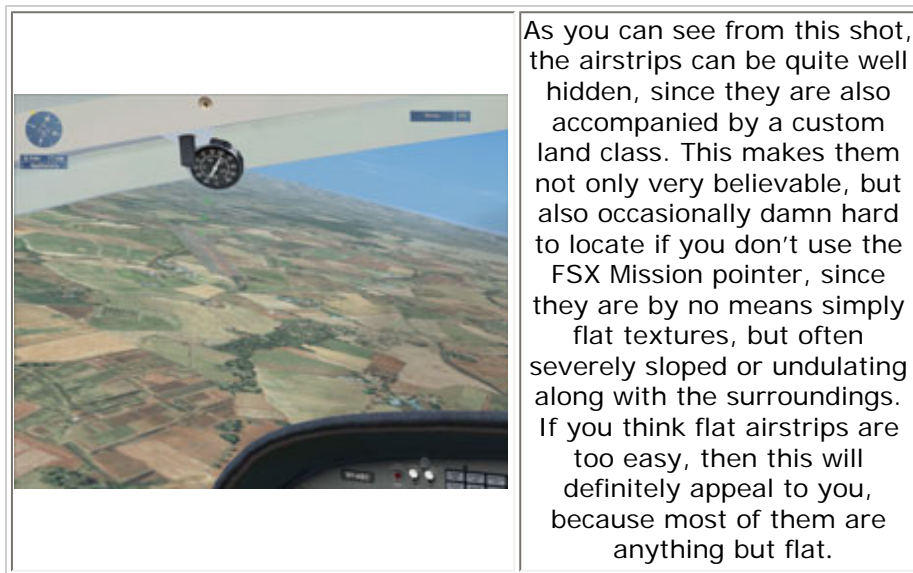
You also get a very nice high resolution map of your operational area, to assist with navigation and job planning, and of course it is also a map of the scenery you get with the package too, which as you can see, is quite a large chunk of land to cover in a GA aircraft, being approximately 200 miles wide



The manual(s) not only explain how the career mode works, but the fancier one also features screenshots of all the airfields, plus notes on the best way to land at them, as well as the main hazards to watch out for. Also listed are the NDB frequencies to locate them, although it should be noted that you don't actually need to use the navigation radios to find the airfields, you can simply select them on the FSX mission pointer and you'll get a waypoint to them via that.

In actual fact, as you get more familiar with things, you'll find yourself 'learning the place' and probably doing simple VFR dead reckoning to find airstrips, since anywhere you have to go is never more than about 60 nautical miles distant in most cases if you are doing things right, and there are plenty of recognizable landmarks to steer by.

Although as in real life, airfields can occasionally be tricky to spot, especially since they are set in custom terrain textures and blend in well. But, if you want a map to fly by, a very nice one is also included in the package, which you can obviously print out if you like.



### **The adventure begins...**

Initially it can seem a bit overwhelming when you start African Airstrip Adventures, since most of us are more used to FSX missions being isolated stand alone affairs, and that is not really how African Airstrip Adventures works. Effectively, it is one big long never-ending mission that you save your progress on when real life intervenes – so in practice it is easy to get your head around matters, especially thanks to some very clever integration in the introductory flight you can take at the start of your virtual adventures in Africa.

When you start the program up via the FSX Missions screen, you get a nice cinematic intro movie accompanied by some suitably African music, whereupon you find yourself at African Safari Charters HQ (ASC), having just arrived on a feeder airliner to start your new career. A menu pops up, offering you the chance to take that introductory flight, which is well worth doing if you want to defer reading the manual until later, and get right into things without having to read up on stuff.

Doing the introductory flight (in the Cessna Caravan) effectively works as an interactive manual, but it introduces you to more than simply how to work the career 'game', it also introduces you to the particularly excellent voice acting which features throughout African Airstrip Adventures. The moment you hear that kick in, you know you are in for something special.

Here I am setting off with the outgoing Charlie One from African Safari Charters HQ as he shows me the ropes on the introductory flight. At this point I didn't have a clue what was in store, fortunately this introductory flight not only makes most things clear, but it also introduces you to the very pleasing audio aspects of African Airstrip Adventures, as well as the control menu. You have to be careful even at this point though, since ASC HQ shares a base with the Kenyan Army, and you'll be in big trouble if you taxi onto their side of the base without permission!



In starting your career with ASC, you take on the role of the replacement 'Charlie One' pilot; your predecessor is leaving the company for pastures new. There are a total of five 'Charlie' pilots who work for ASC, and you'll hear the others on the radio quite a lot. You will in fact compete with them for jobs some of the time too. The outgoing Charlie One graciously offers to take you on an introductory flight, and as he shows you the ropes, he bends your ear about life in general and fills you in on local gossip, warning you about not messing with the Army and various other juicy bit of info.

In a nicely believable touch, he is somewhat scornful of you getting to be 'Charlie One' without having to have worked your way up to the position. In between his comments, he gets you to fly a few local trips and generally tells you a lot of what you need to know, whilst quizzing you about your experience, all of which introduces you to how things work.

At the end of your jaunt with the old Charlie One, when you arrive back at ASC HQ, he bids you farewell, boards the airliner you came in on, and you are on your own - the new Charlie One. All you really need to know to get going is that bringing your aircraft to a halt and putting the parking brake on will invoke the African Airstrip Adventure menu, where you can choose all your options to work the game and save your progress. So as far as learning curves go, it is simplicity itself.

Despite the fairly sophisticated nature of how the game is controlled, in practical terms it is easy for us. Simply come to a halt and put



the brake on, and the menu pops up. For anything else in the game, if you need to make a choice, the menu shows up automatically. It works very well.

The sim menu is nicely implemented and works incredibly well despite only having what appears to be just a few options. As simple as the system sounds, you'll find that there is a remarkably sophisticated bit of programming going on behind the scenes, which makes the program very robust, with little chance of missions getting stuck in loops or failing. So if you've ever experienced that setback with an FSX mission, you're in for a pleasant trouble-free surprise.

It's worth noting here that I never once had anything mess up on me whilst testing it, although there is apparently a patch now out for African Airstrip Adventures, which smoothes out a glitch some users had evidently experienced. I've not tested it with the patch, because it never went wrong for me, and if something ain't broke, then I don't try to fix it, but it is at least worth knowing that the patch is there if you do happen to have any problems.

It's evidently worth going to the Aerosoft site where you find that patch anyway, since I believe there is some sort of 'who's the best' screenshot competition going on around this add-on (with Aerosoft products as prizes), although the link was down when I tried it, so I don't know any more about that at present.

### **A sound decision from Aerosoft...**

Briefly mentioned before, but of particular note is the voice acting by whomever it was they got to do the old Charlie One, which is really excellent, as indeed are all the other voices of the dispatcher and Charlie pilots. If you've seen Leonardo DiCaprio playing the Rhodesian mercenary Danny Archer in the movie Blood Diamond, you'll know the kind of thing to expect.

This may seem like a small thing, but the voice acting in African Airstrip Adventures really does add a lot to the atmosphere, and I simply can't praise it highly enough. Especially when compared to some of the notoriously awful voice acting that I'm sure we've all come across from time to time in computer games. Top notch stuff, not to mention a very clever use of this medium to explain all the game when you start out.

Once you get going, the dispatcher calls you up and offers you various tasks from time to time. These are your means to make your money and your reputation, but you'd better be sure you can do them if you tell the dispatcher that, because she will not be happy if you mess up. If you turn down a job, you will hear other ASC pilots chip in and take the jobs for themselves. Somewhat worryingly, one of them sounds a bit drunk.



To make life easier, you can keep on top of what tasks you have with the kneepad, which will list everything you have to do. You can select the locations of the places you have to go by clicking on the arrows either side of the name in the FSX Mission Pointer. So if you don't want to use the NDB beacons on the Nav radio to locate the airstrips, you don't have to, and can instead simply use the FSX Mission Pointer until you are familiar with the locations. Or you could use the map if you liked, the terrain is dotted with landmarks that make this entirely possible if VFR navigation is your thing.

### How it works...

Unlike a lot of Missions and adventure type stuff we've seen before in FS, this one is a different in that, although it is indeed based on the FSX Mission system, it actually seems more like a standalone add-on. What African Airstrip Adventures does is create an open-ended career in FSX where you can happily fly one 'mission' for hours on end, with new tasks cropping up all the time over the radio via the dispatcher's calls, allowing you to earn money, reputation (and lose it), struggle with aircraft maintenance problems, choose different aircraft to fly, and experience all manner of challenges. So if you thought that the FSX mission system was inevitably going to make things feel a bit like they were running on rails, you'll be pleasantly surprised to learn that's not the case here at all.

Despite the abundance of creatures in African Airstrip Adventures, like their real world counterparts, they can be elusive, so you have to know where to look if you want to find them, which means paying attention to what Charlie One told you on the introductory flight is not a bad idea.

In this shot we can also see that some of the airstrips are what you might describe as a bit on the Spartan side, but whether well equipped or not, they are always very atmospheric and entirely believable.



Because not all the airstrips are well endowed in terms of the maintenance you can perform at them, it's usually a good idea to keep on top of things with regular checks back at ASC HQ, which has full maintenance facilities.

You really do have to stay on top of things too. The various flights you make, such as picking up some passengers and flying them to an airstrip, or picking up some cargo and making multiple drops, are often time critical, and since you have to refuel and keep on top of maintenance, it's not as simple as it might sound. You can perform some maintenance yourself at remote locations, but the serious stuff can only be fixed back at HQ.

Initially you might think that simply filling the tanks up and not worrying about fuel is the way to go, but of course you have to consider that you might get a load of twelve passengers with baggage, and they might want to go up to an airstrip that is 6,000 feet above sea level, in hot temperatures, in mountainous terrain, in which case full fuel tanks are going to be a setback.

Here you can see the timer kicking in because I have returned to HQ for a precautionary maintenance check. You can hit accelerated time and speed this up if you like, but the time in the sim also moves on, which means you have to be careful about planning maintenance and refueling stops if you have a time-critical job on the go.



And you can't cheat with time compression either. You can certainly use time compression, but the clock runs at that speed too of course. Similarly, when you park up for fuel or maintenance, it kicks a timer off, and you really do have to wait ten minutes whilst the mechanics check the thing out. You can accelerate time when this happens, but again the clock is running at that accelerated pace too.

In short, when the dispatcher says: 'Charlie One, I need a pilot in Simangua ASAP. Five passengers to Buffalo Springs, they need to be there in time for their safari. Can you be there in 90 minutes?' you'd better make a note of what the clock in the cockpit is reading and stick to the schedule. All of this might seem like it would be hard to keep tabs on, since jobs can come thick and fast, but fortunately you can keep up to date with what you should be doing via the aircraft kneepad in FS, which helpfully lists what tasks you have queued up – handy if you've accepted several jobs and need to work out the most economical routing.



The variety of the airfields in African Airstrip Adventures manages to keep things interesting visually too. This one is positively luxurious compared to some.

When you get out in the wilder parts, the facilities are less opulent, and that can have a bearing on things if something goes unserviceable on your aircraft.

### Out of Africa...

When it's time for bed, or when real life intrudes, you can simply save the flight as 'AAA Career', and you can pick things up where you left off by restarting that saved flight from the FSX Missions menu. Simple as that. You can indulge in free flights with the terrain in African Airstrip Adventures too of course, but the career mode is really where it is at, and that really is as open ended as you want it to be with African Airstrip Adventures continuing to generate jobs for you for as long as you like. So if ever there was an FSX Mission with longevity on its side, then this is it.

Think of it as being something like Air Hauler from the jobbing pilot's perspective, with the jobs being generated over the radio as you fly around Kenya in your choice of light aircraft, and you've got where it is coming from. It doesn't have the managerial depth of Air Hauler and other add-ons of a similar fashion since it is all about the aircraft you are flying at the time and how best to complete your tasks. If a career that concentrates on things 'at the coal face', rather than one where logistical management is the focus is what you seek, then you will certainly find this appealing. With African Airstrip Adventures, you can leave the paper pushing to others.



The terrain, and as a consequence the difficulties in landing, varies considerably as you fly around. One or two strips are a real nightmare to get a twin into, and require some careful observational fly-bys to check the runway is clear and give the windsock a good look. That is unless you take the helicopter of course!

The airstrips are not always easy to get off from either. Here I made the mistake of carrying too much fuel and barely scraped into the air. I also stupidly took off downwind because I was being lazy and was pointing in the direction I wanted to go. It could very easily have ended up as an expensive mistake!

### Conclusion

I could go on at great length about African Airstrip Adventures, but it really doesn't need me to do that. That's because

as a concept it is not complex, but that simplicity really belies just how enjoyable it is.

What you get here is a reason to indulge in plenty of genuine seat of the pants flying over wonderful varied terrain, with excellent animated wildlife all over the place that is smart enough to be in believable locations, coupled with great airstrip scenery which offers really challenging landings. You get to use a good variety of aircraft, there is tricky decision making to keep you in the good books, you have the ability to make money to chart how well you are doing, which keeps things interesting and at a brisk tempo. There are numerous badges to collect for your pilot logbook, plus of course free reign to fly it how you like in an open-ended way.

To come back to the cinematic analogies, if the kind of free-wheeling pilot role you see Mel Gibson and Robert Downey junior taking on in Air America appeals to you, then you will probably find African Airfield Adventures similarly appealing. Air America might not have won any Oscars, but African Airstrip Adventures is certainly worthy of one. It's a simple concept, but the simplest ideas are usually the best. And put in a similarly simple fashion; it's great fun.

### Test System

A desktop PC with an ASUS P5 KPL SE motherboard, running 2Mb of DDR 3 RAM, an ATI Radeon 4800 PCI-x graphics card with Jan 2009 Catalyst drivers. Operating system: Windows XP Home with Service Pack 3 and DirectX 9.0c. Peripheral devices: Saitek Cyborg EVO joystick, Saitek rudder pedals and Track-IR 4.

**Flying Time:**  
25 hours

### What I Like About Afican Airstrip Adventures

- It's great fun and very simple to use, but offers a good deal of challenge coupled with considerable longevity
- It seems to work flawlessly
- Take offs and landings can be a real test of STOL skills at some of the airstrips
- The included terrain is excellent, and even though there is a lot of detail, I could tweak FSX so that it remained pretty and still very smooth on FPS. It's also useful outside of the career mode for lots of other things, such as soaring the FSX glider over Mount Kenya, which is actually great fun
- You get some cool paint jobs for your default aircraft and a couple of add-on ones too (if you have them)
- The audio is very atmospheric. It's well acted and keeps you feeling you are really there
- The documentation is very good indeed, even including some tips on how to get the best performance out of FSX
- It's more evidence that developers are beginning to see the potential the FSX Mission system has. And that can only be a good thing
- If the micro-management aspects of other complex add-ons such as the excellent Air Hauler are not your cup of tea, then this is an alternative that keeps things in the cockpit

### **What I Don't Like About African Airstrip Adventures**

- Nothing. Yup, that's right, there isn't anything I don't like about this product

### **Printing**

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**[African Airstrip Adventures](#)**

(adobe acrobat required)

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