

# Missing AirAsia QZ 8501 is latest in long series of flight mysteries

AirAsia's flight QZ 8501's disappearance is the latest in a long series of flight mysteries including Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, Air France Flight 447, American Airlines Boeing 727-223 and an Indian Air Force cargo plane that vanished in 2007.

BY ALFRED NG / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS / Sunday, December 28, 2014, 12:57 AM

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<http://JournalofCosmology.com/JOC24/indexVol24CONTENTS.htm>

See Gibson, C. H. AGU 2014 Poster, J of C, Vol 24, Number 17

A jet flying from Surabaya, Indonesia, to Singapore with 162 people aboard lost contact with air traffic control over the Java Sea about an hour before it was to land and is missing, AirAsia Indonesia officials said Sunday.

Flight QZ8501 took off at about 5:35 a.m. Sunday local time from Juanda International Airport and lost contact with air traffic control at about 7:24 a.m., the airline said on its Facebook page. The time in Surabaya is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time; Singapore is 13 hours ahead of ET.

"We don't dare to presume what has happened except that it has lost contact," Djoko Murjatmodjo, Indonesia's acting director general of transportation, told reporters. He said the last contact between pilot and the air traffic control was at 6:13 a.m. local time when the pilot asked to avoid a cloud bank by turning left and going higher to 34,000 feet.

Flight QZ8501 gave no distress signal, he said.

Indonesia, nearby Malaysia and Singapore launched search and rescue operations, officials said. The distance between Surabaya and Singapore is about 860 miles.

Indonesia called off the air search for the night at about 7 a.m. ET. Achmad Toha, an official with the country's search and rescue agency, said the planes returned to their base Sunday evening, but that some ships were still in the area where the plane lost contact with air traffic control. The air search was set to resume at 6 a.m. local time Monday.

The contact was lost about 42 minutes after takeoff from Surabaya airport, Hadi Mustofa, an official of the transportation ministry, told Indonesia's MetroTV. The plane was believed to be over the Java Sea between Kalimantan and Java islands, Mustofa said. The weather in the area was cloudy.

AirAsia Indonesia regrets to confirm that QZ8501 from Surabaya to Singapore has lost contact at 07:24hrs this morning <http://t.co/WomRQuzcPO>

— AirAsia (@AirAsia) [December 28, 2014](#)

Sunardi, a weather forecaster at the Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, said dense storm clouds were detected up to 44,000 feet in the same area at the time the plane was reported to have lost contact.

"There could have been turbulence, lightning and vertical as well as horizontal strong winds within such clouds," said Sunardi, who like many Indonesians uses only one name.

Ten hours after the plane lost contact, Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla said, "It is most possible that it has experienced an accident."

The crew of the Airbus A320-200 included two pilots, four flight attendants and one engineer, according to flight documents.

[USATODAY](#)

Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370

The captain, identified in those documents as Capt. Iriyanto, had a total of 6,100 flying hours. The first officer a total of 2,275 flying hours, said AirAsia, a low-cost regional airline, based in Sepang, Malaysia, near Kuala Lumpur.

The airline, founded in 2001 by Malaysian businessman Tony Fernandes, said in a statement that the plane had an Indonesian captain and a French co-pilot, five cabin crew and 155 passengers, including 16 children and one infant. Among the passengers were three South Koreans, a Malaysian, a British national and his 2-year-old Singaporean daughter. The rest were Indonesians.

USATODAY

### Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17

Before AirAsia released its statement about the missing plane, officials changed the airline's Facebook and Twitter account logos from red to gray.

Indonesian officials earlier had said the flight had 161 people aboard, potentially because the infant was not counted.

"The president has been briefed on AirAsia Flight 8501, and White House officials will continue to monitor the situation,"

White House spokesman Eric Schultz told reporters.

Saddened to hear of missing flight #QZ8501. My thoughts are with the passengers and their families. - LHL

— Lee Hsien Loong (@leehsienloong) [December 28, 2014](#)

Singapore's prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, personally tweeted his condolences: "Saddened to hear of missing flight #QZ8501. My thoughts are with the passengers and their families."

Murjatmodjo, the Indonesian official, said the plane is believed to have gone missing somewhere over the Java Sea between Tanjung Pandan on Belitung island and Pontianak, on Indonesia's part of Borneo island.

Media on Belitung island, about halfway between Surabaya and Singapore, earlier reported that authorities had found the wreckage. Malaysia-based the Star Online said the *Bangka Pos*, which made a report, had added that there was no confirmation the wreckage was from QZ8501.

The Airbus A320-200 with the registration number PK-AXC had its last scheduled maintenance Nov. 16, airline officials said.

Our thoughts are with all affected by QZ8501. We are in contact with [@AirAsia](#) and are providing our full assistance.

<http://t.co/ljK7xdvTbM>

— Airbus (@Airbus) [December 28, 2014](#)

Worldwide, 3,606 A320s are in operation, according to Airbus. In a statement, the firm said the AirAsia aircraft had accumulated approximately 23,000 flight hours in 13,600 flights. It said it will provide full assistance to the investigating authorities.

"The thoughts of the Airbus management and staff are with all those affected by Flight QZ 8501," the statement added.

"We don't dare to presume what has happened except that it has lost contact."

Djoko Murjatmodjo, Indonesia acting director general of transportation

At Surabaya's Juanda International Airport, dozens of relatives sat in a room, many talking on mobile phones, crying and looking dazed as the hours dragged on without additional news. As word spread, more and more family members arrived at the crisis center to await word.

Flightradar24, a flight tracking website, said the Airbus A320-200 was delivered in September 2008. It said the 6-year-old plane was flying at 32,000 feet, the regular cruising altitude for most jetliners, when the signal from the plane was lost.

AirAsia, which has dominated cheap travel in the region for years, has never lost a plane before. AirAsia Malaysia owns 49% of the Indonesian subsidiary.

This is the third major air incident for Southeast Asia this year:

- **On March 8**, Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a wide-bodied Boeing 777, went missing soon after taking off from Kuala Lumpur for Beijing. It remains missing with 239 people in one of the biggest aviation mysteries.
- **On July 17**, another Malaysia Airlines flight, also a Boeing 777, was shot down over rebel-controlled eastern Ukraine while on a flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur. A total of 298 people on board were killed.

Malaysia Airlines offered its support to AirAsia, tweeting: "#staystrong @AirAsia - Our thoughts and prayers are with all family and friends of those on board QZ8501."

[#staystrong@AirAsia](#) - Our thoughts and prayers are with all family and friends of those on board QZ8501.

— Malaysia Airlines (@MAS) [December 28, 2014](#)

Very sad to hear that AirAsia Indonesia QZ8501 is missing. My thoughts are with the families. Malaysia stands ready to help.

— Mohd Najib Tun Razak (@NajibRazak) [December 28, 2014](#)

Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak tweeted: "Very sad to hear that AirAsia Indonesia QZ8501 is missing. My thoughts are with the families. Malaysia stands ready to help."

On my way to Surabaya where most of the passengers are from as with my Indonesian management. Providing information as we get it.

— Tony Fernandes (@tonyfernandes) [December 28, 2014](#)

AirAsia Group CEO Fernandes tweeted that he was on his way to Surabaya.

In a statement, he later said: "My only thought are with the passengers and my crew. We put our hope in the SAR (search and rescue) operation and thank the Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysian governments."

Fernandes stirred controversy earlier this year after incorrectly tweeting that Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, now synonymous with one of aviation's enduring mysteries, had landed safely.

William Waldock, an expert on air crash search and rescue with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Ariz., cautioned against drawing comparisons to the disappearance of Flight 370.

"I think we have to let this play out," he said. "Hopefully, the airplane will get found, and if that happens it will probably be in the next few hours. Until then, we have to reserve judgment."

Circumstances bode well for finding the plane since the intended flight time was less than two hours and the plane disappeared from a known position, he said.

*Contributing: The Associated Press; Jane Onyanga-Omara, USA TODAY*

*BBC news shows video of cloud cover pattern December 28, 2014. No mention of equatorial icing hypothesis.*



*BBC news reports an opinion that "the plane is at the bottom of the sea" on second day of search December 29, 2014.*

*The Java Sea is only about 50 meters deep on average, reflecting a plain flooded during the last ice age. CHG.*