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When Indonesia AirAsia Flight QZ8501 crashed into the Java Sea on December 28, it was the third extraordinary air disaster in 2014 suffered by Southeast Asia's aviation industry. On July 14, Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was (accidentally?) shot down by pro-Russian rebel forces in eastern Ukraine wielding anti-aircraft cannons. On March 8, Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 vanished. Eleven months later, not a trace has yet been found.

With this in mind, *Zman* set out to find other bizarre aircraft occurrences and soon learned that a huge airliner disappearing into thin air was just the tip of the iceberg. Read about a crocodile that downed a passenger jet, the solo pilot that crawled out on his plane's wing to make a repair, the pilot who was sucked out the cockpit window as his co-pilot held his feet, and other fascinating, little-known stories and facts about airplanes.

Shocking Airplane Stories You've Never Heard Before



Airliner Brought Down by Crocodile

Though unusual, it is not hard to imagine a passenger plane being shot down by rebels. But for a crocodile to bring down a passenger jet is something different.

It was August 25, 2010. An airplane carrying passengers over Africa crashed. Locals who visited the crash site found a horrendous scene with only two survivors: a man and a crocodile. And the man had a very strange story to share.

The plane belonged to a small airline named Filair and was flying from Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Bandundu. The pilot was a Belgian named Daniel Philemotte, who was also the owner of Filair. The airplane was a Czech-built Let L-410 Turbojet carrying 18 passengers in addition to the pilot and co-pilot.

It was a routine flight, with everything going smoothly... until just before landing. Then, suddenly, one of the luggage bags opened—and out jumped a live, relatively large crocodile! A passenger who planned to sell the reptile—illegally—had hidden it in an oversized sports bag. The unexpected appearance triggered a panic aboard the small aircraft as the passengers jumped from their seats screaming in fright.

The flight attendant headed for the pilot's cabin, initiating a rush for the front of the plane as everyone tried to distance themselves from the fierce predator. The pilot yelled at the passengers to return to their places, as the concentrated weight of the plane's entire cargo load in the front threw the craft off balance. Understandably, the pilot's orders went unheeded and he was left to fight, unsuccessfully, to regain control. Within seconds the plane crashed near Bandundu Airport.

At first, aviation officials speculated that the plane crashed after running out of fuel, and this would likely have remained the official version of the story. Fortuitously, one passenger survived the crash and reported the truth. That survivor laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the other



The airplane crashed after a crocodile emerged from a luggage bag. Here: Locals sift through the debris in search for survivors.



The aircraft in better times.

survivor, saying it was all the crocodile's fault for not staying in its place until the landing was completed...

Africa is known to have the most dangerous skies in the world. The rate of airplane accidents over that continent is 4.31 per million flights, compared to just .65 per million around the world. The chief cause is the fact that the Third World countries have no established aviation security agencies or airplane security regulations. Airlines often maintain aircraft that are not flight-worthy. In this particular incident, however, the fault was apparently reptilian, not mechanical.

Although the crocodile survived the airplane crash, it was killed by angry locals with a machete.

Largest Airplane Anyone Ever Ate

There are plenty of airplanes recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records, but only one bears the rare distinction of "the largest airplane anyone ever ate."

Michel Lotito is the man who made that record. Truthfully, no one else ever ate an

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