

**Passengers using stolen passports bought MH370 tickets together, reports CNN
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A copy of the E-Tickets issued to the two men using stolen passports to board flight MH370 shows their itinerary and the consecutive E-Ticket numbers. The two people who traveled on the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 under the passports of an Italian and an Austrian citizen appear to have bought their tickets together, CNN reported today.

The tickets were bought from China Southern Airlines in Thai baht at identical prices, according to China's official e-ticket verification system Travelsky.

The ticket numbers are contiguous, which indicates the tickets were issued together. China Southern Airlines sold seven tickets for the code share flight, another media reported yesterday.

The new information adds to the mystery that has enveloped the fate of Flight MH370 which disappeared over Southeast Asia early Saturday on its way to Beijing.

Italy and Austria have said that none of their citizens were on board the plane. And officials say the Italian and Austrian, whose names were on the passenger manifest, both had their passports stolen in Thailand in recent years.

The two tickets booked with China Southern Airlines both start in Kuala Lumpur, flying to Beijing, and then onward to Amsterdam. The Italian passport's ticket continues to Copenhagen, the Austrian's to Frankfurt, CNN said.

But it was unclear how people with stolen passports could have obtained visas to travel to China or passed through immigration control checks in Malaysia.

"As far as we are aware, every one of these people onboard that aircraft had a visa to go to China," Hugh Dunleavy, director of commercial operations at Malaysia Airlines, told reporters in Beijing.

"Which means those passports were in possession of the Chinese embassy before those visas were issued."

Authorities say they are investigating the identities of some of those on board who appear to have issues with their passports.

The Boeing 777-200, carrying 227 passengers and 12 crew members, may have changed course and turned back toward Kuala Lumpur, Malaysian military officials said at a news conference today.

But the pilot appears to have given no signal to authorities that he was turning around, the officials said, attributing the change of course to indications from radar data.

Forty ships and 22 planes continues to scour a portion of the South China Sea for any sign of where the flight might have gone down, authorities said today.

The large, multinational team is focusing its efforts near the Gulf of Thailand, part of the South China Sea that lies between several Southeast Asian countries.

The area in focus, about 145km south of Vietnam's Tho Chu Island, is the same one as where a Vietnamese search plane reportedly spotted oil slicks that stretched between six and nine miles.

Malaysian authorities have not yet confirmed the report of the oil slicks, which came from Vietnam's official news agency.

But the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) also said it spotted oil slicks 20 nautical miles from the aircraft's last known position. A ship has been sent to collect samples for analysis.

As the search continues, relatives of those on board the plane continue to await news of the fate of their loved ones.

Among the passengers, there were 154 people from China or Taiwan; 38 Malaysians, and three US citizens. Five of the passengers were below 5-years-old.

If all those on board the flight are found to have died, it will rank as the deadliest airline disaster since November 12, 2001, when American Airlines Flight 587 crashed into a New York neighborhood, killing all 260 people on board and five more on the ground.

Malaysian authorities have been in contact with counterterrorism organisations about possible passport issues, Acting Transport Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein said.

He did not specify how many potential passport issues there were, saying authorities are looking at the whole passenger manifest.

The US government has been briefed on the stolen passports and reviewed the names of the passengers in question but found nothing at this point to indicate foul play, said a US law enforcement official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Of the two passports in question, the Italian one had been reported stolen and was in Interpol's database, CNN Law Enforcement analyst Tom Fuentes said, citing sources at Interpol.

Additionally, no inquiry was made by Malaysia Airlines to determine if any passengers on the flight were traveling on stolen passports, he said, adding "many airlines do not check the database".

The National Transportation Safety Board announced late Saturday that a team of its investigators was en route to Asia to help with the investigation, the agency said. – March 9, 2014.

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