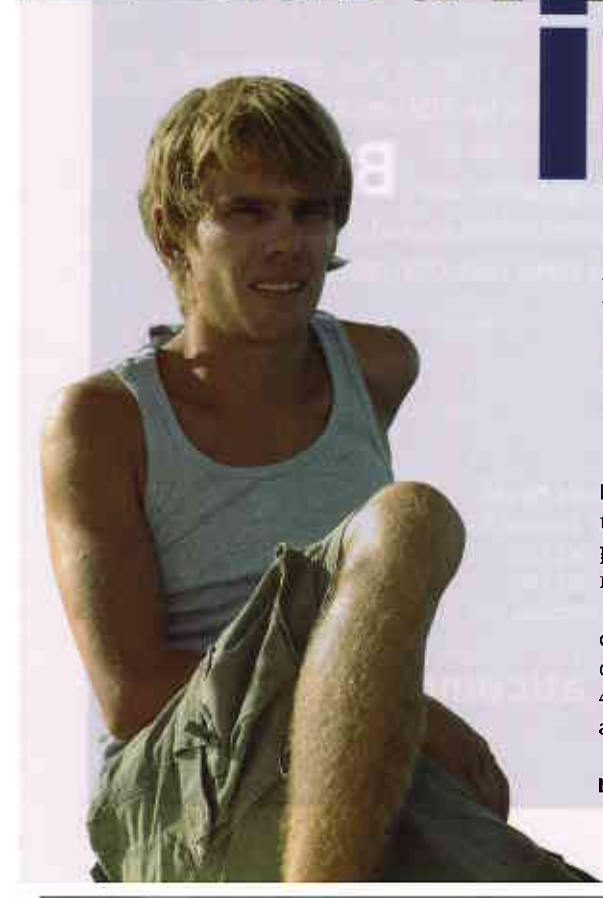


YACHTING LEGEND



# Back to sea in PNG



Jesse Martin has crammed a lot into his tender years. He spoke to **Briar Jensen** about life, travel and the controversy surrounding his most recent adventures.

**HE'S 23 YEARS OLD;** he holds the world record for the youngest solo, non-stop and unassisted circumnavigation of the globe; he's written a best selling book and led a high profile, yet ultimately unsuccessful expedition of young people. Apart from a delivery round as a kid, he's never had a real job. So what's Jesse Martin doing now?

During his circumnavigation in 1999, Jesse dreamed of sailing the world with a group of friends at a more leisurely pace. That dream came to fruition in 2002 with the launch of The Journey of Kijana. This three-year venture entailed five young people sailing a 45-foot ketch to remote locations while undertaking research, filming a documentary and running an on-line classroom.

**LEFT:** Jesse Martin: "I'm up here on my own at the moment. It can get lonely."

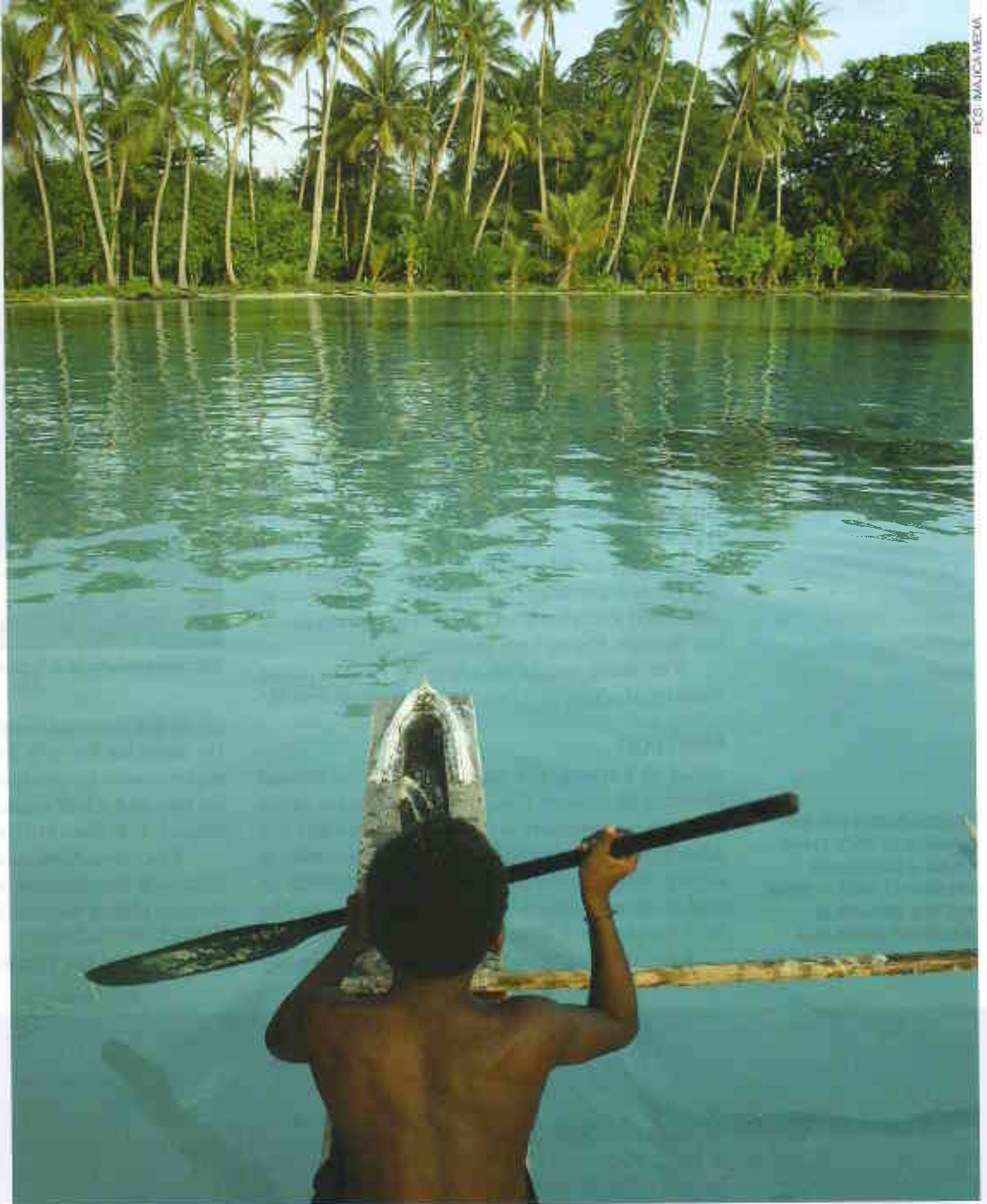


PHOTO: MALINDANG MEDIA

With numerous big name sponsors this was a high-profile project that captured the imagination of adventurers of all ages, who followed the crew's exploits via the Kijana website and newspaper column.

However, from its outset the journey experienced problems. A complex mix of issues, including commercialisation, diverging visions, poor communication, young love and crew tensions, escalated to the point where the trip became unworkable. It ended after less than a year and followers were left wondering what actually happened.

### Indomitable spirit

After this well publicised "failure", it wouldn't have been surprising if Jesse had decided to withdraw from public scrutiny forever. But the indomitable spirit of this young man still burns strong. As one who accepts failure as a natural consequence of striving to achieve your dreams, Jesse believes mistakes form part of the greater learning experience. Consequently, after time-out in the company of his family and girlfriend Maya, whom he fell in love with prior to the launch of the trip, he decided to share the lessons of Kijana with others by writing a book about the journey.

*Kijana - The Real Story*, co-written by Ed Gannon, was released in March 2005, and is a vivid account of what happened, from Jesse's point of view. In the same confronting style as his *Lionheart* book Jesse shares his raw emotions with readers, from the awkwardness of first love, through the highs and lows aboard *Kijana*, to his frustration that led to its demise. But this is not a sob story, nor is there any attempt to lay blame.

"Kijana is the 'journey' of young people. It wasn't a journey about old people in an office back home, though they played a role in it. The story wasn't about trying to blame anyone. The focus [of the book] is what happened to us out at sea." Filled with

**ABOVE LEFT:** *Imajica* at anchor in the calm, cool waters off Kavieng. The town is the main port of New Ireland Province in eastern PNG.

**ABOVE:** Lagoon life around PNG is as tranquil as it is beautiful.

**"I'm taking people on a holiday, but I'm taking them on a holiday that I would love to go on myself."**

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captivating stories, from living off the land with Aborigines to dramatic accounts of running aground, the book makes compelling reading for adventurers, travellers and sailors alike.

As well as giving Jesse some closure, the book and documentary, for which he is searching for a backer, fulfils his promise to record the journey and he hopes they will satisfy the followers who were desperate to know why the trip ended so prematurely.

While Jesse was writing the book he was also preparing for his first commercial venture, a yacht charter business. As can be expected, it is not your typical luxury charter in a well-known cruising location. It's an 'adventure charter', for which Jesse has chosen an older, traditional style catamaran and based it in what is still regarded by many as the last frontier, Papua New Guinea.

"I'm taking people on a holiday, but I'm taking them on a holiday that I would love to go on myself."

### Main port

Based in Kavieng, the main port of New Ireland Province in eastern PNG, Imajica Charters offers guests the opportunity to design their own eight-day adventure holiday based around aquatic activities of sailing, diving, snorkelling, surfing and fishing, as well as shore based adventures incorporating the local people, their village life and cultural heritage.

Jesse has been fascinated with PNG since reading

*Imajica* during her fast passage to PNG. Jesse chose a catamaran because of their stability and the amount of accommodation and deck space they provide.



Mansava Island is a typical New Guinean destination.

about it in National Geographic magazine as a child. He made his first trip there as a 16-year-old when, together with his younger brother Beau, he kayaked for two and a half weeks, covering 150 miles from Rabaul, East New Britain Province to Kavieng.

"I'd chosen New Ireland, which was part of the Bismarck Archipelago, as it was one of the most remote places we could actually travel to in the PNG circle of islands."

So it was his location of choice for his new



**“Jesse has also added a few Melanesian touches with new decking made from local timber and a wheelhouse roof.”**

business. “It’s a beautiful place. I’m fascinated by the culture and history here. I love the ‘wildness’ of it; it still has an element of danger. I hope it will attract the intrepid travellers.” With numerous small islands within easy sailing distance, guests can head in any direction, or just stay and explore the many attractions within Kavieng harbour.

Jesse chose a catamaran because of their stability and the amount of accommodation and deck space they provide. He has always been attracted by Wharrams, and settled on a Tiki 38. “The Wharrams are a fringe type of design. I love the concept of them, the way they’re designed.” The double canoe-like hulls are tied to the deck, in the style of Polynesian outrigger canoes, enabling the boat to flex.

**Kit boats**

“They are kit boats. That’s another thing I like about them, they’re quite simple and straightforward. Also, for that size boat and the price range I had, it was basically the only choice. It just happened that I liked it.”

Using the advance from his latest book Jesse bought his Tiki in the Philippines, where it was built in 1998. As is often the case with Jesse, it was a scramble to get the boat to PNG for the start of his first charter.

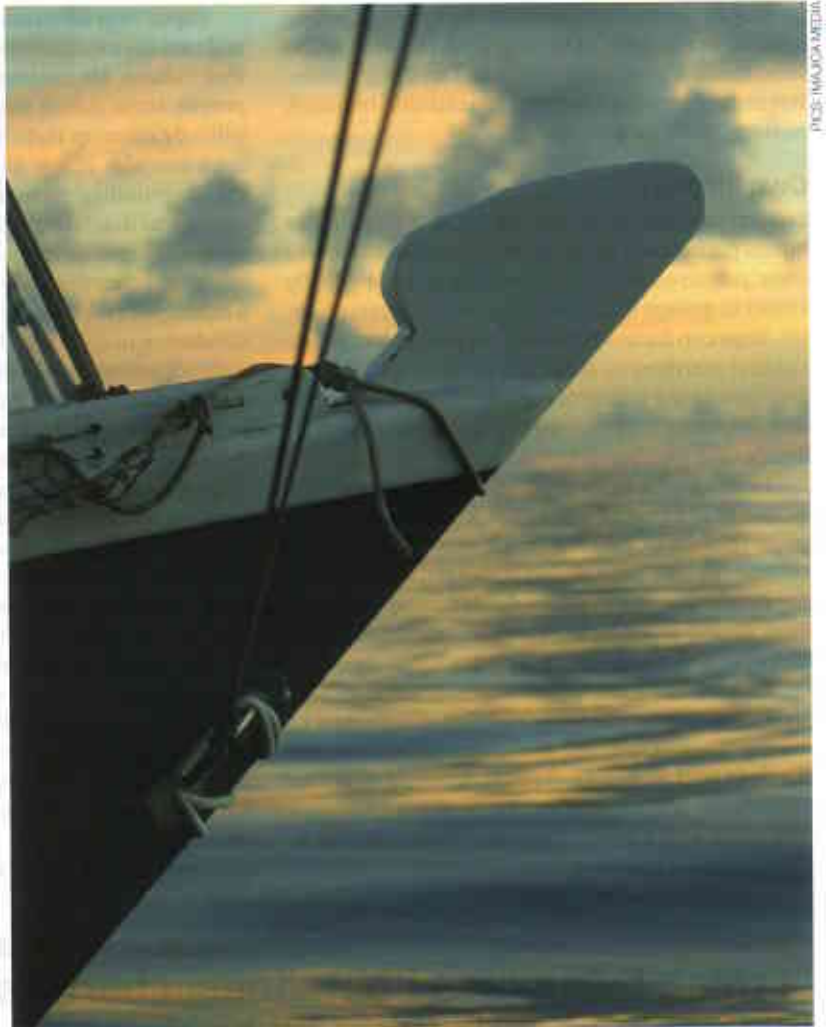
“It seems to be always the way when I do these things, everything gets done at the last minute, just in time.” Well, in this case, not quite in time. Due to a series of unfortunate events, including unfavourable weather, a fallen mast and broken engine, Jesse didn’t make it to Kavieng until after his first charter guest. Thankfully, the American had a flexible timetable and was very understanding.

Modifications to the cat, *Imajica*, have included relocation of the stove on deck, the addition of refrigeration and a new motor. Jesse has also added a few Melanesian touches with new decking made from local timber and a wheelhouse roof of woven sago palm leaves. Decorative bamboo features are also being added.

*Imajica* has one single and two double cabins for sleeping and storage of gear, which are accessed individually from the deck, as is the toilet/storage area. All cooking, washing-up and showering is done on deck, which makes it a bit like camping on the water. But as Jesse says, you can’t experience true adventure without a little hardship.

Jesse’s aim is to give guests an idea of what it would have been like for the sailors of old, without modern technology and conveniences.

“The charter is for sailors, cruisers and adventurers who want to see PNG the old style way, by



A close-up of the bow of *Imajica*.



A storm brewing in the tropical stillness of Kavieng Harbour.

using the wind.” Consequently there are no modern instruments to be found in the wheelhouse, just a compass. Jesse will even teach guests the art of celestial navigation, if desired, and will include an overnight passage in the itinerary. (However, there is a handheld GPS onboard for those times when visual or celestial navigation is impossible.)

The charter is ‘hands-on’ and Jesse expects guests to participate in all aspects of the trip, from

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pulling in the anchor, hoisting the sails and taking a watch at the helm to buying fresh produce at the local market, preparing meals and washing dishes. But in the relaxed atmosphere he cultivates onboard, nothing feels like a chore.

### Own itinerary

*Imajica* can take up to four people at a time and as guests get to chose their own itinerary, based around their preferred activities, the charters are ideally suited to groups of friends with similar interests.

Trips can focus exclusively on diving, surfing, or cultural activities or Jesse will prepare an itinerary incorporating a variety of pursuits. However, flexibility is imperative, as the opportunity to sail to certain locations is weather-dependant.

Kavieng is becoming recognised in diving circles as one of the best places to see wild pelagics, with huge schools of barracuda, trevally, grouper and silvertip sharks. Relic diving is also popular as there are numerous remnants of the Japanese presence here during WWII. Jesse can also organise a cave diving expedition onshore if desired.

*Imajica* has a compressor onboard and carries six dive tanks, weight belts, weights and flippers of various sizes. There are also snorkels, masks and vests, as well as two surfboards. Kavieng offers an abundance of good surf breaks, both left and right. The most well known, Piccinniny Point, is visible from *Imajica's* mooring.

Papua New Guineans have always intrigued Jesse and he is keen for guests to develop an appreciation of their culture. He has many friends amongst the local people, some dating back to his kayaking trip, who willingly open up their homes so guests can experience everyday village life. Traditional ceremonies of the surrounding areas include fire dancers, shark calling and dukduk (spirit) dances, and when possible, Jesse will organise for guests to attend these rituals.

Jesse concedes it's been hard work establishing a business in what he says is, "An economy that's not conducive to running a business." One of the most difficult aspects has been adjusting to 'island-time'. "Living and working in PNG you need patience, independence and initiative."

As with any new business, *Imajica* Charters is still evolving and improvements to the boat will be ongoing, as money allows. Jesse is also negotiating with local villagers for a plot on which to build a traditional-style hut, which he can use as an on-shore base for storing equipment, including two dugout canoes, which he plans to purchase for guest use.

Despite the fact he now has a business to promote, Jesse remains as humble as ever. He only uses his first name when introducing himself, and rarely mentions his circumnavigation (even when pressed by people who are trying to determine if they've just met the famous young Aussie sailor). As Jesse admits, he's not one for small talk and even when meeting potential clients doesn't seize the opportunity to



**"I think living on a boat, doing charters on a boat, this boat, is what I'll be doing on and off for a long time."**



ABOVE: Local Kavieng children. Papua New Guineans have always intrigued Jesse and he is keen for guests to develop an appreciation of their culture.

LEFT: Market day at Kavieng is always a vibrant experience



PHOTO: BRITISH JETSKI

promote his charter business, something he will hopefully overcome if he wants to make a profit.

### Jesse fits in

Kavieng has a population of about 5000 and Jesse fits in easily. He is well liked by both locals and expats in the area – many of the latter whom wound up here because of their own adventurous spirit. They willingly offer assistance and advice, as well as a sense of community.

But Jesse is looking forward to the arrival of his girlfriend Maya, who will join him aboard *Imajica* as co-host. “I’m up here on my own at the moment. It can get lonely.” In the meantime his constant companion is his chocolate-coloured puppy Rani, which he saved from a life scavenging at the local market.

So having made the transition into the workforce, is Jesse enjoying it? “I’m working, but I’m also doing what I love and showing people what I love. It’s what I would choose to do [even] if I didn’t have to work.”

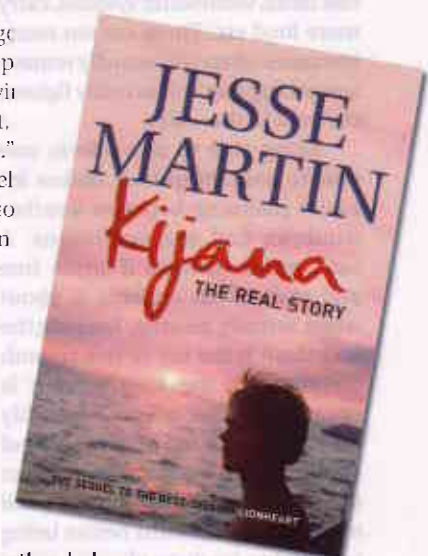
And at this stage, he plans to stick with it.

“It’s a long-term lifestyle thing. The good thing about a boat is that you can always pick up anchor and move somewhere else. I think living on a boat, doing charters on a boat, this boat, what I’ll be doing on and off for a long time.”

In the off-season he intends to keep himself busy by studying film production, “I plan to do a lot of reading about production and learn more about writing, structure and filming.”

And what about the next adventure? “An Arctic trip is always at the back of my mind.”

**Kijana – The Real Story, by Jesse Martin, published by Allen & Unwin, \$29.95. For more information on Imajica Charters go to [www.jessemartin.net/sailing](http://www.jessemartin.net/sailing).** ☘



RIGHT: Jesse's latest book is now on the shelves.