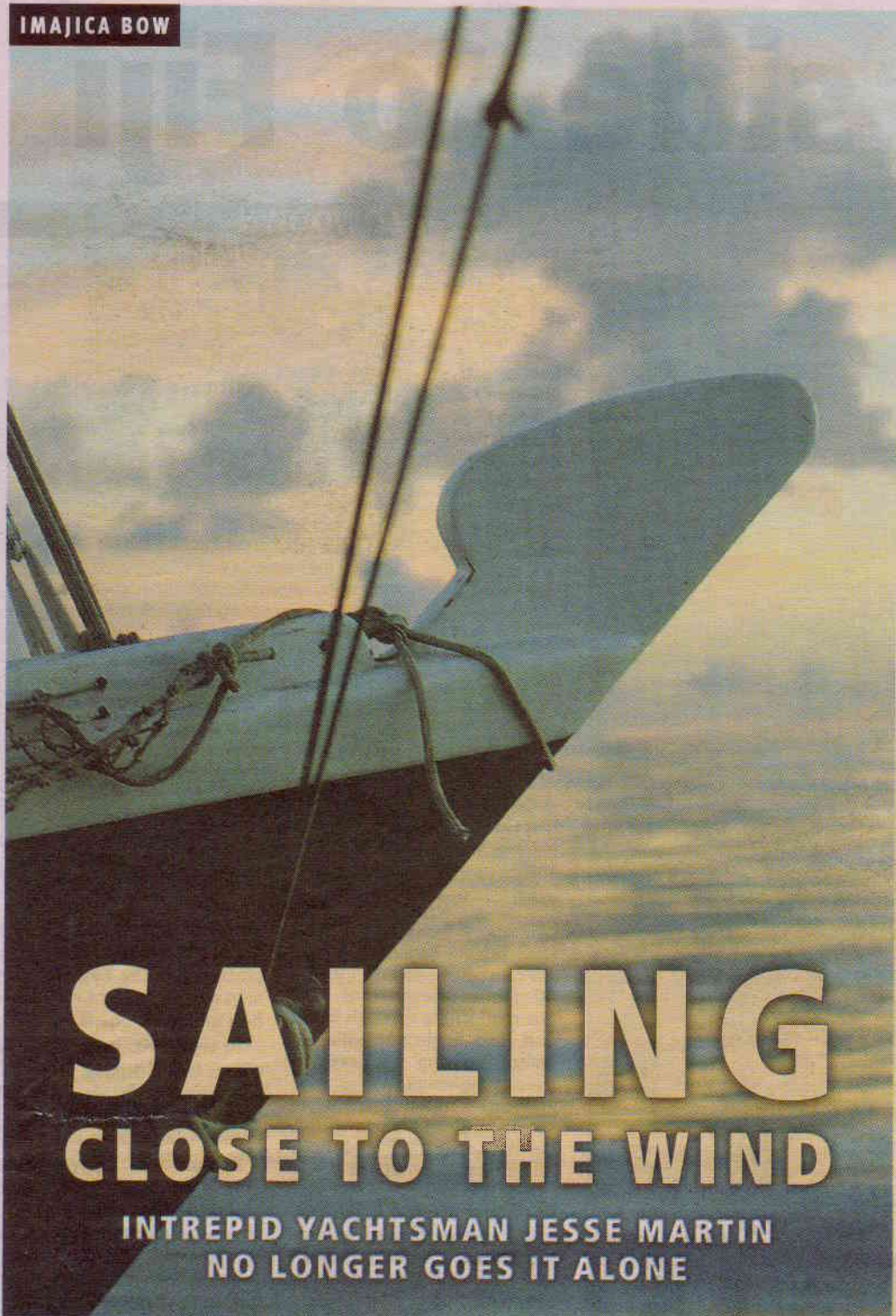


IMAJICA BOW



SAILING CLOSE TO THE WIND

INTREPID YACHTSMAN JESSE MARTIN
NO LONGER GOES IT ALONE



SKIPPER JESSE MARTIN

It is 10pm and I'm exhausted. I've been at the helm of an unfamiliar catamaran and huge rolling swells have unexpectedly propelled the boat forward. The sound as they crest testifies to their power. The wind whips hair into my eyes as I strain to penetrate the blackness ahead.

Storm clouds overhead no longer pelt me with bullet-like raindrops, but they still obscure the moonlight so desperately needed to illuminate the catamaran's path between the twin coral reefs at the narrow entrance to this South Sea harbour.

This is not the tropical sailing I'd imagined and, as an inland waterway sailor, I should be scared. Instead I feel exhilarated. Besides, I'm in good hands.

Hanging over the bow with a torch, looking out for coral bommies and calling directions, is Jesse Martin, who in 1999 became the youngest person to sail solo, non-stop and unassisted around the world.

We are entering Kavieng Harbour, the main port of New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea, on board Jesse's yacht *Imajica*. I'm participating in an eight-day adventure charter, but things are not going to plan.

We had set out this morning for the coral-fringed island of Tsoi in brilliant sunshine with a fair

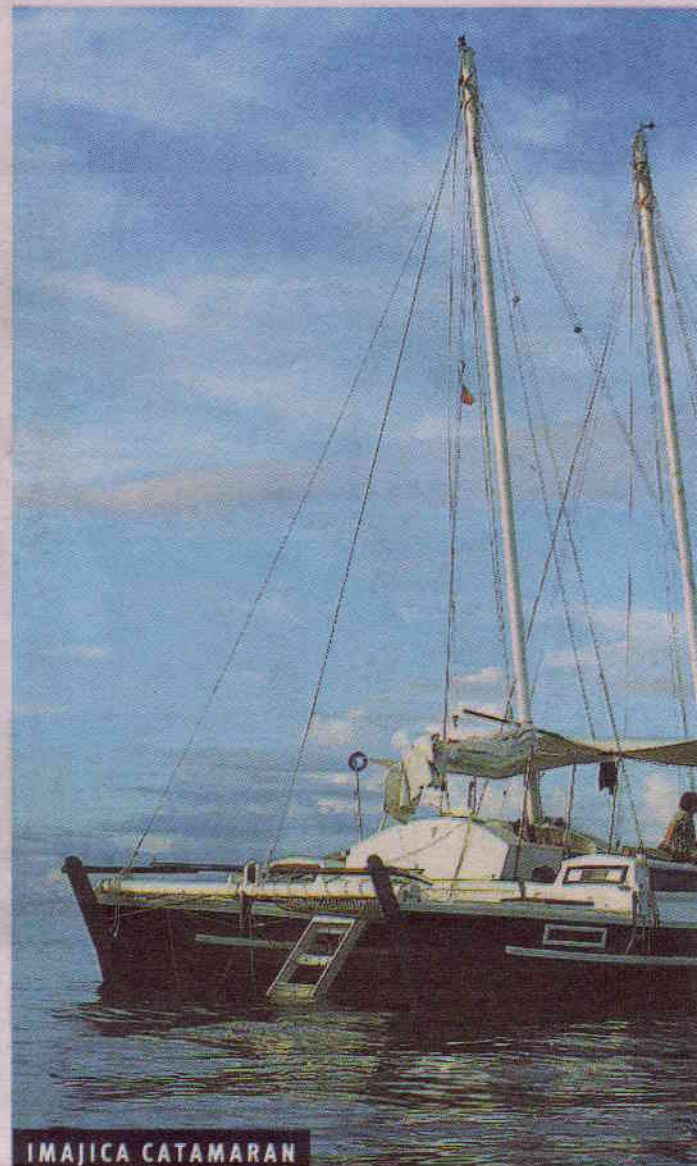
KAVIENG LOCALS



BREAKFAST FRUIT PLATTER



KAVIENG MARKET



IMAJICA CATAMARAN

breeze. It should have taken a few hours, but after our departure the wind died, only to reappear hours later in the wrong direction, followed by what appeared to be a passing rain squall.

However, after motoring into the wind, rain and swell for two hours, we are no closer to our destination and are engulfed by darkness. With no visibility and not knowing the accuracy of the charts, we have the agonising decision of remaining at sea all night to make landfall in daylight or turning around and sailing back to Kavieng, which we had left 10 hours earlier.

Even with the wind behind us, it would take at least four hours in the wet, miserable conditions. But this is adventure cruising and I'm learning to expect the unexpected. This is not your typical yacht charter. Everything from the choice of boat (traditional style) to the location (last frontier) exudes Martin's passion for adventure. "I've planned the trips to be how I would like to go on a trip," Martin says. "I'm taking people on a holiday, but a holiday that I would like to go on myself. I hope it will attract the intrepid travellers and PNG is a perfect location for that."

Jesse first visited PNG as a 16-year-old when, together with his younger brother, he kayaked more than 240km from Rabaul, East New Britain Province, to Kavieng.

"It's pretty much one of the last frontiers in the world. It's wild and that's where I want to be exploring."

Imajica Charters is specifically targeted at the adventure traveller, sailing without modern technology and creature comforts.

Consequently, living on board is akin to camping on the water, with all cooking, washing-up and showering done on deck.

The key feature of the charters is the opportunity for guests to design their own itinerary based on their preferred pursuits. Jesse will conduct trips exclusively for diving, surfing, fishing, snorkelling, relic hunting or cultural activities or prepare an itinerary with any combination of these. And of course there is the sailing. Whether purely a means of transport to a variety of dive or surf locations, or the reason for the trip itself, it's a privilege to sail under a skipper with such unique credentials, but by no means intimidating.

Martin treats guests as fellow crew, which means

sweating alongside him, hauling in the anchor, straining on sheets to hoist the sails and taking a turn at the helm. In recent years, Kavieng has developed a reputation for diving and surfing. "We can head in any direction," says Martin.

"We can head down to New Britain to see the fire dancers in Rabaul, or across to Mānus and New Hanover. Even down the East Coast to the Tabar Islands. Kavieng has heaps of little islands." We'd been heading to one of those islands when we decided not to spend the night at sea, but sail back to Kavieng.

As I clutch the yacht's wheel and strain to listen for the sound of waves breaking on reefs, I struggle to describe what I am feeling. Although my body is taut with nervous tension, I feel invigorated. Despite the fact the slightest error could mean smashing into a reef, I am experiencing a high that I don't want to end. As we drop anchor safely inside the harbour, I realise these feelings are the essence of adventure travel — and I am hooked.

PACKAGE: An eight-day trip starts at \$2400 per person and includes everything except alcohol. *Imajica* takes up to four guests with two double cabins and one single cabin.

INQUIRIES: Imajica Charters, www.jessemartin.net/sailing

Words: BRIAR JENSEN

