

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 47:

El Meson De Pepe

www.elmesondepepe.com

410 Wall Street

Tuesday 9/4, 7:00 pm

Hatuey Cuban Style Ale, \$5.46, incl. tax

I rode over from another Fort Zack swim and locked the bike to the rack. Things looked good for a kickin' sunset. The air was clear, with some clouds just around horizon level for some last minute glows, and, significantly, the sun was angling for the ocean just to the south of Sunset Key. A water landing! Fall is approaching after all!



From Sunset Pier, the sun would still vanish behind the island, but from here, it was water bound. It would be creeping a little farther south every day till about Christmas, just as it has been since about my birthday. Then

it will swing back again, inching north from Jesus' b'day to mine.



The band was on when I arrived, and there was a couple dancing. They were doing some nifty salsa swirls. The song ended and there was some spirited applause from the bar patrons.

One of the band members (there were only two) leaned into the mike, *We're glad you got up to dance. When you have a good*

time, we have a good time. (Pause) So, we're gonna take a break for a little while... WTF? You finally get them up on their feet, and you stop playing? Odd strategy there.

The barkeep was a big boned lass with long straight blonde hair. She looked like a better fit for an Oktoberfest in the Black Forest than a Cuban bar. She

had that jovial look and I could just picture her with five 32-ounce frothy mugs in each hand, swirling through crowd of shitfaced Bavarians. I named her Hilda.

It made me wonder, though. Is there shortage of Cuban women in this town? Did none apply for a bartending job here? The servers looked Cuban, and the busboys looked like they might have arrived today. Nothing against Hilda, I liked her, but how does an authentic Cuban restaurant and bar end up serving *kalt'es bier* instead of *cerveza fria*?



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I wasn't swayed, though. I came here for my little piece of Havana. I ordered up a bottle of Hatuey Cuban Style Ale, *por favor*, to get my Latin blood circulating. Gonna channel my inner Ricky Ricardo.

I had noticed a painted sign on the wall, well above the bar, that said in friendly flowing script, *Gratuity included on all checks*. That did not seem



like a bad policy. My Hatuey cost \$5.46. So, the price of my beer was \$4.75, and the auto-tip was \$0.71. I always tip a buck when I order a beer, even if it's a \$2 beer. So, in this case, the bar lost out on \$0.29. Yeah, I know I could've tossed a quarter on the bar, but they asked for what they got.

Now, I witnessed two occasions where they came out ahead. The couple on my right when I first sat down was just finishing up a sandwich and a couple of drinks. I don't know what they were charged, but they paid with a card, and I saw the guy write an amount on the receipt's tip line. Ching!

The next guy ordered a rum-and-Coke and a Sprite. Hilda made them, and handed them over with his check, saying, *That's \$9.20, please*. He seemed quite surprised, but laid a ten and some coins on the bar. \$9.20 would have

been a \$1.20 tip on top of \$8.00 for a cocktail (\$6) and soda (\$2). Now there is an extra buck or so on top of that. Ching, ching!!

When I barkept in the clubhouse at Indigo Run Country Club in Hilton Head Island a couple of lives ago, we added an automatic 18% tip on all checks. We had no posted sign. The policy was stated on the check, but near the very bottom, even below the signature line, AND there was a blank line for gratuity. We raked the members over on that. Most of them were rich as all get-out and probably never looked at the numbers anyway. We got so bad that, when we got a check back with no tip written in, from a member who knew about the 18% we were already getting, we'd grumble about *that cheap fuck*. Greedy bastids, weren't we?



Hilda was solo on the bar, which was fine for the moment, but would soon become not-so-fine as sunset neared. She said there was another barkeep on duty, but he had shown up an hour-and-a-half late for his shift so she

had sent him on an errand to get snacks. Hmm. Another curious strategy. I'm thinking that, if you stiff me out of 90 minutes of assistance, then *I* am going to the one who wanders off on the casual snacks run while you work the damn bar alone.



But then the sign came to mind: Gratuity included. The keep's name is probably on check, ya think? So Hilda racks up some solid cash for ringing every check between 5:00 and 7:15, when she can handle it solo anyway, and then douchebag shows up for the 7:15-8:15 rush when the crowd might get a little too overwhelming. Yeah, I'll bet that was her plan. Smart girl, that Hilda.

This place has been on my Gotta-Go-There-Sometime List for years. The brick walls, period decorations, and lively music all tugged at me as I'd exit Mallory after a sunset. It's done up

so well. It's all outdoors, though under a roof, so as you walk by you can dig all the old-style signage and get into the cultural groove.

One beer – even a Hatuey – doesn't constitute the full experience of this restaurant-with-a-bar, but it'll do for a bar tour.

47 down. Almost halfway done!

And, by the way, the sunset was purdy dang coolo too.

