

Bar Hoppin' With Hops
The Second Century Tour
Hops MacBarley's 2013
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #189:

First Call

Key West International Airport
3491 South Roosevelt Boulevard
Wednesday, 29 August, 6:00 PM

Key West Sunset Ale (bottle) \$6.00

Key West International Airport has three bars now: Conch Flyer, First Call, and Last Call. It's crazy that it has taken 188 Hops to get to any of them.

Last Call is at the departures gate and you and your boarding pass have to be cleared through security to get to it. You can't just wander in and "pretend you're a guest"; you have to be an actual departure. This bar has yet to be hopped. Hard to say when it will be. On the rare occasion that I'm actually flying somewhere, I'm probably on the first flight out at 6:30 AM, feeling a tad foggy in the haid, and not looking for a beer (if they are even Hop-erational at the hour).

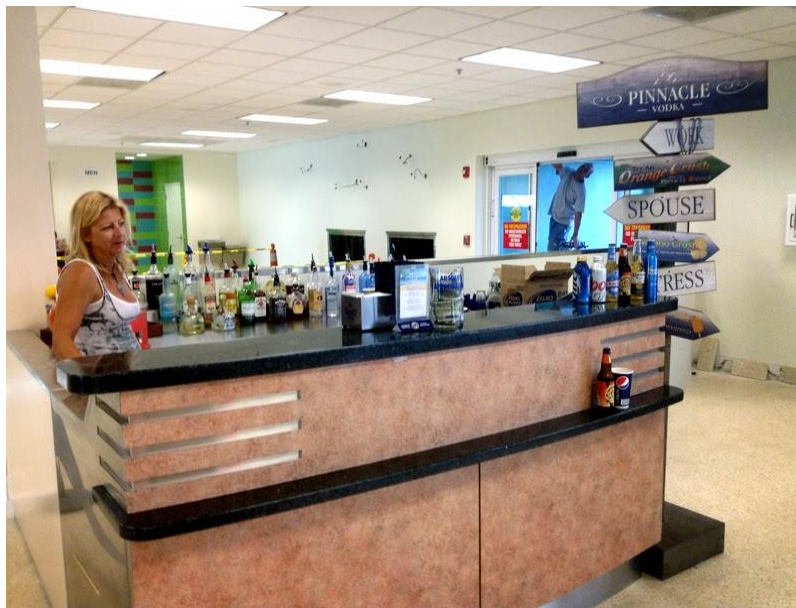
Conch Flyer is big and new and clean. I had been there for a pre-flight beer back in 2010, before the higher powers summoned me to my vocation as a Hopper. Somehow, though, it had escaped hoppage. It's upstairs as you walk in, on the same level as security, but before you pass through it. It'll get hopped soon.



When the KWIA terminal overhaul was done a few years ago, they took the old ground level bar/restaurant and threw it in the dumpster. I thought it had character, but I was told it also had

plumbing nightmares and bugs like you read about. (Do you read about bugs?) So, hey, good riddance to that, I guess.

This First Call bar was even newer than Conch Flyer -- at least, it seemed new to me; I don't do KWIA very often. It has the look of a rollaway bar that some fed-up employee just abandoned in the middle of the room when he stormed out. There are a couple of car rental counters that have wall-side locations, and two baggage carousels that jut out into the main space of the room, but First Call sits dead center, without so much as a water pipe connected to it. It's like the designers did a review of the plans after it was all done and went *Dammmn, we forgot to include a **bar**!*



I saw no sign that indicated the name of the bar. I thought the *The Baggage Bar* might be fun title. The bar is about six feet long, four feet tall, and seatless. There is a signpost next to it, with various planks in arrow shapes pointing to things like *Spouse*, *Stress*, and *Work*, among more colorful arrows pointing in the other direction to specialty drinks that feature Pinnacle Vodka.

Trouble is, the negative signs point out the front door of the airport, while the drink signs point to the runways. Seems backwards to me, but air travel is not my area of expertise.

The barkeep was an unhappy looking woman. I couldn't blame her. This was not an especially happy gig. The room is blahhh. Have you ever seen a baggage claim room that wasn't? Plus, it's not finished yet. This must be the last stage of the overhaul project: wall decorations were not up yet, wires still showing, stuff like that. There are only about ten chairs in the entire area, and they are against the walls in typical terminal deployment. Definitely not a place to sit and relax over a few cocktails.

The Tarmac was only a few yards away, right out beyond those sliding glass doors, so I'm sure she got the occasional whiff of jet fuel wafting in. What could be better than that for keeping you cheery?

She did have a full selection of liquors, though, so she was ready for whatever thirst came her way. And that got me wondering: who is this bar for? Most airport bars thrive on layover traffic: people who have two or three hours to kill and choose to spend it chatting with Mr. Al Cohol. But there are no layovers in Key West. Nobody is just passin' through. We are your destination, baby, your des-ti-ny. You are not on your way to someplace else when you de-plane onto the hot ground of KWIA.

Some airport bars do a good business on people who dutifully do the "90 minutes before departure" thing and zoom through security with 85 minutes to spare. You can easily knock down a few overpriced cocktails in an hour-plus.

But *arrivals*?? These people just stepped off the freaking plane. They want to complete the Joy Of Air Travel experience and get the hell to their fun, *pronto*. They're not gonna hannng arounnd. They are either passing right on through to the waiting taxis, or stepping up to get their rented cars, or toe-tapping those few minutes for the luggage to travel that 100 yards from the plane. I reckon there are some people who step inside and say, *Hell yes, a bar! Mix me a Mojito, my Key West darlin'!* Must be enough of them to justify it all. And hence the name: the very first bar you encounter in KW, your First Call for Alcohol.

An even more likely market, though, are the local people who have come here to meet, greet, and pick up friends, family, or whomever else is arriving from the real world. Sometimes, flights are late. I'm sure you've never experienced that, but yes, it's true. If the plane is *seriously* delayed, you might go upstairs to the Conch Flyer where you can relax in more comfort. But if it's just a few minutes, or a short but indefinite amount of time, or if it's thunder-storming out and the passengers are being kept in the plane till it subsides, you might decide that passing the time with an adult beverage is better than passing the time without one. I often decide that (you may have noticed.)

There are very, very few, I'm sure, that do what **I** am doing this day: popping by the airport to grab a cold one at the baggage claim. But here I was, doin' zackly that. Envious, arncha? Course y'are.

My bottle of KWSA came with a cup. Not the standard issue, 14-ounce, translucent plastic cup, though. No sir or ma'am. This was a waxed cardboard Pepsi cup, like you'd get at the Friday night football game. I'm not a fan of beer in this type of cup; it yields way too much foam, no matter how you pour it, and it gets soggy. But, I quickly figured out that discretion was the likely motive at play here. The plastics may be A-OK on Duval,

where beer-ambulating is allowed, but well outside that Party Zone, you still have to pretend, just like you did in high school, that you're sippin' a soda.

So, duty done, I took my "soft drink" (wink wink) out the door and headed off towards Work and Stress, but definitely not to Spouse.

The Second Century Tour stood at 89 bars in 90 days. A second straight summer of 100 in 100 was a piece of cake ... EXCEPT that, starting tomorrow, Hops would be taking the Hopsmobile north on a 10-day road trip to Beantown and back. The Tour Committee gave it the stamp of approval, but only when I promised to comply with two conditions:

- (1) I had to hit at least a ten bars along the way. Ha. OK, next.
- (2) I had to complete the Second Century within 9 days upon return.

Eazy-peazy. You got it. Hit the road, Hops!

