

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #256:

Ocean Blue

628 Duval Street

Friday, October 30, 2015, 7 PM

Sierra Nevada (draft) \$5.75

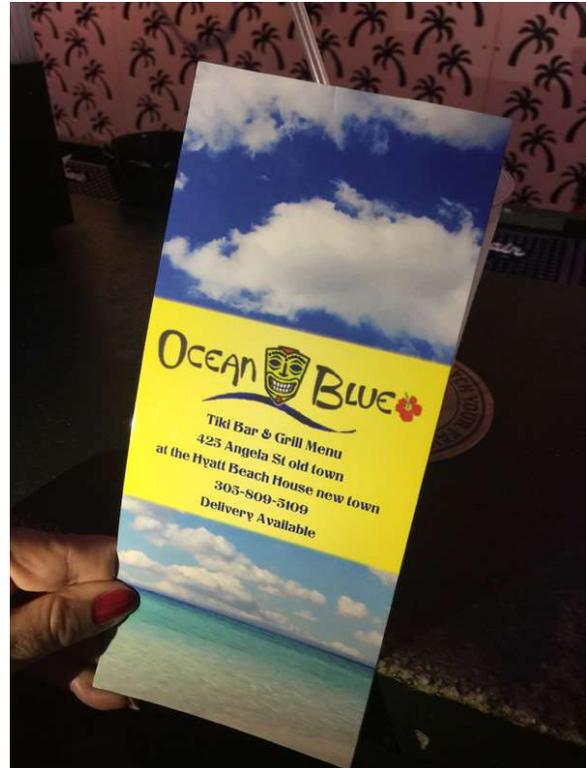
This was a quick hop, because, trust me, we didn't need it. We saw it and we instinctively reacted, but we would have been wiser to postpone it.

You see, it was Friday evening. Now, chalking up a Hop or two on a Friday evening is normally nothing out of the ordinary. We tend to hit Happy Hour at the Lazy Gecko (#2) as our springboard, and then do our Hopping duty. But our springboard tonight

was far more extensive and had already sprung us farther than we needed to be.

Yup, this Friday evening was the night of the Masquerade March, a.k.a. the Local's Parade, which, to many, is the feature event of Key West's annual week-long Fantasy Fest Celebration. On paper, the Saturday night parade is the big dog of the week, but to most of us who live here, you can't beat the Local's Parade. Why? Simple: free booze. What a great phrase, yes? Let me utter it again: free booze.

Hop #99 (Southernmost Beach Café) has many of the details, and sure most of you have memorized that Hopter by now, so I'll spare you the repetition, but here is a nutshell version.





Typical Masquerade Marchers

A few thousand costumed people begin a two-mile-long route that takes them on a casual walk through Old Town to Duval Street. There are two routes, pick one, the effect is the same. Along the way, guest house and some homes have booze giveaways. Rum punch is common, sometimes there's draft beer, occasionally there are shots. The trend lately is the Jell-o Shot. Hundreds and hundreds of them, on tables, on trays, even in barrels. Grab a fistful and suck 'em down. Some taste like Jell-o. Some taste like grain alcohol. None of them hit you right away. But they DO hit you later.

And "later" was now. I know of no other cities that offer free booze so cavalierly to the public, but if they did, I'd bet that the parade would end and some quiet spot where everyone could just mellow

down. We end on Duval Street, where a half-mile-long street fair is in full gear, and bars beckon on every block.

As has become custom, I had walked the western route -- Frances to Fleming to Simonton to Olivia to Duval -- with B&J. This year, Double-A joined us, posing as Abe Lincoln. We weren't fooled.

So, we reached Duval. As usual, I had been the most aggressive with the freebies. Sometimes, at this point, I shift into Wander Mode, and just kinda "walk it off" for a while, let things process themselves inside before recruiting Sir Secondwind.

But this time, it wasn't happening. B&J wanted to stop in at Pincher's Street Bar (#203) to see Stephanie, who, we had been told, would be costumed and made up by the famous Inga, from Aqua (#98) across the street. She looked fannntastic. Leave it to a life-long drag queen to frill you up good. So that was cool.

Visiting Stephanie, though, also meant sitting at the bar for one. But, here, one is two, since you get your second one free. Like I needed two cold delicious Sierra Nevadas after wolfing down 117 Jell-o shots. (OK, I admit I lost count.)

We eventually left there and started to stroll downhill towards the lower numbers, but when we reached the end of our block, Jan was quick to notice Ocean Blue. Of course, we didn't know it was Ocean Blue yet; we only knew it was open as something fresh – as it had been numerous times before.

Often listed as "628 Duval Street #5", this alley venue connects with the sprawling complex that has housed: Cowboy Bill's Honky Tonk Saloon (#8), Sixshooter Saloon (#126), Church Bar (#139), Rose Tattoo (#140), Cowboy Bill's Sports Bar (#178) and Rum Runners (#253).

By itself, this southernmost arm of the complex has been: Fat City Monroe Parish (#127), Levity Lounge (#193), Seadog Tavern (#206), Hen & Hounds (#229), and Cowboy Bill's Patio Bar (#243) before this most recent permutation. This would be the 12th Hop at this complex. Ridiculous.

But a Hop's a Hop, so, fortified by the sixty seconds of Wander Mode over that half-block walk, I followed my compatriots into these familiar digs.

I was happy to see, though, that they list themselves on the brochure with an Angela Street address: 425 Angela, to be precise. This make so much more sense. Anyone

looking for any of the above occupants on Duval Street would have surely given up and gone elsewhere. No wonder they went under, by thunder.

So, yes. We are here. Ocean Blue. If that sounds familiar, it's probably because Hop #170 was Jimmy's Ocean Blue, the outdoor hut bar at Hyatt Beach Club. That one seemed like an unnamed bar in association with a food service, so I wondered if this would feel more integrated.

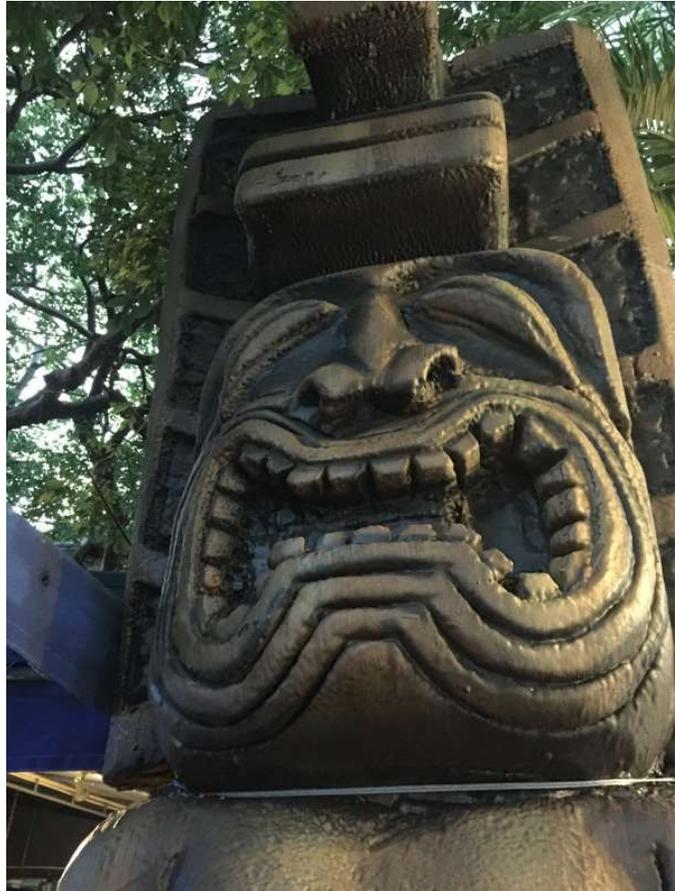
Grasping integration was beyond me at this point, though. Grasping my cup of beer was taking much of my focus.



I did notice some new decorations in the otherwise same-old alley, most obvious of which was the big Tiki dude.

This seemed like overkill, but what the heck, better over than under, some say. It must have been quite a job to haul this big bugga in here. I wondered if he was made of chocolate. I bet Jan wondered that too. She digs chocolate.

Now, I gotta be honest and say that I remember nothing else about this Hop. Not a damn thing. If I hadn't taken those pictures, I wouldn't have a clue that we were ever here. The evening and night were too full of other stuff to keep our brief visit in my besieged memory. In fact, I initially disqualified the Ocean Blue Hop for scant info. The plan was to return sometime for a proper Hop.



Trouble was – anyone? anyone? – yes, Ocean Blue went the way of its predecessors: under. I'm not sure when, but it couldn't have been very long. They still thrive at Hyatt on the northeasternmost tip of the island, but they bailed from here after only a short stay.

Thus, Hop 256. Ocean Blue, you were grand while we knew ye.