



Bangkok is famous for its nightlife and there is no shortage of options. But the nightlife haunt currently ranked No. 1 Night Bangkok Attraction by the influential TripAdvisor website might come as a surprise. Even more so in that it is even included in Trip Advisor's Top 20 Hidden Gems across their entire world wide-listings.

The venue in question isn't the latest concept night club, high-end restaurant or Skybar: it's been around since the late 1950s. Originally named The Copa, it boasts of being Bangkok's oldest continuously operating bar & nightclub, predating the infamous Vietnam R&R period. Indeed, built on the site of Thailand's original ice works, it claims to have stood on the same place since it was still surrounded by paddy fields.. and yet it sits the top of a pile of 70 night attractions that people have written about and critically reviewed.

Checkinn99 is hard to locate (as a hidden gem should be!) and its name can throw you off the scent. It's not a hotel but you will find it by looking directly opposite the Landmark Hotel on Sukhumvit Rd about 30 metres from the corner of Soi 5, down a 'hole in the wall' alley you can easily saunter past

But stumble inside and you will find an original Bangkok nightclub featuring a talented house band, an original teakwood bar, small but proper dance floor, low tables and well worn, wicker arm chairs with ample space around them and welcoming service minded staff.

The venue's staff is touted as a big family, with the head waiter having worked there nearly as long as it has been open, and the "new" waiter, head cook and cashier having clocked up nearly 30 years.

As for the most recognizable face of the establishment it is that of Mama Noi who admits to being over 70 and commenced working at the venue in 1960. The enigmatic lady, a classic Thai beauty in her day, once entertained legendary US comedian Bob Hope among several famous Vietnam R&R entertainers who dropped by and is still known to welcome a chat with inquisitive visitors. Nor does she mind highlighting the various bar mementos and showing the restaurant's photo albums so you can pick up a sense of the history of the place.

Owner and Manager Chris, meanwhile, was described by one TA reviewer as "the friendliest, most positive person I've met in Thailand." The reviewer added: "He has the rare gift to stream his love for this place and make you feel at home before you know it." Chris, an Aussie, and his Thai wife took over the bar three years ago in a run-down state after being abandoned by its previous owners. They signed a lease just hours before it was due to be demolished, restored it to its original condition and turned it around.

Besides its convenient location moments from Nana BTS, the reason for Checkinn99's popularity is undoubtedly its extensive live music programme, cabaret style entertainment and welcoming old-style feel.

Inside is a relaxing, comfortable, hassle free environment that Thais, tourists, and local expats alike flock to. For an evening of live music, dancing and dining there are few better deals for singles, couples or groups.

A highlight is an excellent nightly happy-hour acoustic music session between 6-8.30pm, followed every night by the international class Philippine House band "Music of the Heart" from 8.30pm until 1.30am.



Remarkably, this talented band comprises three generations of the same family. Together they deliver 5 sets of high energy entertainment every night. The nightly music programme ranges from top 40 covers to golden oldies, customer sing-along's and even old time or romantic dancing. There are few song requests that the band can't respond to.

Checkinn99 also hosts Jazz on Sukhumvit open mic jazz jam sessions from 2-6pm every Sunday afternoon that attract some of Bangkok's very best local and visiting musicians who have made it a weekly haunt.

Checkinn99 also often holds weekend party theme nights where staff and band have fun with a costume theme.

On a monthly basis Checkinn99 puts on energizing live musical show such as Grease, Blues Brothers, Andrews Sisters, Casablanca nights and most recently a complete Rocky Horror Show. They will perform the Moulin Rouge musical scheduled in February. Every evening's programme includes hourly cabaret style entertainment sets with choreographed dance routines.

Western authors of Bangkok based fiction have also adopted Checkinn as their preferred venue for book launches and readings even using Checkinn itself in their plots. The next such event Bangkok Fiction Night of Noir is on 5 January 2014. Never closing its doors around the year, its small mezzanine restaurant offers home-style Western, European, and Thai menu choices.

The food is reasonably priced and very tasty with the Chateaubriand and steak menu being highly popular with regulars. Moreover, the drinks prices accommodate the budget conscious with 199 Baht for a 1 litre jug of draft beer. A range of higher priced cocktails, imported beers and spirits being popular as there is no cover charge or hidden costs. One travel reviewer remarked: *"Despite the initial impression from the dimly lit entrance at the start of the alley that it might be a bit sleazy, once inside and the eyes have adjusted this is not the case at all. It is friendly and has more of a supper club feel than a bar."*

Another remarked: *"The service from the staff is excellent, the food varied & very good, & of good value. The group, 4 singing girls in their mid-30, had the place rocking with mainly good old English favourites & a bit of audience participation - well worth a visit!"*

The busiest time is usually 10pm onwards - but most stage side tables are booked by 8.30pm so booking through the website is recommended.