

# Karma comes back around in Karon

With the low season kicking in, most of the clubs are winding down. Some will be closing their doors, others will be toning down the caliber of acts they are booking. For those left on the island for the "Big Low", there are quiet times ahead. With fewer new faces passing through, now is the perfect time to explore the island's live music scene – yes, Phuket does have a live music scene.

While Bangkok offers indie, electro and all things in between, the scene on Phuket is very different. Musicians don't come to play in Phuket because it's cool or because they expect to be signed to Sony BMG; they come here to play music because it's what they enjoy doing. You'll find fewer trendy haircuts than in the city, but there is an unmistakable vibe that has all the hallmarks of a genuine jam session.

You may have heard of Karma Lounge in Karon; it's had a colorful history. At present, Karma Lounge serves as a hub for the island's dedicated jammers.

Owner and manager Reinhard Haiber is an unmistakable character. Beneath the powerhouse-like exterior of someone who might well have competed in the World's Strongest Man competition is a music lover who has a penchant for everything from jazz and blues to... trance.

So what does Karma Lounge have to offer? In addition to drinks, seats and space to dance, Karma Lounge has soul, brother – and lots of it. The bar opens out onto the street, so you can hear the music long before you set foot inside.

The crowd is always a hodgepodge of locals and expats, long-stayers and tourists, all out for a good time. The music



Harry K belts one out with the mic while Colin 'Illy' Hill (back, left) jams with the band at Karma Lounge.

Photo by Dan Miles.

breezes through jazz, real rock 'n' roll, blues and even the odd ballad.

The stars of the show are the musical performers, who represent a broad cross section of the island's population.

On any given night you can never be sure who might show up to flex their musical muscles. While not quite an open house in terms of who supplies the musical moods, jammers are welcome to show up and do their thing – and if the other musicians and Reinhard approve, a beautiful relationship might blossom.

The musicians at Karma

Lounge are all long-time music aficionados. Aussie Colin "Illy" Hill has more than just flowing blond locks and a collection of wild shirts to his name. He has 35 years' experience as a pro guitarist under his belt, having performed more than 9,000 times around in the world.

As enthusiastic as a small child with a new toy, it was clear from the light in his eyes while talking about his excitement for the local music scene just how much Colin enjoys playing at Karma Lounge.

Joining him on some nights is Harry K, who says he was "brought up by the world of rock". Another Aussie, Harry may have shaved off his once-prolific mass

of hair, but he can still rock a venue. Harry is an accomplished vocalist who also holds a residency in Tai Pan. Like Colin, he had nothing but positive words to say about Phuket's live music scene.

Other vocalists who often join the fray are Karen Adkins-Beresford, a long-time Phuket resident who can wail it out with the best of them, and Phuket's own soul diva Bonnie Andersen.

This combination of musicians is only the beginning of the depth of talent on hand at Karma Lounge every

week. While the whole concept isn't going to set the world on fire, it doesn't matter, because it's not intended to. These guys are there to have fun and nothing more.

If you have a case of the low-season blues, then all you need might be a dose of, well, low-season blues, rock and jazz.

As the nights wear on and the drinks flow, the musicians usually take a back seat and chill out while Reinhard

unleashes his passion for trance music on an unsuspecting crowd of revelers.

A big fan of superstar-DJ Tiesto, Reinhard is certainly fond of a diverse range of musical genres.

So there you have it. There are places such as Rock City (and Rock City 2), where you can stock up on nostalgia, there are Thai clubs such as Blue Marina and KorTorMor, where you can hear what the kids are into, and now there's Karma Lounge, where laid-back musicians hang out and jam just 'cos they can.

Karma Lounge is on the corner of Patak Rd and Luang Pho Chuan Rd, Karon. Tel: 076-396733 Email karma lounge2003@yahoo.com

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By Matt Crook

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