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Hotel ditches nightstand Bibles for 'spiritual menu'

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Visitors to Hotel Preston won't find the Holy Bible in their nightstand.

Instead, travelers will have to call room service to order it from a "spiritual menu," which will include other literary offerings like the Book of Mormon, the Quran and books on Scientology, said Dina Nishioka, public relations director for Hotel Preston.

Oregon-based Provenance Hotels, which owns the Hotel Preston, is breaking away from a longstanding tradition of placing Bibles from Gideons

International in its rooms. The goal is to offer variety to travelers who aren't Christians or to visitors looking to learn about a different faith, Nishioka said.

"Our guests come from different places and they definitely come from different cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, so we want everyone to feel welcomed and comfortable," Nishioka said.

Brian Ruf, president of the Travel and Tourism Research Association, said the idea of a spiritual menu is so "leading edge" that the international organization has not done research that would show whether Hotel Preston is on the cusp of a trend. Ruf said he thinks the switch might be politically controversial but said travelers with a more international perspective might appreciate it.

"They obviously have made an observation about the segment of the market they want to go after and it's a calculated risk," Ruf said.

'Only positive feedback'

Hotel Preston has been in the spotlight recently for its unconventional marketing techniques.

Owners put the one-time Radisson through a makeover in 2004 and now visitors to the 200-room hotel are offered complimentary pet fish, rubber duckies and lava lamps for their rooms, as well as a pillow menu. Most recently, as part of a living art display, Hotel Preston began hiring young women to take turns wearing pink lingerie and living in a glass-plated mock hotel room in a corner of the hotel's cocktail lounge.

Hotel Preston and the four others owned by Provenance Hotels are so-called boutique hotels that have mushroomed across the country in recent

years. They target a hipster clientele, with trendy furniture, amenities and entertainment options.

The laminated spiritual menus will be rolled out in the next three to four weeks.

Gideons International spokesman Steve Smith said the Nashville-based organization had not heard of the change at Hotel Preston, and would not comment on "issues regarding Scripture distributions." The Gideons organization has been distributing Bibles since 1908.

A team of Provenance managers came up with the spiritual menu's lineup, Nishioka said, which will feature the King James Version of the Bible and the New American Bible, the Torah, the Quran, the Tao Te Ching, The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, the Book of Mormon, books on Scientology and Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu text.

"We've only had positive feedback because we've included the Bible and we've actually added on to it to have two versions. I think we've made everybody happy," she said.

'An opportunity for all'

Joe McInerney, president and CEO of the American Hotel and Lodging Associa-

tion, said this is the first time he has heard of a spiritual menu, but he thinks Hotel Preston's managers made a good business decision.

"If they want to be ecumenical, that's a great way to do it," McInerney said. "It's taking a positive look at a thing that has been commonplace. What could be wrong with it if they're providing an opportunity for all religions to read their scripture?"

According to a 2006 survey by the American Hotel and Lodging Association, the number of religious texts provided in hotels is going up each year, with 9 of 10 American hotels touting some sort of religious material.

The increase could be attributed to the rising number of hotels that are built each year, McInerney said.

Gideons International sends Bibles every time a new hotel is built, he said.

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