

Trendy hotel swaps bedside Bibles for 'spiritual menu'

A hotel in Nashville will be the first known in the US to remove the standard Holy Bible from its rooms and replace it with a "spiritual menu" that includes other religious books such as the Koran and books on Scientology, a Tennessee newspaper reported Tuesday.

Hotel Preston, a boutique owned by Oregon-based Provenance Hotels, will require guests to call room service to order their religious book of choice, according to The Tennessean.

The religious book list includes the Book of Mormon, the Koran, the Torah, the Tao Te Ching, The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, Bhagavad Gita (a Hindu text), books on Scientology, as well as the King James and New American Bible versions.

The hotel says its goal is to accommodate travellers who are not Christian and those interested in other faiths

"Our guests come from different places and they definitely come from different cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, so we want everyone to feel welcomed and comfortable," said Dina Nishioka, public relations director for Hotel Preston, according to The Tennessean.

Brian Ruf, president of the Travel and Tourism Research Association, said the concept of a spiritual menu is so new that the international organisation has not conducted research on it yet.

Yet offering a spiritual menu means breaking the long held tradition of a Gideons Bible in the nightstand of every American hotel room.

Gideons International, founded in 1899, has distributed millions of Bibles in hotels. In 1898, two Christian businessmen met by chance in a hotel and held a Bible study together. A year later they along with a third man founded Gideons to help meet the religious needs of the travelling public.

Now in the twenty-first century, Bibles are increasingly missing from hotel rooms and are replaced by other comforts such as an iPod docking station, a flat-screen TV, a selection of underground music, a complimentary goldfish, or in some an 'intimacy' kit.

In the trendy New York City Soho Grand Hotel, for example, Bibles have never been offered in guest rooms. According to Newsweek, the Sofitel hotel brand recently removed Bibles from guest rooms after clients questioned why other religious texts were not available.

"The absence of Gideons Bibles from an increasing number of hotel rooms tells us something about the secularisation, sexualisation, and extreme sensitivities of our age," Dr R Albert Mohler Jr, president of the Southern Baptist Theological

"The fact is that many persons have come to faith in Jesus Christ by reading a Bible supplied to their hotel room by the Gideons," Mohler said. "Many others have turned to the Bible when in crisis. Some have even decided against suicide when they read from the Gideon's Bible.

"Are they now to look for salvation and solace from an iPod docking station or a goldfish?" the prominent theologian questioned.

Since 2001, the number of luxury hotels with religious materials in rooms has dropped by 18 per cent, according to the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

Mohler called the development a reminder of the "tremendous cultural" and "moral change" taking place in society.

In 2004, Hotel Preston underwent a makeover from a traditional Radisson hotel to a trendy boutique hotel that offers complimentary pet fish, rubber duckies, lava lamps and a pillow menu.

The hotel also recently held a provocative live art display which hired young women to take turns wearing pink lingerie and live in a glass mock hotel room in the corner of the hotel's cocktail lounge.

The spiritual menu will be launched in the next three to four weeks.