

# Orlando Sentinel Sunday

REACHING 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE WEEKLY IN PRINT AND ONLINE

## Hotels book more religious options

By ROSE FRENCH  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Leave your Bhagavad-Gita at home while traveling out of town?

If you're staying at the Hotel Preston, you can get a copy of this ancient Hindu text for your room from a "spiritual menu" that includes the Quran, the Bible and other religious texts.

Provenance Hotels, which owns Nashville's Hotel Preston and four other boutique hotels, is part of a new trend in the hospitality industry: appealing to visitors from a wide variety of cultural and religious backgrounds by going beyond tucking a Gideon Bible in guestroom nightstands.

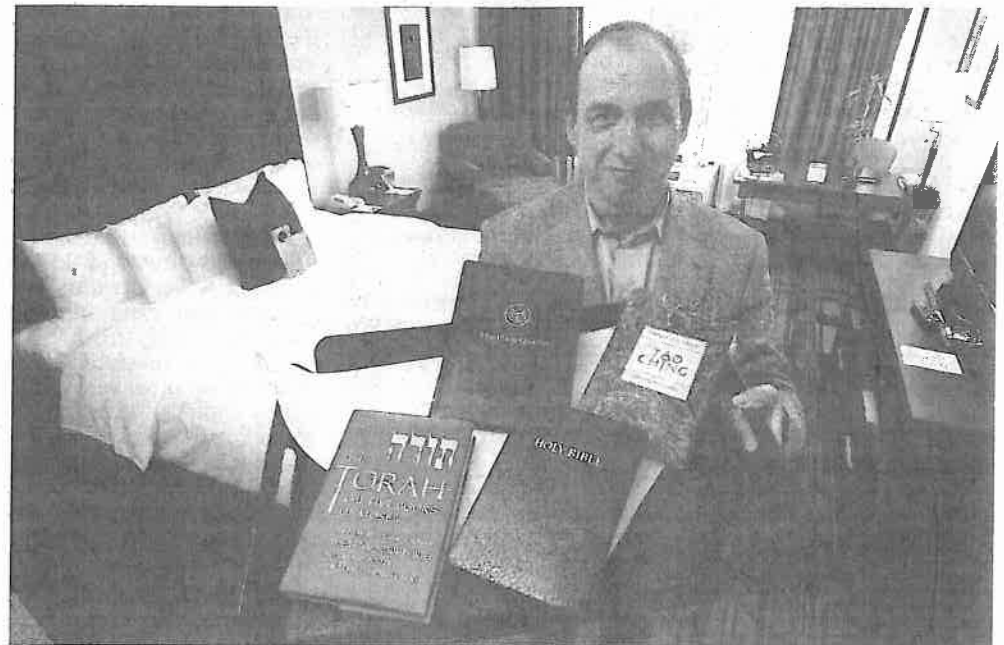
"One of the emerging things we started to hear on a regular basis from guests was a need for spiritual offerings other than just the Bible," says Howard Jacobs, chief operating officer for Provenance Hotels, based in Oregon. "In all of our cities, there's a growing international draw. Within the U.S., there's so many people from other countries coming to work here or for leisure travel."

The overwhelming majority of hotels offer religious materials in their guestrooms, according to a 2008 survey by the American Hotel & Lodging Association. Researchers didn't ask what texts were provided, but the best known is the Gideon Bible.

The Gideons International, a nondenominational evangelical ministry run by businessmen, began the practice of leaving Bibles in hotel rooms a century ago.

Its early founders and members were traveling salesmen who "wanted [to spiritually] nurture themselves and to help others who desired the same," says Mark Noll, an expert in religious history at the University of Notre Dame.

"They were aware of temptations to immoral behavior on the road, and they thought the Bible would be a good



BILL WAUGH/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Howard Jacobs, chief operating officer for Provenance Hotels, displays a serving of spiritual texts the company offers in a room at the Preston Hotel in Nashville, Tenn.

**“ One of the emerging things we started to hear on a regular basis from guests was a need for spiritual offerings other than just the Bible.”**

— HOWARD JACOBS, PROVENANCE HOTELS

counterweight to that,” Noll says.

But while the U.S. population today remains overwhelmingly Christian, many other faiths, including Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, have a significant presence in the country.

The Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City, N.J., which opened in 2003, offers the Bible and several other religious works in its lobby.

Niki Leondakis, chief operating officer with Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants based in San Francisco, says the chain's 42 boutique hotels began to offer a range of spiritual texts in addition to the Bible nearly a year ago. Every hotel has at least four spiritual texts: the Old and New Testaments,

the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Mormon, and Buddhist text. Many other hotels in the chain offer close to a dozen options.

Leondakis says the hotels have received only a few requests for the books so far. Still, she says that, "offering a menu that includes as many philosophies and beliefs and spiritual perspectives was much more in keeping with the culture of our company."

At Hotel Preston, among the other books offered are the Book of Mormon, Buddhist texts, the Chinese Tao Te Ching and the Hebrew Bible. Guests can choose from the works on a laminated "menu" in their rooms and then call the front desk to request a copy.

The concept of diversity is

not entirely new. The Marriott hotel chain, which was founded by Mormon businessmen, many years ago began offering the Book of Mormon in addition to the Gideon Bible. However, few other hotel chains offered any broader choices in the U.S. before now.

The Gideons, who rarely speak to reporters about their work, did not respond to a request for comment. Noll says that the trend of offering more religious texts in hotels "sounds to me like a tribute to the Gideons."

The Gideon Bible still has a place of prominence in at least one of Provenance's hotels — Hotel Preston in Nashville, the home of Gideons International, and offices of several major Christian groups, including the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Methodist Church.

"It was important here... to have that offering in every room, but we also offer the spiritual menu," Jacobs says. "Gideon still is really the anchor text across all hotels."