

TRAVEL | OFF DUTY TRAVEL

An Underwater Library and Other Hotel Amenities for Determined Bookworms

From Miami to Cape Cod, 6 hotels and resorts with unconventional book collections and reading programs



PUMP UP THE VOLUME The library at the Jefferson hotel in Washington, D.C., which favors vintage editions.

By Kelsey Ogletree

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YEARS AGO, Jane Ubell-Meyer found herself dumped by a boyfriend while vacationing together in St. Maarten. The only thing that saved her trip? A book, namely “Cry to Heaven” by Anne Rice. In 2017, Ms. Ubell-Meyer, a former celebrity-gift-bag consultant, turned her lifesaver into a business called Bedside Reading. Each month, the company selects books for more than two dozen hotels, with collections tailored to the property’s clientele. Conrad New York, for example, offers business books, while lifestyle hotels like the James New York—SoHo include some racier options (i.e., “Vicious” by L.J. Shen). For guests, the books are complimentary, and housekeeping replaces them until stock runs out—and fresh titles arrive the following month. Almost all the books get taken, said Ms. Ubell-Meyer.

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That’s a good sign,

BEDTIME STORY One of the books offered to guests at Boston’s Hotel Commonwealth.

considering the latest stats on reading: Fewer than 18% of adults reported reading for pleasure daily in 2018, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—an all-time low. But a number of hotels, and not just those that participate in the Bedside Reading program, cater to traveling bookworms. Some pride themselves on enormous libraries, such as Hakone Honbako, which opened in Hakone, Japan last year, with more than 10,000 tomes (though few are in English). Other places take a more old-fashioned approach, including Curtain Bluff in Antigua, with a

breezy open-air library organized around the simple “take a book, leave a book” premise. “When you immerse yourself in their world, that’s the real vacation,” said Ms. Ubell-Meyer. Here, a few other bookish hotels, as well as recommended reading:

The Gates Hotel

Key West, Fla.

Why read by the pool when you can read in the pool? Last year, the Gates Hotels debuted an underwater library. Created by Bibliobath on synthetic paper made from polypropylene, the collection includes waterproof and tear-resistant classics such as “Macbeth” and short stories by Mark Twain. So, now, at long last, you can quote Lady Macbeth while playing Marco Polo. *From \$267 a night, gateshotelkeywest.com*

Book pick: “Wild Milk” by Sabrina Orah Mark. “The stories are a crazy mix of surreal, funny, heartbreaking and serious,” said Lee Sheehan, area director of sales and marketing.

Acqualina Resort & Residences

Miami, Fla.

Guests tote the Bedside Reading books from the beach to the pool to hammocks around the resort. Some authors such as Michelle Tillis Lederman lead book discussions for guests; and, for kids, there’s a monthly Story Hour in the library. *From \$700 a night, acqualinaresort.com*

Book pick: “Finding Mrs. Ford” by Deborah Goodrich Royce. “I love thrillers, and this one kept me on the edge,” said Alexandra Wensley, the resort’s vice president of communications.

The Jefferson

Washington, D.C.

The hotel library stocks leather-bound books on Thomas Jefferson’s favorite subjects (including ornithology and philosophy), and at the Michelin-starred Plume, solo diners can pluck a book from the shelf above the bar. The hotel also donates a book to a child for every room reserved through DC Public Library Foundation’s partnership with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. *From \$327 a night, jeffersondc.com*

Book pick: “Brunelleschi’s Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture” by Ross King. “It’s a nonfiction book that reads like a movie script,” said Susan Sullivan Lagon, hotel historian.

Chatham Bars Inn

Chatham, Mass.

In January, this Cape Cod inn with its own library of a few hundred books hosted its first Literary Weekend, where author Casey Sherman led writing workshops. *From about \$295 a night, chathambarsinn.com*

Book pick: “Where the Crawdads Sing” by Delia Owens. “I love when a book captures my attention from the first sentence,” said Coleen Traynor, library consultant for the inn.

Kimpton Hotel Arras

Asheville, N.C.

There are loaner books throughout the lobby, but you can also grab one by a local author—such as “Haunted Asheville” by Joshua P. Warren—off the hotel’s Serenity Cart, which wheels around in the evening. *From \$179 a night, hotelarras.com*

Book pick: “Becoming” by Michelle Obama. “It gave me insight into the lives of some of today’s most historical figures and their struggles,” said Michael-David Carpenter, the hotel’s guest experience manager.

Hotel Commonwealth

Boston

The Reading Suite has its own book nook, literature-inspired memorabilia and 50 titles signed by authors who have stayed at the hotel. All rooms are replenished with fresh books each

month, and guests can tune into Bedside Reading’s new podcast, featuring conversations with authors, streaming through room TVs. *From \$190 a night, hotelcommonwealth.com*

Book pick: “Non Obvious Mega Trends” by Rohit Bhargava. “The power to identify trends that are just percolating below the surface can be transformative,” said Adam Smith, the hotel’s general manager.

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