



Welcome to the *Handyman France Annual Awards 2016* for countries sending the cleanest, dirtiest, most awkward, most helpful, most daft, most humorous and generally egregious tourists to France. Several countries are notable by their absence, particularly Germany, Ireland and The Netherlands.

This year's nominees are -

Australia
Belgium
Canada
France
Spain
Switzerland
UK
USA

None of the following is anything but true. Nothing has been invented or exaggerated. Identities and locations have, as always, been omitted to protect the guilty.

The Derek and Clive (I'm going to complain) Award goes to an Australian couple who did nothing but moan about almost everything from the moment they arrived. They didn't even have time to say 'hello' before starting on their list of adverse comments. They complained that the iPod player had an old style docking station, despite not actually having an iPod to plug into it. She checked the quality of the fabric in the curtains and was unimpressed. The dishwasher didn't work, she said – but then admitted she didn't know how to use it. The coffee machine wasn't good enough for her. She doubted that the microwave even worked. The meet and greet, which on a good day can be done in as little as 20-30 minutes, took over one and a half hours. Somewhat bizarrely, they wrote a positive review when they left.

The Head Office Seal of Approval for clean and tidy goes to a UK couple who left the house absolutely spotless. When I say UK, I really mean Yorkshire, but I think it still counts...

...and probably explains why they (she in particular) waxed so lyrical about a shopping trip to Jonquera and le Perthus, though I think he took the view that they couldn't afford to save so much money. A special *Abba "Money Money Money" Award* for them. A lovely couple who we hope will visit again.

The Steptoe Award for the dirtiest guests goes to... no one! All properties this year were left in good order. This has never happened before, and whilst it's most welcome it's also slightly worrying that perhaps we are being led into a false sense of security for 2017.

The Stranglers (Hanging Around) Award goes to UK. Knowing that I was waiting for them, but unable to contact me, they took the scenic route and so arrived 2 hours late. Not a word of apology. They refused to use the pool safety cover, saying that they couldn't be bothered even to read the

instructions, and that if a child were to drown in the pool it wouldn't be their fault as the kid shouldn't be there. To be fair, the house was clean when they left, and the pool cover was re-fitted, so it could have been a lot worse.

A unique award for UK – *The Squeeze* (“*This Summer we've pulled all the sheets off the bed*”) Award. Four brand new pillows, fitted bedsheets amongst other stuff taken from the house.

The Status Quo (Dirty Water) Award. The jacuzzi was filthy, with a tide mark that made it look as though it hadn't been cleaned for weeks. The filters were so dirty it took twenty minutes to clean them instead of the usual five, and the water needed to be changed ahead of schedule. British.

Last, but by no means least the annual *Albert Einstein Award* goes to the US. Because the house in question has very old wooden floors, use of bath mats is essential and is always mentioned during the meet and greet. The guest needed a demonstration on how to put the bath mat on the floor. The supreme irony is that the recipient is a professor of physics.

2016 has been a somewhat strange year. It's tempting to conclude that the downturn in numbers eliminated the customary 'lunatic fringe', but closer examination of the figures fails to support that. It has always been the case that around 1.5% of all guests cause us real problems, a figure that has remained constant this year, though the challenges presented to us have been slightly different.