



Drum-roll please! It's time for the Handyman France Annual Awards for nations sending the most (and least) demanding, difficult, helpful, stupid, dirty and untidy tourists to France. Plus a couple of one-off awards to reflect the more, shall we say, unusual people...

The nominations in all categories are –  
America – Australia – Belgium – Canada – China - France – Germany – Ireland –  
Netherlands - New Zealand – Spain - UK

The Charles Penrose “Laughing Policeman” Award for good humour goes to, of all places, Germany. A German couple laughed all through the meeting and greeting; they were still laughing two days later when I visited to install a new pump in the pool; and they were still laughing four days after that when I cleaned the pool. I have no idea what or who they were laughing at. It couldn't have been me. Could it...?

The Watchtower Award – USA. A group of Jehovah's Witnesses, whom I needed to visit for some maintenance on the house, tried to recruit me. How ironic is that? I knocked on *their* door...

The Preparation H Award for the biggest pain in the bum – Britain. Belgium was a close contender, mostly due to a family who insisted on constantly resetting the valves and timer on the pool, but the British beat them to it. A family who were, it seems, not only afraid of the dark but also of daylight. They left every light on all night - and all day as well. As the house has a temperamental system of solar panels and batteries, they suffered power cuts nearly every night and expected me to wave a magic wand. No amount of explaining made any difference.

The Beatles (We Can Work It Out) Award – UK. Same house as above, same nationality, different family. For the two weeks they were there, no problems. I didn't even hear from them. He actually enjoyed the challenge of managing the temperamental electrical system.

The Auf Wiedersehen, Pet (Gissa a Job) Award – UK. One British holidaymaker found clearing leaves out of the pool with the net so therapeutic he spent his entire holiday doing just that.

The Shaggy ('It Wasn't Me') Award. (Shaggy is a pop singer/rap artiste - apparently). UK. These British guests managed to block the pool filter with ice-cream wrappers; failed to put the overflowing bins out for collection; left the house absolutely filthy; and broke the front gates. When they were informed that they had lost their damage deposit, their indignation was 'not about the money' but about 'being accused of things they hadn't done'. Yeah, right.

The Albert Einstein Award – USA. I had to visit one guest not just once, but twice, to show him how to open and close a window.

Head Office Seal of Approval for clean & tidy people – for the second year, Belgium. USA is the runner-up again.

Steptoe Award for dirtiest/untidiest- UK (for the second year). In particular, the family who left two overflowing wheelie bins inside the house when they departed – on the bin collection day.

The Derek & Clive Award for bad language – UK. The same family that won the Steptoe Award. Message left in the guest-book read “F\*\*\*\*\*g lovely”. The page had to be removed, giving the impression to following guests that an adverse comment had been made. Utterly irresponsible...

The Hyacinth Bucket Award for most difficult/demanding – French with no clear contender. In particular, the French family who arrived two hours late and denied sending an email saying they would arrive at 3 pm. Even showing them the printed email was met with complete denial. They continued arguing about it for the whole two weeks they were here.

The Castlemaine Award for not giving a XXXX about anything – USA with Belgium close second. The Americans are generally not as demanding as you'd imagine.

All of which just goes to prove that whilst national stereotypes do indeed exist, there's always exceptions. Human nature has no respect for national boundaries.

The overwhelming majority of guests are perfectly normal and totally reasonable. The truly difficult people are few – each year it amounts to around 1.5% of the total. It is usually the larger groups that cause problems with the house being left in poor condition, particularly when there are two or more families sharing. The emergence of the leader of the pack (usually the matriarch) is less defined, so the 'normal' last minute instructions issued by the leader ('you, empty the bins; you, strip the beds...' etc.) simply doesn't happen. Unless, of course, one of the ladies compares to Head Office. Then we all do as we're told. Though for some reason she still seems to think that 'yes dear' is a challenge to her authority...

You may think that much of the above is either invented by me, or not truly representative because the British tend to fair badly simply because they are the majority of tourists we meet. Neither is true. I couldn't invent the episodes listed here. And by nationality, we meet more Americans than any other.

And of course, this is only our take on tourism. The owners of a B&B we know says that, for instance, the French are the least demanding. Aren't people wonderful...