



Welcome to the **Handyman France Annual Awards, 2018**. This is where we take a light-hearted look at the holidaymakers we have met during the year, and award those countries that send tourists who are the cleanest, dirtiest, most helpful, most awkward, most miserable and those with any other notable qualities that deserve to be immortalised with a prestigious award. The vast majority of people we encounter are eminently forgettable because they are, well, extremely average. These awards are for the strangely consistent 1.5% of guests who cause problems as well as those who will remain forever in our memories for their harmless eccentricities.

As always, locations and identities are concealed to protect the guilty. Nothing has been invented or even exaggerated, because there is no need to.

Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, a German Field Marshal in the second half of the 19th century, said that *"No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy"*. (Actually, he probably said *"Kein schlachtplan überlebt den ersten kontakt mit dem feind"*, but let's not be too pedantic.) He had a distinct advantage over **Handyman France**, as he almost certainly knew who the enemy was. We have never been able to quite figure it out.

The nominees in all categories for awards in 2018 are -

Antigua
Australia
Belgium
Canada
el Salvador
France
Holland
Ireland
Norway
Spain
UK
USA

So in no particular order, here we go...

A Dutch family's holiday was made perfect by the simple fact that they had UK Freesat TV, and especially that repeats of *Are You Being Served?* were being shown. They win the **I'm Free! Award**. The house was also very clean and tidy, so perhaps another one-off '**Well done everybody - you've all done very well!**' Award.

An elderly American visitor clearly had very poor eyesight. Whether it would have improved had he worn his glasses rather than carrying them isn't known. I thought this was the reason he had a tendency to walk into things. Big things. Like walls. When I pointed out a few hazards that he should be aware of, he explained that he had a problem with his feet. Not a verruca or ingrowing toenails. Oh no. He said he didn't always know for certain quite where his feet were. Or what they were doing. Or where they were taking him. So we were somewhat surprised when he asked if there was somewhere local for him to go running. The only place we could think of was beside the river... For this utterly charming old chap, the **Blame it on the Boogie (I just can't control my feet) Award**.

An Australian group commented that a bedside light didn't work. It did work, but only when it was plugged in. The microwave didn't cook anything – well, it wouldn't when it was on the defrost setting, would it? And they said the vegetable steamer didn't work properly either. It did, though we don't know why they had a problem with it – other than they seemed to find anything electrical somewhat mysterious. They win an **Electric Light Orchestra 'Strange Magic' Award**.

July 2018 was apparently the third hottest in France since Adam was a lad. In hot weather, we tend to not put duvets in covers during changeovers (but leave them available). A couple of families actually put them back in and used them, despite overnight temperatures never dropping below 30° at the time. But there's a very special **Tom Jones and Cerys Matthews** (of Catatonia) **'Baby it's Cold Outside' Award** for a UK family who turned on the central heating. In the third week of July.

Guests sometimes complain about the silliest of things, but wallpaper peeling at the joints? Nationality not certain, but possibly Canadian. All we can think of is a **Pink Floyd 'Another Pr*ck in the Wall' Award**. (With apologies to Pink Floyd for what must be one of the most tired jokes of all time.)

The Head Office Seal of Approval is shared this year between UK and France. Two Welsh ladies left the property in exceptionally good order; a group of six ladies from UK also left the property in excellent order; and a French family managed to attain similar standards as well.

(Perhaps I should explain the term 'Head Office' in this context. It means The Wife, aka Wossername.)

A British couple complained about 'thousands' of ants in the kitchen of a third floor apartment. I went there with ant poison etc, and saw just two ants. They later demanded a 100% refund because the 'problem' totally ruined their holiday. An **Adam and the Ants 'Stand and Deliver' Award** for them.

The annual **Steptoe Award** for the grubbiest guests is a little different this year because it goes to guests in a property where we do not actually do the cleaning. This English family apparently complained at some length to the owner about how dirty the house was when they arrived, but left it filthy when they departed several days early. Whilst I only do the pool at this property, I know the cleaner well enough to know that their complaints were almost certainly unfounded. But the explanation for the complaint is probably because...

... they also win a special **Always Look on the Bright Side of Life Award** because they were, well, just plain miserable. To be fair, they gave me a cup of tea when I arrived to do the pool, but in what little conversation I had with them, everything was a problem. And if anything wasn't a problem, it soon will be. I asked if they were having a good time. The doleful reply was, "It's alright." I quickly reached the conclusion that the difference between them and a battery is that a battery has a positive side. This family of four made not a sound while I was there for nearly an hour - no banter, no chatting between themselves, and certainly no laughter. Not even a smile. I was tempted to say, "You're on holiday - have a day off!" But I don't think it would have made any difference...

A boiler problem at one property meant the plumber needed to attend, and despite assurances from the guests that they would be in, they were not there when he arrived. But it wasn't a problem. The plumber simply climbed through a wide open downstairs window and wandered around looking for the boiler. At every meet and greet we conduct we always emphasise the need to secure the property when guests go out. It's common sense. So this British family win **The Hollies 'Look Through Any Window' Award**.

A British family filled a complete page of the guest book with not just a day-by-day account of their holiday, but almost hour-by-hour. Such gems as 'drove on the wrong side of the road today'; 'went into town and bought some bread'; and much other inane, Facebook type stuff. They win **ELO's 'The Diary of Horace Wimp' Award**.

There were early contenders for the annual **Einstein Award** from a couple of countries, but the US sent in their people (albeit a bit late, but why break with tradition?) and take the trophy by a considerable margin. It started with an email saying he had arrived at the airport with no clue as to who he was or why he was contacting me - because he had no idea which house he was booked in to. It took several emails from him to establish which property he was on he way to. (Fortunately for him, at least the pilot knew which country to land in.) Quite how he found the house is a mystery. After a day or two, he contacted us to say he was too hot in bed, and could he have a sheet instead of the duvet (the owners of this house insist that duvets are always put on the beds). It hadn't occurred to him that all he had to do was simply remove the duvet from the cover. But the thing that clinched his success in claiming the **Einstein Award** was the fact that after he left, he reported a toilet was not working 'most of the time' he was there. I checked it. The plumber who installed it checked it. The cleaner checked it. No fault was found. It was functioning perfectly. He clearly didn't know, and couldn't figure out, how to flush a toilet [sigh]. Now I'm not Listerine** (in fact, I quite like Americans) but we're giving way to national stereotyping and also awarding him a very special **Bruce Springsteen 'Born in the USA' Award**.

*** (Perhaps I should explain the term 'Listerine' in this context. An American is a Yank. In rhyming slang, a Yank is a septic tank, normally abbreviated to septic. So anti American = anti Yank = anti septic = Listerine. Got it?)*

UK has scooped the majority of the awards this year. Shame that most of them are nothing to brag about.

Oh well, roll on next year... [sigh]