

Smiths Abound



According to [Wikipedia](#), Smith is the most common surname in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, and second only to Li in Canada. It is the fifth most common surname in Ireland. Worldwide there are about 5 million Smiths; data on how many live in the U.S. is conflicting, but at least 2.4 million. Therefore, it's not surprising that people who bear the surname Smith have chosen to have their own holiday on January 6.



The event seems to have been started by Adrienne Sioux Koopersmith in 1995, in part to find help in tracing her own genealogy. She chose January 6th because it was the birthday in 1580 of Captain John Smith, the English colonial leader who helped to settle Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, thereby bringing the name to North American shores.

The word “smith” derives from the word “smite” or “strike,” and although there has been a suggestion that Smiths originally derived their name from the occupation of soldiers (smiting the enemy), most present day Smiths are probably descendants of blacksmiths who worked with black metals, such as iron. Related names include:

- Whitesmith and Tinsmith for those who worked with tin
- Coppersmith (or in Adrienne’s case) Koopersmith for those who worked with copper, and Brownsmith, Redsmith, and Greensmith for the color of copper when it oxidized
- Silversmith and Goldsmith, obviously for those who worked with silver and gold

In addition, of course, there are people named Smythe, Smithers, Smitherman, Smithson, or Smithwick, all related in one way or another to their laboring ancestors. In other countries, the equivalent to blacksmith is not necessarily the most common name, but you may recognize these:

- Ferraro or Ferrari (Italian)
- Forger, Forgeron or Forges, Favre, Faber (French)
- Haddad (Arabic)
- Herrero or Herrera (Spanish)
- Kovacs (Hungarian)
- Kowalski (Polish son of a blacksmith)
- McGowan (Scottish)
- Schmidt (German)
- Sedaris (Greek)

It’s not clear if they were invited to celebrate in January, too, but why not?

And if you happen to bear one of the *other* four most popular U.S. names, consider starting your own holiday among

- Johnsons (2 million+)
- Williams (1.7 million+)
- Browns (1.5 million+ and related to hair, skin or clothing color) or
- Jones (1.5 million+ and which like Johnson means John's son)

Plus, if your heritage is Hispanic, and your name is Garcia, Martinez, Rodriguez or Hernandez you are among the top 30 names in the U.S. and might consider creating a holiday, too. Party on.

If you live in China, however, the variety of last names is much smaller, and creating holidays for last names would leave very few people working. It's estimated that 87% of the population – meaning over 1 *billion* people – has one of the top 100 names and 40% of the population has one of the top ten names. Although there are thousands of characters in the Chinese language, very few are used as surnames. Furthermore, there are no foreign surnames in China. As we noted above, depending upon your heritage, there are dozens of names in the U.S. that could suggest a blacksmith or related occupation in your heritage, but there is no such option in China.

As in Canada, Li/Lee is the most popular name in China, followed by Wang/Wong and Zhang/Chong/Cheung (Spellings vary.) If all the Chinese Li's declared a holiday, it would mean over 100 million people taking a day off!

Add to this challenge the fact that certain Chinese first names are also very popular, and you will see that there are tens of thousands of people with the same name. If someone steals your identity, how can you be sure it was yours he stole?

Talk about it:

- Do you or any of your relatives share any of the names mentioned here?
- Has your name ever caused confusion for you or others?
- Whatever your heritage, how might you celebrate *your* name?

Other sources:

- <http://www.interestingchinese.com/culture/names/surnames.html>
- <http://surnames.behindthename.com/names/usage/chinese>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_given_name

