



# Mandarin

PHRASEBOOK & DICTIONARY

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**Editors** Robyn Loughnane, Jodie Martire, Branislava Vladislavljevic,  
Tracy Whitmey

**Production Support** Chris Love

**Language Writers** Anthony Garnaut, Tim Lu

**Cover Researcher** Naomi Parker

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**Contact** [lonelyplanet.com/contact](http://lonelyplanet.com/contact)

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## Look out for the following icons throughout the book:



### 'Shortcut' Phrase

Easy to remember alternative to the full phrase



### Q&A Pair

'Question-and-answer' pair – we suggest a response to the question asked



### Look For

Phrases you may see on signs, menus etc



### Listen For

Phrases you may hear from officials, locals etc

### LANGUAGE TIP

### Language Tip

An insight into the foreign language

### CULTURE TIP

### Culture Tip

An insight into the local culture

## How to read the phrases:

- Coloured words and phrases throughout the book are phonetic guides to help you pronounce the foreign language.
- Lists of phrases with tinted background are options you can choose to complete the phrase above them.

## These abbreviations will help you choose the right words and phrases in this book:

a adjective  
inf informal  
lit literal

n noun  
pl plural  
pol polite

sg singular  
v verb

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Quick reference vocabulary guide – 3500 words to help you communicate.

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INTRO

# Mandarin

普通话 Pǔtōnghuà

## Who speaks Mandarin?

**OFFICIAL  
LANGUAGE**  
MAINLAND CHINA  
TAIWAN  
SINGAPORE

**WIDELY  
UNDERSTOOD**  
HONG KONG  
MACAU  
MALAYSIA

### Why Bother

With more than one billion speakers worldwide, Mandarin is the most widely spoken language on the planet. How can you miss the chance to communicate with one in seven people on Earth?

### Distinctive Sounds

In Mandarin you can change the meaning of a word by raising and lowering the pitch level (tone) on certain syllables. Mandarin has four tones (high, high-rising, high-falling and low falling-rising), plus a fifth, neutral tone.

# 840 million

Mandarin speakers  
in China

# one billion

Mandarin speakers  
worldwide

## Pinyin

Pinyin was officially adopted in 1958 as a way of writing Chinese using the Roman alphabet. Today in Chinese cities you'll see it everywhere: on maps, road and shop signs and in brand names.

## Chinese Script

Many of the basic Chinese characters are pictographs (highly stylised pictures of what they represent), but most have a 'meaning' element and a 'sound' element. Each character represents a syllable, and most words consist of two characters.

## Chinglish

'Chinglish' (Chinese English) provides many entertaining mistranslations – eg a 'Keep Quiet' notice might

instead read 'the subliminal of thought has started while the noisy has stopped'.

## Language Family

The term 'Mandarin' refers to one of the seven Chinese dialect groups and is more accurately called Modern Standard Chinese or *Pǔtōnghuà* 普通话 (literally 'the common dialect'). Close relatives in the Sino-Tibetan family are the other six dialects: Gan, Hakka, Min, Wu, Xiang and Yue.

## Must-Know Grammar

Mandarin doesn't have direct equivalents of 'yes' and 'no' used in isolation. Instead, to answer the question affirmatively, repeat the verb used in the question (eg *shì* 是 – 'be'). For a negative answer, add *bù* 不 (not) before the verb.

## Donations to English

Quite a few – for example, *gung-ho*, *Japan*, *ketchup*, *kung fu*, *silk*, *t'ai chi*, *tea* ...

## 5 Phrases to Learn Before You Go

### 1 Where would you go for yum cha?

哪里早茶好？ Nǎlǐ de zǎochá hǎo?

When in China, make sure you find the right place for what has to be the signature dining experience in Chinatowns the world over.

### 2 Please bring a knife and fork.

请拿一副刀叉来。 Qǐng ná yī fù dāochā lái.

Don't be afraid to ask for cutlery at a restaurant if you haven't quite mastered the art of eating with chopsticks.

### 3 Can I get a discount (for the room)?

这（房间）能打折吗？ Zhè (fángjiān) néng dǎzhé ma?

In China, always bargain for a hotel room – discounts of 10% to 50% off the rack rate are the norm, available by simply asking at reception.

### 4 I'd like to hire a bicycle.

我想租一辆自行车。 Wǒ xiǎng zū yīliàng zìxíngchē.

Bikes are a great option for getting around Chinese cities and tourist sites. They can also be invaluable for exploring the countryside.

### 5 Can you write that in Pinyin for me?

请用拼音写。 Qǐng yòng Pīnyīn xiě.

If you find Chinese script intimidating, Pinyin (the official system for writing Mandarin in the Roman alphabet) is your next best option.



## 10 Phrases to Sound Like a Local

**Great!** 真棒! Zhēnbàng!

**Hey!** 喂! Wèi!

**It's OK.** 还行。 Háixíng.

**Just a minute.** 等一下。 Děngyīxià.

**Maybe.** 有可能。 Yǒu kěnéng.

**No problem.** 没事。 Méishi.

**No way!** 不可能! Bù kěnéng!

**Sure, whatever.** 行,行,行。 Xíng, xíng, xíng.

**That's enough!** 够了,够了! Gòule, gòule!

**Just joking.** 开玩笑。 Kāiwánxiào.



A

B

C

# Basics

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# Understanding

## KEY PHRASES

**Do you speak English?**

你会说  
英文吗？

Nǐ huìshuō  
Yīngwén ma?

**I don't understand.**

我不明白。

Wǒ bù míngbai.

**What does ... mean?**

……是什么  
意思？

... shì shénme  
yìsī?

**Q Do you speak English?** 你会说英文吗？  
Nǐ huìshuō Yīngwén ma?

**Q Does anyone speak English?** 有谁会说英文吗？  
Yǒu shéi huìshuō Yīngwén ma?

**A I speak a little.** 我会说一点。  
Wǒ huìshuō yídiǎn.

**Q Do you understand?** 你明白吗？  
Nǐ míngbai ma?

**A I understand.** 明白。  
Míngbai.

**A I don't understand.** 我不明白。  
Wǒ bù míngbai.

**Could you write that in Pinyin for me?** 请用拼音写。  
Qǐng yòng Pīnyīn xiě.

**Could you write that down for me in Chinese characters?** 请用中文写下来。  
Qǐng yòng Zhōngwén xiěxiàlái.

**Please point to the phrase in this book.** 请指出书上的范句。  
Qǐng zhǐchū shūshàng de fànjù.

# Numbers & Amounts

## KEY PHRASES

How much?	多少?	Duōshǎo?
a few	一些	yīxiē
many	许多	xǔduō

## Cardinal Numbers

Numbers in Mandarin are easy to learn. Multiples of 10 are made by stating the multiple followed by 10 – so 20 is literally ‘two ten’. Two is a tricky number, generally pronounced *èr* unless it’s joined with a classifier, in which case it will be pronounced *liǎng* (see **classifiers/counters**, page 20).

0	零	líng
1	一	yī
2	二/两	èr/liǎng
3	三	sān
4	四	sì
5	五	wǔ
6	六	liù
7	七	qī
8	八	bā
9	九	jiǔ
10	十	shí
11	十一	shíyī
12	十二	shí'èr
13	十三	shísān