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**
  An insight into the foreign language

- **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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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.
Mandarin speakers worldwide

840 million
Mandarin speakers in China

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 ...