



# Mandarin

PHRASEBOOK & DICTIONARY

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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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Learn about Mandarin, build your own sentences and pronounce words correctly.

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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* ...