



# Cantonese

PHRASEBOOK & DICTIONARY

## **make the most of this phrasebook ...**

Anyone can speak another language! It's all about confidence. Don't worry if you can't remember your school language lessons or if you've never learnt a language before. Even if you learn the very basics (on the inside cover of this book), your travel experience will be the better for it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort.

### **finding things in this book**

For easy navigation, this book is in sections. The Basics chapters are the ones you'll thumb through time and again. The Practical section covers basic travel situations like catching transport and finding a bed. The Social section gives you conversational phrases, pick-up lines, the ability to express opinions – so you can get to know people. Food has a section all of its own: gourmets and vegetarians are covered and local dishes feature. Safe Travel equips you with health and police phrases, just in case. Sustainable Travel, finally, completes this book. Remember the colours of each section and you'll find everything easily; or use the comprehensive Index. Otherwise, check the two-way traveller's Dictionary for the word you need.

### **being understood**

Throughout this book you'll see coloured phrases on each page. They're phonetic guides to help you pronounce the language. You don't even need to look at the language itself, but you'll get used to the way we've represented particular sounds. The pronunciation chapter in Basics will explain more, but you can feel confident that if you read the coloured phrase slowly, you'll be understood.

### **communication tips**

Body language, ways of doing things, sense of humour – all have a role to play in every culture. 'Local talk' boxes show you common ways of saying things, or everyday language to drop into conversation. 'Listen for ...' boxes supply the phrases you may hear. They start with the language (so local people can point out what they want to say to you) and then lead in to the pronunciation guide and the English translation.

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# cantonese



For more information, see the **introduction**.

# ABOUT CANTONESE

序

— ‘Hey, a new Jackie Chan film has just come out ... wanna go see it?’

— ‘Excellent! Let’s go tonight, and get some dim sum on our way there ...’

Next time you have a conversation like this, remember to thank Cantonese speakers for dim sum and kung fu movies (and Jackie Chan). The English-speaking world learnt about Cantonese foods like ‘chop suey’, cooked in a thing called a ‘wok’, during Hong Kong’s period as a British colony, and over the last century, the success of the Hong Kong action film industry has introduced us to martial arts cinema. So where

## at a glance

### language name:

Cantonese

### name in language:

gwáwng-dùng-wáa

廣東話

(lit: Guangdong speech)

### language family:

Sino-Tibetan

### number of speakers:

70 million

### close relatives:

Gan, Hakka, Mandarin, Min, Wu, Xiang

### donations to English:

cumquat, dim sum, chop suey, typhoon, wok

can you go to experience such a tasty, athletic language for yourself?

Cantonese is used as the official language of Hong Kong and Macau, and within China it’s the local language of the mainland’s south-east, including most of the province of Guangdong. Elsewhere, the language is spoken by emigrant communities worldwide and minority groups in Southeast Asia, most notably in Singapore. For over 50 years, official Chinese policy has encouraged the use of Mandarin as the one national language of China. However Cantonese speakers have persisted in using their native language, a key part of their pride and cultural

identity. Not only is the Cantonese film industry thriving, but opera, theatre, literature and popular music continue to have great local and international success. The Cantonese language is now spoken by over 70 million people worldwide.

Today's language can trace its history back over 2000 years to the Qin Dynasty (221–206BC). Both Cantonese and Mandarin, its close relative, developed from the same tongue. Cantonese preserved certain intricate elements of Middle Chinese (581–907) which Mandarin has lost, such as a sophisticated tonal system and sharply clipped consonants at the end of words. Standard Cantonese is based on the language spoken in the city of Guangzhou (Canton), and it's colloquially known as **gwáwng-dùng-wáa** 廣東話 (Guangdong speech). Its more formal name is **yue yu** 粵語 (Yue language).

Written Cantonese is mostly ideographic – each symbol represents a concept or object instead of a sound or syllable. Because there aren't pronunciation rules like the ones we're used to in English, you need to memorise the pronunciation of each word when you learn its symbol. To help learners of Cantonese with this process, various 'romanisation' systems have been developed to show Cantonese sounds in Latin script. We've used a slightly simplified version of the widely accepted Yale system.

This book will help you buy tickets, get directions and assist you in your day-to-day communication. The translations we've provided will be understood both in Hong Kong and mainland China – where that isn't the case, a phrase has been marked **HK** for Hong Kong and **China** for the mainland. There's a world of Cantonese food, culture and people to discover, so don't just stand there, open the pages of this book and say something!

## abbreviations used in this book

<b>a</b>	adjective	<b>n</b>	noun
<b>China</b>	used in Cantonese-speaking areas of China	<b>pl</b>	plural
		<b>pol</b>	polite
<b>HK</b>	used in Hong Kong	<b>sg</b>	singular
<b>inf</b>	informal	<b>v</b>	verb



Cantonese sounds aren't that different to English ones, although there are some unique vowel combinations. The biggest challenge for English speakers is the tonal system, but with a bit of practice you'll find Cantonese quite easy to pronounce.

The pronunciation of Cantonese words in mainland China and Hong Kong is essentially the same.

Note that in this book we've used traditional Chinese characters (as opposed to simplified Chinese characters, which are used in the rest of mainland China and have been adopted by Singapore, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian countries where Chinese speakers live).

## vowel sounds

Most Cantonese vowel sounds are similar to ones you use in English.

symbol	english equivalent	cantonese example	
a	but	七	chàt
aa	father (long vowel sound)	單	dàan
aw	saw	歌	gàw
e	ten	蛇	sè
eu	fern	長	cheung
ew	blew (short with tightened lips)	書	sèw
i	deep	知	jì
o	foe	嘈	chò
u	put	富	fu

## **glossary**

<b>adjective</b>	a word that describes something – ‘ <b>delicious</b> food’
<b>adverb</b>	a word that explains how an action was done – ‘he ate <b>slowly</b> ’
<b>aspect</b>	shows whether an action is completed or not
<b>classifier</b>	a counting word like a <b>pair</b> of pants
<b>demonstrative</b>	a word that means ‘this’ or ‘that’
<b>direct object</b>	the thing or person in the sentence that has the action directed to it – ‘I read the <b>menu</b> ’
<b>indirect object</b>	the person in the sentence that benefits from an action – ‘I gave <b>him</b> the specials’
<b>imperative</b>	a type of sentence or verb that tells someone to do something – ‘give me the bill’
<b>noun</b>	a thing, person or idea – ‘rice’
<b>personal pronoun</b>	a word that means ‘I’, ‘you’, etc
<b>preposition</b>	a word like ‘for’ or ‘before’ in English
<b>possessive pronoun</b>	a word that means ‘mine’, ‘yours’, etc
<b>subject</b>	the thing or person in the sentence that does the action – ‘ <b>the chef</b> made his specialty’
<b>suffix</b>	extra syllable(s) added to the end of a word, eg -ly is added to ‘slow’ to make ‘slowly’
<b>tense</b>	marking on the verb that tells you whether the action is in the present, past or future
<b>transliteration</b>	pronunciation guide for words and phrases
<b>verb</b>	the word that tells you what action happened – ‘I <b>ate</b> the fried rice’