

80 Essential Mandarin Phrases for Everyday Life

Greetings and Goodbyes

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
你好	nǐ hǎo	Hello	Pronounced ní hǎo – tone sandhi changes the first tone
您好	nín hǎo	Hello (respectful)	For elders, teachers, bosses
嗨 / 嘿	hāi / hēi	Hi / Hey	What people actually say to friends
早	zǎo	Morning	The casual version of 早上好 – just the first character
你干嘛呢?	nǐ gànma ne?	What are you up to?	More natural than 你好吗? among friends
吃了吗?	chī le ma?	Have you eaten?	Functions as "How are you?" – answer: 吃了, 你呢?
再见	zàijiàn	Goodbye	Formal – friends often say 拜拜 or 走了
拜拜	bāibāi	Bye	The casual, everyday goodbye
走了	zǒu le	I'm heading out	Said when leaving a group
回头见	huítóu jiàn	See you later	Implies you'll meet again soon
明天见	míngtiān jiàn	See you tomorrow	Simple and practical

Introducing Yourself

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
我叫...	wǒ jiào...	My name is...	Literally "I am called..." – more natural than 我的名字是...
我来自...	wǒ lái zì...	I'm from...	我从...来的 (wǒ cóng... lái de) also works
很高兴认识你	hěn gāoxìng rènshi nǐ	Nice to meet you	Said after being introduced
我在学中文	wǒ zài xué Zhōngwén	I'm learning Chinese	This will always make people smile
我的中文不太好， 请多指教	wǒ de Zhōngwén bú tài hǎo, qǐng duō zhǐjiào	My Chinese isn't very good, please guide me	A humble, culturally appropriate way to set expectations – people appreciate it
请问您怎么称呼？	qǐng wèn nín zěnmē chēnghū?	May I ask your name?	More polite than 你叫什么名字？
我想了解更多中国文化	wǒ xiǎng liǎojiě gèng duō Zhōngguó wénhuà	I want to learn more about Chinese culture	A phrase that genuinely opens conversations

At a Restaurant

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
服务员!	fúwùyuán!	Excuse me! (to waiter)	Said to get a server's attention – shout it if needed
麻烦给我拿一下菜单	máfan gěi wǒ ná yíxià càidān	Could you bring me the menu?	麻烦 (máfan) softens requests – "sorry for the trouble, could you..."
两位 / 三位	liǎng wèi / sān wèi	Table for two / three	位 is the measure word for people in formal contexts
请给我来个这个	qǐng gěi wǒ lái ge zhège	I'll have this one	Point at the menu – extremely useful
这个多少钱?	zhège duōshao qián?	How much is this?	Works everywhere, not just restaurants
这个是什么做的?	zhège shì shénme zuò de?	What is this made of?	Essential for allergies and dietary restrictions
我对...过敏	wǒ duì... guòmǐn	I'm allergic to...	Fill in the blank: 花生 (huāshēng, peanuts) , 海鲜 (hǎixiān, seafood)
我吃素	wǒ chī sù	I'm vegetarian	Simpler than asking for a vegetarian menu
不要辣	bú yào là	No spicy please	Essential in Sichuan and Hunan cuisine
请不要放味精	qǐng bú yào fàng wèijīng	Please no MSG	Used for food sensitivities
好吃!	hǎochī!	Delicious!	Say this and your host's day is made
买单	mǎidān	The bill, please	Much more common than 结账
我可以打包吗?	wǒ kěyǐ dǎbāo ma?	Can I get this to go?	打包 (dǎbāo) literally means "pack it up"
干杯!	gānbēi!	Cheers!	Literally "dry cup" – you're expected to finish the drink
随意	suíyì	As you like / no need to finish	Said when you don't want someone to feel obligated to 干杯

Shopping

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
这个多少钱?	zhège duōshao qián?	How much?	Works for anything
太贵了	tài guì le	Too expensive	The starting point of any market negotiation
便宜点可以吗?	piányí diǎn kěyǐ ma?	Can you go cheaper?	Polite bargaining opener
我只是看看	wǒ zhǐshì kànkàn	I'm just looking	Useful when vendors are pushy
我要这个	wǒ yào zhège	I'll take this	Simple and direct
有没有大/小一点的?	yǒu méiyǒu dà/xiǎo yīdiǎn de?	Do you have a bigger/smaller size?	Useful when shopping for clothes or shoes
我可以试一下吗?	wǒ kěyǐ shì yīxià ma?	Can I try this on?	Common in clothing stores
能用微信支付吗?	néng yòng Wēixìn Zhīfù ma?	Can I pay with WeChat Pay?	Essential for modern China – cash is increasingly unusual
能刷卡吗?	néng shuā kǎ ma?	Can I pay by card?	Credit cards are accepted in hotels and malls, rarely in markets
可以开发票吗?	kěyǐ kāi fāpiào ma?	Can I have a receipt?	发票 (fāpiào) is the official tax receipt – different from a regular receipt

Getting Around

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
请问...在哪里?	qǐng wèn... zài nǎlǐ?	Excuse me, where is...?	请问 softens the question – "may I ask..."
...怎么走?	... zěnmē zǒu?	How do I get to...?	Literally "how do I walk to..."
我要去...	wǒ yào qù...	I want to go to...	For taxis and DiDi – show the destination in Chinese characters on your phone
最近的地铁站在哪里?	zuìjìn de dìtiě zhàn zài nǎlǐ?	Where's the nearest metro station?	Useful in any Chinese city
去...多少钱?	qù... duōshǎo qián?	How much to go to...?	For taxis
就在这里停	jiù zài zhèlǐ tíng	Stop here please	Useful when giving directions to a driver
向左转 / 向右转	xiàng zuǒ zhuǎn / xiàng yòu zhuǎn	Turn left / Turn right	Basic navigation phrases
直走	zhí zǒu	Go straight	One of the most common directions
我迷路了	wǒ mílù le	I'm lost	Helpful in emergencies
扫码	sǎo mǎ	Scan the QR code	You'll hear and see this everywhere
叫个滴滴	jiào gè Dīdī	Get a DiDi (ride-hail)	DiDi is China's Uber – essential for getting around cities

At the Hotel

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
我预订了一个房间	wǒ yùdìng le yīgè fángjiān	I have a reservation	Useful for hotel check-in
我叫...	wǒ jiào...	My name is...	For check-in
办理入住	bànlǐ rùzhù	Check in	Formal hotel term
退房	tuì fáng	Check out	Standard hotel term
WiFi密码是什么?	WiFi mìǎ shì shénme?	What's the WiFi password?	Priority number one for most travellers
早餐几点开始?	zǎocān jǐ diǎn kāishǐ?	What time is breakfast?	Common hotel question
退房时间是几点?	tuì fáng shíjiān shì jǐ diǎn?	What time is check-out?	Always good to confirm
空调怎么用?	kōngtiáo zěnmeyòng?	How does the air conditioning work?	More useful than you'd think

Digital Life and WeChat

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
你有微信吗?	nǐ yǒu Wēixìn ma?	Do you have WeChat?	WeChat is how everyone communicates — have it installed
加一下微信	jiā yīxià Wēixìn	Let's connect on WeChat	More common than exchanging phone numbers
扫我的二维码	sǎo wǒ de èr wéi mǎ	Scan my QR code	How WeChat contacts are added
微信支付 / 支付宝	Wēixìn zhīfù / Zhīfùbǎo	WeChat Pay / Alipay	The two dominant payment systems
没网	méi wǎng	No internet	When your VPN or connection isn't working
发给我	fā gěi wǒ	Send it to me	For files, photos, locations on WeChat
在线上 / 线下	zài xiànshàng / xiàxià	Online / offline	Common business and daily usage distinction

Asking for Help and Emergencies

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
请帮我一下	qǐng bāng wǒ yīxià	Please help me	Polite and widely useful
救命!	jiùmìng!	Help!	Emergency – literally "save my life"
叫警察	jiào jǐngchá	Call the police	Emergency number in China: 110
叫救护车	jiào jiùhùchē	Call an ambulance	Emergency number in China: 120
我需要医生	wǒ xūyào yīshēng	I need a doctor	Direct and clear in emergencies
我不舒服	wǒ bù shūfu	I'm not feeling well	Common way to express illness
我的护照丢了	wǒ de hùzhào diū le	I've lost my passport	Report to police immediately – needed for embassy procedures
我被偷了	wǒ bèi tōu le	I've been robbed / something was stolen	Important for emergencies and reporting
我对...过敏	wǒ duì... guòmǐn	I'm allergic to...	Fill in with e.g. 花生 (peanuts), 海鲜 (seafood)
我不懂，你能再说一遍吗？	wǒ bù dǒng, nǐ néng zài shuō yī biàn ma?	I don't understand, could you repeat that?	Very useful in stressful situations
请说慢一点	qǐng shuō màn yīdiǎn	Please speak more slowly	Helps in emergencies or confusion
你会说英语吗？	nǐ huì shuō Yīngyǔ ma?	Do you speak English?	One of the most important survival phrases

Polite Social Phrases

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Notes
谢谢	xièxie	Thank you	Universal
谢谢啦	xièxie la	Thanks	Lighter, more casual
麻烦你了	máfan nǐ le	Sorry for the trouble	Said alongside thanks when someone helped you
不用谢	bú yòng xiè	Don't mention it	Standard response to being thanked
没事	méishì	No problem / It's fine	When someone apologises
对不起	duìbuqǐ	Sorry	For genuine apologies
不好意思	bù hǎoyìsi	Excuse me / I'm sorry (mild)	For minor inconveniences – "sorry to bother you"
没关系	méi guānxi	It doesn't matter	Response to an apology
请	qǐng	Please	Used before verbs: 请坐 (please sit)
随便	suíbiàn	As you like / whatever you prefer	Used when deferring a choice to someone else
辛苦了	xīnkǔ le	You've worked hard	A meaningful phrase acknowledging effort

Yes, No, and Agreement

Chinese	Pinyin	Meaning	Use when...
对	duì	Correct / Right	Confirming a factual statement
好	hǎo	Okay / Good	Agreeing to a plan or suggestion
行	xíng	That works / Sure	Confirming something is feasible
好的	hǎo de	Okay / Alright	Softer than 好, very common in messages
当然	dāngrán	Of course	Strong affirmation
没问题	méi wèntí	No problem	Agreeing easily, "no issue"
不行	bù xíng	That won't work	Clear, direct refusal
不太方便	bú tài fāngbiàn	Not very convenient	Soft indirect "no" – often used to avoid blunt refusal