

Intrepid Travel Language Guides

Chinese (Mandarin) Language Guide Script (phonetic)

Scott: Ahh, Excuse me, do you speak English?

Eric: Yes

Scott: Can you tell me when the next train to Pudang is?

Eric: They usually depart every 20 mins, I think one left a little while ago.

Scott: Ok, thanks and do you know how long it takes to get into town?

Eric: The Magler is the fastest train in the world – it takes about 10 mins to get into town and travels over 400km an hour!

Scott: Wow, you sound like a Local – do you live in Shanghai?

Eric: Yes, I study Engineering overseas and am back for the holidays. Have you been to China before?

Scott: This is my first time and I'm a bit nervous because I don't know any Mandarin

Eric: Don't worry, in Shanghai you should be fine – most signs and transport have both Chinese and English signs and most people speak or understand a little English. But in the countryside you may find it a bit more difficult.

Scott: Yes, I always find some local phrases help.

Eric: Would you like me to teach you a few while we are waiting?

Scott: Would you?!? That would be great!

Eric: My name is Eric – in Mandarin that is war chiao Eric

Scott: I'm Scott – how do I say this?

Eric: War chiao Scott. Where are you staying?

Scott: Actually, I've not decided, I've got two places I'd like to take a look at and choose between. How do I ask 'Have you a room'

Eric: Yew fang jian ma But remember that Mandarin is very tonal – there are five main tones and words must be spoken at the right pitch or their meaning will change.

Scott: Ok, so yew fang jane ma and watch the tones. How do I ask to see the room?

Eric: ker yih kaan kaan farnj jane ma you should also say 'Hello' which is ni hao or if the person looks busy 'Excuse me' which is duei bu chee and of course 'thank you' which is sheh sheh

Scott: Ok, ni hao, duei bu chee which are 'hello' and 'excuse me'

Eric: Yes ni hao, in fact this can be used at anytime of the day and is a very general sort of greeting, 'Goodbye' is zai jane.

Scott: I found it was easy to get a ticket for the train here at the airport, but what about transport in town? How do I say 'bus, train, taxi or boat'

Eric: The Shanghai Metro is very modern and easy to use, it was only opened in 1995 and all signage is in English and Chinese. Generally the train is the fastest way to get around – except at peak hour when it is crazy – avoid this if you can. Buses are also quite good but you can get stuck in traffic, which will make your trip much longer than it needs to be. To say 'bus' is gong gong chee churh, 'train' is di tiye 'taxi' is chew zoo cher and 'boat' is chwan.

Scott: 'bus' gong gong chee churh 'train' di tiye 'taxi' chew zoo cher 'boat' chwan. What about 'ticket'?

Eric: 'Ticket' is piao. For the train you can buy single tickets or most people buy a Transit Card, which you can recharge at ticket booths or convenience stores. You can also use this on buses and some taxi's.

Scott: It seems like Shanghai is a pretty easy city to get around, what about if I'm walking or need directions like 'Where is' or 'Which way to'

Eric: 'Where is' zai na lee and 'Which way to' chiu tzen moor tzow. You could also hire a bike to cycle around – then you will really experience Shanghai like a Eric!

Scott: That actually sounds like a pretty good idea - I might just try that. If I want to hire a bike for a few days how do I say 'today' and 'tomorrow'

Eric: 'Today' is jin tien 'tomorrow' is min tien

Scott: Ok, so jin tien, min tien. What about if I want something now or I'm talking about what I did yesterday? How do I say 'yesterday' and 'now'

Eric: 'Yesterday' is zore tien and 'now' is shyan tzai

Scott: So, today jin tien tomorrow min tien yesterday zore tien now shyan tzai

Eric: jin tien min tien zore tien shyan tzai, very good, you are getting better already!

Scott: I've read that Shanghai is a shoppers mecca – that its even better than Hong Kong. My girlfriend was pretty jealous that I'm shopping here and I'm looking forward to bagging a few bargains – how do I say 'How much?'

Eric: door shao chien ? but you will have to learn to bargain hard, the Erics can be pretty tough

Scott: That's good to know, what about 'too expensive'

Eric: If you were bargaining you could say something like tzuei di jia shih door shao ? which is 'what is your best price' – it's better to start with this and then say too expensive or tie guui later in the negotiations. It will be impressive to a Eric that you have tried to speak some Chinese, so your bargaining should go well.

Scott: so tzuei di jia shih door shao and then tie guui. What about 'I like this' and 'I don't like that'

Eric: I like this is war shih huan jeh ger and I don't like this is war bu shih huan jeh ger, but again be careful of your tones.

Scott: Right, tones again! Hey, what about yes, no and ok – I'm going to need these for sure!

Eric: Ah yes, these will be useful – yes is shih/sing, no is bu shih/ bu sing and ok is more like hao de, hao ba, hao le. But again this is where it gets tricky with tones – Hao de, hao ba and hao le all roughly mean okay – but the meaning changes depending on how you say it!

Scott: So I could be saying "ok that sounds good" when I mean "Ok, but I really don't want to".

Eric: Exactly – but practise makes perfect so just keep practising.

Scott: Ok. What about numbers, can you teach me 1-10

Eric: Yea, are, san, sih, woo, liow, chee, ba, joe, shih

Scott: Yea, are, san, sih, woo, liow, chee, ba, joe, shih

Eric: You should practise these as you will find them very useful.

Scott: I really think I'm going to need a lot of practise! How do I ask someone to speak slowly?

Eric: Yes, the Chinese do speak very quickly so just say ching man yea dian jiang

Scott: Ok, so ching man yea dian jiang. What if I get knocked off the bike or something happens to me, how do I say 'hospital' and 'doctor'

Eric: First, be careful in the traffic and watch what the Erics do! But if something does happen hospital is yee yuan and doctor is yee sheng.

Scott: I've seen how Eric's ride in other Asian countries – I'm not sure that they are the best riding models, but I'm willing to try just about anything! Hey, what if I'm mugged or need the police, how do I say 'stop thief' or 'police'?

Eric: Generally, Shanghai is very safe though, be careful and you should be ok 'stop thief' is juah shiaw tow 'police' is jing charh

Scott: This phrase is something I try to learn in every language as you just never know what might happen – particularly at airports – how do I say "Don't shoot, those drugs aren't mine!"

Eric: You sound like a seasoned traveller – you should say beer kai Chiang, chur sheer doo pin bu shih war de.

Scott: beer kai Chiang, chur sheer doo pin bu shih war de. Eric you've been a true help – here let me help you with your bags, and if you don't mind I'll bore you with practising my new Chinese all the way to town!

Eric: Not at all, the trip only takes a short while anyway!