

What to say, and what you will hear said back, in the situations a trip is made of

490 lines across 17 situations, in the order a trip happens: arriving, moving, sleeping, eating, paying, shopping, emergencies, then the business set. Each situation opens with what the other person is likely to say to you.

- Print the situations you will actually meet rather than the whole file. A phrasebook you carry beats a phrasebook you own.
- If you say nothing else, learn the replies. Recognising 住在哪里? is worth more than a perfect accent on an answer you were going to give anyway.
- Pointing at the characters works. Nobody minds, it is faster than a fourth attempt at the tone, and it is why the Chinese column is printed large.

Built from the travel phrasebook at thepurelanguage.com/travel, and updated when that page is.

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Airport and immigration

Leisure • Getting there

Chinese immigration asks four questions, always the same four: why you are here (来做什么?), where you are staying (住在哪里?), how long (待多久?) and whether you have anything to declare (有东西要申报吗?). Learn to recognise those four and the rest of the hall is signage.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

您来中国做什么?	Nín lái Zhōngguó zuò shénme?	What are you coming to China for? The single most common question. Two words answer it: 旅游 (tourism) or 出差 (business trip).
您住在哪里?	Nín zhù zài nǎlǐ?	Where are you staying? They want the hotel name, not the street. Show the booking on your phone if the name is hard to say.
打算待多久?	Dǎsuàn dāi duō jiǔ?	How long do you plan to stay? Answer in whole units — 一个星期 (a week), 十天 (ten days). It should match your return ticket.
请按指纹。	Qǐng àn zhǐwén.	Please press your fingerprints. Four fingers first, then the thumb. The officer will tap the glass to show you which hand.
看镜头。	Kàn jìngtóu.	Look at the camera. Take your glasses off if asked — 请摘下眼镜 (qǐng zhāixià yǎnjìng).
有没有东西要申报?	Yǒu méiyǒu dōngxi yào shēnbào?	Do you have anything to declare? 没有 (méiyǒu — no, I don't) is the whole answer. It is asked at the customs channel, not at passport control.

Answering the four questions

我来旅游。	Wǒ lái lǚyóu.	I'm here as a tourist.
我来出差。	Wǒ lái chūchāi.	I'm here on business.
我住在北京饭店。	Wǒ zhù zài Běijīng Fàndiàn.	I'm staying at the Beijing Hotel. Swap in your hotel's Chinese name — the booking screenshot is enough.
我待一个星期。	Wǒ dāi yí ge xīngqī.	I'm staying one week.
我待十天。	Wǒ dāi shí tiān.	I'm staying ten days.
没有。	Méiyǒu.	Nothing (to declare).

When you don't understand

我不会说中文。	Wǒ bú huì shuō Zhōngwén.	I don't speak Chinese. Says it in Chinese, which is quietly the most useful sentence on this page.
请说慢一点。	Qǐng shuō màn yìdiǎn.	Please speak more slowly.
请再说一遍。	Qǐng zài shuō yí biàn.	Please say that again.
有没有会说英语的人?	Yǒu méiyǒu huì shuō Yīngyǔ de rén?	Is there someone who speaks English?
请写下来。	Qǐng xiě xiàlái.	Please write it down. Numbers and place names are far easier to read than to hear.

Baggage and transfers

请问行李在哪里取？ Qǐngwèn xíngli zài nǎlǐ qǔ? Excuse me, where do I collect my luggage?

我的行李丢了。 Wǒ de xíngli diū le. My luggage is lost.

这是我的行李票。 Zhè shì wǒ de xínglipiào. This is my baggage tag.

我要转机去上海。 Wǒ yào zhuǎnjī qù Shànghǎi. I'm transferring to Shanghai.

请问几号登机口？ Qǐngwèn jǐ hào dēngjīkǒu? Which gate, please?

我的航班延误了吗？ Wǒ de hángbān yánwù le ma? Is my flight delayed?

Leaving the airport

出口在哪儿？ Chūkǒu zài nǎr? Where is the exit?

地铁站怎么走？ Dìtiě zhàn zěnmē zǒu? How do I get to the metro station?

哪里可以打车？ Nǎlǐ kěyǐ dǎchē? Where can I get a taxi?

哪里可以换钱？ Nǎlǐ kěyǐ huànqián? Where can I change money?

哪里有免费的无线网？ Nǎlǐ yǒu miǎnfèi de wúxiànwǎng? Where is there free Wi-Fi?
Chinese airport Wi-Fi usually needs a passport scan at a kiosk, not a password.

Worth knowing

Screenshot your hotel's name in Chinese characters before you fly, and keep it on your lock screen. It answers the immigration question, it goes straight to a taxi driver, and it works with no signal — which is exactly the state your phone will be in when you land.

Taxis and ride-hailing

Leisure • Getting around

Two sentences do most of the work in a Chinese taxi: 师傅，去这里。 ("Driver, go here" — while showing the address) and 请打表。 ("Please use the meter"). Show a written address rather than saying it: place names are tonal minefields, and a screen removes the guesswork for both of you.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

去哪儿？	Qù nǎr?	Where to? The first thing you'll hear. Answer by showing the address: 去这里 (qù zhèlǐ — go here).
走高速吗？	Zǒu gāosù ma?	Shall we take the expressway? A real question, not a trick: it's faster but you pay the toll. 走 (zǒu — yes) or 不走 (bù zǒu — no).
堵车。	Dǔchē.	There's traffic. Usually said as an apology for a longer route or a slower trip. Nothing is required from you.
停这儿可以吗？	Tíng zhèr kěyǐ ma?	Can I stop here? Asked when the exact door is awkward. 可以 (kěyǐ — that's fine) or 前面一点 (qiánmiàn yìdiǎn — a bit further).
扫码还是现金？	Sǎomǎ háishi xiànjīn?	Scan-to-pay or cash? If your phone payment isn't set up, say 现金 (xiànjīn — cash) and have small notes ready.
要发票吗？	Yào fāpiào ma?	Do you want a receipt? Say 要 (yào — yes) on a business trip; the fāpiào is the only receipt an expense system accepts.

Getting in and getting going

师傅，去这里。	Shīfu, qù zhèlǐ.	Driver, go here, please. 师傅 is the normal, respectful way to address a driver — not 先生.
请打表。	Qǐng dǎ biǎo.	Please use the meter.
去机场，谢谢。	Qù jīchǎng, xièxie.	To the airport, please.
去火车站。	Qù huǒchēzhàn.	To the railway station.
大概多少钱？	Dàgài duōshao qián?	Roughly how much will it be?
要多久？	Yào duō jiǔ?	How long will it take?

Directions on the way

直走。	Zhí zǒu.	Straight on.
前面路口右转。	Qiánmiàn lùkǒu yòu zhuǎn.	Turn right at the next junction.
前面路口左转。	Qiánmiàn lùkǒu zuǒ zhuǎn.	Turn left at the next junction.
请掉头。	Qǐng diàotóu.	Please turn around.
我赶时间。	Wǒ gǎn shíjiān.	I'm in a hurry.

不用着急。	Búyòng zháojí.	No rush.
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Getting out

请靠边停。	Qǐng kào biān tíng.	Please pull over.
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停这儿就行。	Tíng zhèr jiù xíng.	Here is fine.
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到了吗？	Dào le ma?	Are we there?
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多少钱？	Duōshao qián?	How much?
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请开发票。	Qǐng kāi fāpiào.	A receipt, please. The fāpiào also carries the taxi's number — useful if you leave something behind.
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请开一下后备箱。	Qǐng kāi yíxià hòubèixiāng.	Please open the boot.
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Ride-hailing and problems

我叫了车。	Wǒ jiào le chē.	I've booked a car.
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车牌号是多少？	Chēpáihào shì duōshao?	What's the licence plate number?
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我在门口等。	Wǒ zài ménkǒu děng.	I'm waiting at the entrance.
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这不是我叫的车。	Zhè bú shì wǒ jiào de chē.	This isn't the car I booked.
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我不要一口价。	Wǒ bú yào yìkǒujià.	I don't want a flat rate. The polite refusal of an off-meter price. Follow it with 请打表.
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我东西忘在车上了。	Wǒ dōngxi wàng zài chē shàng le.	I left something in the car.
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Worth knowing

Before you leave the hotel, screenshot the hotel's Chinese address as well as your destination's. Getting there is only half the trip, and "I don't know the name of my hotel in Chinese" is a much worse conversation to have at 11pm.

High-speed rail and the metro

Leisure • Getting around

Chinese high-speed rail runs on your passport, not a paper ticket: you book with your passport number, then scan the passport itself at the gate. The three things to know how to say are 一张去上海的票 (one ticket to Shanghai), 二等座 (second class) and 几号站台? (which platform?).

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

请出示证件。	Qǐng chūshì zhèngjiàn.	Please show your ID. At the gate and at security. For you, 证件 means your passport.
这趟车晚点了。	Zhè tàng chē wǎndiǎn le.	This train is delayed. Rare on high-speed lines. The departure board updates before the announcement does.
请把包放上去。	Qǐng bǎo fàng shàngqù.	Put your bag on the belt. Station security scans every bag, every time — the same as an airport.
水要打开喝一口。	Shuǐ yào dǎkāi hē yì kǒu.	Open your water and take a sip. A standard security check on liquids. Perfectly routine; just do it.
检票口在那边。	Jiǎnpiàokǒu zài nàbiān.	The ticket gate is over there. Your gate number is on the ticket and on the big hall display, next to the train number.
这张票不能改签了。	Zhè zhāng piào bù néng gǎiqiān le.	This ticket can no longer be changed. Changes are free up to a cut-off, then not. Ask early rather than at the gate.

Buying a ticket

我要一张去上海的票。	Wǒ yào yì zhāng qù Shànghǎi de piào.	One ticket to Shanghai, please.
明天上午的。	Míngtiān shàngwǔ de.	For tomorrow morning.
二等座。	Èrděngzuò.	Second class.
还有票吗?	Hái yǒu piào ma?	Are there any tickets left?
最早的一班是几点?	Zuì zǎo de yì bān shì jǐ diǎn?	What time is the earliest one?
这是我的护照。	Zhè shì wǒ de hùzhào.	Here's my passport. Buying, collecting and boarding all use the passport you booked with.

Finding your train

请问检票口在哪儿?	Qǐngwèn jiǎnpiàokǒu zài nǎr?	Where is the ticket gate, please?
几号站台?	Jǐ hào zhàntái?	Which platform?
候车室在哪儿?	Hòuchēshì zài nǎr?	Where is the waiting hall?
这趟车去杭州吗?	Zhè tàng chē qù Hángzhōu ma?	Does this train go to Hangzhou?
我的座位在几号车厢?	Wǒ de zuòwèi zài jǐ hào chēxiāng?	Which carriage is my seat in?
我坐过站了。	Wǒ zuò guò zhàn le.	I've missed my stop.

Changing and refunding

我要改签。	Wǒ yào gǎiqiān.	I'd like to change my ticket.
我要退票。	Wǒ yào tuìpiào.	I'd like to refund my ticket.
改成明天可以吗？	Gǎi chéng míngtiān kěyǐ ma?	Can I change it to tomorrow?
要手续费吗？	Yào shǒuxùfèi ma?	Is there a fee?
我赶不上这班车了。	Wǒ gǎnbushàng zhè bān chē le.	I'm not going to make this train.

On the metro

请问几号线？	Qǐngwèn jǐ hào xiàn?	Which line, please?
在哪儿换乘？	Zài nǎr huànchéng?	Where do I change?
去人民广场怎么走？	Qù Rénmín Guǎngchǎng zěnmē zǒu?	How do I get to People's Square?
哪个出口？	Nǎge chūkǒu?	Which exit? Big stations have a dozen; the exit letter matters more than the station name.
这个方向对吗？	Zhège fāngxiàng duì ma?	Is this the right direction?
末班车几点？	Mòbānchē jǐ diǎn?	What time is the last train?

Worth knowing

Photograph your ticket confirmation, including the train number (G1234) and the seat. If your phone dies, the number is the one thing station staff need in order to help you — and the 12306 app will not load without a signal.

Hotel check-in

Leisure • Where you sleep

Two things surprise visitors at a Chinese hotel desk, and neither is language. You will be asked for a refundable cash or card deposit (押金, yājīn), and your passport will be scanned and registered with the police — a legal requirement for every foreign guest, not a suspicion about you.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

请出示护照。	Qǐng chūshì hùzhào.	Please show your passport. Every guest's passport, not just the person paying. It comes back after the scan.
需要押金五百块。	Xūyào yājīn wǔbǎi kuài.	We need a ¥500 deposit. Refundable. Ask 押金什么时候退? if you want to know when you get it back.
这是您的房卡。	Zhè shì nín de fángkǎ.	Here is your room card. Usually two: one opens the door, one goes in the wall slot to switch the power on.
早餐在二楼。	Zǎocān zài èr lóu.	Breakfast is on the second floor. Chinese floor numbering starts at 1 for the ground floor, as in the US.
十二点退房。	Shí'èr diǎn tuìfáng.	Check-out is at twelve. Noon is standard. Late check-out is 晚点退房 (wǎndiǎn tuìfáng) and often free until 2pm.
我们不能接待外宾。	Wǒmen bù néng jiēdài wàibīn.	We can't accommodate foreign guests. Not personal — the hotel isn't licensed to register foreigners. Ask them to recommend one that is.

At the desk

我有预订。	Wǒ yǒu yùdìng.	I have a reservation.
我要办入住。	Wǒ yào bàn rùzhù.	I'd like to check in.
我姓史密斯。	Wǒ xìng Shǐmìsī.	My surname is Smith. Swap in your own — but showing the booking is faster than spelling a foreign name.
住三个晚上。	Zhù sān ge wǎnshang.	Three nights.
还有空房吗?	Hái yǒu kòngfáng ma?	Do you have any rooms free?
多少钱一晚?	Duōshao qián yì wǎn?	How much per night?

Deposit, keys and practicalities

押金多少?	Yājīn duōshao?	How much is the deposit?
押金什么时候退?	Yājīn shénme shíhou tuì?	When is the deposit returned?
可以刷卡吗?	Kěyǐ shuākǎ ma?	Can I pay by card?
无线网密码是多少?	Wúxiànwǎng mìmǎ shì duōshao?	What's the Wi-Fi password?
早餐几点开始?	Zǎocān jǐ diǎn kāishǐ?	What time does breakfast start?

可以寄存行李吗？

Kěyǐ jìcún xíngli ma?

Can I leave my luggage here?

Standard and free, before check-in or after check-out.

When something is wrong

空调坏了。

Kōngtiáo huài le.

The air conditioning is broken.

没有热水。

Méiyǒu rèshuǐ.

There's no hot water.

房间太吵了。

Fángjiān tài chǎo le.

The room is too noisy.

房卡不好使。

Fángkǎ bù hǎoshǐ.

The room card doesn't work.

可以换个房间吗？

Kěyǐ huàn ge fángjiān ma?

Could I change rooms?

能派人来看一下吗？

Néng pài rén lái kàn yíxià ma?

Could someone come and look at it?

Checking out

我要退房。

Wǒ yào tuìfáng.

I'd like to check out.

可以晚点退房吗？

Kěyǐ wǎndiǎn tuìfáng ma?

Can I check out late?

请给我发票。

Qǐng gěi wǒ fāpiào.

A receipt, please.

On a business trip ask for the 发票 specifically — a printed folio is not claimable.

能帮我叫辆车吗？

Néng bāng wǒ jiào liàng chē ma?

Could you call me a taxi?

我东西忘在房间里了。

Wǒ dōngxi wàng zài fángjiān lǐ le.

I left something in the room.

Worth knowing

Take a photo of the hotel's business card, or of the sign over the door, the moment you check in. It gives you the Chinese name and address for the ride home — the exact information you cannot look up when you are lost and your phone has no data.

Ordering in a restaurant

Leisure • Eating

Four phrases cover a whole meal: 服务员! (to call a waiter — say it, don't wave), 这个 ("this one", while pointing), 不要辣 (not spicy) and 买单 (the bill). Chinese meals are shared from the middle of the table, so you order dishes for the table, not a plate each.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

几位?	Jǐ wèi?	How many people? Answer with a number and 位: 两位 (two), 三位 (three). Or just hold up fingers.
现在点吗?	Xiànzài diǎn ma?	Ready to order now? 点 is the verb for ordering. 再等一下 (zài děng yíxià) buys you a few more minutes.
要辣吗?	Yào là ma?	Do you want it spicy? The most important question on the page. 不要辣 or 微辣 (wēi là — mildly spicy).
喝点什么?	Hē diǎn shénme?	Anything to drink? Tap water is not served. 一瓶啤酒 (a beer), 热茶 (hot tea), 可乐 (cola).
这个卖完了。	Zhège mài wán le.	That one's sold out. Very common late in the evening. Point at something else and carry on.
扫码点餐。	Sǎomǎ diǎncān.	Order by scanning the QR code. Increasingly the default. The page is in Chinese — your phone's translate function reads it fine.

Getting seated and ordering

服务员!	Fúwùyuán!	Waiter! Said out loud across the room. This is normal, not rude.
两位。	Liǎng wèi.	A table for two.
有英文菜单吗?	Yǒu Yīngwén càidān ma?	Is there an English menu?
我要这个。	Wǒ yào zhège.	I'll have this one. With a finger on the menu. The most useful sentence in any Chinese restaurant.
有什么推荐的?	Yǒu shénme tuījiàn de?	What do you recommend?
先来这些。	Xiān lái zhèxiē.	That's all for now.

Spice, allergies and preferences

不要辣。	Bú yào là.	Not spicy, please.
微辣。	Wēi là.	Mildly spicy.
我不吃辣。	Wǒ bù chī là.	I don't eat spicy food.
我不吃肉。	Wǒ bù chī ròu.	I don't eat meat. Add 我也不吃鸡蛋 (nor eggs) if you are vegan — 素 alone can still include egg.
我对花生过敏。	Wǒ duì huāshēng guòmǐn.	I'm allergic to peanuts. Swap in 海鲜 (seafood), 牛奶 (milk), 麸质 (gluten).

请不要放味精。	Qǐng bú yào fàng wèijīng.	No MSG, please.
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During the meal

请给我一双筷子。	Qǐng gěi wǒ yì shuāng kuàizi.	Chopsticks, please.
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请给我一把叉子。	Qǐng gěi wǒ yì bǎ chāzi.	A fork, please.
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再来一瓶啤酒。	Zài lái yì píng píjiǔ.	Another beer, please.
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请给我热水。	Qǐng gěi wǒ rèshuǐ.	Hot water, please. Hot water is the default drink; cold water often isn't available.
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这个不是我点的。	Zhège bú shì wǒ diǎn de.	I didn't order this.
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很好吃！	Hěn hǎochī!	This is delicious!
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Paying and leaving

买单！	Mǎidān!	The bill, please!
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结账。	Jiézhàng.	The bill. Interchangeable with 买单; more common in the north.
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可以打包吗？	Kěyǐ dǎbāo ma?	Can I take this away?
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可以扫码吗？	Kěyǐ sǎomǎ ma?	Can I pay by QR code?
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我们分开付。	Wǒmen fēnkāi fù.	We'll pay separately. Uncommon socially — Chinese hosts usually pay the whole table.
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多少钱？	Duōshao qián?	How much is it?
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Worth knowing

If you have a serious food allergy, do not rely on speaking it. Have it written in Chinese on your phone — 我对海鲜过敏，吃了会有生命危险。 ("I am allergic to seafood; eating it is life-threatening.") A written card gets shown to the kitchen; a spoken sentence gets nodded at.

Reading a Chinese menu

Leisure • Eating

You do not need to read Chinese to read a Chinese menu — you need about sixty characters. Dish names are built to a formula: cooking method + main ingredient. Learn 炒 (stir-fried), 蒸 (steamed), 烤 (roast), 炸 (deep-fried), 牛 (beef), 鸡 (chicken), 鱼 (fish), 辣 (spicy) and you can decode most of a menu on sight.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

这个是猪肉的。	Zhègè shì zhūròu de.	That one is pork. Worth confirming if you avoid pork — it is the default meat in much of China.
这个比较辣。	Zhègè bǐjiào là.	That one is quite spicy. 比较 softens it, but in Sichuan and Hunan take the warning at face value.
这是凉菜。	Zhè shì liángcài.	That's a cold dish. Cold dishes open a meal. They are meant to be cold, not left over.
要米饭吗？	Yào mǐfàn ma?	Would you like rice? Rice is ordered separately and arrives last in a proper meal, not alongside.
这个够两个人吃。	Zhègè gòu liǎng ge rén chī.	That's enough for two people. A genuine kindness — portions are larger than most visitors expect.
这个要等二十分钟。	Zhègè yào děng èrshí fēnzhōng.	That one takes twenty minutes. Said about whole fish and braised dishes. Order something quick alongside it.

How it was cooked

炒	chǎo	stir-fried The most common character on any menu — quick, hot, in a wok.
蒸	zhēng	steamed The gentlest option. 清蒸 (qīngzhēng) means plainly steamed, no sauce.
烤	kǎo	roasted / grilled As in 烤鸭 — roast duck.
炸	zhá	deep-fried
煮	zhǔ	boiled
烧	shāo	braised 红烧 (hóngshāo, "red-braised") is soy-braised and sweet-savoury.

What's in it

牛肉	niúròu	beef
猪肉	zhūròu	pork Bare 肉 (ròu) on a menu usually means pork by default.
鸡	jī	chicken
鱼	yú	fish
虾	xiā	shrimp / prawn
青菜	qīngcài	green vegetables

Warnings and staples

辣	là	spicy (chilli)
麻	má	numbing (Sichuan peppercorn) Not heat — a tingling numbness. 麻辣 is both at once.
汤	tāng	soup
面	miàn	noodles
饭	fàn	rice / a meal
饺子	jiǎozi	dumplings

Reading a whole dish name

红烧牛肉	hóngshāo niúròu	red-braised beef 烧 braised + 牛肉 beef. The formula, working exactly as advertised.
清蒸鱼	qīngzhēng yú	plain steamed fish
宫保鸡丁	gōngbǎo jīdīng	Kung Pao chicken 鸡 chicken + 丁 diced. 丁 = cubes, 片 = slices, 丝 = shreds.
鱼香肉丝	yúxiāng ròusī	shredded pork in "fish-fragrant" sauce Contains no fish — the name is the sauce style.
麻婆豆腐	mápó dòufu	Mapo tofu 麻 tells you it will numb your lips. It is not a mild dish.
蛋炒饭	dàn chǎofàn	egg fried rice

Worth knowing

Point your phone's camera at the menu. Live translation is imperfect on poetic dish names but excellent on exactly the characters that matter — the meat and the method — and it works offline once you download the Chinese language pack. Do that before you fly.

Paying and mobile payment

Leisure • Money

China runs on QR codes, not cards. Alipay and WeChat Pay now accept foreign Visa and Mastercard directly — set one up before you fly, because it needs SMS verification and a passport photo. Cash is still legal tender everywhere and is your fallback: 可以付现金吗? ("Can I pay cash?").

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

扫这里。	Sǎo zhèlǐ.	Scan here. Pointing at the QR code on the counter. You scan theirs, or they scan yours.
微信还是支付宝?	Wēixìn háishi Zhīfùbǎo?	WeChat or Alipay? Either answer is fine — both work the same way from your side.
不能刷卡。	Bù néng shuākǎ.	We can't take cards. Extremely common. This is the moment cash saves the day.
没有零钱。	Méiyǒu língqián.	I don't have change. Said when you hand over a ¥100 note for a ¥6 purchase. Break big notes at convenience stores.
请出示付款码。	Qǐng chūshì fùkuǎnmǎ.	Please show your payment code. The barcode inside your payment app that they scan with a gun.
支付失败了。	Zhīfù shībài le.	The payment failed. Usually a network issue or a card limit. Try again once, then offer cash.

Paying

多少钱?	Duōshao qián?	How much?
可以扫码吗?	Kěyǐ sǎomǎ ma?	Can I pay by QR code?
可以付现金吗?	Kěyǐ fù xiànjīn ma?	Can I pay cash?
可以刷卡吗?	Kěyǐ shuākǎ ma?	Can I pay by card?
我用支付宝。	Wǒ yòng Zhīfùbǎo.	I'll use Alipay.
我扫你还是你扫我?	Wǒ sǎo nǐ háishi nǐ sǎo wǒ?	Shall I scan yours or you scan mine? A genuinely everyday sentence in China.

When it goes wrong

我的卡不行。	Wǒ de kǎ bùxíng.	My card doesn't work.
再试一次。	Zài shì yí cì.	Let me try again.
我没有零钱。	Wǒ méiyǒu língqián.	I don't have change.
可以找开一百吗?	Kěyǐ zhǎokāi yìbǎi ma?	Can you break a hundred?
网络不好。	Wǎngluò bù hǎo.	The signal is bad.
我付多了。	Wǒ fù duō le.	I've overpaid.

Cash and machines

哪里可以取钱？	Nǎlǐ kěyǐ qǔ qián?	Where can I withdraw cash?
附近有取款机吗？	Fùjìn yǒu qǔkuǎnjī ma?	Is there an ATM nearby? Bank of China and ICBC machines are the most reliable with foreign cards.
哪里可以换钱？	Nǎlǐ kěyǐ huànqián?	Where can I change money?
这台机器坏了。	Zhè tái jīqì huài le.	This machine is broken.
请给我小面额的。	Qǐng gěi wǒ xiǎo miàn'é de.	Small notes, please.

Receipts and refunds

请给我发票。	Qǐng gěi wǒ fāpiào.	An official receipt, please. The 发票 is the tax receipt — the only one an expense system will accept.
请给我收据。	Qǐng gěi wǒ shōujù.	A receipt, please.
可以退款吗？	Kěyǐ tuìkuǎn ma?	Can I get a refund?
多收了 my 钱。	Duō shōu le wǒ de qián.	I've been overcharged.
价格不对。	Jiàgé bú duì.	The price is wrong.

Worth knowing

Set up both Alipay and WeChat Pay before you leave, and top up a small balance in each. They fail independently — a card that one app refuses is often fine in the other — and having two working options turns a stressful dead end into a two-second retry.

Shopping and bargaining

Leisure • Money

Bargaining in China is expected at markets and tourist stalls, and completely inappropriate in shops with price tags. The two phrases that do the work are 太贵了! ("too expensive!") and 便宜点儿吧. ("a bit cheaper, please"). The most effective move is not a phrase at all — it is walking away.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

你要多少?	Nǐ yào duōshao?	How many do you want? Buying several is real leverage — the discount for two is more than twice the discount for one.
你出个价。	Nǐ chū ge jià.	Make me an offer. The invitation to bargain. Go low: about a third of what they asked.
最低了，不能再少了。	Zuì dī le, bù néng zài shǎo le.	That's my lowest, I can't go lower. Sometimes true. Test it by starting to leave.
给你便宜一点。	Gěi nǐ piányi yìdiǎn.	I'll give you a discount. The bargain is now live. Counter once more before agreeing.
这是最后一件。	Zhè shì zuìhòu yí jiàn.	It's the last one. Sales pressure, and almost never true in a market.
不能试。	Bù néng shì.	You can't try it on. Common at street stalls. Hold clothing against yourself instead and check the measurements.

The bargain

多少钱?	Duōshao qián?	How much?
太贵了!	Tài guì le!	That's too expensive! Say it with a smile. It is the opening move, not an insult.
便宜点儿吧。	Piányi diǎnr ba.	Make it a bit cheaper.
五十块行吗?	Wǔshí kuài xíng ma?	Would fifty yuan do? 块 is the spoken word for yuan, like "quid" or "bucks".
最低多少?	Zuì dī duōshao?	What's your lowest?
我再看看。	Wǒ zài kànkàn.	I'll have a look around. The most effective sentence on this page. Then actually walk.

Deciding

我就要这个。	Wǒ jiù yào zhège.	I'll take this one.
两个多少钱?	Liǎng ge duōshao qián?	How much for two?
有别的颜色吗?	Yǒu bié de yánsè ma?	Do you have another colour?
这是真的吗?	Zhè shì zhēn de ma?	Is this genuine? You will be told yes. Price it as though the answer were no.
我不要，谢谢。	Wǒ bú yào, xièxie.	No thank you. Firm and polite. Repeat it once and keep moving.

Clothes and sizes

可以试穿吗？	Kěyǐ shìchuān ma?	Can I try it on?
有大号的吗？	Yǒu dà hào de ma?	Do you have a large?
有没有更大的？	Yǒu méiyǒu gèng dà de?	Do you have anything bigger? Chinese sizing runs small — you are usually one to two sizes up from home.
太小了。	Tài xiǎo le.	It's too small.
试衣间在哪儿？	Shìyījiān zài nǎr?	Where is the fitting room?
我穿中号。	Wǒ chuān zhōng hào.	I wear a medium.

Afterwards

可以退吗？	Kěyǐ tuì ma?	Can I return it? At a market, no. In a chain store with a receipt, usually yes.
可以换吗？	Kěyǐ huàn ma?	Can I exchange it?
请给我收据。	Qǐng gěi wǒ shōujù.	A receipt, please.
这个坏了。	Zhège huài le.	This one is faulty.
能帮我包起来吗？	Néng bāng wǒ bāo qǐlái ma?	Could you wrap it for me?

Worth knowing

Before you bargain for anything, check the price of the same object in a fixed-price shop or on a Chinese shopping app. Knowing the real number turns the whole exchange from a guess into arithmetic — and it stops you celebrating a 50% discount off a 400% markup.

Pharmacy and emergencies

Leisure • If it goes wrong

The emergency numbers in mainland China are 120 for an ambulance, 110 for police and 119 for fire. The two sentences worth knowing by heart are 我需要看医生。 ("I need to see a doctor") and 我对……过敏。 ("I'm allergic to...").

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

哪里不舒服?	Nǎlǐ bù shūfu?	Where does it hurt? / What's wrong? The first question at any pharmacy or clinic. Point, then name the part.
有没有发烧?	Yǒu méiyǒu fāshāo?	Do you have a fever? 有 (yes) or 没有 (no).
几天了?	Jǐ tiān le?	How many days has it been? Answer with a number: 两天 (two days), 一个星期 (a week).
有没有过敏?	Yǒu méiyǒu guòmǐn?	Do you have any allergies? Have the answer written down in Chinese before you ever need it.
先去挂号。	Xiān qù guàhào.	Register first. Chinese hospitals start at a registration desk (挂号处), not a waiting room. Passport in hand.
需要验血。	Xūyào yànxuè.	You'll need a blood test. Routine and fast in Chinese hospitals — often results the same hour.

Emergencies

救命!	Jiùmìng!	Help!
请帮我叫救护车。	Qǐng bāng wǒ jiào jiùhùchē.	Please call an ambulance.
请帮我叫警察。	Qǐng bāng wǒ jiào jǐngchá.	Please call the police.
我需要看医生。	Wǒ xūyào kàn yīshēng.	I need to see a doctor.
最近的医院在哪儿?	Zuì jìn de yīyuàn zài nǎr?	Where is the nearest hospital?
有会说英语的医生吗?	Yǒu huì shuō Yīngyǔ de yīshēng ma?	Is there an English-speaking doctor?

Saying what's wrong

我不舒服。	Wǒ bù shūfu.	I don't feel well.
我发烧了。	Wǒ fāshāo le.	I have a fever.
我头疼。	Wǒ tóu téng.	I have a headache. Swap 头 for 肚子 (stomach), 嗓子 (throat), 牙 (tooth), 背 (back).
我拉肚子。	Wǒ lā dùzi.	I have diarrhoea. The single most likely complaint of any trip.
我想吐。	Wǒ xiǎng tù.	I feel sick / I want to vomit.
我受伤了。	Wǒ shòushāng le.	I'm injured.

Allergies and existing conditions

我对青霉素过敏。	Wǒ duì qīngméisù guòmǐn.	I'm allergic to penicillin.
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我对花生过敏。	Wǒ duì huāshēng guòmǐn.	I'm allergic to peanuts.
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我有哮喘。	Wǒ yǒu xiàochuǎn.	I have asthma.
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我有糖尿病。	Wǒ yǒu tángniàobìng.	I have diabetes.
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我在吃这个药。	Wǒ zài chī zhègè yào.	I'm taking this medication. Show the box. The chemical name is often printed in English on it.
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At the pharmacy

药店在哪儿？	Yàodiàn zài nǎr?	Where is a pharmacy?
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有感冒药吗？	Yǒu gǎnmào yào ma?	Do you have cold medicine?
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有止痛药吗？	Yǒu zhǐtòng yào ma?	Do you have painkillers?
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有创可贴吗？	Yǒu chuāngkětīe ma?	Do you have plasters / band-aids?
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怎么吃？	Zěnmē chī?	How do I take it?
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一天几次？	Yì tiān jǐ cì?	How many times a day?
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Worth knowing

Write your allergies, your blood type, any medication you take and your hotel's name into a single note in Chinese, and set it as your lock-screen wallpaper for the trip. It works with a dead battery on someone else's phone, and it is the one preparation on this page that could genuinely matter.

Meetings and introductions

Business • Meetings

Address people by surname + title, never by given name: 王总 (Boss Wang), 李经理 (Manager Li), 张老师 (Teacher Zhang). Hand and receive a business card with both hands, read it before putting it down, and never write on it in front of the person who gave it to you.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

久仰久仰。	Jiǔyǎng jiǔyǎng.	I've heard a lot about you. Formal and formulaic. 幸会 (xìng huì — pleased to meet you) is the natural reply.
请多关照。	Qǐng duō guānzhào.	I look forward to working with you. Literally "please look after me". Say the same back.
这是我的名片。	Zhè shì wǒ de míngpiàn.	Here is my card. Both hands out, both hands back. Read it before you set it down.
您怎么称呼?	Nín zěnmē chēnghu?	What should I call you? The polite way to ask for a name and title. Give your surname and role.
请坐这边。	Qǐng zuò zhèbiān.	Please sit here. Seating is not random — accept where you are put rather than choosing.
我们研究一下。	Wǒmen yánjiū yíxià.	We'll look into it. Often a soft no, or at least "not today". Do not read it as a commitment.

Titles — who you are talking to

王总	Wáng zǒng	Mr Wang (the boss) 总 covers general manager and above. The safe choice when you don't know.
李经理	Lǐ jīnglǐ	Manager Li
张主任	Zhāng zhǔrèn	Director Zhang Head of a department or office.
陈董事长	Chén dǒngshìzhǎng	Chairman Chen
刘工	Liú gōng	Engineer Liu From 工程师. Standard in factories and technical firms.
赵老师	Zhào lǎoshī	Teacher Zhao Also used for any respected expert, not only teachers.

Introducing yourself

您好，我是史密斯。	Nín hǎo, wǒ shì Shǐmìsī.	Hello, I'm Smith. 您 rather than 你 in any first business meeting.
这是我的名片。	Zhè shì wǒ de míngpiàn.	This is my business card.
我是市场部的。	Wǒ shì shìchǎngbù de.	I'm from the marketing department.
我负责亚洲市场。	Wǒ fùzé Yàzhōu shìchǎng.	I'm responsible for the Asian market.
很高兴认识您。	Hěn gāoxìng rènshi nín.	Pleased to meet you.
请多关照。	Qǐng duō guānzhào.	I look forward to working together.

In the meeting

我们开始吧。	Wǒmen kāishǐ ba.	Shall we begin?
我先介绍一下。	Wǒ xiān jièshào yíxià.	Let me introduce this first.
我有个问题。	Wǒ yǒu ge wèntí.	I have a question.
我明白了。	Wǒ míngbai le.	I understand.
请再说一遍。	Qǐng zài shuō yí biàn.	Could you say that again?
能不能写下来？	Néng bu néng xiě xiàlái?	Could you write that down? Numbers and specifications: always ask for them in writing.

Wrapping up

感谢您的时间。	Xièxie nín de shíjiān.	Thank you for your time.
我们保持联系。	Wǒmen bǎochí liánxì.	Let's stay in touch.
我回去跟同事商量。	Wǒ huíqù gēn tóngshì shāngliang.	I'll discuss it with my colleagues.
下周给您回复。	Xià zhōu gěi nín huífù.	I'll get back to you next week.
加个微信吧。	Jiā ge Wēixìn ba.	Let's add each other on WeChat. The real follow-up channel — see the WeChat page.

Worth knowing

Get bilingual business cards printed before you fly, and bring three times as many as you think you need. Cards are exchanged with everyone in the room, not just the person you came to see, and running out mid-meeting is a genuinely awkward moment.

Negotiating and pricing

Business • Deals

Four words carry a Chinese commercial negotiation: 报价 (quote), 起订量 (minimum order quantity), 付款方式 (payment terms) and 交货期 (lead time). And one sentence to recognise rather than say: 我需要请示一下。 — "I'll have to check with my superior", which may be true, a stalling move, or a polite no.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

我需要请示一下。	Wǒ xūyào qǐngshì yíxià.	I'll need to check with my manager. May be literal, may be a soft close. Don't press — follow up in writing tomorrow.
我们研究一下。	Wǒmen yánjiū yíxià.	We'll look into it. Leans towards no. If you want a real answer, ask what would need to change.
这个价格很难做。	Zhège jiàgé hěn nán zuò.	That price is very difficult for us. Not a refusal — an invitation to change quantity or terms instead of price.
量大从优。	Liàng dà cóng yōu.	Better price for larger volumes. The standard opening. Have a real volume number ready before you ask.
起订量是一千个。	Qǐdìngliàng shì yìqiān gè.	The minimum order is 1,000 units. Where most first orders die. Ask whether a trial order (试单) is possible.
这是含税价。	Zhè shì hánshuì jià.	That price includes tax. Always establish 含税 or 不含税 — it is a 13% difference on the same number.

Price

请给我报价。	Qǐng gěi wǒ bàojià.	Please send me a quotation.
单价是多少？	Dānjià shì duōshao?	What's the unit price?
含税吗？	Hánshuì ma?	Does that include tax?
包运费吗？	Bāo yùnfèi ma?	Does that include shipping?
能不能再便宜一点？	Néng bu néng zài piányi yídiǎn?	Could you do a little better on price?
我们的预算有限。	Wǒmen de yùsuàn yǒuxiàn.	Our budget is limited.

Quantity and delivery

起订量是多少？	Qǐdìngliàng shì duōshao?	What's the minimum order quantity?
可以先下试单吗？	Kěyǐ xiān xià shìdān ma?	Could we place a trial order first? The most useful question in this whole section.
交货期多长？	Jiāohuòqī duō cháng?	What's the lead time?
能提前吗？	Néng tíqián ma?	Could it be earlier?
一千个多少钱？	Yìqiān gè duōshao qián?	How much for a thousand units?
可以寄样品吗？	Kěyǐ jì yàngpǐn ma?	Could you send a sample?

Terms and contracts

付款方式是什么？	Fùkuǎn fāngshì shì shénme?	What are the payment terms?
可以先付百分之三十吗？	Kěyǐ xiān fù bǎi fēn zhī sānshí ma?	Could we pay 30% up front?
请发合同给我。	Qǐng fā hétóng gěi wǒ.	Please send me the contract.
这条我们需要改。	Zhè tiáo wǒmen xūyào gǎi.	We need to change this clause.
我需要中英文对照。	Wǒ xūyào Zhōng-Yīngwén duìzhào.	I need a bilingual version. Insist on this. Which language governs should be stated in the contract.
质保多久？	Zhìbǎo duō jiǔ?	How long is the warranty?

Holding your ground politely

我理解，不过……	Wǒ lǐjiě, búguò…	I understand, however… The standard soft disagreement. Never open with a flat 不.
我们再考虑一下。	Wǒmen zài kǎolǜ yíxià.	We'll think about it further.
这个我做不了主。	Zhège wǒ zuò bù liǎo zhǔ.	That's not my decision to make. Your own version of 请示 — entirely legitimate, and it buys time.
我们需要比较一下。	Wǒmen xūyào bǐjiào yíxià.	We need to compare options.
如果量翻倍呢？	Rúguǒ liàng fānbèi ne?	What if we double the volume? Moves the conversation off price and onto structure.

Worth knowing

Ask for every number in writing, in a bilingual email, the same day. Chinese business runs on WeChat and email trails, memories differ, and a friendly written recap — "just confirming: ¥12.40/unit, 含税, MOQ 1,000, 30 days" — is both good practice and a courteous way to hold someone to a figure.

Trade fairs and factory visits

Business • Sourcing

At a fair you need four sentences: 我可以看看吗? (may I look?), 这个多少钱? (how much?), 起订量是多少? (what's the MOQ?) and 可以寄样品吗? (can you send a sample?). At a factory the useful one is 我可以看看生产线吗? — may I see the production line?

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

欢迎光临!	Huānyíng guānglín!	Welcome! Called out as you approach any booth. A nod is enough of a reply.
您需要什么产品?	Nín xūyào shénme chǎnpǐn?	What products are you looking for? Answer with a category, not a specification: 我找厨房用品 (kitchenware).
这是我们的目录。	Zhè shì wǒmen de mùlù.	This is our catalogue. Usually a QR code now. Scan it, but still take the card.
我们是工厂，不是贸易公司。	Wǒmen shì gōngchǎng, bú shì màoùyì gōngsī.	We're a factory, not a trading company. Everyone says this. Verify it at the site visit, not at the booth.
样品免费，运费您付。	Yàngpǐn miǎnfèi, yùnfèi nín fù.	The sample is free, you pay the shipping. The normal arrangement. Have a courier account number ready.
这边请，我带您参观。	Zhèbiān qǐng, wǒ dài nín cānguān.	This way, I'll show you around. The factory tour. Ask questions as you walk — it is expected.

At the booth

我可以看看吗?	Wǒ kěyǐ kànkàn ma?	May I take a look?
这个多少钱?	Zhège duōshao qián?	How much is this one?
起订量是多少?	Qǐdìngliàng shì duōshao?	What's the minimum order quantity?
可以寄样品吗?	Kěyǐ jì yàngpǐn ma?	Can you send a sample?
你们是工厂吗?	Nǐmen shì gōngchǎng ma?	Are you a factory?
有英文目录吗?	Yǒu Yīngwén mùlù ma?	Do you have an English catalogue?

Product questions

材料是什么?	Cáiliào shì shénme?	What is it made of?
可以定制吗?	Kěyǐ dìngzhì ma?	Can it be customised?
可以印我们的logo吗?	Kěyǐ yìn wǒmen de logo ma?	Can you print our logo on it?
有认证吗?	Yǒu rènzhèng ma?	Does it have certification? CE, FCC, RoHS — ask to see the certificate, not just hear about it.
有别的颜色吗?	Yǒu bié de yánsè ma?	Are there other colours?
包装是怎么样的?	Bāozhuāng shì zěnmeyàng de?	What's the packaging like?

At the factory

我可以看看生产线吗？	Wǒ kěyǐ kànkān shēngchǎnxiàn ma?	May I see the production line?
一天能生产多少？	Yì tiān néng shēngchǎn duōshao?	What's your daily output?
有多少工人？	Yǒu duōshao gōngrén?	How many workers do you have?
质检怎么做？	Zhìjiǎn zěnmē zuò?	How is quality control done?
我可以拍照吗？	Wǒ kěyǐ pāizhào ma?	May I take photos? Always ask. Refusal is common and is not necessarily a red flag.
你们还给谁供货？	Nǐmen hái gěi shéi gōnghuò?	Who else do you supply?

Following up

请把报价发到我的邮箱。	Qǐng bǎ bàojià fā dào wǒ de yóuxiāng.	Please email me the quotation.
加个微信吧。	Jiā ge Wēixìn ba.	Let's add each other on WeChat.
我回去研究一下。	Wǒ huíqù yánjiū yíxià.	I'll review it when I'm back.
下次来我一定去工厂。	Xià cì lái wǒ yíding qù gōngchǎng.	Next visit I'll come to the factory.
我们需要验货。	Wǒmen xūyào yànhuò.	We'll need a pre-shipment inspection. Say this at the start of the relationship, not when the goods are ready.

Worth knowing

Bring a lightweight roller bag to the fair and wear shoes you would walk ten kilometres in — the Canton Fair complex is over a million square metres. The people who leave on day one with a sore back and a full tote bag see about a third of what they came for.

Sourcing online (1688 and Alibaba)

Business • Sourcing

Most sourcing now starts in a chat window rather than at a fair, and four words carry it: 客服 (the seller's chat agent), 现货 (in stock), 改价 (adjust the price) and 一件代发 (drop-ship single units). The reply that surprises most foreign buyers is 我们不发国际。 — "we don't ship abroad", which on 1688 is normal rather than a refusal.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

亲，在的。	Qīn, zài de.	Hi there, I'm here. The standard marketplace greeting. 亲 is register, not familiarity — no need to match it.
拍下我给您改价。	Pāixià wǒ gěi nín gǎijià.	Place the order and I'll adjust the price. Normal practice. The listed price is not the price you pay.
我们不发国际。	Wǒmen bù fā guójì.	We don't ship internationally. Expected on 1688, not a refusal. Give them a 集运 warehouse address in China instead.
现货，明天发。	Xiànhuò, míngtiān fā.	In stock, ships tomorrow. The answer you want. 现货 is the single most useful word on the site.
这个不支持一件代发。	Zhège bù zhīchí yí jiàn dàifā.	This item can't be drop-shipped. Means you buy a full inner carton. Ask what the smallest pack size is.
定制的话要打样。	Dìngzhì dehuà yào dǎyàng.	For a custom version we'd need to make a prototype. There is a fee and a delay. Reasonable, but it ends the idea of a quick test order.

Opening the chat

你好，这个有现货吗？	Nǐ hǎo, zhège yǒu xiànhuò ma?	Hello, is this in stock?
批发价是多少？	Pīfājià shì duōshao?	What's the wholesale price?
一百个什么价？	Yībǎi gè shénme jià?	What's the price for a hundred?
你们是厂家吗？	Nǐmen shì chǎngjiā ma?	Are you the manufacturer?
有实拍图吗？	Yǒu shípāitú ma?	Do you have real photos of it? Listing images are often the factory's stock shots. A phone photo tells you far more.
可以看视频吗？	Kěyǐ kàn shìpín ma?	Could I see a video?

Price and ordering

能改价吗？	Néng gǎijià ma?	Can you adjust the price?
运费怎么算？	Yùnfèi zěnmē suàn?	How is the shipping worked out?
可以先拍一个吗？	Kěyǐ xiān pāi yí ge ma?	Could I order just one first?
支持一件代发吗？	Zhīchí yí jiàn dàifā ma?	Do you support drop-shipping?
我发到集运仓。	Wǒ fā dào jíyùncāng.	Send it to my forwarding warehouse. The standard workaround for a seller who only posts within China.

几天能发？

Jǐ tiān néng fā?

How many days until it goes out?

Checking before you pay

这个是什么材质？

Zhègè shì shénme cáizhì?

What's it made of?

有没有质保？

Yǒu méiyǒu zhìbǎo?

Is there a warranty?

可以退换吗？

Kěyǐ tuìhuàn ma?

Can it be returned or exchanged?

尺寸有偏差吗？

Chǐcùn yǒu piānchā ma?

Is there any variation in size?

差评是怎么回事？

Chàpíng shì zěnmē huí shì?

What's the story with the bad reviews?

Asking directly works more often than it should. The answer, or the silence, is informative.

When it goes wrong

收到的和图片不一样。

Shōudào de hé túpiàn bù yíyàng.

What arrived isn't what the photo showed.

我要申请退款。

Wǒ yào shēnqǐng tuìkuǎn.

I want to request a refund.

请补发。

Qǐng bǔfā.

Please send the missing items.

我保留了聊天记录。

Wǒ bǎoliú le liáotiān jìlù.

I've kept the chat log.

On Chinese platforms the in-app chat log is the evidence a dispute is decided on.

麻烦帮我处理一下。

Máfan bāng wǒ chǔlǐ yíxià.

Please sort this out for me.

Worth knowing

Ask for one photograph of the actual item on the seller's own bench, taken today, before you pay for anything. It costs them a minute, it is a completely ordinary request on a Chinese marketplace, and the sellers who will not do it have told you something useful for free.

Shipping and customs

Business • Logistics

Three words decide the quote — 海运 (sea freight), 空运 (air) and 快递 (courier) — and two decide who is responsible: 提单 (the bill of lading) and 清关 (customs clearance). The question worth asking before any of them is 报价是FOB还是EXW? , because the same number means very different things.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

走海运还是空运?	Zǒu hǎiyùn háishi kōngyùn?	Sea or air? Ask for both quotes. Air is often only sensible for the first small batch.
大概三十五天到港。	Dàgài sānshíwǔ tiān dào gǎng.	About 35 days to port. Port to port. Add a week of inland transit at each end that this figure excludes.
我们报的是FOB价。	Wǒmen bào de shì FOB jià.	Our quote is an FOB price. Good — it includes getting the goods onto the ship. Confirm which port.
货代您指定还是我们安排?	Huòdài nín zhǐdìng háishi wǒmen ānpái?	Do you nominate the forwarder or shall we? Nominate your own. It is the cheapest insurance in the whole transaction.
单证已经发给您了。	Dānzhèng yǐjīng fā gěi nín le.	The documents have been sent to you. Check the packing list against the invoice before the goods sail, not after.
清关需要您那边配合。	Qīngguān xūyào nín nàbiān pèihé.	Clearance needs your side to act. Correct, and it is your responsibility. Have a customs broker lined up before arrival.

Choosing how it travels

走海运多少钱?	Zǒu hǎiyùn duōshao qián?	How much is it by sea?
空运多久到?	Kōngyùn duō jiǔ dào?	How long does air freight take?
可以发快递吗?	Kěyǐ fā kuàidì ma?	Could it go by courier?
一个柜能装多少?	Yí ge guì néng zhuāng duōshao?	How much fits in one container?
要不要拼柜?	Yào bu yào pīnguì?	Should we share a container? LCL — less than a container load. The normal answer for a first order.
从哪个港口发?	Cóng nǎge gǎngkǒu fā?	Which port does it leave from?

Terms and cost

报价是FOB还是EXW?	Bàojià shì FOB háishi EXW?	Is the quote FOB or EXW? Ask this before comparing any two quotations.
含不含运费?	Hán bu hán yùnfèi?	Does that include the freight?
保险怎么算?	Bǎoxiǎn zěnmě suàn?	How is the insurance calculated?
到岸价是多少?	Dào'ànjià shì duōshao?	What's the landed price?
我们指定货代。	Wǒmen zhǐdìng huòdài.	We'll nominate the freight forwarder. Say it early and it is unremarkable; say it late and it looks like distrust.

请发装箱单。	Qǐng fā zhuāngxiāngdān.	Please send the packing list.
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Documents

提单什么时候能出？	Tídān shénme shíhòu néng chū?	When will the bill of lading be issued?
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请发商业发票。	Qǐng fā shāngyè fāpiào.	Please send the commercial invoice.
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需要原产地证吗？	Xūyào yuánchǎndìzhèng ma?	Do we need a certificate of origin? It can cut your import duty. Worth asking before the goods ship, not after.
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报关谁负责？	Bàoguān shéi fùzé?	Who handles the export declaration?
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请把单证扫描给我。	Qǐng bǎ dānzhèng sǎomiáo gěi wǒ.	Please scan the paperwork to me.
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Chasing it

什么时候发货？	Shénme shíhòu fāhuò?	When do the goods leave?
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有单号吗？	Yǒu dānhào ma?	Is there a tracking number?
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现在到哪儿了？	Xiànzài dào nǎr le?	Where is it now?
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预计什么时候到？	Yùjì shénme shíhòu dào?	When is it expected to arrive?
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延误了多久？	Yánwù le duō jiǔ?	How long is the delay?
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Worth knowing

Ask what the factory's Chinese New Year shutdown dates are before you agree any lead time. Production stops for two to four weeks, the whole country's freight capacity is booked in the fortnight before it, and a January order that seemed to have plenty of slack routinely lands in March.

Quality problems and claims

Business • Sourcing

Four words do the work: 次品 (defective goods), 和样品不一样 (not the same as the sample), 返工 (rework) and 索赔 (a claim). The question that moves things along is not an accusation but 你们打算怎么处理? — "how do you plan to handle this?"

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

请拍照发给我。	Qǐng pāizhào fā gěi wǒ.	Please photograph it and send it over. Always the first request. Include the carton label and a ruler or coin for scale.
我们查一下。	Wǒmen chá yíxià.	We'll look into it. Reasonable, but ask for a date. An enquiry with no deadline quietly closes itself.
这是运输问题。	Zhè shì yùنشū wèntí.	That's a transport problem. The standard first move. A pre-shipment inspection report is what settles it either way.
下次给您补偿。	Xià cì gěi nín bǔcháng.	We'll make it up to you on the next order. A credit note, not a refund. Fine if you are reordering, worthless if you are not.
我们可以返工。	Wǒmen kěyǐ fǎngōng.	We can rework them. Ask who pays the freight in both directions — that, not the labour, is the real cost.
按合同办。	Àn hétóng bàn.	Let's go by the contract. A good sign, and the reason the contract should have been bilingual and chopped.

Reporting it

我们收到货了，有问题。	Wǒmen shōudào huò le, yǒu wèntí.	The goods arrived and there's a problem.
有一批是次品。	Yǒu yì pī shì cìpǐn.	Part of the batch is defective.
和样品不一样。	Hé yàngpǐn bù yíyàng.	It isn't the same as the sample. The strongest complaint you can make, because the sample was agreed by both of you.
数量不对。	Shùliàng bú duì.	The quantity is wrong.
包装破损了。	Bāozhuāng pòsǔn le.	The packaging is damaged.
我已经拍照了。	Wǒ yǐjīng pāizhào le.	I've already photographed it.

Being specific about it

不良率是百分之五。	Bùliánglǜ shì bǎi fēn zhī wǔ.	The defect rate is five per cent. A rate beats an adjective. It is the number a remedy gets calculated from.
少发了两百个。	Shǎo fā le liǎngbǎi gè.	Two hundred units are short.
颜色不对。	Yánsè bú duì.	The colour is wrong.
尺寸差了两毫米。	Chǐcùn chà le liǎng háomǐ.	The size is two millimetres out.

这个功能不能用。

Zhège gōngnéng bù néng yòng.

This function doesn't work.

请看验货报告。

Qǐng kàn yànhuò bàogào.

Please see the inspection report.

Asking for a remedy

你们打算怎么处理？

Nǐmen dǎsuàn zěnmě chǔlǐ?

How do you plan to handle this?

The most useful sentence on this page. It asks for a proposal instead of assigning blame.

我们要求退货。

Wǒmen yāoqiú tuìhuò.

We're asking to return the goods.

可以换货吗？

Kěyǐ huànhuò ma?

Can they be replaced?

谁付运费？

Shéi fù yùnfèi?

Who pays the freight?

我们要索赔。

Wǒmen yào suǒpéi.

We're making a claim.

A serious escalation. Have the report and the contract clause ready before you say it.

请给我一个书面答复。

Qǐng gěi wǒ yí ge shūmiàn dáfù.

Please give me a written reply.

Keeping the relationship

我们想继续合作。

Wǒmen xiǎng jìxù hézuò.

We want to keep working together.

Say this early and mean it. It reframes the problem as shared rather than adversarial.

这次我们各让一步。

Zhè cì wǒmen gè ràng yí bù.

Let's each give a little this time.

下批要注意。

Xià pī yào zhùyì.

The next batch needs care.

请安排第三方验货。

Qǐng ānpái dì-sān-fāng yànhuò.

Please arrange a third-party inspection.

什么时候能答复我？

Shénme shíhou néng dáfù wǒ?

When can you come back to me?

Worth knowing

Agree a third-party pre-shipment inspection in the terms of the very first order, when it is a routine clause and nobody reads anything into it. Introduced later, after something has gone wrong, the same sentence reads as an accusation — and by then the goods are already in your warehouse rather than the supplier's.

Business dining and toasting

Business • Hospitality

At a Chinese business dinner the host sits facing the door, orders for everyone, and toasts first. Your job is to toast back: 我敬您一杯。 ("I'd like to toast you"), glass held lower than the senior person's. To drink less, say 我随意，您随便。 — I'll sip, you please yourself.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

您先请。	Nín xiān qǐng.	After you. Said at doors, lifts and the first chopstick into a dish. Return it once, then go.
来，我敬您一杯。	Lái, wǒ jìng nín yì bēi.	Let me toast you. Stand if they stand, hold your glass lower, drink, show the glass.
干杯！	Gānbēi!	Bottoms up! Literally "dry the glass". If you can't, say 我随意 before you drink, not after.
多吃点！	Duō chī diǎn!	Eat more! Repeated hospitality, not a real instruction. 够了，谢谢 is the polite stop.
不能喝酒吗？	Bù néng hē jiǔ ma?	You can't drink? A genuine question, not a challenge. A medical or driving reason is fully accepted.
我们下次再聊。	Wǒmen xià cì zài liáo.	Let's talk more next time. Business talk is usually closed at the table's end, not reopened over dessert.

Arriving and being seated

谢谢您的邀请。	Xièxie nín de yāoqǐng.	Thank you for the invitation.
我坐哪儿？	Wǒ zuò nǎr?	Where should I sit? Ask rather than choose. Seating carries rank.
您先请。	Nín xiān qǐng.	After you.
您太客气了。	Nín tài kèqì le.	You're too kind.
这家餐厅很好。	Zhè jiā cāntīng hěn hǎo.	This is a lovely restaurant. Praising the host's choice is expected and always lands well.

Toasting

我敬您一杯。	Wǒ jìng nín yì bēi.	I'd like to toast you.
祝合作愉快！	Zhù hézuò yúkuài!	To a happy partnership!
祝您身体健康！	Zhù nín shēntǐ jiànkāng!	To your health!
我先干为敬。	Wǒ xiān gān wéi jìng.	I'll empty mine first, out of respect. A strong gesture. Only say it if you mean to drink it.
我随意，您随便。	Wǒ suíyì, nín suíbiàn.	I'll sip; please do as you like. The graceful way to drink less without refusing the toast.
感谢各位。	Gǎnxiè gèwèi.	Thank you, everyone.

Drinking less, politely

What to say, and what you will hear said back, in the situations a trip is made of

我开车，不能喝酒。	Wǒ kāichē, bù néng hē jiǔ.	I'm driving, so I can't drink. Universally accepted and never questioned.
我身体不太好。	Wǒ shēntǐ bú tài hǎo.	My health isn't great. A health reason closes the subject politely.
我以茶代酒。	Wǒ yǐ chá dài jiǔ.	I'll toast with tea instead. The classic, entirely respectable substitution.
我在吃药。	Wǒ zài chī yào.	I'm on medication.
我真的不能再喝了。	Wǒ zhēn de bù néng zài hē le.	I really can't drink any more.
下次一定。	Xià cì yí dìng.	Next time, for sure. Softens any refusal into a promise.

Eating and leaving

很好吃。	Hěn hǎochī.	This is delicious.
我够了，谢谢。	Wǒ gòu le, xièxie.	I've had enough, thank you.
我不吃辣。	Wǒ bù chī là.	I don't eat spicy food.
今天我来买单。	Jīntiān wǒ lái mǎidān.	Let me pay tonight. Offer once, sincerely — then let the host win. Insisting takes their face.
谢谢款待。	Xièxie kuǎndài.	Thank you for your hospitality. Said on leaving; the correct closing line of the evening.

Worth knowing

Eat something before you go, and never toast on an empty stomach — 白酒 (báijiǔ) is commonly 50%+ alcohol and is served in a glass small enough to make that easy to forget. Pacing yourself is respected; needing to be helped to a taxi is remembered.

WeChat and staying in touch

Business • Follow-up

加个微信吧。 ("let's add each other on WeChat") is how a Chinese business relationship actually continues — not email. Scan each other's QR code before you leave the room, and send a short message the same evening: relationships in China are maintained in the chat window, not the inbox.

What they say to you

Recognising these matters more than saying anything perfectly.

加个微信吧。	Jiā ge Wēixìn ba.	Let's add each other on WeChat. Open your QR code — 我的二维码 — and hold up the phone.
我扫你。	Wǒ sǎo nǐ.	I'll scan yours. Faster than exchanging numbers. Show your code and wait.
我拉你进群。	Wǒ lā nǐ jìn qún.	I'll add you to the group. Being added to the project group means you are now in the working loop.
我发语音给你。	Wǒ fā yǔyīn gěi nǐ.	I'll send you a voice message. Very common. It is fine to ask for text instead — see the phrases below.
方便的时候回我。	Fāngbiàn de shíhòu huí wǒ.	Reply whenever it suits you. Polite, but a same-day reply is still the norm in business.
材料我发你了。	Cáiliào wǒ fā nǐ le.	I've sent you the documents. Files are shared in the chat, not by email. Save them — chat files expire.

Adding someone

加个微信吧。	Jiā ge Wēixìn ba.	Let's add each other on WeChat.
这是我的二维码。	Zhè shì wǒ de èrwéimǎ.	Here's my QR code.
我扫你还是你扫我？	Wǒ sǎo nǐ hái shì nǐ sǎo wǒ?	Shall I scan yours or you scan mine?
我通过了。	Wǒ tōngguò le.	I've accepted your request.
我备注一下您的名字。	Wǒ bèizhù yíxià nín de míngzi.	Let me save your name. Rename every new contact immediately — display names are often nicknames.

The follow-up message

今天很高兴认识您。	Jīntiān hěn gāoxìng rènshi nín.	It was a pleasure meeting you today.
谢谢您今天的时间。	Xièxie nín jīntiān de shíjiān.	Thank you for your time today.
我把资料发给您。	Wǒ bǎ zīliào fā gěi nín.	I'm sending you the materials.
下周我跟你确认。	Xià zhōu wǒ gēn nín quèrèn.	I'll confirm with you next week.
有问题随时联系我。	Yǒu wèntí suíshí liánxì wǒ.	Contact me any time if there's a question.
期待合作。	Qīdài hézuò.	Looking forward to working together.

Managing the chat

可以发文字吗？	Kěyǐ fā wénzì ma?	Could you send that as text? Entirely reasonable — say your Chinese reads better than it listens.
我看不懂，可以发英文吗？	Wǒ kàn bù dǒng, kěyǐ fā Yīngwén ma?	I don't understand — could you write in English?
稍等，我看一下。	Shāo děng, wǒ kàn yíxià.	One moment, let me look.
收到。	Shōudào.	Got it. The standard one-word acknowledgement in Chinese work chats.
我现在不方便。	Wǒ xiànzài bù fāngbiàn.	It's not a good moment for me.
晚点回复您。	Wǎn diǎn huífù nín.	I'll reply later.

Small talk that builds the relationship

您吃了没？	Nín chī le ma?	Have you eaten? A greeting, not an invitation. 吃了 (yes) is the whole answer.
最近忙吗？	Zuìjìn máng ma?	Been busy lately?
周末愉快！	Zhōumò yúkuài!	Have a good weekend!
新年快乐！	Xīnnián kuàilè!	Happy New Year! A Chinese New Year message to every contact is normal and genuinely appreciated.
路上小心。	Lùshang xiǎoxīn.	Take care on the way.
下次来一定告诉我。	Xià cì lái yíding gàosu wǒ.	Tell me next time you're in town.

Worth knowing

Rename every new contact the moment you add them — surname, title and company (王总-深圳电子). WeChat display names are frequently nicknames or single characters, and after a week of a sourcing trip an unnamed contact list is unusable.