The basic unit of the Chinese language is the zi (字), i.e. a Chinese word. Each zi has a written form (called a character, made up of strokes), a sound (made up of consonant and vowel) and a meaning (or multiple meanings). When we speak or write Chinese, we string zi together to form terms, phrases and sentences.

This week: Words about the beaches

曬 (radical 晒 = 日 ri = sun)
Pronunciation: shai (Putonghua, 4th tone), saai (Cantonese, 3rd tone)
Basic meaning: expose to sunlight, sun-bathe

曬 (日 ri, sun + 麗 li, lovely) = 晒 (日 ri, sun + 西 xi, west). Both characters are ideograms.


Sun-bathers want 古銅色皮膚 (gu tong se pi fu = ancient-bronze-color-skin = bronze tan), 曬太陽 (shai tai yang = sun-bathe-ultimate-yang = laze around in the sun), but too much sun may cause 皮膚癌 (pi fu ai = skin-cancer).

by Diana Yue