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.

In Putonghua (the spoken form of Modern Standard Chinese) each zi is pronounced in one of four tones:

1st tone: 1 = diacritical mark — pitch: 5 to 5, highest prolonged
2nd tone: 2 = diacritical mark / pitch: 3 to 5, middle to high
3rd tone: 3 = diacritical mark U pitch: 2 to 1 to 4, low to lowest to high
4th tone: 4 = diacritical mark \ pitch: 5 to 1, highest to lowest

To pronounce each zi below, follow its pinyin and the given tone number. Light-sound words, which have no definite pitch, carry no diacritical mark and are marked by 0.

This week: Words about hiking

伴 (radical 亻 = person) = 陪伴 (pei2 ban4 = accompany-companionship): 男伴 (nan2 ban4 = male-companion/escort/beau), 舞伴 (wu3 ban4 = dancing-partner), 伴遊 (ban4 you2 = accompany-tour = tour escort), 伴奏 (ban4 zou4 = accompany-perform = musical/instrumental accompaniment).

有美相伴 (you3 mei3 xiang1 ban4 = has-beauty-mutual-accompany) = pretty girl’s company. Un-ambitious person marries to 團個伴 (tu2 ge4 ban4 = desire/have-a-mate). 終生伴侶 (zhong1 sheng1 ban4 lü3 = end-life-companion/mate/spouse) = lifelong companion/mate/spouse.

States/businesses form 伙伴關係 (huo3 ban4 guan1 xi4 = mate-companion-relationship = partnership). Hikers welcome 同伴 (tong2 ban4 = fellow-companions) 結伴同行 (jie2 ban4 tong2 you2 = form-companionship-together-walk = walk together).

by Diana Yue