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 group tours

Putonghua pronunciation: **tuan2**
Cantonese pronunciation: **tuen4**
Meaning: round, spherical, lump, cluster, roll, group, association, regiment

團 (radical ⺼ weī, surround) means round/lump/group: 飯團 (fan4 tuan2 = cooked-rice-lump = rice-ball), 劇團 (jù2 tuan2 = drama-group/troupe), 團體 (tuan2 ti3 = group-body/association), 軍團 (jūn1 tuan2 = army-regiment), 集團 (jí2 tuan2 = assembled-group = business/military group), 團隊精神 (tuan2 dui4 jīng1 shēn2 = group-team-essence-spirit = group spirit).

Kids play 團團轉 (tuan2 tuan2 zhuan4 = round-round-turn = round-and-round-we-go). Allies 團結 (tuan2 jie2 = cluster-together-tie/unite = support each other). Scattered siblings eventually 大團圓 (dà4 tuan2 yuán2 = big-round-circle = are all together/reunited).

旅行團 (lü2 xíng2 tuan2 = tour-travel-group) = group tour. Agents 斜團 (tuan2 fei4 = tour-prices), promote 十天北歐團 (shí2 tiān1 běi3 ou1 tuan2 = ten-sky/day/north-“Eu”-rope-transliterated-group = 10-day Scandinavian tour).

by Diana Yue