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: lü3
Cantonese pronunciation: lui5
Meaning: travel, journey, sojourn, trip, itinerary, route, traveler, brigade

旅 (radical 方 fang2, square) means people/army moving: 旅客 (lü3 ke4 = traveling-guest = traveler/sojourner), 旅程 (lü3 cheng2 = travel-route), 旅伴 (lü3 ban4 = traveling-companion). Army unit 旅 = brigade. 劍旅 (jing4 lü3 = strong-army/team) e.g. Manchester United. 軍旅生涯 (jun1 lü3 sheng4 ya2 = army-travel-life-rim/horizon) describes army soldier’s unsettled life.

旅遊 (lü3 you2 = travel-leisurely-roaming) = tourism. 旅行社 (lü3 xing2 she4 = tour-travel-society = travel agencies) organize 旅行團 (lü2 xing2 tuan2 = tour-travel-group = group tours).

Poet sighs: 天地者, 萬物之逆旅 (tian1 di4 zhe3, wan4 wu4 zhi1 ni4 lü3 = heaven-earth, ten-thousand-thing-s’ transit-inn = The universe is just an inn for all things = We are all temporary dwellers in our universe).

by Diana Yue