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

宿
Putonghua pronunciation: su4, xiu3, xiu4
Cantonese pronunciation: suk1
Meaning: rest, sleep, night stay, overnight, depend, dormant, residence

宿 (radical ~ mian2, house/cover) means 留宿 (liu2 su4 = stay-night) or long-term: 宿敵 (su4 di2 = old-enemy), 宿疾 (su4 ji2 = chronic-illness), 宿命 (su4 ming4 = predestined-fate). 露宿者 (lu4 su4 zhe3 = exposed-sleep-ers) = outdoor/street-sleepers.

宿舍 (su4 she4 = resident-hall/dormitory) charges 宿費 (su4 fei4 = staying-rates), provides 食宿 (shi2 su4 = eat/board-sleep/bed = bed-and-board) for 寄宿生 (ji4 su4 sheng1 = depend-sleep-student = night-boarders). Star-gazers 宿營 (su4 ying2 = stay/sleep-in-tents), watch 星宿 (xing1 xiu4 = star-residence/mansion = stars).

Tourists 住宿 (zhu4 su4 = stay-the-night) in 民宿 (min2 su4 = people-sleep = Japanese-“minshuku”/bed-and-breakfast), listen to 宿雨 (su4 yu3 = overnight-rain), 一宿無話 (yi1 xiu3 wu2 hua4 = one-night-no-talk = pass night quietly).

by Diana Yue