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You're not ready to visit Hong Kong if you don't know these 

Must-know Cantonese phrases for your Hong Kong trip

cantobestie

THE BIG IDEA

Nine phrases, one confident trip

These aren't textbook phrases — they're the ones you'll actually use, every single day, from the moment you land to the moment you ask for the bill. Two of them — 唔該 and 多謝 — sound similar but are NOT interchangeable, so pay close attention to the difference below.

GROUP 1

Greetings — simpler than English 🙌

Cantonese doesn't really have separate words for "good afternoon" or "good evening" the way English does. You mostly just need these two.

PHRASE 1

GOOD MORNING

早晨。

zou2 san4.

Good morning.

Use it: Only in the morning — roughly until lunchtime. There's no equivalent for "good afternoon" or "good evening"; people just say hello or jump straight into the conversation.

PHRASE 2

HELLO, ANYTIME

哈佬。

haa1 lou2.

Hello.

Use it: A borrowed word from English "hello" — works at any time of day, unlike 早晨. This is your safe default outside the morning.

GROUP 2

唔該 — the single most useful word 🙏

If you only learn one Cantonese word before your trip, make it this one. 唔該 (m4 goi1) covers "excuse me," "please," and "thanks for the service" all at once — you'll use it constantly in restaurants, taxis, shops, and hotels.

PHRASE 3

THE ALL-PURPOSE SERVICE WORD

唔該。

m4 goi1.

Excuse me / please (asking for service).

Use it: Anytime you want a server's attention, are asking for something, or need to say "excuse me" to get past someone — restaurants, taxis, shops, hotels, all of it.

See it in three real situations

我要呢個，唔該。

ngo5 jiu3 ni1 go3, m4 goi1.

I'll have this, please. — ordering or pointing at something you want

唔該，俾杯水我呀。

m4 goi1, bei2 bui1 seoi2 ngo5 aa3.

Excuse me, can I get a cup of water? — asking a server for something

唔該借借。

m4 goi1 ze3 ze3.

Excuse me, coming through. — squeezing past someone in a crowd

GROUP 3

多謝 — thank you the RIGHT way 📺

Here's the mix-up almost every learner makes: 唔該 and 多謝 both get translated as "thank you" — but they're used in different situations.

PHRASE 4

THANK YOU (FOR SOMETHING GIVEN)

多謝。

do1 ze6.

Thank you.

Use it: When someone GIVES you something — a gift, a compliment, a personal favor. 唔該 is for service and requests; 多謝 is for things you receive. Mixing them up is common, but now you know the difference!

Also used for compliments

你好靚仔㗎。

nei5 hou2 leng3 zai2 wo3.

You're so handsome! (said to a guy — reply with 多謝)

你好靚女㗎。

nei5 hou2 leng3 neoi5 wo3.

You're so pretty! (said to a woman — reply with 多謝)



Bonus tip — want faster service?

Try calling the waiter 靚仔 (leng3 zai2, "handsome guy") or the waitress 靚女 (leng3 neoi5, "pretty girl"). It's just a common, friendly way to get staff's attention in Hong Kong — not flirting, promise. 😊

GROUP 4

Shopping & prices 💰

Markets and small shops in Hong Kong are often open to a little gentle haggling — these two phrases are all you need.

PHRASE 5

ASKING THE PRICE

呢個幾多錢呀？

ni1 go3 gei2 do1 cin2 aa3?

How much is this?

Use it: The standard way to ask a price — point at the item as you say it.

PHRASE 6

GENTLE HAGGLING

平啲得唔得呀？

peng4 di1 dak1 m4 dak1 aa3?

Can it be cheaper?

Use it: A soft, polite way to ask for a discount — literally "cheaper, is that okay?" Works best at markets and small independent shops, not chain stores.

GROUP 5

At the restaurant 🍜

From complimenting the food to closing out the bill — the three phrases that carry a whole meal.

PHRASE 7

COMPLIMENTING THE FOOD

好好味呀!

hou2 hou2 mei6 aa3!

It's delicious!

Use it: A genuine, enthusiastic compliment — staff and hosts love hearing this. Doubling 好好 makes it feel more heartfelt than a plain 好味.

PHRASE 8

ASKING FOR THE BILL

唔該，埋單。

m4 goi1, maai4 daan1.

Excuse me, bill please.

Use it: The standard way to close out a meal — 埋單 literally means "settle the bill." Say it to any passing server or raise your hand and say it toward the counter.

PHRASE 9

FINDING THE BATHROOM

唔該，洗手間喺邊度呀?

m4 goi1, sai2 sau2 gaan1 hai2 bin1 dou6 aa3?

Excuse me, where's the bathroom?

Use it: Useful everywhere, not just restaurants — malls, MTR stations, and hotels too.

九句走天下!

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