

Character Builder

您好嗎？蝦

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.

This week: Words about sea creatures



Pronunciation: *xia* (Putonghua, 1st tone), *ha* (Cantonese 1st tone)
Basic meaning: shrimp, prawn

蝦, with radical 虫 (*chong* = insect/worm), are crustaceans: 海蝦 (*hai xia*) = sea prawns, 河蝦 (*he xia*) = river shrimps. 蝦汛 (*xia xun* = shrimps~tide/surge) means shrimp season, when shrimps swarm the seas and rivers. 龍蝦 (*long xia* = dragon~prawns) means lobsters.

蝦 and 蟹 (*xie* = crabs) are common seafood. 白灼蝦 (*bai zhuo xia* = plain~boiled~shrimps), 醉蝦 (*zui xia* = drunken~prawns) and 清炒蝦仁 (*qing chao xia ren* = unmarinated~stir-fried~shrimps~seed/ ball) are famous dishes. Chinese cooking often uses 蝦米 (*xia mi* = shrimps~rice = sun-dried small shrimps). 蝦兵蟹將 (*xia bing xie jiang* = shrimp~soldier~crab-general) means a sloppy army/team. 大頭蝦 (*da tou xia* = big~head~shrimp) is saying facetiously someone is very absent-minded.

by Diana Yue