

Language and culture guide

Arabic

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Arabic language and Arab cultures that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About the Arab region

The Arab region includes 22 countries and territories in North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the eastern Mediterranean coast. It is home to 450 to 480 million people (in comparison, just under 28 million people live in Australia). The region is linked by a common language – Arabic.

Countries and territories in the region include Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Early childhood education in the Arab region

The Arab region encompasses many different countries and territories, each with different policies and levels of wealth. Early childhood education varies across the region. For example, in 2010, less than 5 per cent of children in Yemen and Mauritania attended early childhood education. In the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, more than 80 per cent of children attended.¹

Did you know?

Iran and Turkey are not part of the Arab region.

Language

There are many different dialects of Arabic. The language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps is called Modern Standard Arabic. This is the most commonly understood language across the Arab region, and is the language used in books, newspapers and media (including children's cartoons). All of the dialects of Arabic share a common writing system, which has an alphabet of 28 letters and is read from right to left.

Pronouncing Arabic

In the support materials for the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program, Arabic script has been transcribed using the Roman alphabet. This is guidance only. For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Did you know?

Arabic is the third most commonly spoken language in Australia after English and Mandarin.

Culture

The Arab region is huge and diverse and has many different peoples, cultures, religions and traditions. A large majority of people in the Arab region are Muslim. Christianity is also a significant religion in the region.

Politeness and customs

- The left hand is considered unclean. It is rude to eat with your left hand or to use your left hand to pass someone food or drink.
- The polite way to beckon someone is with your right hand. Hold your palm down and make a scratching motion with your fingers.
- In some parts of the Arab region, you can say thank you by placing your right hand against your chest and bowing your head slightly with your eyes closed.
- Take off your shoes when going into someone's house.
- It is rude to show the soles of your feet or shoes. When sitting, point your feet down or put them flat on the floor.
- In some parts of the Arab region, it is not polite to open a gift in front of the person who gave it to you. You can open it later, at home.

¹ 'Education starts early: Progress, challenges and opportunities: Regional Report for Arab states', UNESCO, 2023

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Arab cultural references such as a camel, a pomegranate, an Aladdin-style lamp and a mosaic tile. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of the Arab region include:

- Arabian horses
- camels
- caracals or desert lynxes (wild cats with long black ears)
- crocodiles
- donkeys
- elephants
- hippopotamuses
- horned vipers (venomous snakes with tiny horns above their eyes)
- jackals (animals in the same family as wolves and dogs)
- sand cats
- scorpions.

Arts

- Calligraphy: the Arab world has a long tradition of using beautifully presented Arabic script to celebrate the Qur'an and to decorate buildings and objects.
- Carpets: Arabian carpets are made from wool, silk, cotton and sometimes camel and goat hair.
- Zellige: mosaic tiles are a feature of Moroccan buildings. They are colourful and geometrical.

Food

- Food varies greatly across the Arab world.
- Across the Arab region, dates are eaten with and without fillings as snacks.
- Sweet mint tea is enjoyed in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. It is made with green tea, mint leaves and sugar.
- Lahoh is a flat pancake-like bread eaten in Djibouti, Somalia and Yemen. It can be eaten at breakfast with honey and ghee (clarified butter) or at lunchtime and dinnertime with a main meal.
- Tabbouleh is a salad made with parsley, mint, tomatoes and onions. Variations are eaten in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.





Interesting topics

Games

- In Syria, children play hajla, a game similar to hopscotch.
- In Tunisia, there is a game called tlagha, in which players compete to score points by knocking a small stick with a large stick in and out of a circle.
- In Oman, Al Hawalees is a game played by adults. It can be played on the ground with stones or on a board with pieces. The goal is to remove all of your opponent's stones from the game.

Places

- The Sahara desert extends across Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia. After the Arctic and Antarctica, it is the largest desert in the world.
- South-west of Doha in Qatar, there is a desert where sand dunes 'sing' when the wind blows.
- The Dead Sea is a border between Jordan and Israel. The sea is very salty and people float easily in it. In fact, people's bodies are so buoyant in the water that it can be difficult to touch the ground.
- Babil in Iraq is home to the ruins of the ancient city of Babylon.
- The city of Petra in Jordan is partly carved into the side of a mountain. Much of the stone is pink.
- Off the coast of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, artificial islands have been created, each in the shape of a different country of the world.
- Egypt's famous pyramids are the tombs of ancient pharaohs. They were built 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. Sudan also has pyramids, somewhat smaller than those in Egypt.

Geography

Like Australia, much of the Arab region is desert. There are also large areas that are grassy, around the Tigris, Euphrates, Jordan and Nile rivers. The majority of people in the region live in those areas.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



Australian Government
Department of Education

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Language and culture guide

Chinese

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about China and Chinese culture and language that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About China

More people live in China than in any other country in the world – about 1.48 billion (in comparison, about 28 million people live in Australia). The country is also geographically big – it borders 14 other countries.

Early childhood education in China

Increasing access to early childhood education has been a priority of the Chinese government in recent years. In 2025, 92 per cent of children attended early childhood education.¹

Language

There are many Chinese dialects, which are often mutually unintelligible. However, all are united by a common writing system. That means that even if speakers cannot understand each other, they can understand each other's writing.

Mandarin is the official language in both China and Singapore. It is also the world's most widely spoken language – the first or additional language of more than 1.1 billion people. It is a tonal language with four main tones: a level tone; a rising tone (such as English speakers use when asking a question); a falling and rising tone; and a falling tone.

Simplified Chinese characters and Pinyin

In the 1950s, written Chinese characters were simplified. The support materials for the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program use the simplified system. The support materials also use Pinyin (<https://chinese.yabla.com/chinese-pinyin-chart.php>), the official phonetic system for representing Mandarin with a Roman alphabet. For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

China was unified by the first Chinese emperor in 221 BCE, and it has a long and rich cultural history that has influenced many of its neighbours. In the 1960s, great cultural changes swept across the country as the Cultural Revolution challenged 'old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas'. In recent decades, China has become the manufacturing centre of the world, with the world's fastest growing economy.

Did you know?

Mandarin is the most commonly spoken language in Australia after English.

Politeness and customs

- You can beckon someone by holding your palm down and making a scratching motion with your fingers.
- Only close friends and relatives ask 'Ni hao ma?' (How are you?) When greeting acquaintances, you could say 'Ni hao' (Hello).
- You can point by using your whole hand. (It is rude to point with your index finger.)
- Take off your shoes when going into someone's house.
- When giving a gift, you hand it to the other person with both hands. The person receiving the gift will accept it with both hands.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Chinese cultural references such as a panda, a dragon and a peony flower. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

¹ 'Overview of the education system', <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=CHN&treshold=5&topic=EO>

Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of China include:

- Asian elephants
- horses
- leopard cats (small wild cats with leopard markings)
- pandas
- pangolins (an unusual mammal with large scales and a long tail)
- raccoon dogs (an animal with a raccoon-like appearance from the same family as dogs and wolves)
- tigers.

Arts

- Painting: traditionally, an 'inkstick' is used rather than paint. It is rubbed onto a surface and mixed with water to create ink.
- Calligraphy: there is a long tradition of writing beautifully using an ink and-wash technique.
- Lanterns: paper or silk lanterns are used as decoration, especially to celebrate Chinese New Year.
- Paper cutting: this craft is made by folding and cutting paper. When unfolded, the paper forms intricate patterns and pictures.

Food

There are many regional cuisines in China. The Chinese food that we see in Australia is often Cantonese food from the Guǎngdōng region (for example, yum cha). Rice and noodles are particularly popular in the south. Steamed breads are popular in the north. Tea (including green, jasmine and chrysanthemum tea) is very popular throughout China. Some people carry a small thermos with them so that they can drink tea wherever they are.

Chinese foods include:

- yum cha: small dishes such as jiǎozi (dumplings) and bāo (buns), eaten with tea. Yum cha means 'drink tea' in Cantonese. This Cantonese term is used because yum cha is a Cantonese cuisine.
- hot, peppery dishes from the Sìchuān area.
- congee (rice porridge), sometimes served with pork and pídàn (century egg – egg that has been preserved and that has a green yolk).
- Peking duck from Beijing (slices of crispy-skinned duck wrapped in a pancake).

Games

Traditional games include:

- cat and mouse: children hold hands to make a circle. One child (the cat) stands outside the circle and another (the mouse) stands inside. The mouse weaves in and out of the circle, and the cat must follow their path and catch them.
- dragon's tail: this game needs a big group of children (at least 10). The children stand in a line to form a 'dragon', each with their hands on the shoulders of the child in front of them. To play the game, the child who is the dragon's 'head' has to try to touch the dragon's 'tail' (the last child in the chain). The other children in the chain try to stop them without breaking the chain. When the tail is caught, that child goes to the front of the line to become the head, and the game starts again.



Interesting topics

Places

- Chengdu Panda Base: a sanctuary for pandas where people can see baby pandas being raised.
- The Forbidden City: located in Beijing, this was once the imperial palace. It was named the 'Forbidden City' because no-one could enter the palace without the emperor's permission.
- The Great Wall of China: a collection of long walls that stretch across China.
- The Yangtze River: the longest river in Asia.

Seasons

- China is very large, and so the cold climate of the far north is very different to the tropical climate of the far south. Most of China experiences four seasons. Chinese people celebrate the different seasons with festivals such as the Spring and Mid-Autumn festivals. In Australia, the Spring festival is also known as Chinese New Year.

Traditions

- These are just a small selection of China's many rich traditions:
- Chinese New Year (or the Spring Festival) is the most important festival in China. Most people take holidays at this time of the year to visit family and friends.
 - The dragon dance is performed by groups of people who hold poles to control a long dragon puppet made with silk and wood. It is often seen alongside lion dances (performed by people with lion puppets) during Chinese New Year.
 - Red envelopes containing money are often given as gifts at Chinese New Year and other special occasions, such as birthdays. The colour red is considered to be lucky.
 - During the Dragon Boat Festival, people race each other in boats shaped like dragons.

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Language and culture guide

French

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About France

France, known as 'the hexagon' for its shape, is the largest country in Western Europe. It has borders with Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Italy, Germany, Andorra and Spain. About 67 million people live there (in comparison, about 28 million people live in Australia). There are also overseas departments of France – French territory in places such as French Polynesia and New Caledonia in the Pacific Ocean.

Early childhood education in France

Nursery school in France caters for children 2–6 years old. It is part of the primary education system and there is a strong focus on structured learning in reading, writing and numbers as well as creative activities and games. In 2024, more than 99 per cent of French children attended early childhood education.¹

Language

French is spoken by approximately 321 million people in 51 countries around the world. It is the second most widely learned language in the world after English. Originally, there were many regional French dialects, and outside 'the hexagon' there are many variations, such as African French, Vietnamese French and Canadian French. French is a gendered language, which means most nouns are masculine or feminine.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Many ethnic groups from former French colonies contribute to French culture, in particular to the rich variety of food available. North African couscous has become a national French dish. A large number of French people are Roman Catholic but many other religions are practised in France.

Politeness and customs

- Say hello ('Bonjour, monsieur' or 'Bonjour, madame') when you first meet someone, and shake their hand. When you are leaving, say goodbye ('Au revoir') and shake their hand again.
- In a small shop you should say hello and goodbye to the person serving.
- When you first meet someone, use the formal form of 'you' (vous) until asked to use the familiar form (tu). Likewise, don't use a given name until invited to. However, adults always speak informally and use given names with children.
- Friends and family greet and farewell each other with a kiss on both cheeks. If someone offers their cheek, you are invited to this level of intimacy.
- Pointing or beckoning with your index finger is considered rude. Use your open hand to indicate.
- French children are expected to be well behaved in a social setting. There is no such thing as a 'children's menu' at a restaurant.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing French cultural references such as a croissant, cheese and snail (escargot). You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



¹ 'Gross enrollment rate, early childhood education (%)', Human Capital Project, World Bank, 2026, https://humancapital.worldbank.org/en/indicator/WB_HCP_ECEDU

Interesting topics

Animals	• Deer and wild boar (relatives of domestic pigs) live in the forests. • Antelope and brown bears can be found in the mountains. • Millions of migrating birds stop over on the Mediterranean coastline, including thousands of pink flamingoes. • French people love pets, and can take their dogs with them to restaurants.
Arts	France is rich in the arts, including dance, theatre, films, music, architecture, literature and painting. • Famous Impressionist artists include Monet and Renoir. • The singer Edith Piaf ('piaf' is slang for 'sparrow') is revered in France. • Asterix and Obelix are popular French comic book characters. • <i>The Little Prince</i> is a well-loved illustrated book about a lonely young boy.
Food	Food has a special role in French culture. Traditionally, meals were leisurely and had many courses, but today long meals are for special occasions. Even so, sharing a meal with family every day is very important. French people shop daily for food, usually from local markets and small shops. Discussion about regional foods is common. • Wine and cheese are France's most famous products. There are more than 300 varieties of cheese and every region in France has its own specialties. • Famous French dishes include bouillabaisse (fish soup), quiche Lorraine and beef bourguignon (beef in red wine). • A bread stick (baguette) is eaten with every meal. • Hot chocolate is a common breakfast drink for children. • A croissant is a crescent-shaped French pastry that is often eaten for breakfast. It is made by folding butter into dough over and over before baking, so that the end result is very flaky.
Sports	• The most popular game in France is football (soccer), followed by tennis. • The Tour de France bike race zigzags across France every summer. • Skiing is very popular in the French Alps in winter.
Games	Traditional games include: • escargot: similar to hopscotch but in the shape of a snail • bilboquet: catching a ball that is attached by string to a cup • boules (or pétanque): throwing a large ball as close as possible to a smaller one.





Interesting topics

Places	France is the most popular tourist destination in the world. • Paris, the capital city of France, is known for its art galleries, museums, restaurants, markets, elegant shops and river cruises. • There are many parks and gardens where people stroll and meet. A lot of people live in apartments, especially in cities, so they are used to accessing public places, promenading in the streets and catching public transport. • Every summer, an artificial beach is created on the banks of the river Seine in Paris, complete with deck chairs and beach umbrellas. • The French Riviera is known for its mild climate and beautiful coastline. • Provence is famous for its fields of lavender flowers, its olives and its perfume.
Famous monuments	Some of France's most visited sites are: • Arc de Triomphe: a powerful triumphal arch at the top of the Champs Élysées in Paris that honours those who have fought for France • Carcassonne: a fairytale castle, complete with turrets and a moat, in south-west France • Eiffel Tower: an iconic pointed tower made of iron for the 1889 World's Fair in Paris • the Louvre: a massive art gallery with the <i>Mona Lisa</i> by Leonardo da Vinci as a star attraction • Notre Dame Cathedral: a Gothic building with towers and gargoyles • Pont du Gard: a huge Roman aqueduct in the south of France.
Seasons	France is in the northern hemisphere. It has a cool, temperate climate but each region has a microclimate, with snow in the mountains and early spring in the south.
Traditions	This is just a small selection of France's many rich traditions: • Bastille Day, on 14 July, commemorates the French revolution and is celebrated with fireworks. The French national song 'La Marseillaise' is often sung. The red, white and blue French flag (le Tricolore) is displayed everywhere. • On April Fools' day, children make paper fish and tape them secretly to other people's backs. • Easter is in spring in France and many traditions symbolise new life and renewal, such as giving decorated eggs and placing spring blossom around the house. • At French weddings, it is traditional for someone to chop the top off bottles of champagne with a sword.

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Language and culture guide

German

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About German

German is an official language of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Luxembourg and South Tyrol (in Italy). It is also used as an official regional or auxiliary language in a number of other countries in Europe, and in Namibia in Africa. German is one of the official languages of the European Union. German, or one of its dialects, is spoken by communities in many countries around the world, including Australia.

Language

German and English both come from the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family so they have some similarities. German is a largely phonetic language with many of the same sounds as English, and the same Roman alphabet. Like English, it has 26 letters, but there are four extra ones: three vowels with dots called 'umlauts' above them (ä, ö, ü) and the letter ß, called 'Eszett' or 'scharfes S', which makes the 's' sound.

In German, all nouns are capitalised.

German is a gendered language. Nouns have a gender – masculine, feminine or neuter, for example, 'die Banane' (feminine), 'der Apfel' (masculine) or 'das Gras' (neuter).

In German, many words change their form or add different endings depending on whether the word is the subject or an object of the sentence. This is known as the case system and each noun, pronoun, and article has four cases.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.



Culture

Germany has a rich culture with a strong tradition in the arts, architecture, design, literature, philosophy and music.

A significant percentage of Germans are Christians, with about half of those being Roman Catholic and the other half Protestant.

A number of other religions are practised too. In Austria, the majority of the population identify as Roman Catholic.

Politeness and customs

In German-speaking countries, depending on the time of day, you may say hello/good day ('Guten Tag'), good morning ('Guten Morgen'), good evening ('Guten Abend'), and shake hands when you meet or leave someone. Close friends and family may give a kiss on the cheek or embrace.

Young people may say 'Hallo!' to their peers for 'Hi!', and 'Tschüss!' for 'Bye!' However, with their elders they mostly use greetings such as 'Guten Tag' and the more formal goodbye 'Auf Wiedersehen'.

When you first meet someone, it's polite to use the formal form of 'you' ('Sie') until asked to use the familiar form ('du'), unless they are a child, friends or family.

Similarly, Germans tend to address those they don't know well by their last name unless they are invited to do otherwise. This practice is evolving, however, as social-media-savvy young people align more with the informal greetings and forms of address of young people globally.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing German cultural references, such as a dachshund, a ladybird, red currants or a tuba. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals of Germany include:

- mammals such as chamois, ibex, deer, wildcats, lynxes, foxes, wild boars, hedgehogs, weasels, polecats, martens, beavers, badgers and otters
- birds such as owls, eagles, pelicans, storks and herons, and many species of migratory birds
- sea animals such as porpoises, seals and turtles.

Some of these animals are also found in other German-speaking countries in Europe.

Arts

Germany is rich in the arts, including visual arts, theatre, music, architecture, design and literature.

- Famous German visual artists include the Renaissance printmaker Albrecht Dürer and painter Hans Holbein the Younger; the Romantic landscape painter Casper David Friedrich; members of the Expressionist art groups Die Brücke and Der Blaue Reiter; and other artists such as Paul Klee, Max Ernst and Käthe Kollwitz.
- The Bauhaus was a school of arts that existed from 1919–1933 and had a huge influence on design, architecture and applied arts.
- Famous classical composers from Germany and Austria include Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johannes Brahms, Franz Schubert and Richard Wagner.
- *Grimm's Fairy Tales* were collected and first published by the Brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhelm) in 1812. Many of the stories, such as 'Snow White', 'Rapunzel', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella', have been turned into animated children's classics, but the original stories are not so family-friendly.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era and is often referred to as 'Germany's Shakespeare'. His contemporary Friedrich Schiller was also a prominent German dramatist, poet and literary theorist, despite his relatively short life.

Sports

- Soccer is the most popular sport in Germany and the national men's team has won the World Cup four times. Other sports that many people like are golf, ice hockey, basketball, handball and motor sports.
- Skiing and snowboarding are very popular activities in the Alps in winter.
- With around 200,000 kilometres of trails in Germany, hiking is a popular summer activity.



Interesting topics

Food

German people traditionally eat their main meal in the middle of the day as a family, with a smaller dinner consisting primarily of bread, cheese and cold meats. With changing work patterns, this has shifted more to having the main meal in the evening. There are many different regional variations in German cuisine and some dishes are shared with neighbouring German-speaking countries.

- Families and friends often gather together in the afternoon for coffee and cake ('Kaffee und Kuchen').
- Bread is a very important part of German cuisine and there are hundreds of different types. Dark rye-flour breads are popular.
- Germany is one of the top meat producers in the European Union, particularly of pork, which is the most frequently consumed meat product in Germany. Germany is the world's leading producer of Wurst (cold cuts and sausages).
- Well-known German dishes include bratwurst, sauerkraut and schnitzel.
- There are many delicious German and Austrian pastries, cakes and desserts, such as Schnecken, Berliner Pfannkuchen, Zwetschkgenkuchen, SchwarzwälderKirschtorte (Black Forest gateau), Bienenstich, Stollen and Apfelstrudel.

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Language and culture guide

Hindi



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About Hindi

Hindi is an official language of India and Fiji. It is the most widely spoken language of the Indian subcontinent and is spoken by more than half the overall population of India. Hindi has a number of related languages and dialects. It is also spoken in many other parts of the world, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, Mauritius, some Caribbean countries, the Gulf States and Australia.

Early childhood education in India and Fiji

In India, the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy, coordinated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, caters for children from 0–6. It commits to universal access to quality early childhood education, but many children are not enrolled in preschools.¹ In 2024, enrolment rates in pre-primary education were 56.7 per cent. There are public, private and NGO-sponsored programs, and pre-primary sections in schools (3–6 years).²

Fiji included early childhood education in its Education Act in 2015. This Act includes one year of non-compulsory free education. In 2021, 89 per cent of new entrants in primary school were reported to have had an early childhood education experience.³

Language

The language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps is Modern Standard Hindi. This is descended from Sanskrit but has been influenced by various other languages, including Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Portuguese, English, Dravidian and other Indian languages.

Hindi is written in Devanagari script. It has 13 vowels and 33 consonants and is written from left to right with no distinction between upper case and lower case. The Hindi full stop looks like a vertical bar (।).

Devanagari is a phonetic script and the written form generally directly represents the pronunciation of Hindi words.

Grammatically, Hindi is a gendered language. Nouns have a gender; they are either masculine or feminine.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

In the apps, the cultural references are from the broader Indian culture as well as specifically Hindi-speaking communities. Around 80 per cent of people in India follow the Hindu religion, 14 per cent follow Islam, with the remaining 6 per cent being of Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and other faiths.

In Fiji, 37.5 per cent of the population identify as Indo-Fijian. Around 69 per cent of Fijians are Christian, 24 per cent follow the Hindu religion, 5.8 per cent follow Islam, 0.3 per cent are Sikh and the remainder follow another or no religion.

Not all people who speak Hindi practise the Hindu religion, and not all Hindus speak Hindi.

Politeness and customs

In India, the traditional greeting is to bring your hands together with palms touching and say 'Namaste', which literally means 'I bow to the divine in you'. The namaste is also used to say goodbye, and the gesture can be used without saying anything. It can be used with people of any age and at any time of day or night. A younger person would greet an older person first.

Use only your right hand for picking up and eating your food.

¹ UNICEF: India, *Early childhood education*, <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/early-childhood-education>

² 'Gross enrollment rate, early childhood education (%)', Human Capital Project, World Bank, 2026, https://humancapital.worldbank.org/en/indicator/WB_HCP_ECEDU

³ 2024 Status Report on Early Childhood Care and Education in 15 Pacific Island Countries, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2024

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Indian cultural references, such as a peacock, a tiger, a mango, a sitar and samosas. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals of India include:

- Indian elephants
- bears, including sun bears, Himalayan bears, brown bears and sloth bears
- horses and Indian rhinoceroses
- dogs, foxes, jackals, hyenas, wolves and mongooses
- pangolins and porcupines
- monkeys, including macaques and langurs, and gibbons
- martens, weasels, stoats, badgers, otters, civets and red pandas
- big cats, including tigers, lions and leopards
- wild sheep and goats, ibex, deer, wild buffaloes, wild yaks and wild pigs
- birds such as Indian peacocks, Indian cranes, Indian bustards and vultures
- river dolphins, including Ganges River dolphins and Indus River dolphins
- crocodiles, gharials, kraits and cobras
- sea animals such as dolphins and whales.

Animals of Fiji include flying foxes, snakes, iguanas and other lizards and many different birds.

Arts

India is rich in the arts, including visual arts, music, theatre, film, architecture and literature.

- India is renowned for its arts and crafts, such as pottery, sculpture (metal, stone and terracotta), jewellery, woodcarving and textiles, and also for wall paintings and miniature paintings.
- Two ancient Sanskrit epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are considered by Hindus to be both stories of past events and the goals of life. Both poems are extremely long.
- Bollywood is the Indian Hindi-language film industry, based in the city of Mumbai. The movies often include singing and dancing.



Interesting topics

Food	Food varies greatly across India, with many regional variations. • Main meals may consist of rice, roti (flatbread), vegetable and lentil dishes, salad, yoghurt and pickles. Non-vegetarians may include meat dishes. • Some well-known dishes are dosas, dhal, biriyani, bhajis, chana masala, pakoras, paratha, chaat, kofta and samosas. • There are many delicious sweets and desserts, such as gulab jamun, jalebi, laddu, barfi, gajar halwa and kheer. • Spices are an important ingredient in Indian cooking. Many are native to India and others are produced there or imported. Some common spices used are coriander, cumin, turmeric, mustard seed, cardamom, cinnamon, chilli, ginger, cloves, curry leaves and fenugreek.
Games	Traditional children's games include: • kho kho: a game of tag played in teams. One team are the chasers, who take turns trying to touch 'out' all the players on the opposite team in the fastest time. • gutte/pacheta: a game requiring five small stones. One stone is thrown in the air. The child tries to pick up the other stones from the ground with one hand and then, with the same hand, catch the thrown stone before it hits the ground.
Places	• The Taj Mahal is a white marble building built in the 17th century in Agra by emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife, Mumtaz Mahal. It took more than 20 years, 20,000 workers and 1,000 elephants to build. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. • The city of Varanasi is a major pilgrimage site for followers of the Hindu religion. It is situated on the Ganges River, which is one of the religion's most sacred symbols. Hindus bathe in the river before prayers. • The Jantar Mantar is an observatory in Jaipur City. It was built from stone and bronze by Maharaja Jai Singh II between 1727 and 1734, to help tell the time and predict weather. • The Sun Temple at Konark dates from the 13th century and was built in the shape of a chariot being pulled by seven horses. It represents the chariot of the Sun God, Surya. • The Ellora Caves at Aurangabad were built between the 5th and 10th centuries by Buddhist, Jain and Hindu monks. Monasteries, chapels and temples were carved out of the rock. • Western Ghats is a mountain range that runs along the western side of India. It is recognised as one of the world's eight 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity. It also influences the Indian monsoon weather pattern.



Interesting topics

Geography

There is huge variation in climate across India, which has six major climate zones. These range from dry desert in the west, to alpine tundra in the north, to humid tropical regions with rainforests in the south-west and the islands. There are four seasons: winter; summer or pre-monsoon season; monsoon or rainy season; and autumn or post-monsoon season. The Himalayan states in northern India also have spring.

In India, the deserts and nearby areas heat up during the summer and then moisture-laden monsoon winds rush in from the Indian Ocean. The summer monsoons supply over 80 per cent of India's annual rainfall. The heavy rainfall can cause flooding and landslides but it is essential for agriculture.

The two rainiest places in the world are in India. Mawsynram in Meghalaya state has 11,873 millimetres of rain per year and nearby Cherrapunji has 11,430 millimetres. Meghalaya means 'land of the clouds'. Most of the rain occurs during the monsoon season. Surprisingly, these places can suffer drought outside the monsoon season.

Traditions

Below are just two of India's many rich traditions. India is so diverse that there are many different meanings and stories behind traditions and the way they are celebrated.

- Diwali, the festival of lights, is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. The festival celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance.
- Holi is a festival that marks the end of winter and celebrates the coming of the spring harvest. Crowds of people sing religious songs and throw 'gula' (brightly coloured powder) over each other.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



Language and culture guide

Indonesian

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Indonesia and Indonesian culture and language that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Indonesia

Indonesia is made up of more than 18,000 islands and is one of Australia's closest neighbours. About 288 million people live there (in comparison, about 28 million people live in Australia). There are about 11.8 million people living in the capital city, Jakarta – more than one-third the population of Australia occupying a city no more than 8 kilometres wide.

Early childhood education in Indonesia

Improving access to early childhood education has been a priority of the Indonesian government in recent years. In 2023, 36.3 per cent of children in Indonesia participated in early childhood education.¹

Language

Indonesia is home to hundreds of diverse peoples. Together, they speak almost 750 languages and dialects. In 1945, Indonesia declared independence, and Bahasa Indonesia became the official language. Bahasa Indonesia is taught in Indonesian schools and is used by the Indonesian media and government. This is the language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Indonesia is culturally diverse. Across the Indonesian archipelago there are about 300 ethnic groups, each with their own unique cultural practices. A large majority of people are Muslim and there are also many people who are Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Animist.

Politeness and customs

- The left hand is considered unclean. It is rude to use your left hand to pass someone food, drink or a gift.
- You can point by using your right thumb and folding the other fingers against your palm. It is rude to point with your index finger.
- The polite way to beckon someone is with your right hand. Move your hand in a downward motion.
- Take off your shoes when going into someone's house.
- It is rude to show the soles of your feet or shoes. When sitting, you can point your feet down or put them flat on the floor.
- A person's head is considered sacred in Indonesia, so it is rude to touch someone on the head.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Indonesian cultural references such as an orangutan, a cicak lizard, rambutan fruit and an Indonesian mask. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



¹ 'Indonesia lags in early childhood education', *The Jakarta Post*, 3 July 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2024/07/03/indonesia-lags-in-early-childhood-education.html>

Interesting topics

Animals	The animals of Indonesia include: • elephants • green sea turtles • Komodo dragons • orangutans • rhinoceroses • slow lorises (small primates with big eyes and a toxic bite) • tarsiers (small primates with even bigger eyes and an appearance that some people may find creepy; they catch insect prey by jumping on them) • tigers.
Arts	• An angklung is a traditional bamboo instrument. • Batik and ikat are traditional techniques used to create textiles with beautiful patterns. • A gamelan is a traditional musical ensemble played with Indonesian instruments. • Wayang golek are wooden puppets. • Wayang kulit are shadow puppets.
Food	The national dish of Indonesia is called nasi tumpeng. It is served on a plate with a big cone of rice in the centre. Surrounding the rice are lots of side dishes, which can include satays, vegetables, pickles, seafood and more. Other Indonesian foods include: • gado gado (salad with peanut sauce) • nasi goreng (fried rice) • satay (meat skewers with peanut sauce) • kue lapis legit (layer cake, made by grilling each layer of the cake).
Games	Traditional games include: • congklak (a board game played with shells, stones or seeds) • semut, orang, gajah (a game played with the right hand, similar to rock, paper scissors).



Interesting topics

Places	• Bali is a popular tourist destination, known for its temples, beaches, arts and crafts. • In Banjarmasin in Kalimantan, there is a floating market where people buy and sell from their boats. • Jakarta is the capital city of Indonesia. It has big shopping centres and theme parks such as Dunia Fantasi Theme Park (also known as Dufan Ancol). • The island of Komodo is home to the Komodo dragon, the world's biggest lizard. There is a beach on Komodo called Pink Beach because of its pink-coloured sand. • Lake Toba in Sumatra is the biggest volcanic lake in the world with an island in the middle that is almost as big as Singapore. Lake Toba was formed after a super volcano erupted about 75,000 years ago. • The Maluku (Spice) islands were once the only source in the world of the spices mace and nutmeg.
Seasons	Indonesia has a tropical climate, with a wet season and a dry season. The dry season is generally around June to September. The rest of the year is wetter.
Traditional houses	Across Indonesia, different areas have different traditional houses: • long houses in Kalimantan • Minangkabau people's houses with 'spired' roofs in West Sumatra • Batak people's boat-shaped houses in North Sumatra • compound houses in Bali • Tongkonan houses in Sulawesi.
Traditions	This is just a small selection of Indonesia's many rich traditions. • In South Sulawesi, the Toraja people have elaborate funerals that can go for many days. • In Sumba, a ritual game celebrates the rice-planting season. In it, people throw spears at opponents while riding horses. • On the island of Nias, stone jumping is a manhood ritual where boys jump over a stone wall.

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Language and culture guide

Italian

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Italy, and Italian culture and language, that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Italy

Italy, known as 'the boot' for its shape, is mainly surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea.

It has borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, San Marino and Vatican City. About 59 million people live in Italy (in comparison, about 28 million people live in Australia).

Early childhood education in Italy

Nursery schools (scuola materna) in Italy cater for children from 3 to 6 years old. The preschool program is under the authority of the Ministry of Education. It is not compulsory but 95 per cent of Italian children attend early childhood education.¹ The emphasis at the nursery schools is on learning through play. The Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education originated in Italy.

Language

Italian, also known as Standard Italian or 'italiano standard', is the official language of Italy, Vatican City, the Republic of San Marino and parts of Switzerland. As well as being one of the official languages of the European Union, it is a major community language in Australia. Italian is also widely used in countries such as Luxembourg, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina, and in parts of Africa.

Italian uses the same Roman alphabet as English. The Italian alphabet has 21 letters and uses the remaining 5 letters (j, k, w, x, y) of the English alphabet to spell foreign words, such as 'weekend' or 'jeans'. Accents are sometimes used on vowels.

Italian has a strong spelling-to-sound correspondence and is sometimes called a phonetic language. There are only seven vowel sounds (English has over 20).

Grammatically, Italian is a gendered language: certain word classes (nouns, adjectives, articles, pronouns) have gender. This means they are either masculine or feminine, for example, 'una banana' (feminine) or 'un fico' (masculine).

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Italy has a rich culture with a strong tradition in the arts, architecture, music and food.

A large number of people are Roman Catholic but many other religions are also practised in Italy.

Politeness and customs

- In Italy, people say good day ('buongiorno') or good evening ('buonasera') when they meet. Friends use the more casual 'ciao' (hello/goodbye).
- People shake hands if they don't know you very well, while friends and family kiss each other on both cheeks.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Italian cultural references, such as tiramisu, Pinocchio and Venetian masks. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



¹ 'Education at a glance 2024', OECD, 2024, https://oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2024/09/education-at-a-glance-2024-country-notes_532eb29d/italy_1f8f65a5/c46299a8-en.pdf

Interesting topics

Animals	• Deer and wild boar (relatives of domestic pigs) live in the forests. • Ibexes (a type of wild goat) and brown bears can be found in the mountains. • Millions of migrating birds stop over on the Mediterranean coastline, including thousands of pink flamingos. • In 2024, more than 63 per cent of Italians owned pets, with more than half of these owning at least one dog.
Arts	Italy is rich in the arts, including visual arts, opera, theatre, music, architecture and literature. • Famous Renaissance artists include Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. • Opera and ballet originated in Italy. • The Commedia dell'arte style of theatre began in Italy in the mid-16th century and is still performed today. • Italian author Carlo Collodi published <i>The Adventures of Pinocchio</i> in 1883.
Food	Food has a special role in Italian culture. Traditionally, meals were leisurely and had many courses, but today long meals are more for special occasions. Even so, sharing a meal with family every day is very important. Many Italian people still shop daily for food, usually from local markets and small shops. There are many different regional cuisines in Italy rather than an overall Italian cuisine. • Wine and cheese are two of Italy's most famous products. There are hundreds of varieties of cheese and every region in Italy has its own specialties. • Well-known Italian dishes include lasagne, pizza, pasta and risotto. • There are many delicious Italian pastries, cakes and desserts, such as crostata, cannoli, tiramisu, panna cotta, panforte, cassata and gelato.
Sports	• The national sport of Italy is soccer (calcio). Basketball, volleyball and cycling are other popular sports. • The Giro d'Italia (Tour of Italy) is a major long-distance cycling race held every May. • Skiing (sci) is very popular in the Italian Alps and in the Apennine Mountains in winter. • Beach tennis (tennis da spiaggia) with paddle racquets was invented by Italians. • Bocce – bowling a large ball to come closest to a smaller one – is a popular sport and game. It is related to lawn bowls and the French game of boules or pétanque.



Interesting topics

Games

Traditional games include:

- campana: similar to hopscotch; it has been played in Italy since Roman times
- guardie e ladri (police and robbers): a chasing game with two teams – one police and one robbers
- lupo mangia frutta (fruit-eating wolf): a chasing game where the children are fruit and one child is the wolf
- strega comanda color (witch controls colour): one child is the witch and calls out a colour. The other children must run and touch something of that colour before the witch tags them.

Places

Italy is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world.

- Rome, the capital city of Italy, is known for its historic buildings and monuments, museums, parks and elegant shops. Rome was the capital of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire.
- There are many parks and gardens where people stroll and meet. A lot of people live in apartments, especially in cities, so they are used to accessing public places, promenading in the streets and catching public transport.
- The Amalfi Coast is known for its mild climate and beautiful coastline.
- Pompeii is an ancient Roman city that was buried by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius volcano in 79 CE.
- Venice is famous for its canals and its historic buildings, such as the Doge's Palace and St Mark's Basilica.
- Florence is renowned for its Renaissance art and architecture.
- Vatican City is a walled enclave within Rome and contains some of Italy's major tourist attractions, including St Peter's Basilica and Square, and the Sistine Chapel.

Famous landmarks

Some of Italy's most visited sites are:

- the Colosseum: the largest amphitheatre of its kind built by the Roman Empire
- the Pantheon: built as a Roman temple with a remarkable concrete dome
- the Roman Forum: contains the ruins of important ancient Roman government buildings
- the Leaning Tower of Pisa: the tower began to sink soon after building started in the 1100s.



Interesting topics

Seasons

Italy is in the northern hemisphere. Its climate varies greatly from north to south. The north has very cold winters and hot, humid summers. Central Italy has milder winters, and in the south and on the islands winters are very mild. Summer temperatures don't vary so much between north and south.

Traditions

This is just a small selection of Italy's many rich traditions:

- Christmas is celebrated over several weeks. Most Italians open their presents on Christmas Day but there is an old tradition of waiting until Epiphany on 6 January. It's traditional for children to get a stocking full of sweets if they've been good or one full of 'coal' (made of black sugar) if they've been bad.
- Easter is in spring in Italy and many traditions symbolise new life and renewal, such as giving decorated eggs (real or chocolate) and placing spring flowers on the table. Carnevale (carnival) celebrations are held before Lent, the start of the Easter period for many Christians.
- At Italian weddings it is traditional for the guests to be given confetti. These are sugar-coated almonds, not small pieces of coloured paper.

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Language and culture guide

Japanese

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About Japan

Japan is made up of nearly 7,000 islands with a population of around 122 million (in comparison, about 28 million people live in Australia).

Early childhood education in Japan

Japan has a high rate of participation in early childhood education. In 2023, 98 per cent of 4-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education.¹

Language

Around the world, about 126 million people speak Japanese as a first or additional language. In Japan, there are several regional dialects of Japanese. The language spoken in *The Polyglots* apps is Standard Japanese (Nihongo).

Japanese writing systems

Japanese has three different writing systems:

- kanji (Chinese characters), used to write words borrowed from Chinese or to write Japanese words with the same or similar meanings
- hiragana, used for words without kanji representation
- katakana, used mostly for loan words from other languages.

The support materials for the Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program use rōmaji to represent Japanese with a Roman alphabet.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Japan has a rich culture with many traditional art forms such as flower arrangement, dance, painting and poetry. Japan's popular culture is also very rich; it includes anime (Japanese animated films), manga (Japanese comics), street fashion and music.

Politeness and customs

In general, politeness and respect for elders are important aspects of Japanese culture.

- In Japan, children can address their teachers as [Surname]-sensei. For example, Suzuki-sensei.
- An educator can address young children as [Given name]-chan. For example, Yuka-chan.
- In Japan, children can greet their teachers by bowing and saying 'Sensei, konnichiwa'.

Before eating a meal in Japan, people say 'itadakimasu' (I receive).

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover some fun and intriguing Japanese cultural references such as sushi, a ninja, a kokeshi doll and cherry blossom. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



¹ 'Japan: overview of the education system'. OECD, 2025, <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=JPN&treshold=5&topic=EO>

Interesting topics

Animals	The animals of Japan include: • brown bears • Japanese macaques, also known as snow monkeys because they live in snowy climates; in some parts of Japan, you can find macaques bathing in the hot springs • raccoon dogs (an animal with a raccoon-like appearance in the same family as dogs and wolves) • sea otters • serows (furry animals in the same family as sheep and goats).
Arts	• Ikebana flower arrangement is minimalist and often small in scale. Flowers as well as leaves and stems are treated as features. • Kabuki is traditional Japanese theatre with music and dance. • Painting in Japan is often characterised by the use of natural materials such as brush and ink, mineral pigments and silk. Traditional woodblock printing (ukiyo-e) is also a celebrated Japanese art form. • Calligraphy: in Japan, there is a long tradition of writing beautifully using an ink-and-wash technique. • Origami is the art of paper folding. • Haiku is a form of short poetry. In traditional haiku, the first line has five syllables, the second seven and the third five. Children may like 'What am I?' haikus. For example: 'I live on a farm / eating grass in the pastures / snug in my white wool'. • Kimonos are traditional clothes worn by Japanese women and sometimes men. They are robes that are wrapped around the body. The fabric for women's kimonos is often highly decorated with painting or embroidery.
Food	• Bento boxes are usually eaten at lunchtime. The boxes often have several compartments, each containing a small dish (such as rice, beef or chicken, pickles, salad and fruit). Some people put a lot of effort into making their bento boxes look cute (for example, by making rice balls look like animals). • Onigiri is a ball of plain or salted rice with a stuffing such as fish or vegetables. It is wrapped in nori (seaweed). It is often shaped into a triangle, and is designed to be easily portable. • Sushi is vinegared rice with raw or cooked fish, vegetables or meat. It is often presented as a roll wrapped in nori. It may come with pickled ginger, soy sauce and wasabi. • Tempura is battered and deep-fried vegetables or seafood.
Games	Traditional games include: • otedama – a game traditionally played by girls; it involves throwing small beanbags (traditionally made from kimono scraps) • kendama – a traditional wooden toy that has a ball attached to a handle by string; the aim is to toss the ball and then catch it with the handle.

Interesting topics

Places	• Mt Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan, and is an active volcano. The top of Mt Fuji is often covered in snow. • In Nara, wild deer (shika) wander Nara Park and sometimes even the city streets. • The Imperial Palace in Tokyo is home to Japan's emperor, the country's symbolic head of state. • Kinkaku-ji is a golden Buddhist temple located in a beautiful garden in Kyoto. • Osaka's aquarium is one of the largest in the world. Each section has sea creatures from a different part of the world.
Geography	Japan has four seasons. Japanese people celebrate the different seasons with festivals such as the Cherry Blossom Festival in spring.
Traditions	This is just a small selection of Japan's many rich traditions. • In Japan, 3 March is 'Doll's Day' or 'Girls' Day'. Families display dolls on platforms covered in a red cloth. The dolls represent the emperor, the empress and their court. • Children's Day is 5 May. Families fly 'koinobori' streamers with fish-shaped windsocks to celebrate.

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Language and culture guide

Korean

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Korea and Korean language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Korea

The Korean peninsula is situated in East Asia and today is divided into two sovereign states: North Korea and South Korea. The population of North Korea is 26 million and the capital is Pyongyang. The population of South Korea is 51 million and the capital is Seoul. The Korean peninsula is bordered by Russia and China, with Japan sitting to the east across the Korean Strait and the East Sea.

Language

Korean is the official language of both North and South Korea with around 80 million native speakers. Korean is a language isolate, which means it isn't part of a language family and does not descend from any other language. The official alphabet used for written Korean is the Hangul. The Hangul was developed in the 15th century, which actually makes it one of the youngest alphabets in the world. Today, the Hangul consists of 24 letters, made up of 14 consonants and 10 vowels.

Words are written in syllabic blocks with letters compiled both vertically and horizontally to form characters. Traditionally, the language was written top to bottom, but today it is written left to right with westernised forms of punctuation.

Just in South Korea, there are five different dialects of the language spoken, with slightly different alphabets and vocabularies used.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Korea is said to have one of the world's longest continuous cultures, dating back to 3000 BCE. However, since the separation of North and South Korea in 1948, the two nations have diverged and become more culturally distinct. Religious beliefs across North and South Korea are very diverse with Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Confucianism, Daoism and Shamanism all existing side by side.

Politeness and customs

- Koreans are a very polite people and address each other with their full, formal title. It is considered impolite to address Koreans by their given name unless you are specifically invited to do so.
- Bowing is the traditional form of greeting, with the depth of the bow increasing with the formality of the occasion.
- In South Korea, shaking hands has become a customary greeting, but eye contact between juniors and seniors is considered impolite.
- Koreans love gift-giving and it is polite to bring a small gift when invited to someone's home.
- In South Korea it was the custom to write the names of people who had died in the family register in red ink. It is considered bad luck for living people to write their names in red pen.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Korean cultural references, such as a tiger, a lotus flower pattern, jujubes and persimmons. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of North and South Korea include:

- red-crowned cranes
- Asiatic black bears
- lynxes
- Siberian musk deer
- mandarin ducks
- common minke whales
- Korean gorals (a variety of mountain goat)
- amur leopards.

Arts

- K-pop is a popular style of contemporary music originating in South Korea. In recent years, popularity has grown, with K-pop stars performing to packed arenas around the world.
- The hanbok is the traditional Korean dress that is still worn for many formal occasions. The hanbok is a long, A-line dress, usually made from bright fabric, worn by both men and women.
- It may surprise you to learn that Seoul is known as the breakdancing capital of the world! For the past 15 years, South Korea has produced some of the world's very best breakdancers.

Food

- Korean food is delicious and healthy cuisine with meals centred on rice, vegetables, meat and lots of accompanying side dishes. Bibimbab is a dish of rice, meat and vegetables served together in a bowl with an egg on top. In Korean, bibimbab means 'mixed rice'.
- Kimchi is a traditional Korean dish of salted, fermented cabbage and other vegetables. It is served as a side dish with almost every meal. Kimchi is packed with vitamins and minerals and has lots of good bacteria that are great for gut health.
- Korean barbecue is called gogigui, which means 'roasting meat'. At gogigui restaurants, food is prepared at the diner's table with meat cooked on a grill right in front of them. At some restaurants the diners cook their own meat; at others, the chef will prepare the food at the diner's table.



Interesting topics

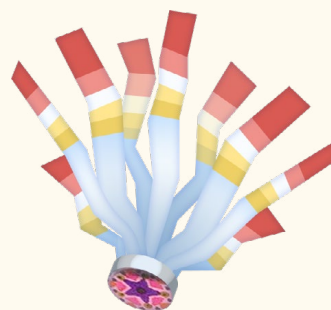
Places

- Seoul is the capital city of South Korea. It is a bustling city with world-class restaurants and shopping. There are also lots of fascinating historic sites, such as the grand palaces Gwanghwamun and Changdeokgung. A quarter of South Korea's population lives in the capital and the city is situated on the Han River.
- Pyongyang is the capital of North Korea. It is the largest city in North Korea and is home to all the major government institutions operated by the ruling party.
- Over half of South Korea is covered in beautiful forest so there are lots of places to get away from the bustle of the busy cities. The Seoraksan National Park is one of the most visited parks in the country, with unique rock formations, hot springs and ancient temples.

Celebrations

- In Korea, the New Year is celebrated on the first day of the Korean lunar calendar. The date varies from year to year but normally falls on the second new moon after the winter solstice. Korean New Year is celebrated over three days and is the most important holiday of the year.
- Chuseok is a traditional Korean harvest festival that is held at the end of summer. For chuseok, Koreans travel to their hometowns to pay their respect to their ancestors and to give thanks for the harvest.
- At the popular Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival, visitors can ice-fish in the frozen waters or try to catch the fish with their bare hands in a pool.

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Language and culture guide

Modern Greek

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Modern Greek language and Greek culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Modern Greek

Modern Greek is the official language of Greece and Cyprus. As well as being one of the official languages of the European Union, it is a major community language in Australia. Modern Greek is spoken by Greek communities in many places, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Argentina, South Africa and Russia.

Early childhood education

Early childhood education in Greece is in pre-primary schools under the authority of the Ministry of Education, or in local government or private infant/child centres. Early childhood education usually starts at age 4 in pre-primary, and compulsory education begins at age 5. In 2019, 76 per cent of 4- to 6-year-old children in Greece attended early childhood education.¹ In Cyprus, 87 per cent of 3- to 6-year-old children attended in 2023.²

Language

Modern Greek is written in the Greek alphabet, which has 24 letters and has changed little since ancient times. In Modern Greek, each letter has its own upper- and lower-case forms. Accents are used on vowels.

Many English words have Greek origins but the structures of the two languages are very different.

Modern Greek has a strong spelling-to-sound correspondence and is sometimes called a phonetic language. There are only five vowel sounds (English has over 20).

Grammatically, Modern Greek is a gendered language: certain word classes (nouns, adjectives, articles, pronouns) have gender – they are either masculine, feminine or neuter; for example, 'ἡ μπανάνα' (feminine), 'ὁ χυμός' (masculine) or 'το σύκο' (neuter).

In Greek punctuation, the question mark looks like a semicolon.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Greece has a rich culture with a strong tradition in the arts, architecture, music and food.

A large number of people are Greek Orthodox (part of the Eastern Orthodox Church, as is the Church of Cyprus) but a number of other religions are also practised.

Politeness and customs

In Greece and Cyprus, depending on the time of day, you may say good morning/good day ('kalimera'), good afternoon ('kalo apogevma') or good evening ('kalispera') and shake hands when you meet or leave someone. Close friends and family may give two kisses or embrace.

Young people say 'Gia!' to their peers for 'Hello!' and 'Goodbye!' However, with their elders they mostly use greetings such as 'Gia sas!' and the more formal goodbye 'Antio!'

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Greek cultural references, such as an owl, a fishing boat, a fig, a bouzouki and a tourta. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

¹ Education policy in Greece: A preliminary assessment, OECD, 2017

² Early childhood care and education regional report: Europe and North America, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals of Greece include:

- brown bears
- deer
- wildcats and lynxes
- foxes, wolves and jackals
- wild boar
- wild goats and wild sheep or mouflon
- weasels, polecats, martens, badgers and otters
- porcupines and hedgehogs
- birds such as owls, eagles, vultures, pelicans, storks and herons and many species of migratory birds
- sea animals such as dolphins, seals, whales and turtles.

Some of these animals are also found in Cyprus.

Arts

Greece is rich in the arts, including visual arts, theatre, music, architecture and literature.

- Famous ancient Greek artists include sculptors Phidias and Praxiteles. Sculptures, usually in marble or bronze, were often of gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, or athletes.
- The pottery of ancient Greece is renowned, not only for its beautiful shapes but also for its striking painted decoration.
- Most ancient Greek cities had a theatre and the plays performed there were usually either comedies or tragedies. Actors wore masks to represent their characters.
- Homer, the writer of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, is one of the best known of the ancient Greek writers. More modern famous poets are Odysseus Elytis and George Seferis.



Interesting topics

Food	Food has a special role in Greek culture. Greek people traditionally eat the main meal in the middle of the day. Sharing a meal with family every day is very important. Many Greek people still shop daily for food, usually from local markets and small shops. There are many different regional variations in Greek cuisine. • Small dishes (mezes) frequently help make up a main meal, served with salads, dips and pita bread. • Olive oil and cheese are two of Greece's most famous products. There are hundreds of varieties of cheese and every region in Greece has its own specialties. • Well-known Greek dishes include moussaka, souvlaki, spanakopita and dolmades. • There are many delicious Greek pastries, cakes and desserts, such as tourta, baklava, koulourakia, kourabiedes, loukoumades and galaktoboureko.
Sports	• Greece was the birth place of the Olympic Games, with the first recorded ancient Olympics taking place around 776 BCE in Olympia. Greece has hosted the modern Olympic Games twice. Greece always enters the stadium first during the parade of nations. • Today, soccer and basketball are the two most popular sports in Greece. Water sports, such as sailing and windsurfing, are especially popular along the coastline. • Wrestling was the most popular organised sport in ancient Greece. It was added to the ancient Olympic Games in 708 BCE as part of the pentathlon. Freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling are part of the modern Games.
Games	Traditional games include: • Little Eleni (H mikri Eleni): a group of children hold hands in a circle and walk anticlockwise, singing a song. One child stays in the middle of the circle with their eyes covered. When the song finishes, the child in the middle puts their hands on another child's shoulders and guesses who the child is. If they are right, the child they named takes a turn in the middle. • Abariza: a chasing game with two teams. Each team has an abariza (a spot, such as a tree or basketball column) in their territory and the children try to touch the abariza of the other team without being touched.



Interesting topics

Places

- The Acropolis, built high (acro) above the city (polis) of Athens, contains the Parthenon, a temple built in the 5th century BCE to honour the goddess Athena, along with other buildings of significance.
- Knossos, an archeological site on the island of Crete, is the palace and surrounding city of King Minos. It was the capital of the Minoan civilisation, which existed from around 3000 BCE to about 1100 BCE.
- Delphi, on the slopes of Mt Parnassus, was the site of the oracle of Delphi who was consulted by the ancient Greeks about important decisions.
- Mount Olympus is not only the highest mountain in Greece, it was traditionally regarded as the home of the gods, such as Zeus and his wife Hera.
- The Tombs of the Kings site near Paphos (on Cyprus) is an ancient necropolis (cemetery) with underground burial chambers carved out of rock.

Geography and climate

Greece consists of a large mainland at the southern end of the Balkan Peninsula, with two peninsulas and an archipelago of thousands of islands ranging from small to large. Greece has 13,676 kilometres of coastline and is bordered by the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Ionian Sea. Most of Greece is mountainous or hilly.

Greece mainly has a Mediterranean climate, with hot, dry summers and cold, wet winters. There are long sunny periods throughout the year. The coastal regions don't get very cold in winter, whereas inland, in the north and in the mountains, it can get very cold and snowy. Greece is also affected by strong winds, such as the sirocco from North Africa and the meltemi from north-eastern Greece.

Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean. It has two major mountain ranges with a central plain between them. It also has a Mediterranean climate.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



Language and culture guide

Spanish

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Spanish language and Spanish-speaking cultures that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Spanish-speaking countries

Spanish is spoken by approximately 561 million people across the world. It is the official or national language in Spain, Equatorial Guinea and 19 countries in the Americas.

Early childhood education

Spanish is spoken in many different countries and territories, each with different policies and levels of wealth. Early childhood education varies from one to the next. Policies adopted in some countries (Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) show a trend towards emphasising early childhood education as part of human development. In Mexico and Peru, compulsory education begins at the age of three.¹ In 2022, more than 97 per cent of children in Spain attended early childhood education.²

Language

'Castellano', the original language in which modern Spanish has its main foundation, travelled from Spain to the Caribbean and to North, Central and South America as a result of expeditions funded by Spain during the 15th and 16th centuries.

Besides evolving from Latin through Castellano, Spanish has been influenced by many other languages, including Catalan, Arabic, Basque, Greek, French, English and the native languages of the Americas.

Spanish uses the same Roman alphabet as English but the alphabet has one extra letter (ñ), and accents, called 'tildes', are used on some vowels (for example, á). Question marks and exclamation marks both start and end a sentence, for example, '¿Por qué?' (Why?).

The pronunciation of Spanish words is generally directly represented by their written form.

Spanish is a gendered language. Articles, nouns and adjectives have a gender, meaning they are either masculine or feminine; for example, 'la piña' (feminine) or 'el brócoli' (masculine).

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Spanish-speaking countries have many different peoples, cultures, religions and traditions. A majority of people are Christian with Catholicism being the main religion.

Politeness and customs

In Spain, depending on the time of day, you may say good day ('buenos días'), good afternoon ('buenas tardes') or good evening/night ('buenas noches') and shake hands when you meet or leave someone. Close friends and family give two kisses or embrace.

In most Spanish-speaking countries, young people say '¿Hola!' to their peers. However, with their elders they mostly use courtesy greetings such as '¡Buenos días!' and the formal 'you', as in '¿Cómo está usted?' (How are you?).

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing cultural references to Spanish-speaking countries, such as a bull, a llama, a pineapple, maracas and a piñata. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.

¹ 'Early childhood care and education regional report: Latin America and the Caribbean', United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010

² 'Education at a glance 2024', OECD, 2024

Interesting topics

Animals

Some animals in Spanish-speaking countries include:

- wolves
- brown bears
- deer
- opossums or possums
- armadillos
- sloths and anteaters
- lemurs, monkeys and apes
- rodents, including the huge capybara
- big cats, including ocelots and jaguars
- llamas, alpacas and vicuñas
- guinea pigs
- elephants
- birds such as toucans, Argentinian horneros (ovenbird) and turquoise-browed motmots
- sea animals such as pink dolphins in Colombia.

Arts

Spanish-speaking countries are rich in the arts, including visual arts, music, theatre, film, architecture and literature.

- Famous visual artists include Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí, Francisco Goya, El Greco, Diego Velázquez, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera.
- The Chupa Chup's lollipop logo was designed by surrealist painter Salvador Dalí in 1969.
- Pre-Columbian art (the art of the native peoples of the Americas and the Caribbean prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus) includes that of the Olmec, Toltec, Maya, Aztec and Inca civilisations.

Food

Food varies greatly across the Spanish-speaking world, with many regional variations. Some well-known dishes are:

- paella (from Spain): a saffron-flavoured rice dish from Valencia that may contain meat, seafood and vegetables
- tacos (from Mexico): small tortillas (flat cornbread) stuffed with a variety of fillings
- tapas (from Spain): small dishes of different types of appetiser or snack food
- ceviche (from Peru): raw fish marinated in lemon or lime juice
- churros (from Spain): deep-fried dough snacks.



Interesting topics

Games

- 'Pares y nones' (evens and odds) is played in Mexico. Children walk in a circle and when a number is called by the teacher (or a designated child) they try to form groups with that number of people. The maximum number they can call depends on the number of participants playing. Children without a group are out of the game.
- 'Mar y tierra' (sea and land) is a game played in Spain. A line is drawn on the ground; one side of the line is sea and the other side is land. One child calls out either 'mar' or 'tierra' and the other children must jump to the correct side of the line.
- 'El escondite' is the Spanish-speaking version of hide and seek. In some countries it is called 'las escondidas' (South America) or 'las escondidillas' (Mexico).
- 'Arriba y abajo' (up and down) is a game where the players must keep a beachball in the air. Children work together to keep the ball from falling, saying 'arriba' (up) every time they hit it.

Places

- The Alhambra Palace in Granada was originally an Islamic palace and fortress. Alhambra contains many beautiful details, including mosaic tiles.
- Machu Picchu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Peru, was built by the Inca civilisation in the 1400s. This stone citadel is on a mountain ridge 2,430 metres above sea level. The stones fit tightly together without mortar.
- Museo del Prado in Madrid is a museum and art gallery that has one of the world's best collections of European art.
- Sagrada Família is a Catholic church in Barcelona designed by Antoni Gaudí. He used the natural world for his inspiration, so there are pillars that look like trees and no straight lines. Construction began in 1882 and may finish by 2035.
- The Iguazu Falls on the border of Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil are the largest waterfalls system in the world. Angel Falls in Venezuela is the highest uninterrupted waterfall.
- The Panama Canal is an artificial waterway (77 kilometres long) that connects the Pacific Ocean with the Atlantic Ocean and is used for shipping.
- Chichen Itza in Mexico was a large pre-Columbian city built by the Maya. It includes many amazing structures, such as step pyramids, a great ball court and an observatory.



Interesting topics

Geography and climate

There is huge variation in climate across Spanish-speaking countries.

- Spain has three different climate zones. Weather in the south has warm, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. North of the Cantabrian mountains the climate is similar but is moist all year round. The west and northwest coastal areas have wet winters and dry summers.
- South America covers a huge area and its climate varies greatly. While South America's rainforests are some of the wettest places on earth, the Atacama desert in Chile is considered the driest place on earth.
- The Andes, running along South America's western side, is among the world's longest mountain ranges. It has glaciers, volcanoes, grasslands, deserts, lakes and forests.
- Central America and the Caribbean lie in the tropics and generally have a humid tropical climate, but there are many different climate zones.
- Mexico has temperate and tropical zones.
- Equatorial Guinea has a tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons.

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Language and culture guide

Turkish

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Türkiye and Turkish language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Türkiye

The Republic of Türkiye is uniquely situated in both Asia and Europe, sharing borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, Iraq and Syria. The population of Türkiye is 80 million and the capital is Ankara. There are large communities of Turks living outside Türkiye, notably in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Southeast Europe and Central Asia. Australia has a significant Turkish population with the Turkish migration to Australia dating all the way back to the early 19th century.

Turkish is the official language of Türkiye and one of the official languages of Cyprus. It is the most commonly spoken language of the Turkic language family. The total number of Turkish speakers worldwide is 90 million.

Language

Modern Turkish is based on the Turkic dialect spoken in Istanbul. The predecessor of modern Turkish was the Turkish language spoken during the Ottoman period. Ottoman Turkish incorporated many words from Arabic, Persian and Greek and used an Arabic alphabet. After the formation of the modern Turkish state in 1923, the Turkish language underwent major reforms. In 1928 the Latin alphabet was introduced for written Turkish. The alphabet was varied to meet the requirements of the language, with the modern-day alphabet consisting of 29 letters, with the letters q, x and w omitted, and ç, ş, ğ, ı, ö and ü added. Turkish is a phonetic language with each letter of the alphabet representing one sound.

Turkish uses vowel harmony, which means that there are rules about which vowel sounds can be used near each other. The basic word order in Turkish is subject-object-verb; for example, 'Ayşe pears ate' as opposed to 'Ayşe ate pears'. For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Türkiye is often referred to as a 'bridge' between the East and the West, incorporating both Islamic and European influences. Türkiye has a majority Sunni Muslim population with a sizeable Shia community. The cultural landscape of Türkiye also incorporates elements from Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Georgian and Kurdish cultural traditions. Despite this diverse cultural makeup, the Turkish people are united in their love of football and food.

Politeness and customs

- The Turkish people are very hospitable and courteous.
- Turkish people shake hands if they are not well acquainted, while friends and family often kiss each other on both cheeks.
- When shaking hands, it is important to shake hands with all people present, starting with the elders. Turkish people shake hands again when leaving.
- The common Turkish greeting is 'Nasilsiniz' (How are you?) or 'Merhaba' (Hello). The Islamic greeting is 'Asalamu alaykum' (Peace be upon you).
- Never point the soles of your feet or shoes towards a person. When sitting, point your feet down or put them flat on the floor.
- Shoes are removed before entering Turkish homes.
- The Nazar is the blue, eye-shaped glass pendant that can be found hanging throughout Türkiye. It is believed to protect against the evil eye.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Turkish cultural references, such as a mosaic tile, an apricot, a börek and an adana kebab. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

The animals of Türkiye include:

- hyenas
- kangals
- brown bears
- grey wolves
- Eurasian lynxes
- Caspian red deer
- red foxes
- loggerhead turtles
- storks
- caracals (a medium-sized wild cat)
- Eurasian otters.

Arts

- Textiles: Türkiye is renowned worldwide for its textiles and carpets. These beautiful carpets are hand-woven or knotted from wool, cotton or silk.
- Ceramics: the history of ceramic art in Türkiye dates back 10,000 years. One of the most distinct ceramic traditions is the brightly coloured Iznik tiles.
- Folk dance: there are many different traditional folk dances performed throughout Türkiye. The Halay is one example of a folk dance originating from central and south-eastern Türkiye. It is a group circle dance often performed at weddings. The Halay starts slow and speeds up. It is accompanied on the zurna (wind instrument) and davul (drum) while the singer leads the dance with poetic improvisation.

Food

- Kahvalti (breakfast) is a banquet-style meal that includes a wide range of foods such as simit (round bread roll with sesame seeds), peyniri (Turkish cheese), dips, olives, eggs, sucuk (Turkish sausage), fresh vegetables and thick yoghurt.
- Turkish çay (tea) is served black in distinctive, decorative glasses. It is drunk throughout the day and is an integral part of many social occasions.
- There are many varieties of delicious sweets in Türkiye such as baklava, Turkish delight and lokma (a doughnut coated in honey).
- Other popular Turkish dishes include köfte (meatballs), pide (Turkish pizza) and şiş kebab (skewered meat).



Interesting topics

Places

- Istanbul is the largest city in Türkiye and was the capital of the former Ottoman and Byzantine Empires. Old Town is the oldest part of the city. Many significant historical sites are located here, such as the Hagia Sophia and the Blue Mosque.
- The Grand Bazaar, in Istanbul, is one of the world's largest indoor markets. It dates back to 1461 and has over 5,000 stalls.
- Türkiye is bordered by four different seas – the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara – and has over 8,000 kilometres of beautiful coastline.
- Antalya is a coastal city that sits on the Mediterranean against the backdrop of the Taurus Mountains. It is a popular resort city and is often referred to as the gateway to the Turkish Riviera.

Celebrations

- Ramazan (Ramadan) is the holy month for Muslims and is a time for prayer, fasting and feasting. In Türkiye, the end of Ramazan is marked by a three-day celebration called Ramazan Bayramı.
- The Whirling Dervishes Festival is an annual celebration held in the city of Konya to commemorate the teachings of the Sufi poet Rumi. At the heart of the festival is the ceremonial dance in which the dervishes spin around until they achieve inner peace.
- There are several public holidays to commemorate important events in the formation of the Turkish state. One such holiday is National Sovereignty and Children's Day, held on 23 April. This holiday celebrates the first day of the Turkish National Assembly and is also a celebration of children. Schools and groups of children take part in public performances to mark the occasion.

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Language and culture guide

Vietnamese

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Vietnam and Vietnamese language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Vietnam

Vietnam is a country in South-East Asia situated on the most easterly point of the Indochinese Peninsula. Vietnam has a population of 102 million and Hanoi is the capital city. Vietnam is bordered by China to the north and Laos and Cambodia to the west.

Language

Vietnamese (Tiếng Việt) is the most widely spoken language in the Austroasiatic language family and is the official language of Vietnam. It is spoken by over 82 million native speakers worldwide. Australia has a sizeable Vietnamese-speaking community after large numbers of Vietnamese refugees made Australia their home after the Vietnam War.

Vietnamese is a tonal language. In a tonal language, words are spoken with a particular pitch or intonation. This makes Vietnamese a very musical-sounding language!

The alphabet used for writing in contemporary Vietnamese is called chữ Quốc ngữ. This alphabet is based on a Latin script and has accents added to numerous letters. There are 29 letters in the Vietnamese alphabet including 12 vowels.

Vietnamese has lots of 'loan words' from Chinese, French and English; for example, the Vietnamese word for coffee is cà phê from the French word café.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Vietnamese culture combines traditional customs with a wide range of foreign cultural influences. Vietnamese culture is influenced by nearly a thousand years of Chinese rule. Later, during the French colonial era, European influences were absorbed into Vietnamese culture. This is particularly evident in the architecture and cuisine. The Vietnamese are a proud, hardworking people with a steadfast commitment to family.

Politeness and customs

- It is very rude to touch anyone on the top of the head as this is considered the most sacred part of the body. This even applies to babies and children, so no tussling little ones' hair!
- The idea of 'face' is a very important aspect of Vietnamese culture. Face is a person or family's reputation and dignity. The Vietnamese place great importance on protecting one's own face and honouring that of others. By showing respect you 'give face', but by criticising or mocking someone you cause them to 'lose face'.
- Elders are deeply revered in Vietnamese society. When greeting a group of people in Vietnam, the elders must always be greeted first to show respect.
- Good manners and modesty are very highly valued in Vietnamese society.
- The Vietnamese can be quite superstitious. In some regions, people put mirrors in front of doors to scare away dragons, while others believe praising a newborn too much can cause it to be stolen by the devil for its desirability.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Vietnamese cultural references, such as a lychee, an apricot blossom, a buffalo and a Vietnamese pond turtle. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

- Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys
- great hornbills
- Indian elephants
- sun bears
- water buffaloes
- pygmy slow loris
- red-shanked doucs
- Sunda pangolins

Arts

- The dragon is a very important symbol in Vietnamese art and culture. It is believed to bring rain and represents prosperity and power. You will find a lot of dragon imagery in Vietnamese architecture, art and sculpture.
- Vietnam has a rich and varied musical culture with many different forms of traditional folk music throughout the country. Xẩm singing is an example of a song style from northern Vietnam. Traditionally, Xẩm was sung by blind performers who earned their living singing from town to town.
- Áo dài is the name of the Vietnamese national garment. It is a long, fitted tunic, usually made from silk, that is worn over trousers. The áo dài used to be worn by both men and women but these days it is mainly worn by women on special occasions.
- Silk painting dates back to the 15th century. The artist paints directly onto the silk, using the silk as the backdrop of a painting. Silk paintings are usually vibrant, colourful works depicting rural life and natural landscapes.

Food

- Vietnamese food is among the healthiest cuisines in the world with an emphasis on fresh ingredients, vegetables and minimal use of fats or oils.
- Vietnamese cuisine is based on the Asian five-element principle, which separates taste into five 'elements': spicy (metal), sour (wood), bitter (fire), salty (water) and sweet (earth).
- Food in Vietnam is bursting with fresh flavours thanks to a love of fresh herbs such as coriander, lemongrass, chili, basil, ginger and mint.
- The Vietnamese love their coffee. It is served hot or cold, thick and sweetened with condensed milk.
- Bánh mì is the Vietnamese word for bread. The baguette was introduced to Vietnam by the French. Today, bánh mì is popular around the world, with fillings including pork, paté, coriander, pickles, mayonnaise and daikon (a type of radish).



Interesting topics

Places

- Ha Long Bay features stunning limestone islands in beautiful blue water. Visitors often stay on junk boats.
- Hội An is a vibrant, historical port town known for its expert tailors.
- With over 3,000 kilometres of coastline, Vietnam has no shortage of beautiful beaches. Some of the most popular are located around Nha Trang.
- Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, is the most populous city in Vietnam and is located in the south-east of the country. It is a busy, modern city jam-packed with vibrant markets and historical buildings from the French colonial period.
- Cat Tien is one of the largest national parks in Vietnam. Its lush rainforest is home to hundreds of species of animals, with many people visiting for a chance to see the golden-cheeked gibbon in the wild.

Celebrations

- Tết Nguyên Đán, or Tết for short, is the name of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration. Tết Nguyên Đán, which means 'Feast of the First Morning of the First Day', is celebrated at the beginning of spring over the first three days of the lunar calendar. During Tết, offerings are made to gods and ancestors, gifts of tien le xi (lucky money) are given, and families gather to feast on delicious food.
- Hoi An's lantern festival is held on the 14th day of each lunar month. In the evening, the city is aglow with beautiful, brightly-coloured lanterns that are sent floating down the river.
- The Hue Festival is a celebration of Vietnamese culture. It takes place every two years and includes historical re-enactments, as well as music, street performances, dance, kite-flying, boat races and poetry.

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