

DOGSTER HEROES



Marc Ching Risks His Life to Save Dogs From the Meat Trade in Asia

This brave rescuer goes into slaughterhouses undercover to buy dogs. He has been found out in past trips, resulting in beatings and threats against his life.

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Lucky for dogs everywhere, there are a growing number of animal advocates, rescuers, and activists throughout the world fighting on behalf of man's best friend. But not everyone is willing to risk life and limb — or come face to face with one of the planet's most violent forms of animal cruelty — in the process.

Enter Marc Ching, founder of the Animal Hope & Wellness Foundation and owner of The PetStaurant. A holistic pet nutritionist and Japanese herbalist by profession, this incredibly brave rescuer has made it his mission to save as many dogs as he can from the Asian pet-meat trade.

Ching's harrowing odyssey into this dark underworld began last May, when he learned about the summer solstice lychee and dog meat "festival" in Yulin, China. Shocked and disbelieving that such an inhumane practice could actually exist in the modern world, Ching bought a plane ticket, grabbed a backpack, and headed to China with a raw determination to witness the trade for himself and rescue as many dogs as possible.

"My first trip was after the Yulin festival, on Sept. 1," he says. "When I went to China, I saw things I didn't know people could do. I knew they ate dogs there, but I didn't know about the torture and abuse aspect associated with the preparation of the meat. It doesn't make sense to me — it's unspeakable."

Since that first fateful journey, which shook him to the core but also galvanized his resolve to keep going back to save more dogs, Ching has made three additional trips, rescuing a grand total of 249 canines from some of the worst and largest slaughterhouses in notorious dog meat locales, including China's Guangzhou province; Busan, South Korea; and Hanoi, Vietnam. Unfortunately, only 61 dogs survived.

"My trips are a little different than those of most people who rescue from the dog meat trade," Ching says in his soft Hawaiian accent. "Typically people go to dog farms and try to shut them down or push meat trucks off the road. I actually go into the slaughterhouses and rescue dogs who are being tortured or abused."





Marc with Hope, the first dog he rescued from a slaughterhouse in China. Hope has since recovered from his injuries and has been brought back to the U.S., where he serves as an ambassador for the Animal Hope & Wellness Foundation's China Effort. He is indeed a miracle! (Photo courtesy Marc Ching)

As the founder of a nonprofit focused on rescuing, rehabilitating, and rehoming severely abused dogs in the U.S., Ching is no stranger to cruelty. But he admits his rescue missions to Asia have come at a cost both mentally and physically — he's been beaten, held hostage, had a machete put to his throat and a gun to his head, and lives with visions that will haunt him for the rest of his life. But neither mental anguish nor fear of death has deterred this gentle savior from his quest.

Since that first fly-by-the-seat-of-his-pants trip to China, Ching has developed a more organized process, which includes travel itineraries, securing translators and veterinarians in advance, working with teams of researchers to locate slaughterhouses, and finding ways to obtain undercover video footage — without getting caught (he was beaten severely when a South Korean butcher caught him wearing a GoPro). Posing as a wealthy American dog meat buyer, he makes a point of never going to the same slaughterhouse twice.

"It's actually a great cover," Ching boasts. "When I come into a country, I prep my translator for about two hours before we go out, so when he goes to a slaughterhouse with me he knows what to say. He'll tell the butchers, 'This is my client, he's a rich American, and he wants to buy [large quantities of] dogs ... because he's going to kill them himself, prepare the meat, and export it to America.'"

He continues, "Before we go out, we call local veterinarians and ask them how many dogs they can take, treat, and keep for a few months, because the number of vets we find determines the number of dogs we save. So our process now is to take the dogs, load them up in vans, and get them straight to the vets."



Marc on the back of his translator's moped in Hanoi, following a near-death experience at a slaughterhouse. (Photo courtesy Marc Ching)

For those unfortunate dogs who don't make it to the vet, Ching makes a point of driving them into the countryside and giving them a dignified burial.

"At least they knew in their last moments that someone cared for them," he says.

Despite the unspeakable horrors and mental anguish he has endured along the way, Ching insists his Asia efforts are worth the pain and sacrifice, especially when he's able to fly dogs to the U.S. and bring them to his foundation in Sherman Oaks, California. So far, Ching has brought back 46 lucky dogs, most of whom have since been rehabilitated and adopted into loving homes.

"It's very expensive to bring these dogs to the U.S., so I try to adopt out locally to Canadians or veterans who live there, as well as to great local Asian people who would never hurt their dogs," says Ching. "But the ones that I bring back are the dogs that really mean something to me — they all have a story. I also realize these dogs have value here ... people in America rally around them. Part of raising awareness is showing people the end product of [my rescue missions], so it becomes tangible to them. It spreads awareness that there are people in these countries doing these things and we should do something to stop it."



Sorrow just moments after his rescue. (Photo courtesy of Marc Ching)

Ching says one of his most special rescues is Sorrow, a black-and-white French Bulldog he saved from slaughterhouse in Tongzhou, China.

"That's a dog who means a lot to me because he's become the face of what I do now, as so many people have seen that picture of him with his mouth and feet bound," says Ching. "If you love animals, especially dogs, and you see that picture, it's just emblematic of what they're doing over there. That dog and the dogs I rescued from that slaughterhouse, they are miracles because once an animal enters a place like that, there's no getting out — they were supposed to die. So I think people connect to that image because he really is a miracle."

Rescuing and getting treatment for dogs in other countries, especially those with extensive medical needs, can be incredibly costly. Luckily, Ching's thriving wellness and nutrition-centered pet store, The PetStaurant, has enabled him to fund his Asia efforts without having to rely heavily on donations, although he always appreciates any help he can get from his passionate supporters.

"My business is very successful, but where most people would buy a Rolex watch, I save dogs," he says. "I never want someone to look at what I do and pollute it by saying I do it for [donation] money, because that's not possible — I lose a few hundred thousand dollars a year on these rescues because they're so expensive. But in the end it's worth it because this means so much to me."



These puppies were rescued from a slaughterhouse in China. It is unthinkable that anyone would want to harm such innocent beings. (Photo courtesy Marc Ching)

Ching's purity of intention is also reflected in the beautiful and tragic, yet inspiring writings he posts on Facebook and Instagram before, during, and after his missions. Writing has essentially become a therapeutic outlet for Ching, who admits he has been deeply traumatized by what he has witnessed. Yet besides helping him to heal his heart and mind, his heartfelt, sometimes gut-wrenching posts have also touched the hearts of thousands of animal lovers throughout the world, devoted social media fans who follow his travels and cheer him on, every step of the way.

"I actually post in real time when I'm [in Asia], so I'm able to take my experiences and use my words to paint a picture so people can feel the moment," says Ching. "I think they appreciate that and they can see what it's like out there."

But after staring into the jaws of death one too many times, this devoted husband and father of two has begun to rethink his strategy, from one of rescuing to shifting to a mindset that will inspire lasting change.



*Marc with a very grateful Bull Terrier he rescued from Li Yuan, China. The sweet kisses make it all worthwhile!
(Photo courtesy Marc Ching)*

"In starting this I didn't have a goal. I just went out there and rescued dogs from slaughterhouses," Ching explains. "Internally, I felt like it was a way to save myself because it's addicting, that moment when you feel like a hero. But in the long run, especially on trip three, it became so burdensome on my consciousness I even had a hard time living my life. Now my goal has changed from risking my life to creating an effort where I'm doing something to end [the dog meat trade]."

At the core of this new strategy is a media campaign in China and South Korea that will feature a short documentary tempered with graphic undercover video footage Ching and two undercover slaughterhouse workers have compiled over the last several months. Dubbed "The Compassion Project," its intention is to shed light on the abusive practices tied to the trade, turn people away from eating dog meat, and support change.

"In China and South Korea, they care more about image, so my goal is to put this media campaign together, line up celebrities, and schedule important meetings with people in the government. My message will be, 'You can be hated by all these countries because of this inhumanity or you can rise up and decide that your country is better than that.' In our culture, we used to have slavery and lynching, but one day we realized that was no longer acceptable, and we changed. I believe their countries are no different, and that they'll change in time, too."



Sorrow snuggling with his foster brother. He is back in the U.S., doing great and already has several prospective families vying to adopt him! (Photo courtesy Marc Ching)

Meanwhile, Ching is about to embark upon a fifth mission, this time to Thailand, Cambodia, northern Vietnam, South Korea, and Yulin, China, a trip he expects to be his "most intense yet." It appears there is no stopping this determined rescuer.

"I recently wrote a post where I describe what that moment of rescue is like for me," he says. "When you save a dog and that dog looks at you, it's like that moment when you're in love with someone ... it's amazing. I don't think people realize that there's beauty in what I do."

To learn more about Marc Ching and how to support his incredibly heroic efforts, check out the [Animal Hope & Wellness Foundation website](#) and [Facebook page](#).