



Wong Tsai at the SPCA centre in Wan Chai yesterday; Ping Chau villagers Cat Tang Chi-ching, Nicole Tang Suet-man and Siu Lok-man say goodbye to Wong Tsai; Wong Tsai in 2007. Photos: May Tse

Dog that guided visitors to Ping Chau gently bows out

Jennifer Ngo

He's had a long life for a dog—20 years—but time has run out for Wong Tsai, last permanent resident of one of Hong Kong's most remote islands and regarded as a mascot by villagers and tourists alike.

The "tour guide dog of Ping Chau Island", named for his habit of meeting tourists at the pier and accompanying them on walks around the scenic island, said his last goodbyes to visitors at the SPCA in Wan Chai yesterday before he was put down. A veterinarian said it was the only way to end his suffering from bone cancer.

Former Ping Chau resident Chow Lan-heung, who still owns a store on the northeastern island near the

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Former Ping Chau resident Chow Lan-heung, as she brought Wong Tsai a can of his favourite beef-flavoured dog food before he was put down.

mainland border in Mirs Bay, brought Wong Tsai a can of his favourite beef-flavoured dog food. "He loves taking people around his home, like he's really proud of his island," Chow said. "He is also very gentle and he listens when we talk to him."

Older sister Chow Tai-tai said the old native dog was part of the family. "I've known him since he was a tiny puppy, and, in turn, he watched my daughter grow up."

Hidy Tsang Ho-ye, who has visited the island regularly since 1998, recalled her first meeting with the dog.

"He was just there, waiting for us visitors at the pier," she said. "My friend went up to him and asked him if he was male or female, and Wong Tsai let my friend lift his back-leg to

check. It was quite funny and Wong Tsai was really nice about it."

Tsang said Wong Tsai, who seemed to understand human feelings, was the reason she got over her fear of dogs. "He would let me pet him, and he never barks at people."

Wong Tsai's former owner, Mo Shui-ching, who died in 2009, signed a letter of consent with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for euthanasia if the dog ever had an incurable and painful disease.

"[Mo] wanted to make sure that Wong Tsai wouldn't suffer. It is an extremely hard thing, but one of the best things we can do for our pets," the SPCA's chief veterinary surgeon Dr Jane Gray said. "No animal should go through unnecessary suffering."

She said the dog was in pain that was kept at bay with heavy doses of morphine-based painkillers and his health was deteriorating quickly.

"Wong Tsai has lived a full and beautiful life compared to many other animals we see here [at the SPCA]," Dr Gray said.

"He is loved and cared for, and we should always remember to let animals go with dignity. We just want to give him a chance to bid farewell to his family."

The SPCA has been keeping an eye on the old free-roaming dog since he developed a non-malignant lump on his left cheek in 2009.

A passing policeman noticed he had a serious limp last week and notified the SPCA, which sent a team to

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SPCA surgeon Dr Jane Gray

check on him and found he had bone cancer which had crippled his right hind leg.

Yesterday he could only limp for a few steps before collapsing.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department dubbed him the "friendly local guide" of Ping Chau Island, which is part of the Hong Kong National Geopark and listed by the government as a "site of special scientific interest".

Ping Chau has had no full-time residents since 1971; islanders return at weekends to cater for tourists or go fishing.

Some former villagers wanted to take Wong Tsai back to Ping Chau, but the SPCA said the journey would be too painful.