

HK Disneyland won't cut ban on beards

Park management defies US guidelines allowing facial hair, while rights and religious groups claim policy discriminates against Muslims and Sikhs

Hong Kong Disneyland has bristled at suggestions that its ban on beards for staff - a policy scrapped by its sister parks in the United States last week - is discriminatory.

Disney's California park said last week it would loosen up on a dress code as severe as Cruella de Vil, which is known as the "Disney Look". It requires workers to look clean, polished and natural.

Workers are now allowed to wear a beard or goatee, as long as it is less than a quarter of an inch thick. The parks first allowed neatly trimmed moustaches - like the one sported by founder Walt Disney - in 2000.

But Hong Kong Disneyland, jointly owned by the government and the Walt Disney Corporation, says the revisions "will not apply to our appearance guidelines at this time".

"Frankly, imposing a beard ban to maintain the park's brand image is not justifiable at all," said **Fermi Wong** Wai-fun, executive director of minority rights group Unison. "The beard ban implies that a beard is damaging for their brand image. That makes no sense because there are plenty of Disney characters that have beards."

Wong said the ban violated the Employment Ordinance because it could deprive Muslims and Sikhs, who wear beards for religious reasons, of the opportunity to work at the park.

Mufti Muhammad Arshad, chief imam for Hong Kong, said the policy was discriminatory and he hoped that it would not prevent any Muslims from working at the park.

"This is a form of discrimination and is not in practice in the United States, so it should be the same here," Arshad said. "But this is not just to do with Muslim people. Those of all faiths and non-religious people should have the right to grow a beard if they want to."

"Conditions like these should not be put on people in general. Hopefully Disneyland will show discretion to all sections of the community."

Allan Zeman, chairman of rival Ocean Park, said looks were a personal choice.

"As long as it's within reason, it shouldn't matter. It's part of someone's personality after all."

The local Disneyland spokesman said employees had to abide by the firm's guidelines and the park had not encountered any problems with the dress code so far.

He said one exception had been made when an employee from New Zealand who had a tattoo was allowed to work there as the marking was part of his Maori culture.

Disney's dress code is a product of the 1960s, when the family-friendly park did not want to be in any way associated with hippy culture.

Male employees had to be clean-shaven and have short hair, while visible tattoos, body piercings (except earrings for women), "extreme" hairstyles or colours were also banned.

LEISURE

HK DISNEYLAND WON'T CUT BAN ON BEARDS

Park management defies US guidelines allowing facial hair, while rights and religious groups claim policy discriminates against Muslims and Sikhs

John Carney and Jennifer Cheng
john.carney@scmp.com

Hong Kong Disneyland has bristled at suggestions that its ban on beards for staff – a policy scrapped by its sister parks in the United States last week – is discriminatory.

Disney's California park said last week it would loosen up on a dress code as severe as Cruella de Vil, which is known as the "Disney Look". It requires workers to look clean, polished and natural.

Workers are now allowed to wear a beard or goatee, as long as it is less than a quarter of an inch thick. The parks first allowed neatly trimmed moustaches – like the one sported by founder Walt Disney – in 2000.

But Hong Kong Disneyland, jointly owned by the government and the Walt Disney Corporation, says the revisions "will not apply to our appearance guidelines at this time".

"Frankly, imposing a beard ban to maintain the park's brand image is not justifiable at all," said Fermi Wong Wai-fun, executive director of minority rights group Unison. "The beard ban implies that a beard is damaging for their brand image. That makes no sense because there are plenty of Disney characters that have beards."

Wong said the ban violated the Employment Ordinance because it could deprive Muslims and Sikhs, who wear beards for religious reasons, of the opportunity to work at the park.

Mufti Muhammad Arshad, chief imam for Hong Kong, said the policy was discriminatory and he hoped that it would not prevent any Muslims from working at the park.

"This is a form of discrimination and is not in practice in the United States, so it should be the same here," Arshad said. "But this is not just to do with Muslim people. Those of all faiths and non-religious people should have the right to grow a beard if they want to."

"Conditions like these should not be put on people in general. Hopefully Disneyland will show discretion to all sections of the community."

Allan Zeman, chairman of rival Ocean Park, said looks were a personal choice.

"As long as it's within reason, it shouldn't matter. It's part of someone's personality after all."

The local Disneyland spokesman

This is not just about Muslims. Non-religious people should have the right to grow a beard

CHIEF IMAM MUFTI MUHAMMAD ARSHAD

said employees had to abide by the firm's guidelines and the park had not encountered any problems with the dress code so far.

He said one exception had been made when an employee from New Zealand who had a tattoo was allowed to work there as the marking was part of his Maori culture.

Disney's dress code is a product of the 1960s, when the family-friendly park did not want to be in any way associated with hippy culture.

Male employees had to be clean-shaven and have short hair, while visible tattoos, body piercings (except earrings for women), "extreme" hairstyles or colours were also banned.

DOCUMENT ID: 201201290270001

The copyright of this content is owned by the relevant media organization / copyright owner. Any reproduction, adaptation, distribution or dissemination of this content without express authorization is strictly prohibited. All rights reserved. This content is sourced from Wisers' electronic services.

----- 1 -----