

(VIP visit special)

# Visit of Spanish King and Queen

## State visit reinforces long-standing bilateral relationship

**GONZALO DE BENITO**  
AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN



On the occasion of the state visit of Their Majesties King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia of Spain to Japan, at the invitation of Their Majesties Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko,

from April 4 to 7, I wish to convey a message to the Japanese people on the importance of the relations between our two countries.

This state visit will set a milestone in the historical relations, which date back over 400 years, that have brought the Japanese and the Spanish people closer together, to the point where we stand today, namely two countries working hand in hand to promote peace and understanding, economic growth and solidarity, cooperation in innovation and research and a deeper mutual knowledge between our citizens.

With this opportunity, I wish to convey to the Spanish citizens living and working in Japan with their families, my appreciation as they represent Spain in this great country and celebrate the opportunity for them to meet with their king and queen during their visit to Japan.

The first contact between our countries dates back to 1613, when the daimyo of Sendai sent the Keicho Mission, led by Hasekura Tsunenaga, to the King of Spain Philip III. It was the first Japanese diplomatic mission to the Western world



**King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia** CASA REAL

and with the visit Japan became the first Asian country to cross the Pacific eastward.

The bond between our two countries has strengthened throughout these 400 years and developed into a fruitful partnership based on the mutual respect and appreciation of our Imperial and Royal families, our governments and our people.

Today, the framework of our relations is the "Japan-Spain Association for Peace, Growth and Innovation," that Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Mariano Rajoy announced in Tokyo in October 2013.

This is a comprehensive and far-reaching declaration through which we are enhancing our cooperation at the highest level, fostering together peace, trade, investment, research, innovation and

better knowledge between our citizens through tourism and cultural exchanges.

We have been working together under these guidelines, with significant results, that allow us to say that relations between Japan and Spain stand today at their best moment in history.

We have recently completed negotiations for new bilateral agreements on exchanges of students and foreign-service officials, as well as on economic, research and cultural cooperation and exchange of expertise between both administrations in tourism and sports. These new agreements will soon enter into force and create new opportunities for our youth, our companies and our civil societies.

As a result of our enhanced relations, bilateral trade has significantly expanded in the last years, reaching a total amount of ¥709 billion in 2016.

We are pleased to see new investments by Japanese companies in Spain in the last year. They show renewed confidence in our economy, after we have completed a long journey of fiscal consolidation and structural reforms that put Spain's economy again on a solid path of growth.

In the tourism sector, the number of visitors traveling between our countries is increasing significantly.

The number of Spanish tourists visiting Japan is growing rapidly, with 91,849 visiting in 2016 (an increase of 19 percent compared to 2015). Additionally, we are pleased to see that the number of Japanese tourists coming to Spain reached 578,792 in 2016.

There is no doubt that the new non-stop Tokyo to Madrid flight by Spain's Iberia airline is contributing to these great numbers.

All these figures are proof of the growing importance of our relations and the very positive trend under our Association for Peace, Growth and Innovation.

In the upcoming months, we will continue promoting these exchanges, among



**Royal Palace of Madrid** TURESPANA

other actions, through the Japan-Spain Symposium — following its successful meeting in Shizuoka last year — that will convene again this autumn in Malaga, Spain.

As in previous editions, the symposium will present an opportunity for representatives of both governments, the economy and civil society to reflect together on the future of our bilateral relationship and present new fields of cooperation.

Of course we will continue promoting Spain's culture and heritage in Japan through a rich cultural program developed by Instituto Cervantes in Tokyo, and the presentation of Spain's most important cultural institutions in other cities.

All these positive developments are leading us to the year 2018, when we will celebrate 150 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Spain.



**Iberia's non-stop flight between Tokyo and Madrid was launched in October.** IBERIA

Japan is an important and respected political, economic and cultural partner for Spain. Our relations stand today at their very best moment in history.

We expect the state visit of their majesties — the first to Asia since the king's proclamation in 2014 — to set a historical milestone in Japan-Spain relations and contribute to new fields of cooperation between our two countries and people.

### Biographies of King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia

His Majesty King Felipe VI of Bourbon and Greece is the third child of Their Majesties the King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia. He was born in Madrid, on Jan. 30, 1968.

In 1981, he received the Collar of the Distinguished Order of the Golden Fleece, granted by His Majesty King Juan Carlos, Head and Sovereign of the Order.

On Jan. 30, 1986, when he turned 18, he swore loyalty to the king, before the Spanish parliament, taking an oath to discharge his duties faithfully, to abide by the constitution and the law and ensure that they are abided by and to respect the rights of citizens and the autonomous communities, fully undertaking his institutional role as successor to the crown.

On Nov. 1, 2003, Their Majesties the King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia announced his engagement to Letizia Ortiz Rocasolano.

Their wedding ceremony was held on May 22, 2004, at the Santa Maria la Real de la Almudena Cathedral of Madrid.

They have two daughters, Leonor, born on Oct. 31, 2005, and Sofia, born on April 29, 2007, both in Madrid.

His father, King Juan Carlos I, abdicated the Spanish Throne and sanctioned the preceptive Organic Law on June 18, 2014.

On June 19, 2014, Felipe took the oath set forth in article 61 of the constitution

and was proclaimed king before parliament, taking the name of Felipe VI.

The king holds the military rank of captain general — the highest military rank — of the army, navy and air force, corresponding exclusively to the supreme commander of the armed forces.

An enthusiast of sports in general, he was a member of the Olympic sailing team in the Soling class at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, where he was Spain's flag bearer in the parade of nations during the opening ceremony. He came in sixth, for which he was awarded an Olympic Diploma.

Her Majesty Queen Letizia Ortiz Rocasolano was born in Oviedo on Sept. 15, 1972, and is the daughter of Jesus Ortiz Alvarez and Paloma Rocasolano Rodriguez.

She started school in Oviedo, at La Gesta public school, and later at the Alfonso II Institute. At the age of 14, she moved, together with her parents and sisters, to Madrid, where she finished her secondary education at the Ramiro de Maeztu Institute. She entered a civil marriage in 1999, divorcing a year later.

She has a bachelor's degree in journalism from the Complutense University of Madrid and a master's degree in audiovisual journalism from the Institute for Audiovisual Journalism Studies.

One of the principal endeavors of the

queen is promoting scientific research, not only in regards to rare diseases or the fight against cancer, but also to support any initiative facilitating the inclusion of scientific research as one of the basic pillars in the context of education, health and innovation. In other words, always making scientific research a priority and a light to guide a society that is committed to the progress of all.

The queen also supports people with disabilities. Throughout these years, she has provided institutional support for different groups within Spanish society, ranging from the visually impaired to those affected by hearing impairment or by autism spectrum disorders, to name only a few.

In addition to the military activities she attends together with King Felipe VI, Queen Letizia has maintained contact with the military by attending Armed Forces Day, presenting combat flags to certain units and presiding over a flag oath ceremony of the Royal Guard.

The queen often accompanies the king on his official visits abroad.

Information taken from the websites at <http://www.casareal.es/EN/FamiliaReal/ReyFelipe/Paginas/biografia.aspx> and <http://www.casareal.es/EN/FamiliaReal/ReinaLetizia/Paginas/biografia.aspx>

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