



KING AND QUEEN

A right royal visit

King Felipe and Queen Letizia recently made their first official visit to the Canaries, travelling to Gran Canaria on April 24 followed by Tenerife on April 25.

The Spanish royals were received by Canarian president Fernando Clavijo, local politicians and excited members of the public. Huge crowds waited in warm temperatures to catch a glimpse of the King and Queen, and wherever they went the couple shook hands, addressed people directly, and even posed for the occasional selfie.

Several official engagements were on the agenda. In La Vegueta, in the city of Las Palmas, the couple visited the Casa Colón as they were interested in the pre-Hispanic history at the Risco Caído site. The astronomical calendar discovered in one of the caves is a truly remarkable example. Canarian representatives have requested that it be classified as a UNESCO world cultural heritage site.



↑ **President Alonso, President Clavijo, King Felipe and Queen Letizia (L-R)**

Canary Islands president Fernando Clavijo, Parliamentary president Carolina Darias, and Island president Antonio Morales accompanied the royals in Gran Canaria. They visited the Cruz Roja Africa Coordination Centre in the port of La Luz in Las Palmas, where the Spanish Red Cross and the World Food Programme

work hand in hand. They have food and supplies for disaster and crisis areas in stock so they can react on demand. Also in the capital, the King and Queen learned about the successful concept, Barrios Orquestado (orchestrated neighbourhoods). The social project offers free training on string instruments for six to 17

year olds for up to five years. In Gran Canaria and Tenerife, 260 youngsters are supported and taught every day. In honour of the royal visit, 200 students played at the Pabellón El Batán while their parents sang as a choir. They performed the Congolese song *Banahan* and Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean*.

In Tenerife, the royal couple, accompanied by the Island president Carlos Alonso, got to know the fruits of another social project, Barrios por el empleo (city suburbs for work) which is concerned with the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market. To this end, local social workers work very closely with various non-profit making organisations and employers to offer training and subsidised projects to those who have a poor chance of being successful in the labour market.

Afterwards, the royals visited the University of La Laguna (ULL); however, this visit was not quite as harmonious. The student association AMEC protested against the visit in advance; rejecting the system of hereditary privilege and power by a right of inheritance. In addition, some students had to move their classes to alternative lecture halls so that the King

and Queen could be received in the best ones. From the students' point of view, this was an ironic representation of reality. Director Antonio Martínón Cejas was more concerned with solving key construction defects than with the organisation of a royal visit.

The royal couple's last trip to the Islands was over three years ago. In January 2014, Felipe and Letizia, then as Prince and Princess of Asturias, opened the Palmetum Palm Garden in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and in Gran Canaria they opened the Castillo de La Luz museum. Previously in 2012, they had visited El Hierro to learn more about the underwater volcanic eruption.

Following his coronation, King Felipe visited the archipelago alone to attend the final of the basketball Copa del Rey at the Gran Canaria Arena and the 30th anniversary of the Canarian Astrophysics Institute. Both took place in 2015. ■

PRIVATE LETS

Supreme Court throws out rental ban

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The Supreme Court also has to decide on four other issues raised by the ASCAV Canarian Holiday Lets Association, with the results expected soon.

Nevertheless, the president of La Gomera, Casimiro Curbelo, released a statement saying he welcomed the verdict so far. The existing law has, he believes, placed the small western islands at a particular disadvantage. He highlighted the fact that for many families in those areas their only income is from tourist rentals and thus they've been forced to face working illegally since the introduction of the restrictions. He also spoke about the differences between the western islands and the bigger ones, plus the fact he is convinced all types of rentals can work together, giving

the area of Valle Gran Rey as an example of positive coexistence. "There, we have both models working directly next to each other, and well. Our small islands are not characterised by mass tourism, but by rural tourism: the type of guests that not only treat the environment respectfully, but generally spend more money within the destination as well", he noted. Paulino Rivero passed the disputed regulations shortly before the last elections, and from the beginning they attracted criticism. The ex-president had, many said, given in to the demands of the hoteliers' lobby, and at the last moment changed a previously negotiated draft in favour of the larger companies.

Hoteliers' reactions

Whilst some are celebrating the recent Supreme Court ruling, others are not so happy with the outcome.

Representatives of Ashotel, the Hotel Association for Tenerife, La Palma, La Gomera and El Hierro, say that more lenient rental laws will place the way tourism works in the Islands in danger.

The existing rental model has, they say, been perfectly successful over the past decades, leading to general prosperity and peaceful coexistence. Over 65,000 people are currently employed in the hotel industry, all employees are paid according to trade union agreements and, especially in the last few years, new jobs in the industry have led to a reduction in the high unemployment rate. Private lettings do not, say Ashotel, create jobs.

This argument is refuted by representatives of ASCAV. They insist that their visitors hire cars, buy goods from supermarkets and eat out in restaurants much more than hotel guests do, especially those in all-inclusive resorts. This, they say, creates and sustains employment indirectly.

One aspect both sides agree on is that rental activities must be taxed, but a further worrying point for the Hotel Association is a phenomenon already noticeable in many Spanish cities, such as Madrid, and Canarian coastal towns like El Médano. Increasingly, more houses and apartments are let via platforms like Airbnb, allowing owners to make more money than on long term rentals, thus reducing numbers of available proper-

ties for ordinary city dwellers, and drastically raising rental prices overall.

Evidently worried for the future, Ashotel has proposed

the complete annulment of the 2015 holiday rental directive so negotiations for a mutually beneficial agreement can take place. ■

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