The house of Borbón has held thrones all over Europe since the 16th century, when Bourbon kings ruled Navarre and France. Currently, the only Borbón monarchies still in power are those in Spain and Luxembourg.

The current Spanish Royal Family is headed by King Juan Carlos, whose history is outlined in the timeline below:

- Born in 1938 in Rome.
- Youth included spending time studying at Military Academies and Colleges of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.
- Completed his education at the Complutense University in Madrid in 1961, having studied constitutional and international law, economics and taxation.
- Designated royal title in 1969, when General Franco chose Juan Carlos as his successor.
- Had three children between 1963 and 1968 – two daughters, Infanta Elena and Infanta Cristina, and one son, Prince Felipe, who is now successor to the crown. The next successor to the throne has become a controversial issue in Spain recently, with the birth of Prince Felipe and Princess Letizia’s two daughters, Leonor and Sofia. Since the deposition of Queen Isabella II (the first and only Queen Regnant of Spain) in 1868, there has been much discussion as to whether women should be able to inherit the crown.
- Juan Carlos officially became king on 20th November 1975, when Spanish dictator Franco died.

The Spanish Royal Family and the Public

The moment King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia returned from their honeymoon, they set the tone for their reign by moving into La
Zarzuela Palace, just outside of Madrid. Choosing this modest abode, in comparison to the enormous Palacio Real, earned them a very favorable opinion amongst the general public.

When he officially became king, Juan Carlos immediately expressed his aim to restore democracy in the country and to become the" King of all Spaniards" – a challenge which many would argue he has achieved given that today the Spanish Royal Family continue to be an object of huge public interest and respect in Spain. Perhaps the reason for this is that their direct contact with the press and the public is very limited. Indeed, unlike the British Royals, whose comments to the public and the press are frequently cited in the media, their Spanish counterparts are forbidden from answering questions or making comments to the press or the public.

The Spanish Royal Family and their Work

• Highly focussed on strengthening international relations, in particular with Europe and Latin America, King Juan Carlos is now a significant international figure whose work has been acknowledged with many International Awards. In addition, he is the patron of the Cervantes Institute, which aims to promulgate the Spanish language worldwide.

• Queen Sofia is devoted to a number of social and welfare activities, including the Queen Sofia Foundation, which sends relief funds to developing countries. She has an excellent relationship with the public in Spain, and demonstrated her solidarity when Felipe was young and she participated in a boycott of his school for increasing meal prices.

• Infanta Elena has always played a very active role in institutional activities, particularly in the cultural arena, and has made frequent visits to other parts of Europe, as well as overseas. The Infanta Elena is especially supportive of educational and cultural activities and is the Honorary President of the Spanish Paralympic Committee. Elena was married to Jaime but they have since divorced and he has lost his title of Duke. Elena and Jaime have two children; Felipe and Victoria.

• Infanta Cristina carries out a huge range of institutional, cultural, academic and welfare activities in Spain and abroad, particularly in Europe and Latin America. She is the Honorary President of the Spanish Committee of UNESCO, and focuses on supporting educational projects and those which work to preserve both natural and artistic heritage. In addition, she is the President of the International Foundation for Disabled Sailing. Cristina is married to Iñaki, a retired handball player. Cristina and Iñaki have four children; Juan, Pablo, Miguel, and Irene.

• Prince Felipe, having completed a Master’s Degree in International Relations, now concentrates on development projects, voluntary work, the environment, universities, the integration of young
people in business, and social communication. Prince Felipe has two children, Leonor and Sofia.

- The Spanish Royal Family Outside the Political Arena

All of the Spanish Royal Family are keen sportspeople and most particularly enjoy snow sports and sailing. Indeed, sailing enthusiast Queen Sofía was a reserve member of the Greek sailing team at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, while the Infanta Cristina followed in her mother’s footsteps, participating in the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. Prince Felipe then followed suit and was part of the Spanish sailing team in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

The Spanish Royal Family are a huge media presence in Spain, not least due to the “rags to riches” love story of Letizia Ortiz and Prince Felipe, who married in May 2004. The successful journalist has presented for a number of prominent TV channels, including Bloomberg, CNN+ and TVE, but her on-screen presence doesn’t stop there. The couple, along with the rest of the Royals, has also been portrayed in a popular television series dramatising their fairytale courtship.

When the Prince announced his engagement to the then-journalist, granddaughter of a taxi-driver and divorcée, Letizia Ortiz, the Spanish public was immediately captivated by the story of this unlikely couple. Ever since, the pair has been in the media spotlight, not least as Letizia’s career saw her broadcasting to millions of people every day.

Despite not being of royal or aristocratic ancestry, the Princess has adapted to her Royal position well and her work is now centred on social issues including children’s rights, culture and education.
The Spanish Coat of Arms