

Beat: News

## Oviedo hosts the Princess of Asturias Awards Ceremony this Friday

### City supports the Spanish Royal Family

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**USPA NEWS** - Ancient Oviedo has been closely linked, since its founding in the 8th century, to the Asturian monarchy, becoming the capital of the Kingdom of Asturias. This fact has left a historic centre with an undeniable medieval flavour, which modernity has provided with a carefully designed urban layout that is easy to navigate. An exceptional starting point for exploring examples of pre-Romanesque art, a World Heritage Site, the Costa Verde coastline, incredible natural landscapes where you can practice all kinds of sports, and of course, enjoy a first-class gastronomic culture. This Friday, Oviedo will be the venue for the Princess of Asturias Awards, the most important awards given in Spain.

The Royal Family is already in the city, where the Princess of Asturias was appointed honorary Mayor on Thursday. The Princess and her family are staying at the Hotel of La Reconquista, in the centre of the Asturian capital. The first stone of the current Eurostars Hotel of La Reconquista -5 stars- was laid in 1752. Since then, the building has lived for more than two centuries, serving as, among other things, an orphanage, a hospital for those wounded during the Civil War and the headquarters of the Princess of Asturias Awards. In its last stage, this historic monument, declared a Site of Cultural Interest, has been visited by prominent personalities who enhance its legacy.

With the construction of the Hospice and Royal Hospital for Orphans, Foundlings and Desamparados of Oviedo, the Regent Isidoro Gil de Jaz initiated a policy of reforms in Asturias aimed at curing the ills of a sick society. To do so, he counted on the charity of the Asturians, who contributed 30,730 reales -an ancient Spanish coin- to the work. The Asturian Hospice is one of the most important buildings in the region, not only for its architectural value, but also for its area of almost 15,000 square meters. The architect Pedro Antonio Menéndez proposed a design based on a large central courtyard at the back of which is a chapel designed by Ventura Rodríguez. The coat of arms on the baroque façade is the most innovative element of the complex.

The 19th century began with a fire on the night of August 17, 1803. The wood of the building was reduced to ashes, and the Regent himself helped in the tasks of extinguishing it. The visit made to the Hospice by Queen Isabel II on August 1, 1858, left us with a bust from 1846 that is now preserved in a corridor near the Patio de la Reina.

During the Civil War, the Royal Hospice of Oviedo continued with its original tasks and at the same time assisted wounded soldiers. From that time, a bunker and an eleven-metre tunnel in the basement are preserved.

The old Hospice saw its survival in danger in the mid-1950s, when the need arose to build new schools for boys and girls. At that time, a project was born to rehabilitate the building, which would turn it into a Provincial Museum, School of Fine Arts and Conservatory. However, the high budgeted cost led the project to bankruptcy.

On August 7, 1973, it began its new journey as the Gran Hotel de La Reconquista, inaugurated in June 1974. Currently, the hotel has 142 rooms, in addition to the Gil de Jaz, Reconquista, Convadonga and Capilla rooms. It also has cafeterias, the Florencia restaurant, rooms, a Business Centre and a gallery of small shops.

Various works of art have been preserved from the old Hospice, including three murals by Joaquín Vaquero Palacios, paintings by Mariano Moré, Adolfo Bartolomé and José Purón Sotres; as well as a banner of Charles III and a sculpture of San Roque Peregrino. Corbels and chests from different periods complete the furniture, not forgetting some curious rustic carved benches that come from Portugal and were used as halters to yoke oxen.

In addition to its artistic value, it is also close to the Royal Family, having been the venue for the meetings of the Princess of Asturias Award juries and decisions since 1980. These are held in the Covadonga Room, and the King and Queen stay in the Royal Suite. Among the illustrious guests that the hotel has received during its recent history, names such as Nelson Mandela, Gabriel García Márquez, Stephen Hawking, J.K. Rowling, Jane Goodall, Pelé and others stand out.

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