

REAL MONASTERIO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE RUEDA -RUEDA ABBEY-



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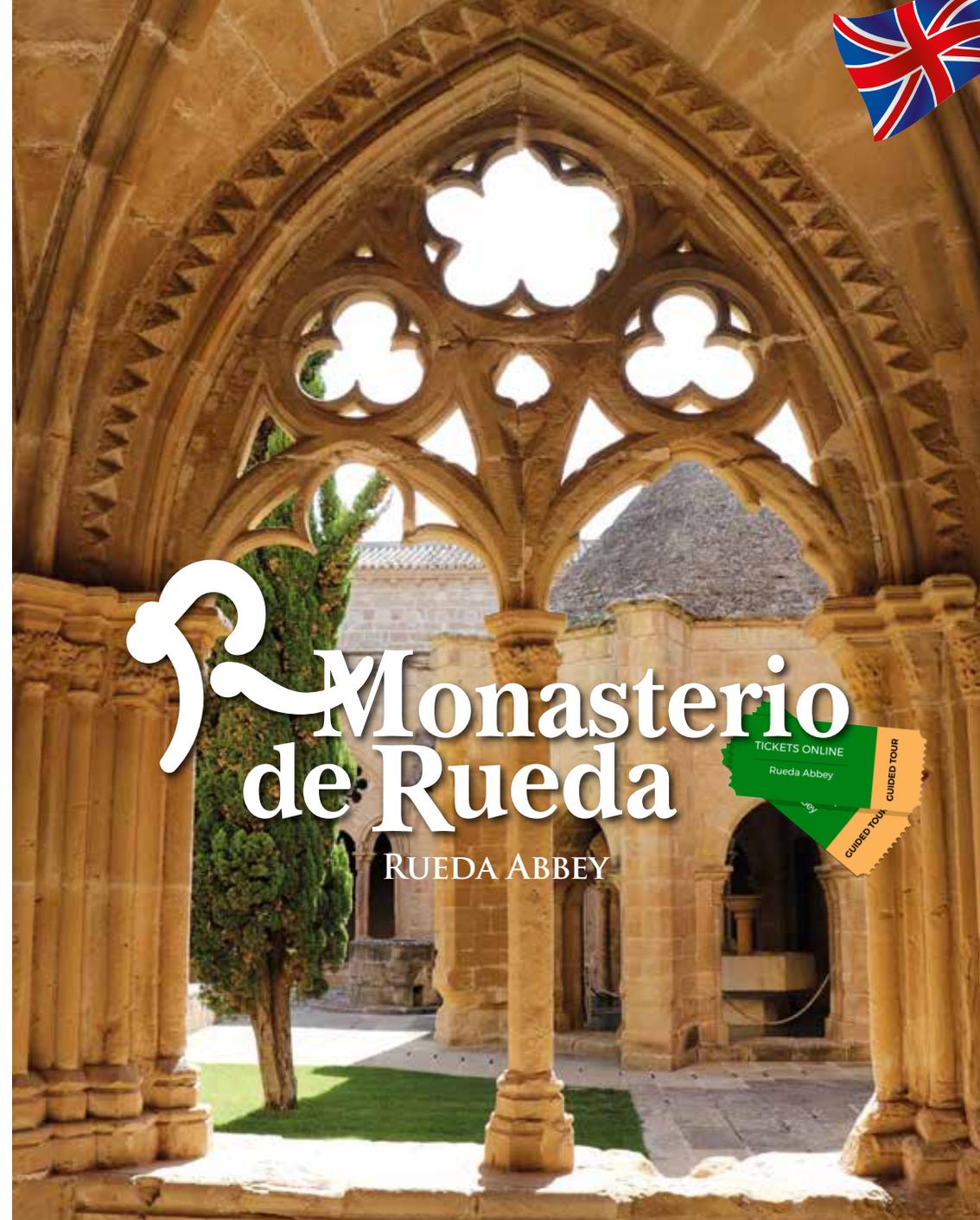
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**Monasterio
de Rueda**
RUEDA ABBEY



REAL MONASTERIO DE NUESTRA SEÑORA DE RUEDA

-RUEDA ABBEY-

Welcome to the **Real Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Rueda** [Rueda Abbey], a treasure of Cistercian art in Aragón and one of the best preserved medieval abbey complexes in all of Europe. It dates all the way back to the year 1182, when the first king of the Kingdom of Aragón, Alfonso II *the Chaste*, ceded

the village and castle of Escatrón to the Cistercian order for it to guard and repopulate the Christian border lands. Work soon began, and the majestic Rueda Abbey was consecrated in 1238; construction of the slender Mudejar tower finished off the building in the fourteenth century.

On entering the abbey, we are greeted by its **cloisters (3)**, the centre around which the rest of the abbey complex is arranged according to the typical Cistercian floor plan. At Rueda the original medieval core has been preserved intact, and the entire building exhibits the same splendour as it did in the thirteenth century. Walking along the west wing, through a small door, the **Door of the Conversos**, or **Converts**, we enter the **church (1)**, the private chapel reserved solely for use by the monks. Austerity and humility, cornerstones of the order, pervade the chapel, since Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of the Cistercian order, maintained that decorating churches served only as a distraction for whoever was in them. Next to the **sacristy (2)**, the **matins stairway** takes us directly to the **monks' dormitory (16)**, a large open space where, in keeping with Saint Benedict's rules, the brothers were all to sleep in common to foster group spirit; the monks did not stop using this room until the seventeenth century, when they moved to the Abbot's Palace on Saint Peter's Square. In the centre of the dormitory, the **daytime stairway (6)** takes us to the most important site in the entire complex, the beautiful **Chapter House (5)**, where the **chapter** would meet to discuss all matters that had a bearing on the community. Next door, the **library (4)** where the holy books the brothers used to help them with their prayers in the cloisters were kept, and the **jail (8)**, strategically located beneath the stairway, where misconduct by any of the monks was

punished should the abbot order it. *Ora et labora* was Saint Benedict's rule followed by the Cistercian monks, and in the **locutory (7)** the brothers assigned themselves their farming duties, and they went out to the agricultural areas to work the land through this **door (9)**. A small number of the brothers, copyists, would work in the **scriptorium (10)** making the gorgeous works created at Rueda: bibles, translations, illuminated manuscripts, and more came into being between these walls. This was also the most comfortable room, directly connected to the **calefactory (11)** to heat it during the cold winters, and the spectacular water supply system, with its waterwheel, capable of irrigating this medieval abbey's four hectares (nearly 10 acres) of land. This brings us at last to the **refectory (12)**, opening out onto the south wing, and strategically placed across from it, the **lavatory (13)**, a reminder of the importance of cleanliness and washing before meals. The staircase leading up to the refectory pulpit is especially striking, built into the wall using arcades that turn it into a genuine architectural work of art. Next to and directly connected to the refectory is the **kitchen (14)**, which still has its original fireplace flues and built-in cupboards in the wall. On the outside now, the compound is rounded off by the **granary (15)**, the old, medieval, thirteenth-century storehouse, singular in that it is the only medieval granary built as a separate, stand-alone building instead of as another room around the cloisters, and the majestic waterwheel, which, besides irrigating its land, lent the abbey its name and made the Real Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Rueda one of the most important historical complexes of its age.

