



Mdina Malta: The Silent City Visitor Guide

Description

“The legs go where the heart goes”
Maltese proverb

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Mdina, Malta, is for curious travelers. It is a city that will capture your imagination and, as a result, leave you in awe. It is known as the “Silent City” because it became uninhabited after the 1565 Great Siege of Malta. The government stripped it of its capital status and gave it to present-day Vittoriosa. People started leaving Mdina behind, and it became almost a ghost town. Therefore, the “Silent City” nickname refers to the lack of inhabitants. Mdina has a small population (about 500 people) living within the city walls. As you stroll through the city in the evening, an eerie silence remains.

The town of Mdina has a rich, turbulent, and unique history. It fell into the hands of several different empires. From the Romans to the Arabs, many rulers governed this town. They not only governed it but also made it prosperous in their time. That’s why you can feel the amalgamation of many different cultures in its attractions today. Even the name Mdina is a metamorphic form of Arabic.

Mdina is next to Rabat city, contributing excellent cultural-historical value. Rabat’s history traces back 4000+ years and attracts thousands of tourists yearly. When tourists visit Mdina, they usually spend some time in Rabat because it has more cafes and many exciting things to see.

Where is Mdina, and how do you get there?

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Most people arrive in Malta by plane at the international airport or by ferry from Italy, but Valetta is also a stop on many Mediterranean cruises. Once in the country, traveling to Mdina is quick as the island is tiny.

Mdina is located near the center of the island nation of Malta. As you approach, Mdina's immense ancient ramparts rise from the surrounding countryside. No matter how prepared you are for the view, it still takes your breath away, and you may call out, "Pullover; I need to take pics." As was the case with us, many people will join you along the roadside. It is no less impressive at night versus day. As you approach, the town has a fairy-tale charm, which will only grow stronger as you enter.

We had a rental car and parked in a pay lot right next to the main gate of Mdina. Those car lots are likely busy at peak season. There are no cars within the city walls of Mdina except for residents.

Taxis are an option in Malta but can be pricey. Most visitors will come to this city from Valletta, a walled town with a rich history of its own. If you are coming by bus, you must catch bus 51 from Valletta. It will take you straight to Mdina in 30 minutes and is an absolute bargain at \$2.

Rabat

The town of Rabat adjoins the ancient capital city of Mdina. It has a more chill vibe that permeates both districts. Rabat also has some ancient parts, but it is also a modern and happening place. On Saturday, there's a popular farmers' market in the main square of Rabat.

After our visit to Mdina, it was obvious there was a busy nightlife with many well-dressed young professionals walking around looking for a fun night. Rabat is known for its culinary options, and you will also have more accommodation choices here than in Mdina.

Map of Mdina Malta

- [Mdina](#)

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Mdina and Malta's Turbulent History



Malta has a long history of occupations due to its strategic location in the Mediterranean Sea. Even Napoleon and Hitler occupied the island. Mdina's elevated location in the center of the island made it highly desirable for the rulers. From Mdina, you can view the whole island and the sea, providing warnings about enemies approaching.

The ancient fortified town of Mdina dates back to the Bronze Age, ~2000 BC. The impressive fortifications were built by the many occupiers Malta has known, including the Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards, and Knights of St John. Through St Paul's shipwreck, Mdina, at the time named Melite, can be found in the Bible!

Mdina was the old capital city of Malta when the Phoenicians occupied it. The Romans subsequently conquered Malta in 218 BC. The Eastern Romans/Byzantines acquired the island in the 6th century AD. The city's footprint was much larger back then, its walls enclosing a large part of neighboring Rabat. The Byzantines reduced its size in an attempt to make it more defensible. The Byzantines were overrun by Arab forces around 870 AD, who then changed the city's name to Mdina.

In 1090 AD, the Normans took over, bringing Christianity back to Malta. As a result, many noble families settled in Mdina. But the occupations were not over. The Normans were followed by the Germans, which were followed by the Angevins from France. The Maltese noble families grew in stature after a 1482 Royal Charter 1482 from King Alfonso V confirmed the right of the Maltese people

to hold a degree of independence. As a result, local government and a university were established in Mdina.

Mdina's Knights of the Military Order of Saint John



When the Knights of the Military Order of Saint John arrived on the island around 1530, Malta's self-governing power was lost. As a result, resentment grew among the nobles. The Knights, though, found Mdina's fortifications weak, and the Knights wanted to be closer to the harbor, so they made their base Birgu. This left the nobles isolated in Mdina, but the city lost its capital status. In the following years, the Knights were in constant battle with the Islamic Ottoman Empire over the rule of the Mediterranean. It came to a head in 1565 in the form of the Great Siege. The Ottomans tried to take Mdina but retreated when the city fired its cannon.

Only after the highly destructive earthquake of 1693 did the Knights of St John move back to Mdina. In 1722, Grand Master Vilhena ordered the restoration of Mdina. French architect de Mondion was tasked with introducing many French Baroque elements to the city. Most of the fortifications and the city gates were completely redone.

The French invaded Malta in 1798, which led to a two-year uprising and blockade that led the Maltese people to set up a National Assembly, which met in Mdina. In 1800, the French surrendered, and as a

result, Malta became a British protectorate.

Mdina – Interesting Facts

- Did you know that Mdina was also introduced as the King's Landing in Game of Thrones? This reason alone attracts many tourists to this town.
- Mdina's location has also been used in other major films and TV series. For example, the structure and sights of this town can be seen in Cutthroat Island, Treasure Hunt, The Sign of Four, and Agora.
- The city was nearly destroyed after a devastating earthquake in Sicily in 1693. Surprisingly, no civilians were killed.
- Although it is a small town, it welcomes more than 700,000 tourists annually.
- Most tourists know this place as the "Silent City" but don't know that it is also known as the "Noble City" (Citta' Notabile). In the 12th century, aristocratic families from different regions and cultures lived in Mdina and built beautiful royal buildings according to their status. This is why Mdina is also one of the prime examples of a walled city.

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- It is located on the top of the highest hill in Malta. The ancient rulers of this town were aware of its strategic location, so they made it a noble city, giving it high status. If you visit this place, you will also understand the importance of the location. However, this top-of-the-hill position also has a downside for Mdina. A little autumn wind will make you feel chilly.
- Tourists cannot use cars in the city, but residents within the walls can use their vehicles.
- Mdina has many old buildings, but the most famous church in the middle of town is not as old. This is because the earthquake of 1693 destroyed the original church. The church you see today was redesigned by Lorenzo Gafa (a professional sculptor and architect who built many other churches).
- This small town also has its own soccer team called “Mdina Knights.”

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Top 16 Things to Do in Mdina



First, you need to understand that Mdina is a tiny town. As you pass through its main gate, you discover its silence, ancient buildings, and enchanting alleyways. You won't find many tourist shops here; there are just a handful of little stores, an ice cream shop, and some restaurants. There is a laid-back and calming vibe, a respect for place that is refreshing to see.

Therefore, you can walk most of this walled city in 30 minutes, but both times, we found ourselves just drawn in by its magic. We spent much longer, especially in the evening. It is easy to fully absorb yourself photographing Mdina. The various gates and the exterior are well worth exploring as well.

1. Visit the impressive **St Paul's Cathedral**. Dedicated to the Patron Saint of Malta, St Paul's Cathedral is Baroque in style and was built during the 17th century after the original was destroyed in the devastating 1693 earthquake, after taking in the Cathedral museum next door.

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2. **Check out the intricate maze street plan.** It is the most obvious influence of the Arab occupation, modeling an old Islamic urban design. We found ourselves fascinated with the streets, especially in the evening.



3. See the magnificent **Palazzo Falson Historic House Museum**. The museum is located in a medieval townhouse and was a family residence for the Maltese nobility. It is named after the Falson family. It has seventeen rooms of historic domestic belongings and several antique collections.

4. Want to see Mdina's prison life? Visit Mdina's Dungeons. They have an extensive collection of instruments of torture. Wander through the authentic passageways and chambers that run under the Vilhena Palace, with sound effects of the dark side of medieval Mdina.

5. **Slowly wander the streets** and admire the architecture the noble families built. Do not let those tiny doors deceive you; they lead to properties with vast interiors. Maybe you will catch a glimpse when the resident leaves for errands.



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6. Are you a Game of Thrones fan? This will be special for you. As you approach **Mdina gate**, you'll see sculptures of weapons, lions guarding the gate, and Grandmaster de Vilhena's crest, which is seen in the show as Kings Landing.

7. **Find an event at Palazzo de Piro.** This 17th-century imposing structure is huddled in the bastions of Mdina and the nearby majestic baroque St Paul's Cathedral. This magnificent Palace offers one of the most spectacular panoramas of the Maltese coastline. There's always something happening at the Palazzo, from live jazz nights to art exhibitions. [Click here for the event schedule.](#)

8. Spend a romantic evening at the **De Mondion Restaurant in 17th-century Xara Palace.** This is in one of only two hotels in Mdina. We did not visit the restaurant, but the reviews are glowing, and the views are stunning.

9. Travel back in time with the **Knights of Malta Experience** to discover the epic history of Malta. Great options for kids as it brings to life the characters that play roles in the turbulent history of Malta.



10. Stroll through the lush, green **Buskett Gardens**. Originally planted as a hunting ground by the Knights of Malta, it is now an excellent place to picnic and relax. Grab some food in Rabat, relax, and enjoy the gorgeous setting.

11. Stop by the **National Museum of Natural History**, located in an 18th-century Vilhena palace that was also once a hospital for cholera sufferers and British troops during the 19th century and tuberculosis patients in the early 20th century,



12. **Walk down the dimly lit streets after dark** to see the private residences where only a handful of residents live. Silence permeates the air, and you understand quickly why it still keeps its name, the Silent City.

13. **Attend special events**, such as Grand Prix or Medieval Performances.

14. Stop for tea and cake at the **Fontanella Tea Garden**. Famous for their homemade cakes, with generous portion sizes. With seating both downstairs and upstairs, the upstairs offers the most spectacular views.

15. Pay a visit to **St Paul's Catacombs** outside Mdina's city walls. A series of corridors, cavities, and rooms still bear the original work carved into the stone. The underground chambers were a resting place believed to have been used up to the 8th century.

16. **Explore the city fortifications** from outside the city. Leave through any of the city gates and study the defensive structures built centuries ago. Outside the city walls are excellent pathways, benches, and open lawn areas, allowing you to get up close to the walls.



Mdina's Most Attractive Feature

We can say the most attractive feature of Mdina is "Silence." Our first visit was in the evening. It was so peaceful and mystical, as if the walls had so many stories to tell. You could find yourself stepping back in time and imagining its bustling days long ago.



You will find this small fortified town eerily quiet. Do visit it, especially once the sun has set. No one will bother you or push you into disillusionment. Sit quietly and enjoy the silence in the air. Your only companion will be the dim light of the street lamps.

In almost every small town in the world, you won't experience an atmosphere of silence or stillness because the construction development is going on continuously. But in Mdina, there are no disturbing noises of modernization. Malta is a country that is going through a tremendous amount of reconstruction. This has caused quite a strain on many of its residents, as well as fear of the over-modernization of the country. In Mdina, you will have no sense of that chaos. Even tourists respect the atmosphere of this city and prefer to keep it quiet. Instead of using bicycles or cars, they go for a calm walk.

It is because of this feature that it is a photographer's paradise. Photographing this city at night was so much fun, and having whole streets to yourself. Mdina struck us so hard at night that we returned during the day. We are glad we did it that way; though we enjoyed our day visit, it wasn't nearly as impressive as our visit in the evening.

Malta captured our hearts, and we dedicated a blog post to this great country. Check out [Exploring Mighty Malta: A Visitor Guide](#)

When To Visit Mdina



Malta's weather is one of the primary reasons people come to the Maltese islands throughout the year, with its warm summers, mild winters, and over 3,000 hours of sunshine. The best time to visit Mdina, Malta, is late summer or in the shoulder months of May and October. Malta's summer temps are reasonable and rarely get over the low 80s. In our view, the ideal months are September and October, when average temps stay in the 70s, and spring temps average in the 60s. Winter highs are in the 50s, so it is a mild climate year-round.

Malta has become a trendy tourist destination, especially among Europeans. During the summer months, you'll find crowded beaches and resort areas. Even the Blue Lagoon, the famous swimming area of Comino accessible only by boat, can get quite congested in peak season. Mdina will likely get busy as well. We visited in the fall, and during our evening visit to Mdina, we had the place primarily to

ourselves. During our day visit, crowds were low too.

Dining in Mdina



As for accommodations in Mdina, there are few dining choices in the small fortified town. But the options there are pretty good. Our hotel recommended Bacchus, and the concierge made the reservations for us. Bacchus offers fine culinary delights in a beautiful medieval building in the heart of Mdina. The restaurant is inside a building that dates back to 1658, and it has outstanding architecture ranging from Roman to Medieval, thus making Bacchus a unique setting. The fare was a mix of French and Mediterranean cuisine. We had a delicious and relaxed meal.

[De Monidan restaurant](#) is situated in the 17th-century Xara Palace, which is also a hotel. It is rated as one of the top restaurants in Malta. The restaurant offers a stunning 180-degree view of Malta. Its baroque architecture and attentive service create an enchanting atmosphere that makes for an ideal stop for a romantic dinner. De Mondion offers fine Modern Mediterranean cuisine, combining seasonal products to create tantalizing dishes. We did not get to dine here, but the reviews are exceptional.



Are you looking for a cafe for delicious desserts and coffee or tea? Give **Fontanella Tea Garden** a visit. It is one of the most popular cafes on the island because of its delicious fare. It is perched on Mдина's Bastions walls and spread around a central courtyard. As a result, Fontanella offers fantastic and unique panoramic views of the east side of Malta, stretching to the sea. Fontanella is famous for its view and homemade desserts, especially its cakes! The menu contains basic dishes such as baguettes, wraps, salads, and pizzas. Fontanella is a perfect place to have a slice of cake after a day of exploring Mдина.

Keep in mind that nearby Rabat has extensive dining options. You can easily walk from Mдина to Rabat, as it sits right outside the fortified walls.

Where to stay in Mдина



Mdina is a tiny and very protected gem. As a result, there are only two highly rated accommodations: Xara Palace Relais & Chateaux and St Agatha Bastion. The latter looks quite pricey. Just outside the ancient city's walls is Rabat, which has many choices.

Keep in mind that Malta is a small island; the total length is 27 miles, and the width is only nine miles. Mdina is at one of the island's highest points in the center. That puts you pretty central to everything. That said, you are not near the ocean but have ocean views in the distance. During our time in Malta, we were on the water at the Malta Hilton in the St Julian area, which we loved. But when we return, it would be very tempting to stay inside the fortified walls of Mdina. The walled city has a magical atmosphere at night -and you'll be one of the few people walking the silent streets.

Click the links below to search for accommodations and vacation rentals in Malta. Compare each site, as not all options are available at both locations. Always look closely at recent reviews before booking.

Final Thoughts



Mdina, Malta, is one of Europe's most beautiful fortified cities. Despite its compact size, even in Malta,

the Silent City is a must-see. Its historical significance to the island is a core part of its history. It's a small town compared to its ancient days but no less impressive. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the authorities significantly reduced its size. Their main goal was to make it safer from attacks and protect its inhabitants.

Surprisingly, it is not yet a World Heritage Site, but it is on the tentative UNESCO list, and soon it will become an official World Heritage Site in Malta.

The ancient narrow streets, stunning architecture, and great vibes of Mdina assure a memorable experience. When visiting the Mighty island of Malta, do not miss Mdina.

To learn more about Mdina and the neighboring city of Rabat, check out [Malta's official tourism website](#).

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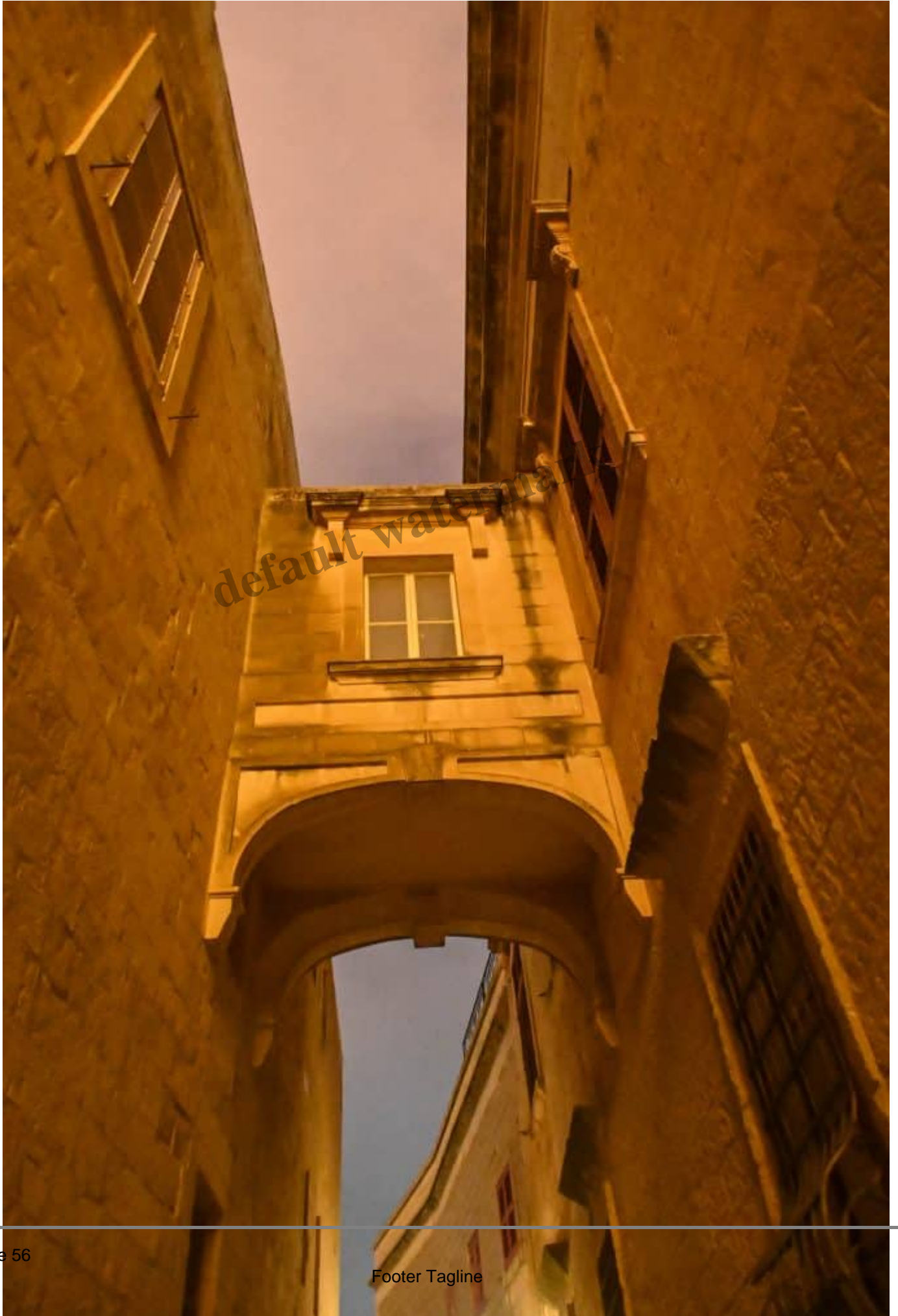




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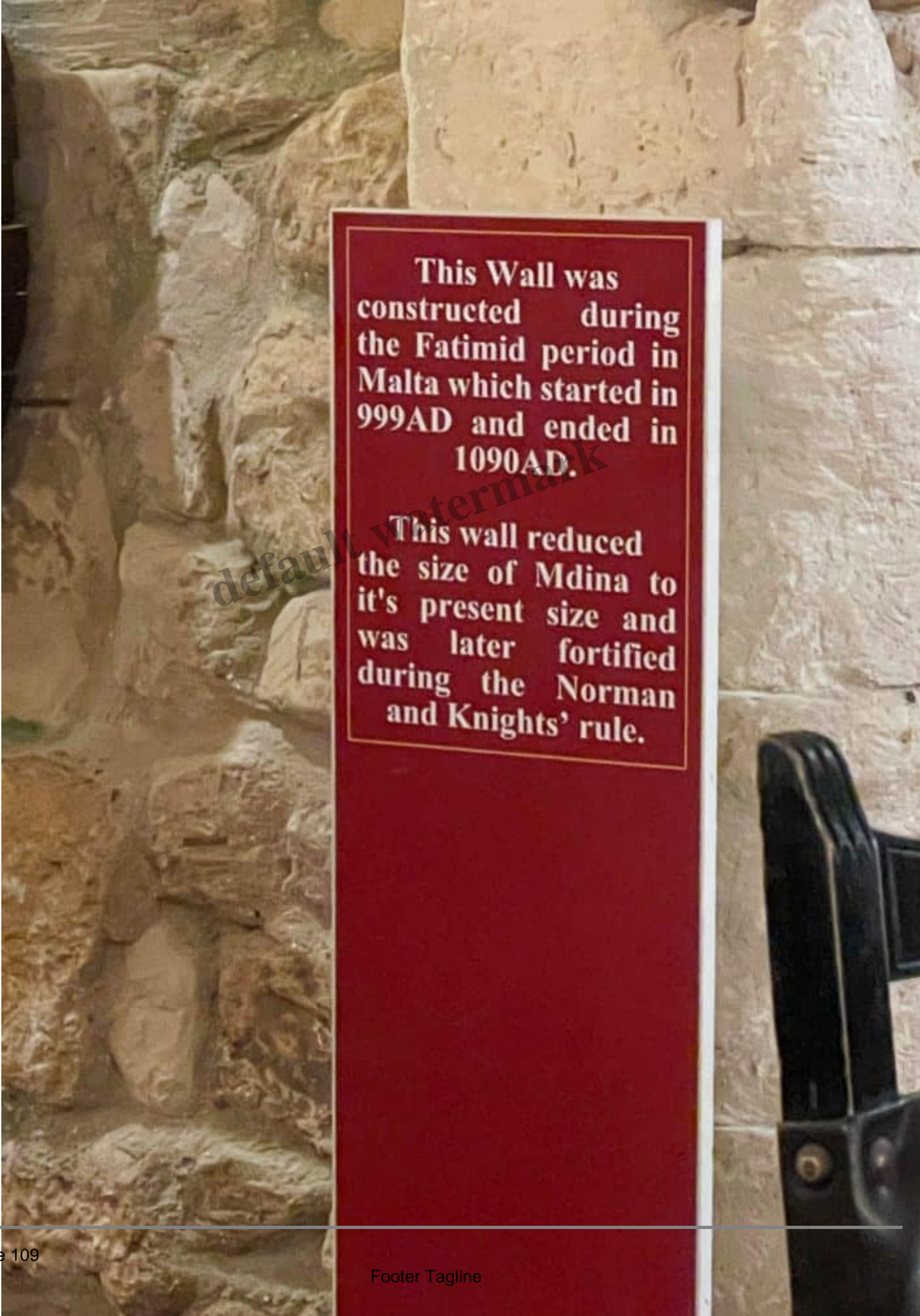
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This Wall was constructed during the Fatimid period in Malta which started in 999AD and ended in 1090AD.

This wall reduced the size of Mdina to it's present size and was later fortified during the Norman and Knights' rule.

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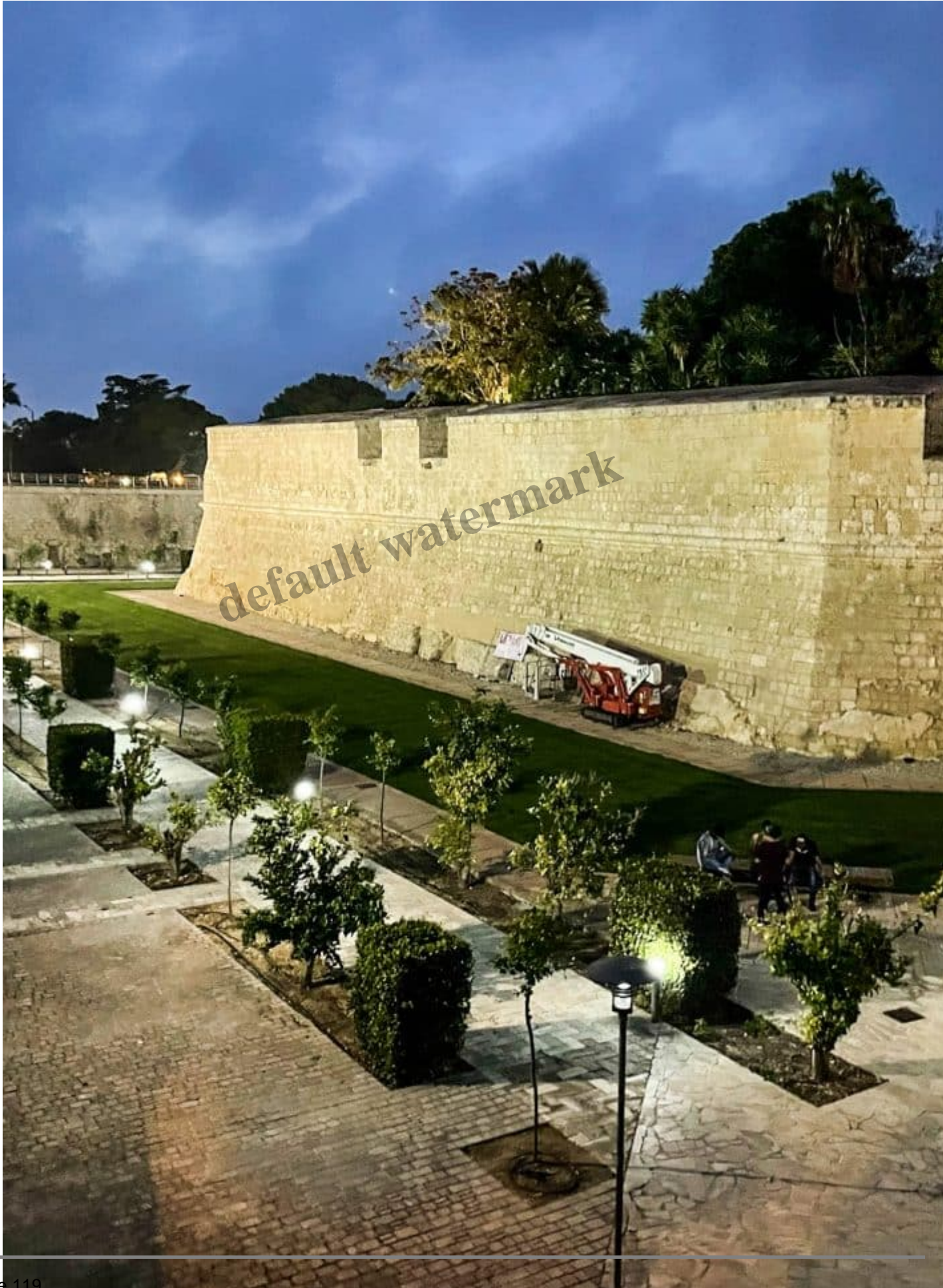
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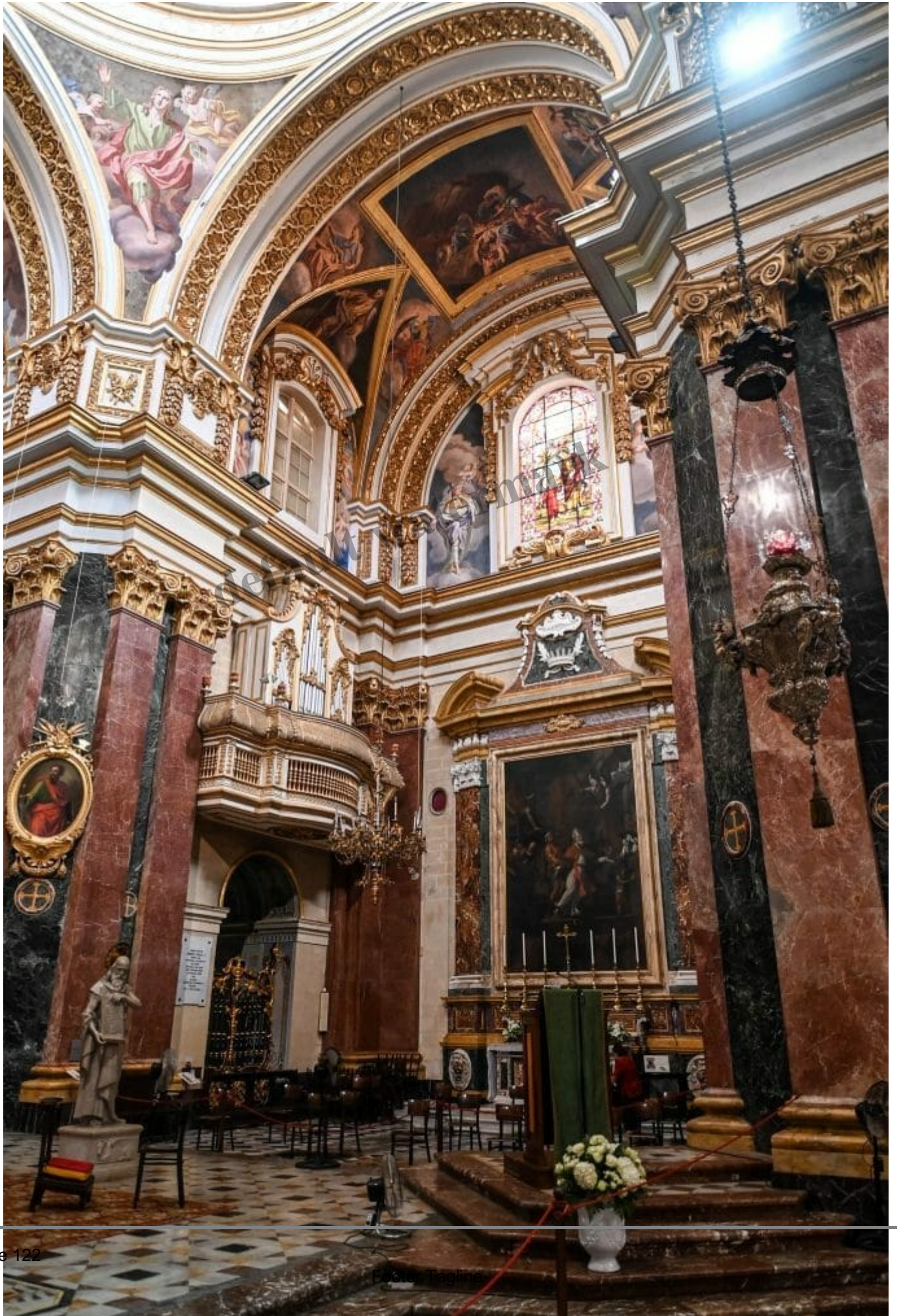








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