Kate's Knitalian Sojourn
on the Viking Vesta

On a sailing from Venice to Rome, textile artist Kate Jenkins found inspiration in every port, creating a feast of knitted pasta, crocheted *cannoli* and textile treats for a new Italian-inspired autumn exhibition

Words by Kate Jenkins





VIEW OF MT VESUVIUS, NAPLES, ITALY

When I selected Viking's *Italian Sojourn* ocean voyage from Venice to Rome, I knew it would be an incredibly inspiring journey filled with breathtaking landscapes, centuries of history and unforgettable cuisine.

As a knit and crochet artist preparing a textile food exhibition for October 2026, I decided to keep a daily food diary. Every breakfast pastry, seafood supper and market delicacy became more than something to eat—it became a future knitted sculpture or crocheted artwork. Food tells stories, and on this remarkable voyage I discovered that yarn can tell them too.

The adventure started in Venice where we embarked the *Viking Vesta* and spent the first evening on board having dinner at Manfredi's where I chose a ravioli dish followed by a tiramisu for dessert. This meal then became my first inspiration for knitting and decided to create a plate of knitted smiling raviolis and a layered knitted and crocheted portion of tiramisu completed with a dusting of chocolate wool.

I adored Venice; it was my first time here and it did not disappoint. I quickly searched for a good spot for an Aperol Spritz and *Cicchetti* and when it arrived it proved to be the perfect subject matter for my next artwork. Then, after a fascinating walking tour which ended in St Marks Square we went back to the ship for the afternoon to prepare to set off, leaving behind the city's domes and *campaniles* shimmering in the light. As the Adriatic stretched before us, I opened my knitted food notebook and began recording flavours, colours and textures that would eventually become stitches.

Second stop was Šibenik, Croatia, where medieval streets led us to bustling cafés serving flaky *börek*, local cheeses and fresh figs. The olive oil was peppery and fragrant, drizzled generously over warm bread. The deep purple of ripe figs contrasted beautifully with creamy white cheese, and I immediately imagined crocheting the fruit in rich aubergine cotton with embroidered crimson centres. Even the basket holding the bread became a design idea, inspiring textured knitted stitches.



Back on board, Viking's chefs celebrated regional ingredients with elegant simplicity. Dinner featured sea bass resting on silky risotto with herbs picked fresh that morning. Every plate looked like a work of art, reminding me that presentation is as important as flavour.

Crossing to Bari on Italy's Adriatic coast felt like entering another culinary world. Bari is famous for its handmade *orecchiette* pasta, and watching local women rolling tiny ears of pasta along wooden boards was mesmerising. Lunch consisted of *orecchiette* with broccoli rabe, garlic and anchovies—a humble dish elevated by







IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RIALTO BRIDGE, VENICE, ITALY; KATE JENKINS' CROCHET PROCESS; KATE JENKINS AT WORK ON BOARD THE *VIKING VESTA*







IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: OLIVE BRANCH; COLLECTION OF KATE'S CROCHETING; CROCHET GELATO; TRADITIONAL STREET, ŠIBENIK, CORATIA; KATE JENKINS, FRUIT STAND, ITALY

exceptional ingredients. I sketched little pasta shapes in my diary, noting exactly how each curve could be recreated using a simple crocheted shape. Sometimes the simplest foods become the most charming textile sculptures. I then created a few pieces of broccoli and sliced chillies to recreate my lunch later on back on board.

Crotone introduced Calabria's fiery personality. Here the flavours became bolder, with spicy 'nduja, roasted peppers, sweet red onions and citrus fruits grown beneath the southern Italian sun. A seafood stew arrived at lunch, filled with mussels, prawns and squid in a rich tomato broth. The brilliant scarlet sauce instantly suggested layers of red wool blended with silk fibres to capture its glossy sheen. Even the curled tentacles of squid seemed perfect for freeform crochet techniques.

Every evening on board the ship, I organised my notes into categories: colours, textures, stitches and construction ideas. Viking had unknowingly given me the perfect floating studio. While other guests relaxed with cocktails, I often sat quietly on deck, yarn in hand, experimenting with miniature samples inspired by the day's discoveries. The rhythm of the sea seemed to match the rhythm of my crocheting!

Messina, on the island of Sicily, welcomed us with sunshine and extraordinary pastries. We took a trip to Taormina which was astonishingly beautiful with incredible views and rich in culture. I sampled amazing cannoli filled with sweet ricotta and pistachios which were served fresh from the *pasticeria,* their crisp shells presented an intriguing technical challenge. How could knitting recreate such delicate crunch? I imagined using tightly knitted yarn rolled into a tube-like structure, while fluffy alpaca could mimic the creamy filling. The vivid green pistachios would become tiny embroidered French knots.

No Italian journey would be complete without celebrating *gelato*, and Messina's artisan *gelaterias* offered flavours ranging from lemon and almond to dark chocolate infused with sea salt. Each scoop became another potential exhibit, complete with knitted waffle cones and crocheted spoons.

Our final major stop before Rome was Napoli, a city bursting with life, colour and irresistible aromas. Pizza, of course, took centre stage. We went on the *Pizzas and Piazzas* tour with our Viking guide and watched skilled *pizzaioli* stretch dough before sliding it into blazing wood-fired ovens was almost theatrical. The finished Margherita pizza, with bubbling mozzarella, vibrant basil and rich tomato sauce, embodied the colours of the Italian flag. Recreating melted cheese in yarn will undoubtedly be one of the greatest challenges for my exhibition, but perhaps also the most enjoyable.

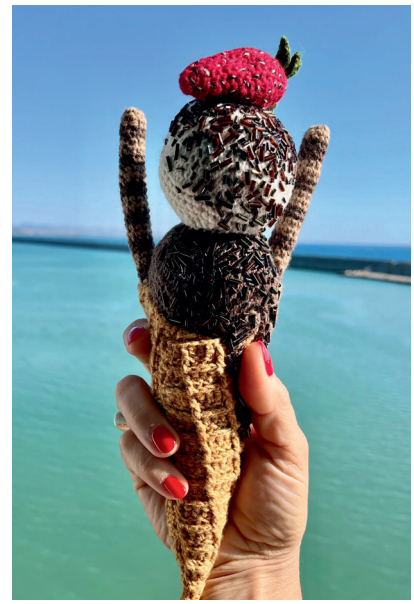
Naples also gifted me with lots of fresh ideas including *rum baba, limoncello, granita* and an espresso so intense it almost demanded contemplation. Walking through the vibrant street markets overflowing with tomatoes, lemons, aubergines and scarlet chillies. Every stall looked like an artist's palette waiting to be translated into a textile work of art. I couldn't resist creating a '*pulcinella gelato with waffle cone*' using the 17th century Italian Commedia Dell'Arte iconic symbol of Naples '*Pulcinella*'.

Life on board complemented every destination beautifully. The ship offered understated Scandinavian elegance, attentive service and cuisine that reflected the regions we visited. Lectures enriched our understanding of local history, while panoramic lounges allowed us to watch coastlines drift past with sketchbooks or knitting in hand. Travelling at sea provides rare moments of uninterrupted creativity, something difficult to find in everyday life.

Finally, we arrived in Rome, where ancient history and modern Italian culture exist side by side. A final lunch featured creamy *cacio e pepe*, artichokes, fresh bread and tiramisu that seemed almost too beautiful to eat. As I closed my diary, I realised it had become far more than a record of meals. It had evolved into the blueprint for an entire exhibition.

In October 2026, I will be opening my latest exhibition 'Kate's Knitalian' where visitors will expect to see a knitted and crocheted Italian deli and Restaurant inspired by the *Italian Sojourn* on the *Viking Vesta*. Alongside the deli counter and pizza oven there will be handmade pasta from Bari, Calabrian chillies, Sicilian cannoli, Neapolitan pizza and a whole collection of delectable desserts. Each piece will represent not only a delicious meal but also a place, a memory and a conversation shared along the way.





Travel changes us in unexpected ways. Sometimes we return home with photographs; sometimes with recipes. I came home with pages filled with sketches, colour palettes and stitch ideas that transformed an unforgettable voyage into a textile celebration of Mediterranean food.

Viking allowed me to experience Italy, but they also gave me something far more enduring: inspiration knitted and crocheted through every port, every meal and every mile sailed between Venice and Rome. For an artist, there can be no finer souvenir than that.

'Kate's Knitalian' exhibition opens from 30th October 2026 - 7th December at Air Contemporary Gallery, Ham Yard London W1D 7DT. ENTRY IS FREE.

To learn more about Kate's work scan QR code

An eight-day Italian Sojourn ocean journey from Rome (Civitavecchia) to Venice (Chioggia) departing in 2027, 2028 and 2029. 2027 prices from £3,745pp. Viking.com