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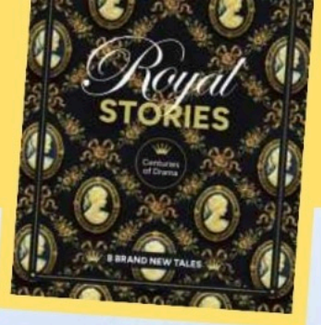

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"Knitting is a wonderful distraction"

Karen Evennett meets two women who have honed their yarn skills while on a craft retreat in Italy.



ATTENDING her first knitting retreat – a weekend in Northamptonshire 10 years ago – was a revelation for Reena Pastakia from London.

"I realised how much I didn't know about knitting! I was more of a novice than I thought," she remembers.

"I'd already become hooked on the mindfulness aspect. Knitting is a wonderful distraction from worries – I find it even eases aches and pains.

"But, in just three days on this retreat, I discovered there was so much more I wanted to learn."

Keen to take her hobby to the next level, the following year Reena signed up for her first week-long knitting holiday, in Tuscany.

"My husband Steve, who is fifty-one like me, came along, too.

"While I learned advanced crochet techniques like slip stitch and filet stitch with top knitwear designer Lisa Richardson, Steve went hiking in the nearby hills.

"Then, we'd have supper together with the rest of the group. It was all very relaxed.

"An all-in price, with beautiful food, and our hosts were happy to cater for complex dietary requirements, too."

Reena has now been on five knitting holidays at the Watermill at Posara, near Pisa, learning from Lisa and other esteemed designers.

"We're taken to knit in beautiful locations like monasteries and local villages," she says.

"One year, Georgia Farrell got us all creating our own designs by taking photos, turning the images into patterns, and then reproducing them in colourful yarn.

"And I've been on two courses with Norah Gaughan, the former editor of 'Vogue Knitting' who's famous for her cable knits.

"She helped us create our own cable hat designs – I'm still looking forward to starting work on mine!

"There are also courses with a physical therapist, Carson Demers, who teaches people how prevent issues like repetitive strain injury while they knit."

But you don't have to be an advanced knitter to enjoy one of these retreats.

Sixty-year-old Jocelyn Chambers, from Kent, stumbled across her Watermill knitting holiday last October while she was searching for an Italian language course.

"I'd learned Italian as an au pair in Rome when I was eighteen, and now that my children are grown up, I wanted to go back to it," she says.

"The Watermill's language retreat was fully booked – but the knitting holiday had spaces.

"As someone who likes knitting socks and scarves, I thought, 'why not?'

"I'm sure I was the worst knitter on the course, but I enjoyed chatting while we knitted – and learning about the other ladies' lives."

Knowing Jocelyn wanted to brush up her Italian, the hosts even arranged for her to have five lessons with a local tutor – so she had her language course, too!

Reena and Jocelyn both say they couldn't imagine a more relaxing break.

"Most attendees are women travelling alone but, from our pick-up at Pisa airport, we don't have to worry about a thing," Jocelyn says.

"The only thing we have to pay for is lunch on an optional day out in nearby Lucca or Cinque Terre."



Reena modelling a Norah Gaughan designed scarf she knitted.



Jocelyn enjoyed the divine Italian food as well!



Retreats take place at the Watermill at Posara.

Images: Reena Pastakia, Jocelyn Chambers, stock.adobe.com.