UTOPIA, ITALY
A New Festival for Courageous Dreamers

This brand-new festival was founded by American expat Shimon Shemtov and grew out of a series of English cultural events provided by his Pisa-based school, *New York English Academy*.

The festival will focus on a different culture each year but will always be based in the ever-popular region of Tuscany, Italy. For this year we already have the participation of more than 15 leading institutions in Pisa, Lucca and Florence.

This year's edition will focus on the U.S.A., specifically Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., since April 4, 2018 will be the 50th anniversary of his death. The actual anniversary is a Wednesday, and we will have some events on that day as well, but the main events will take place on the following weekend, April 6-8, 2018.

Each year the festival will be divided into 3 sections: *Reflection*, *Celebration*, and *Innovation*.

Reflection will look back at the history of each year's chosen culture and reflect on what happened, refresh our memories and refine our knowledge. In this year's edition we will learn more about the events of 1968, MLK's life, his writings, speeches, his international impact, etc. We will have documentary screenings, readings, talks, discussions, workshops (artistic, theatrical and cinematic) for children, teenagers and adults. In addition to focusing on Dr. King's 'I have a dream', we would like to focus primarily on 'What is your dream?', encouraging people of all ages to think about what kind of world they would love to live in and, perhaps most importantly, what they are willing to do for it.

The second section, *Celebration*, will celebrate the beauty of each year's culture in the form of concerts, theater, poetry, cinema, etc. So this year we will have movies on the subject of MLK and civil rights, Jazz and Gospel concerts, theater performances, and much more.

The third section is *Innovation*, where we will look forward and try to take what we have learned from the past and apply it to the future in very specific, concrete, realistic ways. In addition to talks by prominent thinkers of various nationalities and backgrounds, we will have a competition where everyone will be invited to submit an idea; perhaps we will even open it up to the world at some point but for now it will certainly be open to all of Italy. The winners will be awarded prizes of various types and sizes; this year's Grand Prize, sponsored by *New York English Academy,* will be a free round-trip ticket to New York.

We hope to conclude the entire festival on Sunday evening, where people will gather in Pisa, Lucca and Florence, to show their support for human equality and inclusiveness. One symbolic gesture we are planning to express the concepts of diversity, hope and action is for people to write their dreams and commitments on variously-colored helium balloons which we will then release simultaneously, as a kind of communal prayer, but also as a sign of commitment to a brighter, more colorful – read diverse – future.

We believe that these images have the potential to inspire people, particularly young people, and send the important message to people around the world that there are hundreds of thousands of people in Italy who still believe in these values and are prepared to take action to protect and nurture them. If other cities around the world would like to join this gesture, and we believe that they will, all the better.

We were warmed by many displays of this type from around the world and we would like to send the signal back and create a sort of large international conversation of optimism which we hope will dwarf, if not silence, the aggressive heart-breaking images that we are being bombarded with daily. Symbolism is only symbolism, but we believe that negative symbolism must be answered with positive symbolism – and we feel as though this can be the perfect playful conclusion to the 5-day festival of intensive, in-depth, *Reflection*, *Celebration* and *Innovation*.

For more info please visit www.utopiaitaly.com